

COMMERCIAL RECREATION AND TOURISM: A COMPONENT ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is a primary element related to profits in commercial recreation. Consumers who are satisfied return and spend additional dollars. The purpose of this article was to explore the potential of a different evaluation system to help developers of tours to improve their programs, services and facilities. This study was conducted on a senior citizen tour into an historical resort area. The approach being used was that instantaneous measures of mood and quality were correlated to an overall index of satisfaction. The data were analyzed using a stepwise regression format and there was a different equation for each of the scheduled components. Results suggest that this type of assessment process helps to improve the design of tours to the point of increasing satisfaction with trips significantly.

Customer satisfaction is one of the primary elements related to profits in commercial recreation [1, 2]. Customers who are satisfied return and spend additional dollars. Another extension of this concept is being satisfied with a program, service and facilities enough to recommend it to friends and acquaintances. Word of mouth is one of the strongest factors, either positive or negative, that influences overall participation in an attraction [3, 4]. The classic example is where the advertisement for an attraction is good but the quality of the programs, services and facilities is not worth the entrance fee or the time of the experience. The use of word of mouth has spread rapidly with a resulting loss in volume of business. This has happened to several major attractions in the past two or three years and has reduced their potential for profit.

Quality programs, services and facilities are directly related to the amount of money a customer or patron will spend [5, 6]. The question is one of customer satisfaction in relation to programs, services and facilities to be provided

by the recreation venture. It is not always the most expensive facility that has an attractive effect upon the audience. It is those attractions that have been well conceived and planned and provide an experience that has significant impact upon the client [7, 8]. Thousands of dollars are spent to add new attractions each year that will excite and tantalize the participant. This type of thinking, in terms of the capital investment, has and will continue to escalate costs and reduce profits. Many of the attractions are moving away from this philosophy toward one that represents better programming and services recognizing that more than just facilities have to be provided to achieve customer satisfaction [9, 10].

Recreational enterprises provide the spectrum of experiences from entertainment to cultural and/or educational outcomes [10, 11]. Those types of commercial ventures that provide a lasting experience beyond the entertainment function are those that usually show greater patron satisfaction and profits in the long run. Many recreational attractions or enterprises have focused primarily on the short-term outcomes. These facilities have been developed in relation to only filling immediate needs. Some organizations have focused so much upon the long-term outcomes that they represent a cultural and/or educational experience and have completely disillusioned the customer. Those attractions that are more successful in terms of satisfaction/profits are those that have some type of balance between immediate and long-term types of outcomes [9]. They move toward neither end of the perspective, but provide a median position and try to satisfy the immediate needs of the individual and relate these to elements that have a lasting impact.

The statements provided above have some empirical evidence to support their positions but many assumptions are still untested. This is due to a lack of adequate methodology to ascertain the developmental aspects of programs, services and facilities [12]. The development or organization of commercial facilities and ventures is usually completed on the basis of a marketing survey or on an "I think" basis. The marketing approach, of course, is the most valid method but the result is that the surveyor asks questions about needs and then translates them into programs, services and facilities [13, 14]. These types of methods are usually based upon gross measures that paint a broad picture and usually provide baseline data. What, in essence, is needed is some type of component approach to ascertain specifically the mix among programs, services and facilities that will satisfy a particular target audience. Component, in this context, is breaking programs, services and facilities into separate assessment categories to be able to determine the impact of each. This does not suggest that the component approach is a panacea to answering all of the questions of the organizer or developer. It only suggests that it has been a missing or weak element in most assessment processes. Both component and gross measures are needed—the component measures to give details and the broad baseline data to put the pieces together. Such a system of assessment must be based upon the

concept of change and be sensitive enough to determine how component parts affect a particular dimension of satisfaction.

There are two traditional approaches to assessment of change. One is the experimental approach of changing segments or components of programs to determine the impact it has on a comparative structure with previous program adjustments. The other approach is surveying customers as to their satisfaction with parts of a program. Both of these approaches have provided valuable information and have helped improve operations significantly. The problem with each of these approaches is that they do not give an idea about the net effect of the interaction of component parts [15, 16]. They give an idea about the interdimensional aspect. Another major limitation is that they do not give an indication about the impact of each of the elements upon satisfaction [6, 15]. Another major methodological weakness is that they do not show the relationships between short- and long-term outcomes and their impact upon satisfaction [17]. The purpose of this article is to explore the potential of a different assessment method to help developers and organizers to improve programs, services and facilities.

