

DESTINATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS—HOW LINKED ARE THEY FROM A CUSTOMER'S PERSPECTIVE?

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Abstract.—Success in the hotel and tourism industry depends on understanding the key factors of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction leads to purchase repetition, intention to revisit, and potential increased future patronage of the hotel. The purpose of this research is to better understand (1) the factors that influence overnight accommodation decisions; (2) how these factors relate to satisfaction ratings for a variety of accommodation and destination elements; and (3) how these factors and satisfaction ratings relate to return visitation and/or making positive recommendations to others. Results indicate that some hotel services and facilities had significant influence on hotel satisfaction ratings. Most *Push* factors (i.e., sightseeing, shopping, business trip), hotel satisfaction, and some of the other satisfaction factors tested (i.e., family attraction, value of a vacation, shopping, restaurant, entertainment) had a positive relationship with overall trip satisfaction. For the destination studied, the results also showed that shopping satisfaction can result in repeat visitation and recommending the destination to others.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is a leading criterion for measuring the perceived quality of a product or service and any accompanying services (Vavra, 1997). Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the result of interaction between the consumer's prepurchase expectations and post-purchase evaluation (Czepiel and Rosenberg, 1997). Success in the hotel industry depends on understanding the key factors that influence customer satisfaction both at the hotel property and possibly the larger geographic destination. Satisfying customers during their first visit and prolonging their stay can help develop customer loyalty and thereby encourage the desire to revisit the destination (Poon and Long, 2005). This can lead to purchase repetition over time and increased future patronage of the hotel or revisitation to the destination. Otto et al. (2004) found that the relationship between customer satisfaction and repeat purchase was bolstered when the customer found value in the product.

The purpose of this research is to better understand (1) the factors that influence overnight or accommodation decisions; (2) how these factors relate to satisfaction ratings for a variety of accommodation and destination elements and (3) how these factors and satisfaction ratings relate to return visitation and/or making positive recommendations to others. Results indicate that some hotel services and facilities had significant influence hotel satisfaction ratings.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Push* and *Pull* Factors in Travel Motivation

One of the travel motivation models related to travelers' decisionmaking in choosing a destination involves defining *Push* and *Pull* factors (Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Hagan, 1993). According to this theory, when people make travel decisions, they are pushed by

internal motives and pulled or attracted by destination attributes (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). *Push* motivations have been useful in explaining the desire for travel, whereas *Pull* motivations help to explain actual destination choices (Christensen, 1983; Crompton, 1979). *Push* factors include the cognitive processes and socio-psychological motivations that cause individuals to travel (Chon, 1989).

2.2 Hotel Services and Facilities

Past hotel services and facilities research has focused on the relationship between customer satisfaction and repeat visitation (Choi & Chu, 2001; Skogland & Siguaw, 2004). Because of the intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability of services, customer satisfaction criteria may include contextual cues that customers use to evaluate service quality and to make decisions about future patronage (Bitner & Parasuraman, 1991). Wuest, Tas, and Emenheiser (1996) defined perceptions of hotel attributes as the degree to which travelers find various services and facilities important in promoting their satisfaction with hotel stays.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

In the hotel industry, customer satisfaction with reception desk services, food and beverages, housekeeping, and price are important factors in determining whether a customer will repurchase and/or recommend (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Getty and Thompson (1994) studied relationships between quality of lodging, satisfaction, and the resulting effect on customers' intentions to recommend lodging to prospective customers. Their findings suggest that customers' intentions to recommend are a function of both their satisfaction with the lodging experience and their perceptions of service quality.

Satisfaction with a tourist destination can be defined as a tourist's affective state resulting from an overall appraisal of pleasure and psychological preferences connected to the tourist destination (Huang and Chiu, 2006). Customers who have a satisfactory experience with a tourist destination are more likely to show positive behavioral intentions (Zeithaml, Berry, &

Parasuraman, 1996), leading to increased destination loyalty (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Tax & Brown, 1998).

