The Relationship Between Tourist Expectation, Perceived Quality and Satisfaction with Tourism Products

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Abstract: The primary objective of this research is to conceptualize and empirically test valid prepositions of the relationship between tourist's expectation, actual experiences and satisfaction with Malaysian tourism products. To establish these objectives, the researchers made used of quantitative data where questionnaires were personally delivered to Nigerians in two public universities in Malaysia. The results indicate that tourist expectation (pre-purchase evaluation) and perceived quality (post-purchase intention) are two major antecedents of tourists' satisfaction. This research concludes that the continuous influx of Nigerians into Malaysia is a consequence of satisfaction with the tourism and hospitality services backed by positive word of mouth promotion from fellow Nigerians. Importantly, the results and recommendations in this research has availed tourism managers the practical implications of establishing tourist's expectations before designing their service standards.

Key words: Tourist satisfaction, tourist expectation, perceived service quality, Nigerians in Malaysia, Malaysia tourism products

INTRODUCTION

With rapid developments in the tourism industry, both the governments and private entrepreneurs have started to maximize the opportunities of attracting tourists to their countries. Trying to define the term tourism could actually be difficult. World Tourism Organization defines tourism as any form of activities that involves people leaving their homes to travel and stay in other places that are outside their environments within 1 year either for business, leisure or other purposes. These domestic and international travels have shown tourism as a dynamic and unique industry that its competitiveness strategically requires the destination's ability to constantly adapt to the customers' ever changing needs and demands (Alegre and Cladera, 2006). The market mandates that customer's satisfaction should primarily be the focus for tourism service providers (Sitikantha and Tapan, 2001).

According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism industry has successfully become a competitive sector in the global economic development. This is because tourism business has become so lucrative that some developed and developing countries like Greece primarily depend on it as a major source of foreign exchange earnings for their country (Mohammed, 2006). Many of these countries depend on tourism as source of revenue, employment creation and poverty reduction (Andriotis et al., 2008).

In a bid to catch up with and explore these opportunities in tourism, many countries have now started to design their regions, cities and states in a manner that will attract tourist and tourism investors (Gil and Ritchie, 2008). Some have also argued that apart from assisting in the development of a country, tourism is a strategic means through which local cultures and traditional heritage could come into international limelight (Meng et al., 2008).

A good practical example is Malaysia that was successful in increasing the number of international tourist arrival between 2008 and 2009 to 23.6 million tourist with total receipts of RM53.37 billion (approximately $16.7 billion). Tourist arrival includes >14,000 Nigerians as estimated by Ministry of Tourism Malaysia. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) updates in 2010 and 2011 has ranked Malaysia the 9th position among the top ten most visited countries in the world. Through the projection of a good destination image in the market, Malaysia has been able to expand in their tourism sector as the year goes by and this growth has helped in increasing their global recognition.

As observed in the literature review, Nigerian tourist satisfaction with their foreign destinations has not been empirically studied. In Malaysia, this subject continues to be neglected despite the sudden surge in Nigerian's visit

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to the country in recent years. A review of the extant literature reveals that to date, there has not been any research that have empirically established the relationship between Nigerian tourist's expectation, actual experiences and satisfaction with their respective destinations in Malaysia. The official communication network of Nigerians in Malaysia (NIDOMY) has also revealed that despite the negative perceptions of the host country about Nigerian tourists in Malaysia, the last few years have witnessed a surge in the number of Nigerian tourists to Malaysia. Yet, there is lack of study to determine the post-visit experience of the Nigerian tourists in Malaysia.

