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TOURIST SATISFACTION VARIABLES AND DESTINATION LOYALTY: A STUDY OF KASHMIR DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

Customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are two main issues which companies are focusing and trying to be successful about. Loyalty is concerned with the likelihood of a customer returning, making referrals, providing strong word-of-mouth, as well as providing references and publicity. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of tourist satisfaction variables like accommodation, information, accessibility and attraction on destination loyalty in Jammu and Kashmir. The respondents of the research study have been the tourists visiting the destinations of Jammu and Kashmir. The respondents have been categorised into two groups of first time visitors and revisitors. The data has been collected through a well designed questionnaire using 3-point likert Scale. The results of the study shows that a satisfied tourist shows increased likelihood of future repeat visits and a keen willingness to recommend the destination to others.

KEYWORDS

loyalty, satisfaction, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between service behavior and service quality has proven its role and importance in management/marketing (Valarie et al., 1996, Heskett & Sasser, 2010; Hutchinsona et al., 2009). The concepts of service quality and service satisfaction have been highly considered and used in marketing texts and activities, during previous decades. Marketing researchers have praised the advantages of satisfaction and quality, and have mentioned them as indices of an organization competitive benefit (Ruyter, 1997). On the other hand, service loyalty is one of the most important structures in service marketing, due to its final effect on customers' repeated purchases, and in fact, those loyal customers who purchase repeatedly are considered as the base of any business (Caruana, 2002). Although these concepts have been used so many times in the marketing literature, but the relations between these three concepts still remain ambiguous. Therefore, this research intends to study the relation of these three concepts. Customer satisfaction is a key factor in formation of customer's desires for future purchase (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Furthermore, the satisfied customers will probably talk to others about their good experiences. This fact, especially in the Middle Eastern cultures, where the social life has been shaped in a way that social communication with other people enhances the society, is more important (Jamal & Naser, 2002). Although satisfaction has been defined as the difference between expectation and performance, but there are differences between quality and satisfaction. For example, Parasuraman et al. (1991) say that satisfaction is a decision made after experience while quality is not the same. On the other hand, in satisfaction literature, expectations for goods is "would", while in service quality literature, expectations for goods is "should". Cadotte & Turgeon (1988) have introduced another group of factors known as neutral factors. Besides, Liljander & Strandvik (1993) say that experience is not needed for evaluating service quality, and service can be evaluated on the basis of the knowledge about service provider, while satisfaction is an inner view, resulted from customer's own experience from the service. Finally, several researches have been done on the relation between service quality and satisfaction: findings of some of these researches show that satisfaction results in service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Also, the research conducted by Sureshchandar et al. (2002) shows that, there is a two-way relation between satisfaction and service quality.

Many service organizations have developed customer loyalty programs as a part of relations development activities. Customer loyalty is a complicated concept. Oxford Dictionary defines loyalty as a state of true to allegiance. But the mere repeated purchase by customers has been mixed with the above mentioned definition of loyalty. In service domain, loyalty has been defined in an extensive form as "observed behaviors" (Bloemer et al., 1999). Caruana (2002) argues that behavior is a full expression of loyalty to the brand and not just thoughts. However, behavior standards (such as repeated purchase) have been criticized, due to the lack of a conceptual basis of a dynamic process (Caruana, 2002). For example, the low frequency of repeated purchase of a special service may be resulted from different situation factors, such as non-availability or absence of a provider. According to this point of view, loyal behavior cannot offer a comprehensive conception of fundamental causes of loyalty. Additionally, repetition may be due to different restrictions resulted from the market. Consequently, the loyalty of this type of customers mainly differs from the loyalty of those customers who seriously support a product, and do have psychological bond with a product and a company. Therefore, customer's loyalty was considered as an attitudinal structure. For example, this issue appears in the tendency to advise the service offer to other customers. Finally, in addition to behavioral and attitudinal approaches, another approach to customer's loyalty, called cognitive approach, was introduced. The operational definition of this approach often refers to the first product or service which comes to the mind of a person, while making decision for purchase. Meanwhile, in their definition of this approach, Ostrowski et al. (1993) and Bloemer (1999) refer to the first product or service that a person chooses among products and services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of loyalty has been recognised as one of the more important indicators of corporate success in the marketing literature (La Barbara and Mazursky, 1983; Turnbull and Wilson, 1989; Pine et al., 1995; Bauer et al., 2002). Baker and Crompton (2000) define satisfaction as the tourist's emotional state after experiencing the trip. Therefore, evaluating satisfaction in terms of a travelling experience is a post-consumption process (Fornell, 1992; Kozak, 2001). Assessing satisfaction can help managers to improve services (Fornell, 1992) and to compare organisations and destinations in terms of performance (Kotler, 1994). In addition, the ability of managing feedback received from customers can be an important source of competitive advantage (Peters, 1994). Moreover, satisfaction can be used as a measure to evaluate the products and services offered at the destination (Ross and Iso-Ahola, 1991; Noe and Uysal, 1997; Bramwell, 1998; Schofield, 2000). Recently, more holistic models have been used to explain destination loyalty in tourism research. Yoon and Uysal (2005) propose a model which relates destination loyalty with travel satisfaction and holiday motivations. This study finds a significant cause-effect relationship between travel satisfaction and destination loyalty as well as between motivations and travel satisfaction. Oh (1999) establishes service quality, perceived price, customer value and perceptions of company performance as determinants of customer satisfaction which, in turn, is used to explain revisit intentions. Bigne et al. (2001) identify that returning intentions and recommending intentions are influenced by tourism image and quality variables of the destination. Kozak (2001) model intentions to revisit in terms of the following explanatory variables: overall satisfaction, number of previous visits and perceived performance of destination. In a recent paper, Um et al. (2006)

