The Impact of Destination Service Quality on Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty: Evidence from Mauritius

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Abstract

The literature on travel and tourism reveals an abundance of studies on destination and tourist satisfaction. However, the impact of destination service quality on tourist satisfaction and loyalty has not been thoroughly investigated. Consequently, the aims of the study are to firstly gain a deeper understanding of destination service quality using a qualitative approach and secondly to assess the impact of tourists’ perceptions of destination service quality on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Mauritius. The research instrument for this study was developed using a mixed methodology approach; qualitative and quantitative methods. In the first instance, in-depth interviews were conducted with international visitors to identify the relevant dimensions of destination service quality. Based on the findings of the interview and review of literature, eight (8) dimensions of destination service quality have been adapted to develop the questionnaire. The dimensions ‘people and hospitality’, ‘accommodation and food’ and ‘tourist satisfaction’ were the most important factors predicting tourist loyalty. This study also revealed that satisfaction has a positive effect on tourist loyalty. Based on the findings, specific recommendations have been made.

Key Words: destination service quality, tourist satisfaction, loyalty, Mauritius
1. Introduction

Destinations are considered as an important element in the travel and tourism industry (Fyall & Leask, 2007). A destination consists of a combination of tourism products and services which provide a unique experience to tourists (Buhalis, 2000). Tourist satisfaction is a significant element for successful destination marketing (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Rajesh, 2013) and consequently it is important for tourists to revisit and recommend the destination (Oppermann, 2000; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Jang & Feng, 2007). As destinations face increasing competition, destination managers need to find out why travellers are loyal to destinations (Chen & Gursoy, 2001), so as to address the major factors which affect tourist retention and improve the appeal of the destination. Although several studies have been conducted on destination satisfaction, yet, there are few studies which have assessed destination loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chi & Qu, 2008; Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Oppermann, 2000), however, no studies examined the influence of destination service quality on satisfaction and loyalty. This study is conducted in the small island of Mauritius which is a well-established beach destination in the Indian Ocean (Naidoo et al., 2010). Islands are attractive as tourism destinations because of their sense of distance, cultural and environmental insularity (Cave & Brown, 2012). According to the UNWTO, international tourism to emerging destinations is predicted to grow twice as fast than in advanced economies (Mariani et al., 2014). To be able to tap effectively into opportunities of growing tourist numbers, in terms of existing and emerging markets, it is crucial for Mauritius to deliver a high level of service quality. The purpose of the study is to twofold. First, it aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the underline factors that predict destination service quality. Secondly, it seeks to assess tourists’ perceptions of destination service quality and its impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Mauritius. The next sections review the literature followed by the methodology, results and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Destination Service Quality

In the tourism industry, quality is created by the processes of service delivery, such as friendliness, courtesy and efficiency and outcomes of services such as accommodation, food and leisure facilities (Zabkar et al., 2010; Gallarza et al., 2013; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). A tourism product is a bundle of elements such as accommodation, food and entertainment at destination level (Zabkar et al., 2010). The tourists have experiences with destinations and their perceptions are influenced by destination facilities, destination accessibility and destination attraction (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Al-Ababneh, 2013).
2.2 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most widely researched topics in the tourism and hospitality industry as satisfaction brings positive behavioral outcomes (Kozak, 2001; Gursoy et al., 2007; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Many frameworks and theories have been developed to explain satisfaction such as the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm and the equity theory (Jang & Feng, 2007). Although the definitions of customer satisfaction vary, researchers generally agree that an essential element underlying customer satisfaction is an evaluation process (Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Ryu, Han & Kim, 2008). Tourist satisfaction can be recognised by those involved in tourist activities and serve as a basis for assessing the performance of products and service destination (Salleh, Omar & Yaakop, 2013). There are many studies which have indicated that positive tourists’ satisfaction is a strong indicator of loyalty (Kozak & Remmington, 2000; Kozak, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Prayag, 2009; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015).

2.3 Customer Loyalty

In the marketing literature, customer loyalty involves repeat purchases or recommendations to other people (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Prayag, 2009). It is important to know the determinants of customer loyalty as destinations would be able to concentrate on the major factors that would lead to customer retention (Chi and Qu, 2008). Prayag (2008) found that attributes like comfort facilities, safety and infrastructure, cultural attractions and shopping, tourist attractions and ambience and variety and accessibility affects loyalty. Several studies have shown that previous visit, overall satisfaction and quality are good predictors of customer loyalty (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Petrick et al., 2001; Bigné et al., 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag, 2009; Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011; Hung & Petrick, 2012; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). Additionally, it is essential to understand service quality and satisfaction as they are predictors of loyalty (Lee, Huh & Hong, 2008). Many researchers have studied the link between service quality and satisfaction in determining loyalty (Canny & Hidayat, 2012), but the results are debatable.