The increase in number of inbound tourists to Malaysia is an issue which also involves Nigerian tourists whose choice of Malaysia as a destination is yet to be understood. This study empirically examines Nigerian tourists experience in Malaysia with a focus on factors that influence their satisfaction with Malaysia tourism products (Jani and Zabairin, 2010). This was done by examining the impact of tourist's expectation on perception towards service quality and post choice satisfaction as theoretically suggested by Chen and Tsai (2007). Finally, the researchers strongly believed that findings from the hypothesized relationships in the theoretical model will avail the academics and tourism practitioners in Malaysia a good feedback of what actually constitute Nigerian tourist satisfaction in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Tourist satisfaction model and methodology: In this research, there are three construct that was developed to achieve the research objectives and the research questions. These variables are tourist expectation, perceived quality and tourists' satisfaction. The entire measurement items were adopted from existing literature using 5 Likert rating scales starting from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For compliance with data collection requirements, 250 questionnaires were distributed to the Nigerian postgraduate and undergraduate students studying in Malaysia using cluster probability sampling in two public universities (Roscoe, 1975). This type of data collection method is consistent with existing industry literature such as Quintal and Polczynski (2010). From this number, only 115 questionnaires were returned out of which 7 were deleted because they were outliers. Thus, the total usable response was 108 constituting 46% response rate. The sample size in this study appears to be very adequate, comparable to many tourist satisfaction studies that have used postgraduate and undergraduate
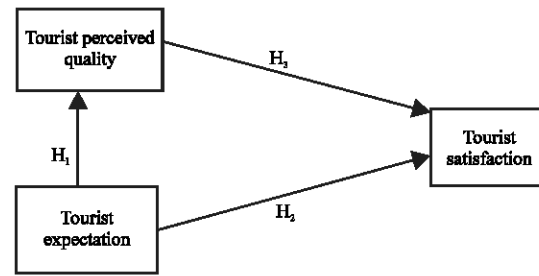

Fig. 1: Tourist satisfaction model (theoratical framework of the research

students as the study sample. In those studies, their respective response rates were between 21.2 and 60% (Quintal and Polczynski, 2010; Furutani and Fujita, 2005).

The measurement items in the research questionnaire were intended to capture basic perceptions of Nigerian tourists, such as purpose of visit, initial expectation and actual experience in Malaysia. The questionnaire is structured in a way that will enable the researchers to make efficient utilization of the measurement items in order to answer the research questions. The proposed interrelationships in the research framework have been conceptualized to determine the outcomes of Nigerian tourists' expectations with Malaysian tourism products and their degree of satisfaction with these products. Conceptualized in Fig. 1 is the research framework.

Theoretical linkages of the constructs in the research model: The extant literature have shown that there have been a number of empirical studies on tourist's expectations and perceptions of specific service quality attributes (Meng *et al.*, 2008). However, very little research has investigated international students' expectations with the destination country (Arambewela and Hall, 2009).

One of the most widely adopted frameworks in understanding customer perceptions is Fornell *et al.* (1996) that was conducted in United States to validate a model that can best explain determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Due to its strong explanatory power, this model has been globally adopted to test the impact of tourist expectation and perceived quality with satisfaction. Hence, this research used this literature as the main reference in modeling the determinants of Nigerian tourists with Malaysian tourism products.

As mentioned earlier, few recent studies have discovered that customers from different places formed different perceptions of perceived quality because of the

differences in expectations or the way they attached different weighting to different service quality they encounter. For example, Nelson and John (2007) investigated how tourists in the Asian and Western countries evaluate service encounters and found that Asian and Western tourists gave significantly different ratings on restaurant employee behavior. His finding shows that using SERVQUAL to measure perceived quality, customers from different cultures assigned different importance to weightings.

Another similar acceptable standard within the existing literature is that service quality can be defined as a perception of customers' judgments about the superiority of the services that are rendered by a company (Alcaniz *et al.*, 2005). But, a major issue of concern to some researchers is that the exact nature of customer's attitude or perception of service quality has not been generally agreed within these literatures. Whereas, some researchers suggested that the concept of perceived quality originates from the comparison of different customer expectations based on its perceptions of different company's performance or disconfirmation of expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 2004). Other researchers like Teas (1993) have empirically argued that the concept of service quality is derived from customers' comparison of the service performance with the expected industry ideal standards. Similarly, Cronin and Taylor (1992) also argued that service quality is a concept that derives its root from customers' perceptions of the organization's performance alone, without necessarily relating it to the ideal industry standards. Some of the scholarly efforts that were taken in the process of further analyzing the different opinion and findings of researchers on those differences that exist between quality perceptions and actual quality performance have led researchers into proposing some instruments that could be used in measuring service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Quintal and Polczynski, 2010).