propose a structural equation model that explains revisiting intentions as determined by satisfaction, perceived attractiveness, perceived quality of service and perceived value for money. In this study repeat visits are determined more by perceived attractiveness than by overall satisfaction.

Another important conclusion from the study carried out by Um et al. (2006) is that the revisit decision-making process should be modelled in the same way as modelling a destination choice process. This implies that the personal characteristics of tourists, such as motivations and socio-demographic characteristics also play an important role in explaining their future behaviour. Despite sharing equal degrees of satisfaction, tourists with different personal features can report heterogeneous behaviour in terms of their loyalty to a destination (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). Motivations form the basis of the travel decision process and therefore should also be considered when analysing destination loyalty intentions. Beerli and Martín (2004) propose that “motivation is the need that drives an individual to act in a certain way to achieve the desired satisfaction” (Beerli and Martín, 2004:626). Motivations can be intrinsic (push) or extrinsic (pull) (Crompton, 1979). Push motivations correspond to a tourist’s desire and emotional frame of mind. Pull motivations represent the attributes of the destination to be visited. Yoon and Uysal (2005) take tourist satisfaction to be a mediator variable between motivations (pull and push) and destination loyalty. The effect of socio-demographic variables in the tourist decision process is also an issue which has received some attention. Some studies propose that age and level of education influence the choice of destination (Goodall and Ashworth, 1988; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Weaver et al., 1994; Zimmer et al., 1995). Font (2000) shows that age, educational level, nationality and occupation represent determinant variables in the travel decision process.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study had before it the following objectives:

- To study different variables of tourist satisfaction and their relation with destination loyalty.
- To study the perspective of distinct tourist groups in terms of their expectations and perceptions.

HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis was laid down for the purpose of present research study.