3. Methodology

Most of the studies conducted on destination service quality have used the quantitative approach. Destination dimensions are highly contextual and the measurement of quality should reflect the specificity of the destination (Zabkar et al., 2010), there was thus a need to carry out the qualitative approach in order to identify the critical dimension of destination service quality of Mauritius and then the constructs were empirically tested. Initially, interviews with international visitors were undertaken to identify the relevant dimensions of destination service quality. The visitors were asked what motivated their choice to visit Mauritius as a holiday destination and how they felt about Mauritius taking into considerations destination service quality. The derived
dimensions were then compared to the literature and a final list of 8 dimensions was retained on the basis of similarities with other studies.

Based on the dimensions identified in the qualitative study and the literature, a self-administered questionnaire was designed. The attributes relating to destination service quality, tourist satisfaction and loyalty were captured using a 5-point Likert scale. Using convenience sampling, 250 questionnaires were distributed to tourists who were willing to fill the questionnaire. A total of 218 usable questionnaires were retained for further analysis. Using SPSS version 21.0, descriptive statistics and multiple regression were used to analyze the data.

4. Results

4.1 Perceptions of destination service quality dimensions

As shown by Table 1, the overall mean scores for the 8 factors measuring destination service quality. All the factors were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. The qualitative study revealed a new dimension has emerged, namely “adventure and discovery” which has not been used by previous studies to assess destination service quality. The findings in the current study showed that the tourists were moderately agreeable to the two attributes measuring this dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People and Hospitality</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>14.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility and Transport</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>21.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>23.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>23.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>23.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>13.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and Sports</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>19.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure and Discovery</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>13.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Impact of destination service quality on tourist satisfaction

Table 2 showed the results of the regression analysis investigating the impact of destination service quality dimensions (People and Hospitality; Accessibility and Transport; Environment; Attractions; Accommodation and Food; Price; Activities and Sports; Adventure and Discovery) on tourist satisfaction. The regression analysis was used to identify the importance of the destination service quality dimensions, the independent variables, in predicting tourist satisfaction, the dependent variable.
Table 2: Regression analysis of destination service quality on tourist satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People and Hospitality</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>3.865</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility and Transport</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>-0.310</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>-0.451</td>
<td>0.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>6.463</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.399</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>-0.920</td>
<td>0.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and Sports</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.136</td>
<td>0.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure and Discovery</td>
<td>0.263</td>
<td>3.667</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R square = 0.531; F=11.162 (p < 0.01)

The 8 destination service quality dimensions indicated 53% of the variance in the evaluation of tourist satisfaction and it is significant as shown by the F-value. Moreover, the t-values of the destination service quality dimensions showed that “people and hospitality”, “accessibility and transport”, “attractions”, “accommodation and food” and “adventure and discovery” were the significant factors in predicting satisfaction. However, the t-values also indicated that “accessibility and transport” had a negative effect on tourist satisfaction. It is interesting to see that the new dimension “adventure and discovery” that had emerged from the qualitative study played an important role in predicting satisfaction.

4.3 Impact of destination service quality and satisfaction on tourist loyalty

Table 3 showed the results of regression analysis investigating the impact of destination service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction on tourist loyalty. The 8 destination service quality dimensions and satisfaction indicated 49% of the variance in the evaluation of tourist loyalty. Moreover, the t-values of the destination service quality dimensions showed that only “People and Hospitality”, “Accommodation and Food” and “tourist satisfaction” were the most important factors predicting tourist loyalty at p < 0.05. These 3 factors positively influenced tourist loyalty.

Table 3: Regression analysis of destination service quality dimensions and satisfaction on tourist loyalty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People and Hospitality</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>1.776</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility and Transport</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.669</td>
<td>0.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td>-0.105</td>
<td>-0.917</td>
<td>0.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.990</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>-0.379</td>
<td>0.705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and Sports</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>0.517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure and Discovery</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>-0.249</td>
<td>0.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.346</td>
<td>3.107</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R square = 0.490; F=1.281 (p < 0.000)
5. Conclusion

The aim of the study was firstly to gain a deeper understanding of destination service quality using qualitative approach and secondly to assess tourists’ perceptions of destination service quality and its impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Mauritius. It has attempted to provide an empirical evidence of the relationship between destination service, tourist satisfaction and loyalty in an island destination. It can be seen that the new dimension “adventure and discovery” plays a crucial role in predicting tourist satisfaction, but however, it does not have a positive effect on tourist loyalty. It is important to study the factors that influence tourist loyalty, particularly in the island destination where repeat visitors consist of an important part of the total tourist arrival.

References