Among the famous instruments that are used in measuring service quality within the service industry is SERVQUAL that was originally postulated by Zeithaml *et al.* (1985). Part of what they developed at the early stage of their research is a 10 dimensions instrument that is meant to measure service quality attributes in services industry. Out of these 10 dimensions, Zeithaml and his team finally grouped them into 5 most important factors, i.e., tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, empathy and assurance. These 5 dimensions have been globally used as a measurement instrument upon which the impact of service quality could be determined within the service industry.

Within the tourism industry, a unique quality model that has been mostly adopted is the American satisfaction index as conceptualized and empirically validated by Fornell *et al.* (1996). Importantly, this model comprises of tourist expectation as the independent variable where perceived quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, customer complaint are the mediating variables while customer loyalty is the dependent variable (Fornell *et al.*, 1996). In this connection, Chen and Tsai (2007) and Alcaniz *et al.* (2005) have argued and empirically established the need to conceptualize tourist expectation as the independent variable upon which all other variables can be influenced. Based on these and many more evidences, this research hypothesized that:

- H₁: Tourist expectation is positively related to tourists' satisfaction
- H₂: Tourist expectation is positively related to perceived quality
- H₃: Perceived quality is positively related to tourists' satisfaction
- H₄: Perceived quality positively mediate the relationship between tourist expectation and tourists' satisfaction

RESULTS

Measures: As availed in social science research, researchers have been using a 5 or 7 Likert scales for measuring and establishing valid prepositions between variables of interest (Byrne, 2010). For this research, the researchers have structured all the measurement instruments for measuring the three variables of interest to use 5 point Likert scale, starting from the dependent, mediating and the independent variables. A major reason, for this decision includes the unique inherent benefits in 5 point Likert scale such as providing detail feedback and not subjecting respondents to undue cognitive dissonance. Table 1 summarizes the results of the total variance explained and reliability analyzes for tourist expectation, perceived quality and tourist satisfaction.

As evident in Table 1, this study has made used of content reliability to determine if the hypothesized items are actually measuring their constructs (John and Reve, 1982). To do this, the researchers conducted a critical assessment of all the items' reliability to primarily examine loadings or the correlations of their measures with the construct upon which they were hypothesized. Theoretically, John and Reve (1982) suggested that the reliability and internal consistency of an item can be judged by set of rule of thumb which includes: Alpha level that is >0.90 should be categorized as been excellent

Table 1: Operationalization of constructs and validity results

| Variables	Measurement items	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach α
Tourist expectation	I expect Malaysia to possess good infrastructural facilities	60.065	0.738
	I expect Malaysia to have a moderate cost of living	-	-
	I expect Malaysia tourism service provider to charge		
	a reasonable price for shopping items purchased by tourist	-	-
Perceived quality	My expectations on Malaysia infrastructural facilities were met	-	0.721
	Malaysia has a moderate cost of living	-	-
	The services provided to tourist in Malaysia are highly reliable		
	at reasonable cost	-	-
Tourist satisfaction	In overall, I am satisfied with Malaysia tourism	-	0.761
	I am satisfied with the cultural and historical sites in Malaysia	-	-
	I am satisfied with the price of accommodation in Malaysia	-	-