2.4 Repeat Visitation and Recommendation

In tourist behavior research, repeat visitation has been used to assess tourists' destination loyalty. Repeat visitation is conceptually similar to two of the three customer loyalty indicators, namely, intention to continue buying and intention to buy more. However, repeat visitation may not truly represent loyalty and a nonrepeat visit behavior may not represent lack of loyalty to a destination. For example, those who do not return to a previously visited destination may remain loyal to that destination but simply want to seek different travel experiences at new destinations. It may be true that loyal tourists are more inclined to use the same airline and stay in the same franchised hotel wherever they travel but this may not necessarily be applicable to selection of travel destinations. To test this concept, the measure of a tourist's willingness to recommend a destination was applied as an indicator of their loyalty. Thus, destination loyalty was operationally defined as the level of tourists' perceptions of a destination as a recommendable place (Chen & Gursoy, 2001).

3.0 METHODS

A questionnaire collected information about tourists' reasons for visiting a destination, their loyalty to the destination, descriptions of their experiences there, and their level of satisfaction with services and facilities. On-site questionnaires were used to study overnight tourists who stayed in motels, hotels, and bed and breakfast businesses in Saginaw County, a major tourist destination in Michigan. Saginaw County is located in mid-Michigan, is home to two of Michigan's most visited tourist destination communities, is a center for health care, and has a number of highly regarded professional service firms and a growing medical device and technology sector. This research was conducted at 12 bed & breakfast (B&B) establishments and 42 hotels, which have a combined total of 3,279 rooms in the cities of Saginaw, Bridgeport, Birch Run, Chesaning and Frankenmuth.

Tourism and the hospitality industry in this county are dependent on leisure, group, and business travelers.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section was designed to extract tourists' experiences at the lodging facility where they stayed. The second section collected information on tourists' activities during their Saginaw County stay, asked respondents to rate their levels of satisfaction with various aspects of Saginaw County on a seven-point Likert scale, and provided open-ended questions regarding revisitation to the destination and recommendation to others about the destination. The third section was about tourists' experience levels with Saginaw County. The last section asked about socio-demographic information.

The target population for our study was tourists who stayed overnight in the Saginaw County area for leisure or business over a 6-month period from July to December 2006. During 6 months, 4,494 surveys were provided to hotel properties for distribution, according to the sampling frame designed by researchers, to ensure random selection and generalizability of results. In July, 54 properties agreed to participate in the study, which required them to follow the sampling frame. Forty-two of these properties continued participating in the research study through December. After 6 months, 662 completed questionnaires had been returned to researchers in prepaid envelopes, for an approximate response rate of 15 percent at the time this analysis was completed.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Demographic and Traveling Characteristics of the Respondents

Descriptive statistical methods including cross-tabulations were used to analyze tourists' demographic and traveling characteristics as presented at Table 1. Among the respondents, 66 percent were female and 34 percent were male. The average age of the respondents was 51 years old. Annual household income was high with a majority (68 percent) earning more than \$50,000. The respondents were primarily from Michigan (41 percent), Ohio (10 percent), Canada (8 percent), Indiana (5 percent), and other

Table 1.—Demographic and travel characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	
Male	34 %
Female	66 %
Average age	51 years old
Zip code of respondent's primary residence	
Michigan	41 %
Ohio	10 %
Canada	8 %
Other states	36 % of total but each state <5 %
Annual household income	
less than \$25,000	7 %
\$25,000-\$49,999	25 %
\$50,000-\$99,999	47 %
\$100,000 or more	21 %
Primary purpose of a visit to Saginaw County	
Shopping	25 %
Sightseeing	18 %
Visiting a friend or a family	16 %
A business trip	11 %
The most important factors in selecting the hotel where respondents stayed*	
Hotel location	39 %
Room rate/package price	26 %
The specific hotel room	25 %
Hotel amenities	24 %
Repeat guests	19 %
Hotel service	14 %
Hotel membership holder	14 %
Recommended by a friend	11 %
Hotel advertising	10 %
Mean satisfaction with: ^a	
Family attraction	1.7
Hotel	1.8
Restaurants	1.9
Shopping	1.7
Overall trip	1.8
Visit Saginaw County again in the next 12 months	
Yes	73 %
No	24 %
Not sure/Maybe	3 %
Recommend Saginaw County visit to others	
Yes	96 %
No	4 %

*Note: Three responses allowed

^a1=extremely satisfied; 7=not at all satisfied)

states (36 percent total but fewer than 5 percent of respondents were from any one state).