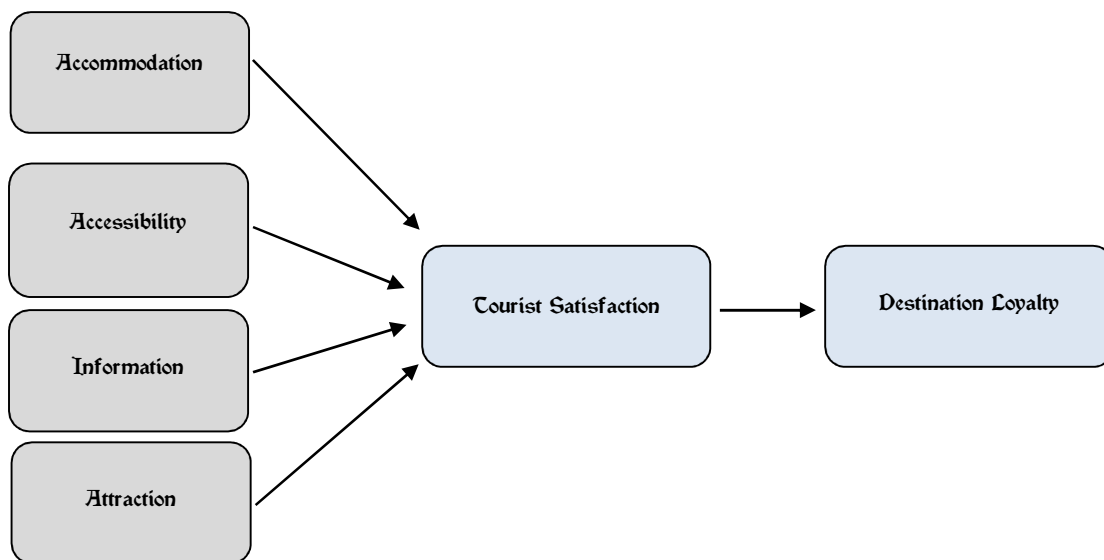
H₀: Tourist satisfaction has insignificant impact on destination loyalty in Kashmir Division

H_a: Tourist satisfaction has significant impact on destination loyalty in Kashmir Division

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The proposed structural equation model of the tourist loyalty intention is presented in Figure 1. The model establishes a direct causal-effect relationship of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty.

FIGURE 1: THE PROPOSED HYPOTHETICAL MODEL



METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to examine the theoretical and empirical evidence on the causal relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The sample of the study were the tourists visiting tourist destinations of Jammu and Kashmir. The respondents were categorized into tourists visiting for the first time and the tourists who have visited destination earlier. A total of 200 respondents had been contacted to collect required data pertaining to tourist satisfaction and its impact on tourist loyalty. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire, which was based on the tourist satisfaction dimensions like accommodation, accessibility, attraction and information. The data was collected on 5-point likert scale. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS and various statistical measures like mean, SD, were used to arrive at the results. Cronbach’s alpha was used to examine the reliability of the scale items.

RESULT FINDINGS

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

TABLE 1

Category	
Tourists Visiting for the first time	50
Revisitors	150

SURVEY FINDINGS

TABLE 2

Components	Cronbach’s alpha	Mean	SD
Accommodation	0.82	4.113	0.571
Accessibility	0.81	4.071	0.741
Information	0.79	3.971	0.352
Attraction	0.84	4.217	0.451

The result in the above table shows the mean score of tourist satisfaction components. The highest mean score obtained by the attraction depicts tourist destinations of Jammu and Kashmir are highly attractive to the tourists. The overall result reveals that the tourist satisfaction components positively affects destination loyalty.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis of the present research paper as shown in the table (3).

TABLE 3: LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TOURIST SATISFACTION

Tourist satisfaction components	R	R(Square)	F	Sig (f)	T	Sig (t)	α	β	Hypothesis decision
Accommodation	.368	.187	22.47	0.000	4.871	0.000	1.365	0.496	Null hypothesis rejected
Accessibility	.433	.209	15.95	0.000	5.493	0.001	2.187	1.256	
Information	.450	.130	14.60	0.000	6.142	0.000	2.167	0.965	
Attraction	.475	.218	17.46	0.000	5.128	0.004	1.545	0.013	

The result in table (3) indicates simple linear regression analysis of tourist satisfaction components in the tourist destinations of J and K. The significances level t ($p < 0.05$) indicates linear relationship of tourist satisfaction components (accommodation, accessibility, information, attraction) with destination loyalty. The results therefore reveal that the alternate hypothesis supports the research objectives.

CONCLUSION

Tourist satisfaction and loyalty are two important components in improving tourist arrival to a country. When a tourist is satisfied with his visit, the desire to revisit the place is high and this will lead to his desire in recommending the said tourism location to friends and family members. This will indirectly promote the said tourism destination. This will be beneficial to tourism operators and ultimately to the nations income. The present research paper examines tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty in tourist destinations of Kashmir. From the regression analysis it was revealed that the components of tourist satisfaction do have an impact on destination loyalty. This finding can be used as a benchmark element to make a comparison with other research studies to be undertaken during the season and will help various stakeholders of J&K Tourism in designing future marketing strategies.

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