Fig. 2: Structural Inner Model with path analyses and R^2
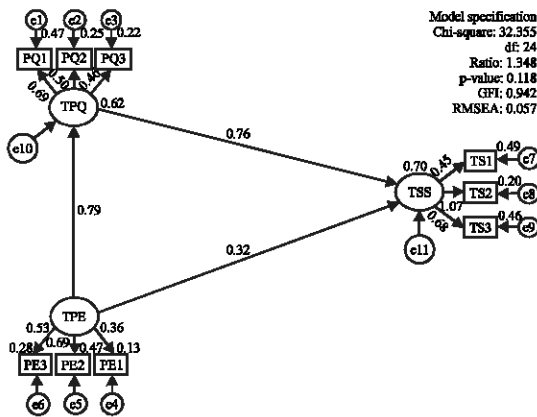
Table 2: Squared multiple correlations (R^2)

Variables	Estimate
Tourist perceived quality	0.619
Tourist satisfaction	0.703

Table 3: Goodness of fit index for the model

Final models	Criteria	Results
CMIN/df	<5.00	1.348 (32.355/24)
p-value	>0.05	0.118
GFI	>0.90	0.942
CFI	>0.95	0.957
TLI	>0.90	0.935
IFI	>0.90	0.959
RMSEA	<0.08	0.057

while the one that is >0.80 is good, >0.70 should be acceptable, >0.60 should be categorized as questionable, >0.50 is poor for scientific research, <0.50 is generally unacceptable for academic purposes. The results in Table 1 are good indication of the strengths in the measurement items that were employed in this study.

Final structural inner model: As noted earlier that the initial structural model was conceptualized based on available literature. However, making appropriate linkages between the paths analyses as an explicit hypothesis to be tested in this study left the researchers with 4 hypotheses. For this research, Fig. 2 that shows all the paths analyses and the variance explained (R^2) for the two endogenous variables, namely; tourist perceived quality and tourist satisfaction.

As illustrated in Fig. 2 and Table 2, the result from the final structural model shows that the latent variables in this research explain 62% of the variations in Nigerian tourist perceived quality. Similarly, the aggregate results shows that the combined effect of Nigerian tourist expectation and perceived quality account for 70% of the variability in their satisfaction with strong statistical significance between tourist perceived quality and tourist satisfaction. However, the positive relationship between

Nigerian tourist expectation and their satisfaction is consistent with the hypothesized model but not statistically significant. For detail explanations, please refer to the discussion and implication part of this study. For further verifications of the detail list of the earlier results as shown in the structural model, in Table 3 which is a direct extraction of outputs from AMOS 16 on goodness of fit index for your understanding.

As could be seen in Fig. 2 and Table 3, SEM result for the overall model shows that the Chi-square (χ^2) statistic is very small for the final revised model specifically with values (χ^2 = 32.355). The degrees of freedom for this model is also very small with the value of df = 24. The structural model in this research also achieved the suggested insignificant p-value where p = 0.118 for the final revised structural model. This result is very good because it is greater than the suggested p-value of 0.05, a valid indication that the model is statistically accepted (Byrne, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2006). This is because the inability of an hypothesized structural model to achieve a p-value that is >0.05 and a Chi-square that its ratio to degree of freedom is <5 will technically lead to the rejection of the model as stipulated in the goodness of fit indices of any SEM analysis (Byrne, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2006; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Notably, the ratio of the Chi-square of this model to its degree of freedom is CMIN/DF = 1.348 for final revised model. This value is far smaller compared to the suggested <5 that are prescribed for the achievement of

goodness of fit indices (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The results in Table 3 have statistically shown that the model in this study is acceptable. Also, very important are the other indicators to achieve goodness of fit in any model: Such as GFI: 0.942, CFI: 0.958, TLI: 0.935, RMSEA: 0.057 to mention a few. A critical comparison of these results with the earlier corresponding values in Table 3 has suggested that the hypothesized structural model in Fig. 2 empirically fits the data very well. Table 4 which is a direct extraction of outputs from AMOS 16 on path coefficients and the standardized beta estimates for your understanding.