Four out of ten respondents indicated the primary purpose of their visit to Saginaw County was

shopping (25 percent), sightseeing (18 percent), visiting friends or family (16 percent), or a business trip, conference/convention, or truck route (11 percent). The most important factors in selecting the hotel where they stayed were (three responses allowed): hotel location (39 percent), room rate/package price (26 percent), the specific hotel room (25 percent), hotel amenities (24 percent), repeat guests (19 percent), hotel service (14 percent), hotel membership holder (14 percent), recommended by a friend (11 percent), and hotel advertising (10 percent). When asked to rate various aspects of their visit to Saginaw County, respondents were most satisfied with shopping (mean 1.7, on a scale where 1=extremely satisfied and 7=not at all satisfied), followed closely by family attractions (1.7), hotels (1.8), and scenery (1.9). Overall satisfaction was rated very high (1.8). More than seven out of ten respondents indicated that they would revisit Saginaw County in the next 12 months (73 percent), and 96 percent of respondents would recommend Saginaw County for a visit to others.

4.2 Relationship between Accommodations and Destinations

To test the relationship between hotel service/facilities and hotel satisfaction, two different types of cluster analysis were applied to hotel service/facilities factors. The data were initially analyzed using a hierarchical clustering procedure to measure similarity between cases. The K-means clustering technique was then used to fine-tune the results. As shown at Table 2, the three clusters were:

Cluster 1: Recommended by a friend or a family

Cluster 2: Price and advertising

Cluster 3: Loyal and satisfied past customers

The three clusters were then entered into multiple regression analysis to determine their contribution to hotel satisfaction ratings. Surprisingly, the result was that these three clusters were not significantly related to hotel satisfaction. Thus, each variable of hotel service/facilities was analyzed again using multiple regression analysis and showed that several individual variables had positive relationships with hotel satisfaction, as shown Table 3: ‘Hotel rooms are very good’ ($\beta = .144$, $t=3.12$, $p<.05$), ‘Hotel service is very good’ ($\beta = .117$, $t=2.589$, $p<.05$), ‘Recommended by a friend’ ($\beta = .095$, $t=2.021$, $p<.05$), ‘I always stay at this hotel’ ($\beta = .103$, $t=2.226$, $p<.05$), ‘I like the location of this hotel’ ($\beta = .108$, $t=2.278$, $p<.05$), and ‘Hotel amenities are very good’ ($\beta = .156$, $t=3.535$, $p<.05$).

Table 4 presents the data related to connections between trip purpose, hotel services/facilities, hotel satisfaction, other satisfaction related to a trip, and overall satisfaction with a trip. The analysis suggests that hotel service/facilities were not significantly related to overall trip satisfaction but that hotel satisfaction had a positive correlation with tourists’ overall trip satisfaction ($\beta = .24$, $t=5.648$, $p<.001$). Most of other measures of satisfaction had positive relationships with overall trip satisfaction as well; these included satisfaction with family attractions ($\beta = .236$, $t=4.472$, $p<.001$), satisfaction with vacation

Table 2.—Clusters of hotel service/facilities by respondents who stayed at a hotel in Saginaw County

Cluster 1 Recommended by a friend or a family member	Cluster 2 Price and advertising	Cluster 3 Loyal and satisfied past customers	Others Not clustered in any group
I prefer staying at a new hotel	I saw advertising for the hotel	Hotel rooms are very good	My organization chose the hotel
Recommended by a friend	Easy to reserve online	Hotel service is very good	I like the location of this hotel
Allowing pets, kid-friendly feature (i.e., cribs, game rooms, activities)	Room rate/package price	I always stay at this hotel	I like the restaurant at this hotel
		I have a membership card with this hotel	Special events that are held at the hotel
		Hotel amenities are very good (i.e., lobby, pool, breakfast area)	

Table 3.—Relationships between hotel service/facilities and hotel satisfaction

	β	t	Sig.
Hotel service is very good	.117	2.589	.010
Easy to reserve online	.048	1.081	.280
Room rate/package price	.070	1.542	.124
I prefer staying at a new hotel	.053	1.226	.221
Recommended by a friend	.095	2.021	.044
I always stay at this hotel	.103	2.226	.026
I have a membership card with this hotel	.015	.323	.747
My organization chose the hotel	.031	.683	.495
I like the location of this hotel	.108	2.278	.023
I like the restaurant at this hotel	.081	1.861	.063
Special events that are held at the hotel	.082	1.892	.059
Allowing pets, kid-friendly feature (i.e., cribs, game rooms, activities)	.044	.979	.328
Hotel amenities are very good (i.e., lobby, pool, breakfast area)	.156	3.535	.000
Hotel rooms are very good	.144	3.120	.002
I saw advertising for the hotel	.017	.358	.720