As evident in existing literature that the path coefficients is statistically equivalent to the normal standardized beta weights in any multiple regression analysis (Byrne, 2010). Some researchers have also argued that the standardized path coefficients should normally be between the values of 0.20 and 0.30 for it to be meaningful (John and Kunz, 2005). Meanwhile, Hair *et al.* (2006) argued on the need for a path coefficient to be up to 0.08 as a criteria for retaining it and that other higher paths values mainly indicates the significant effects that such variables has on the hypothesized relationships. For this study, the earlier path coefficients as shown in the structural model of the relationship between Nigerian tourist expectations, perceived quality and satisfaction are all above the standard criterion has suggested by the different schools of thought. Hence, there is no need for a model re-specification to establish an alternative competing structural model.

In overall, the earlier results as obtained from the structural model analyzes have empirically show that tourist expectation has a significant effect on tourists' ability to behave positively towards the quality of goods and services in their respective destinations. Remarkably, the path coefficient of 0.79 and p-value of $p<0.006$ was obtained in the relationship between Nigerian tourist

expectation and their perception towards quality of goods and services. This depicts that tourists' initial expectation has a major influence on their ability to positively perceive the quality of goods and services in their various destinations. This same result applies to the significant effects that perceived quality of tourism product has on tourists' satisfaction (path coefficient of 0.76, $p<0.038$). Although, the direct effect of tourist expectation is not statistically significant. However, the result is still consistent with the argument in the extant literature that tourist's expectation is very useful in determining their judgments of satisfaction with any destination. This is because obtaining anything less than what is expected will potentially results into dissatisfaction as empirically argued in the theory of disconfirmation paradigm. Table 5 which comprises of AMOS outputs for both the direct and indirect effects primarily to establish the mediating effect of tourist perceived quality in the relationship between Nigerian tourist expectations and satisfaction with Malaysian tourism products.

The summary of regression analysis in Fig. 2 as shown in Table 4 and 5 depicts a significant relationship between perceived quality and tourists' satisfaction (path coefficient of 0.76, $p<0.038$). This result statistically indicates that perceived quality of Nigerian tourist significantly influence their satisfaction with Malaysian tourism products. Table 2 also shows that the conceptualized model has established the observed theoretical linkage between these three constructs with tourist expectation and perceived quality explaining 70% of the variations in Nigerian tourist satisfaction with Malaysian tourism products. Equally important in the regression results is that perceived quality is statistically significant and positively mediates the relationship between tourist expectation and satisfaction. Table 5 shows that the value of the indirect effect is greater that the direct effect (0.599>0.321), statistically making us to conclude that full mediation has occurred. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is equally supported.

For better understanding of the aforementioned analyzes, shown in Table 6 that contains the hypotheses testing results.

Table 4: Direct effects of revised mode

Variables	Estimate	SE	CR	p-value	Status
TPQ←TPE	1.516	0.550	2.757	0.006**	Sig.
TSS←TPE	0.600	0.642	0.935	0.350	Not sig.
TSS←TPQ	0.739	0.356	2.074	0.038**	Sig.

**$p<0.05$; Sig. = Significant; Not sig. = Not significant; TPE = Tourist Perceived Expectation; TPQ = Tourist Perceived Quality; TSS = Tourist Satisfaction

Table 5: Interpretations of indirect effects and mediating hypotheses

Hypotheses	Exogenous	Mediated	Endogenous	Direct effects estimates	Indirect effects estimates	Mediating hypothesis
H$_4$	TPE	TPQ	TSS	0.321	0.599	Mediating

H$_4$ = Hypothesis 4; TPE = Tourist Perceived Expectation; TPQ = Tourist Perceived Quality; TSS = Tourist Satisfaction

Table 6: Summary of the hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Accept/Reject
Hypothesis 1: Tourist expectation is positively related to tourist satisfaction	Reject
Hypothesis 2: Tourist expectation is positively related to perceived quality	Accept
Hypothesis 3: Perceived quality is positively related to tourist satisfaction	Accept
Hypothesis 4: Perceived quality positively mediate the relationship between tourist expectation and tourist satisfaction	Accept