Note: Adjusted R square: 0.62

value ($\beta = .210$, $t = 4.541$, $p < .001$), satisfaction with shopping opportunities ($\beta = .171$, $t = 3.906$, $p < .001$), satisfaction with restaurants ($\beta = .120$, $t = 3.013$, $p < .05$), and satisfaction with entertainment' ($\beta = .135$, $t = 2.845$, $p < .05$). The result of the regression analysis was not significant so ANOVA was used again. The findings this time were that satisfaction with sightseeing ($df = 586$, $p < .05$), shopping ($df = 586$, $p < .05$), and business trips ($df = 577$, $p < .001$) were significantly related to overall trip satisfaction.

The last tests showed positive relationships between each independent variable related to customer loyalty. Logistic regression analysis found that only shopping satisfaction had a significant relationship with destination revisitation (S.E. = .406, $p < .05$). This result was expected because shopping is a primary reason for visiting Saginaw County, as previously mentioned. Other variables were not significantly related to destination revisitation. However, recommendation to others about the destination was not tested because there was not enough variance to test between

Table 4.—Relationship between purpose of trip, hotel services/facilities, hotel satisfaction, other satisfaction measures related to the trip and overall satisfaction with the trip

	β	t	Sig.
Purpose of trip			
Visit with friends or family	.115	.658	.418
Sightseeing	.540	3.092	.080
Shopping	.031	.179	.673
Business trip	.607	3.478	.064
Other satisfaction measures related to trip			
Family attractions	.236	4.472	.000
Value of a vacation	.210	4.541	.000
Entertainment	.135	2.845	.005
Shopping	.171	3.906	.000
Restaurants	.120	3.013	.003
Hotel service/facilities ^a	-.001	-.026	.980
Hotel satisfaction	.240	5.648	.000

Note: Adjusted R square: .817

^aAnalyzed with clustered cases

“yes” (96 percent responded) and “no” (4 percent responded).

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the main objectives of this research was to identify the factors that influence accommodation decisionmaking. Several hotel service/facilities factors were found to be important, including hotel location, hotel room and package rate, the type of hotel room, hotel amenities, repeat guests, and recommendations from a friend. Findings from this study showed that some *Pull* factors (i.e., hotel room type, hotel service, recommendation by a friend, always stay at this hotel, location, hotel amenities) had a significant relationship with hotel satisfaction. Hotel satisfaction also had a positive relationship with tourists' overall trip satisfaction. Most *Push* factors (i.e., sightseeing, shopping, business trip), with the exception of ‘visit with friends or family’, and some of other satisfactions (i.e., family attraction, value of a vacation, shopping,

restaurant, entertainment) had a positive relationship with tourists' overall trip satisfaction. Finally, it was found that shopping satisfaction alone can positively influence repeat visitation and recommendation of the destination to others.

Our findings are useful to the hotel industry as they provide a clear indication of how to improve their services. Once the hotel attributes in relation to customers' requirements are clearly identified and understood, hotel managers are more able to anticipate and cater to their customers' desires and needs, rather than merely reacting to their requests. A better understanding of tourists' behavior to revisit the destination or to recommend the destination to others would help the hotel and tourism industries develop customer loyalty. Although our study found that hotel service/facilities are less important in influencing tourists' overall satisfaction and customer loyalty to the destination, this model can be used by hotels and tourism-related businesses to increase customers' satisfaction with and loyalty to the destination.

Future studies using this model could help us better understand the relationships between push/pull factors, destination loyalty, and trip satisfaction for various destination. First, future studies could investigate more resort-dominated destinations using this model to see if there are more causal relationships between hotel service/facilities, hotel satisfaction, and destination loyalty in this different type of setting. Second, this model needs to be re-examined using other possible data analysis. For example, structural equation modeling may provide additional rigor and add to the robustness of the model.

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