DISCUSSION

The mentioned earlier empirical results, in this present study have provided the needed statistical evidence in support of the theoretical linkages in the conceptual model. This research has empirically investigated and brought together two antecedents of satisfaction by primarily determining the impact of tourist' expectation and perceived service quality on satisfaction with Malaysian tourism and hospitality services. These two antecedents were tested and its shows that they positively influence Nigerian tourist satisfaction in Malaysia. However, a major issue that led to this study is to find out why the numbers of Nigerians in Malaysia keep increasing despite their negative image. As shown in the quantitative analysis of the hypothesized relationships, this study indicates that the high growing number of Nigerian tourists is presumably related to their satisfaction with Malaysia tourism products. Theoretically, this scenario can be related to the marketing literature that emphasized on the impact of positive word of mouth on customer retention and loyalty. The ability of Malaysia tourism sector in fulfilling its promises in term of good quality of product and services as thus, lead to the satisfaction of Nigerian tourist and subsequently influenced more to visit Malaysia. However, this study conceptualized three variables and itemized some question under the relationship between these three constructs with particular reference to Fornell *et al.* (1996) and Quintal and Polczynski (2010). Notable among important measurement instrument upon which the three hypothesized constructs were tested is available infrastructure in the host country. Included among important infrastructural facilities that a tourist destination must possess is good and affordable transportation system, access to internet, uninterrupted electricity, etc., that could assist in providing desired relaxation for tourist at various destinations.

Regarding accommodation, tourists expect good accommodation to be made available at the tourist destination by tourism marketers or by private agencies at minimum standards of comfort and at reasonable cost. The tourist also expects that accommodation should be available when required. Townley make direct reference to accommodation as a factor. This researcher group accommodation with food and not as a separate factor and another researcher Harvey said accommodation is an important factor that influences tourist satisfaction.

Equally important among the measurement instruments is safety, a major factor that is considered as paramount to tourist and their families. It is important for the host country to have a good reputation for safety and Malaysia is not left out of this given her good record on safety if compared to gun disaster zone like US and some European destinations. Malaysia is an Islamic country and people consider the country peaceful and this helps tourist to be less worried.

Racial tolerance in the country, the country as a mix cultured country which includes Malay, Chinese and India, this make it more social and enticing, they have mix culture with different traditions that tourist will like to know and this aspect make the country interesting to visit.

Malaysia also has moderate cost of living compare to the US and Europe. The country has reliable goods that have the same standard with the West and even cheaper if compared. Tourist will always consider a destination with good standard of infrastructure, good quality product and nice shopping places but less costly, all these are encompass in choosing a destination. The services provided at the tourist destination is also a factor that contributes to the development of host country and it is one of the crucial factors that tourism marketers should always be aware of because the tourist expectations and perceived quality are significant factors affecting the satisfaction of tourist.

There are few limitations in this study as it also applies to other studies. The first limitation is that the study has used 108 Nigerian respondents from two universities in Malaysia. For better result in the regression analyzes, future research can work on larger sample. Another limitation is the explanatory nature of the study which only seeks to establish two major antecedents of satisfaction; it further provides future research opportunities to work on other variables that lead to tourist satisfaction. Finally, the data collection in this research made use of cross sectional data due to time constraint. To have opportunity in comparing changes over time, future research could work on longitudinal data collection.

CONCLUSION

Sequel to the aforementioned results, this research concludes that the continuous influx of Nigerians into Malaysia is a consequence of satisfaction with the tourism and hospitality services backed by positive word of mouth promotion from fellow Nigerians. Importantly, the results and recommendations in this research has availed tourism managers the practical implications of establishing tourist's expectations before designing their service standards. Thus, the primary objectives of conducting this empirical research are to some extent achieved.

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