INSTRUMENTATION

The approach being used was the correlation of short-term measures to long-term factors. The instantaneous measures utilized were mood, quality of programs, services and facilities while the long-term factor being used was satisfaction [15].

The control element being used in this study was anticipation. Anticipation is the pre-conceived notion about the experience before the trip [17]. There were three anticipatory groups: 1) those with no experience with the current destination involved, 2) those with extensive experience with the trip involved (lived in the area), and 3) those with limited experience with the trip involved (vacationed or visited the area). No distinction was made in the grouping with no experience as to whether they had limited or extensive travel experiences in general.

Mood in terms of personality theories is a short-term element that indicates instantaneous feelings. Moods are the basic building blocks of a social psychological construct such as satisfaction. A list of words describing feelings were given to the participants [18, 19]. They were asked to indicate, using no more than three words, their feelings during the various segments of the program during the day. The author felt that it was important for mood change to be characterized using only a word description list and not a scale because most mood changes having the greatest ability of measurement are those aspects that relate to qualitative characterization of feelings.

Each of the segments of the trip were listed on the questionnaire and the individual was asked to rate the program, services and facilities in terms of its

quality. Quality was rated on an excellent, good, average and poor scale. A monetary scale was used in conjunction with wording to give the respondent the indication about the relative value of these statements. The following symbols were used with the evaluation words: \$20 = excellent, \$15 = good, \$10 = average and \$5 = poor.

The mood and quality questionnaires were completed in the evening at the end of each day's activities. The client was asked to recall the experiences of the day and to fill out the questionnaire.

Satisfaction, the long-term measure, was measured using the concept of objectives accomplished. This type of measure was utilized because it is easier to deal with a percentage of objectives accomplished than with the more elusive term of satisfaction [1, 2]. The participants were interviewed at the beginning of the trip to determine their objectives. They were interviewed at the end of the trip to obtain the number of objectives accomplished. The objectives were rated on the following scale: completely achieved, partially achieved, not achieved at all. The following scale was used to rate the objectives: if an objective was completely accomplished, it was assigned a value of 1; if it was partially achieved, it was assigned a value of 0.5; if it was an unexpected outcome, it was assigned a value of 0.25. The sum of these scores was divided by the total number of objectives listed. This provided an index of satisfaction based upon individuality and helped standardize the concept of satisfaction.

A post-evaluation survey was conducted two months after the trip. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the relationship between satisfaction and the individual's willingness to make a behavioral commitment [20]. Behavioral commitment was measured using a 1 to 5-point rating scale (have, will, or will not make a commitment) with statements about behavioral change elements such as taking the trip again and recommending the tour to friends and acquaintances. In addition, comments were sought about improvements. This information was obtained in terms of "if/then" statements in which proposed conditions were rated to improvements in satisfaction with the experience.

STUDY POPULATION AND AREA

This study was conducted on a five-day senior citizen tour [21, 22]. The tourist program was regimented in terms of time and location. Two days were spent in transit to and from the destination site with a one-night stopover. The travel pattern was a spring trip going from northeast to southwest into a historical area during garden week. Three days were spent in the destination area with tours of the homes as well as many of the historical and shopping sites in the area. There were eighty-three senior citizens in the group and sixty-seven of them directly participated in the pilot study.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to test the methodology and determine the diagnostic value of mood as a short-term measure to indicate effectiveness of parts of the tour and its relation to satisfaction. The data were analyzed using a stepwise regression in which the program satisfaction was utilized as a dependent variable. Mood and quality rating of the program, services and facilities were the independent variables. There was a different equation for each of the schedule components. This allowed for each of the program segments to be assessed in terms of its overall impact. Since the mood is only a qualitative characteristic, it was incorporated into the regression equations using a dummy variable framework.

Standardized beta coefficients were also used to obtain a relative indicator of importance of variables within each equation. Equations were reported based upon their R^2 value. Those equations with an R^2 of greater than 0.4 gave the most reliable information about the program components (a 0.01 probability level was used to determine which variables to incorporate in the equation).

The results of the stepwise regression indicate that those program components that had a greater entertainment value were more closely related to the development of satisfaction (Table 1). Those components that provide less direct contact with the participants were the ones that were inversely related to satisfaction. There was a trend in the analysis of the equations toward the immediate outcomes and those that had a high transfer value to contemporary life. The equations that had a value of less than 0.4 will also be reported but they are less reliable on which to make conclusions because they are not significantly related to the satisfaction index.

Table 1

<i>Schedule Components</i>	<i>Independent Variables</i>
DAY 1	
Departure	
* Travel/Games and Songs—2 hours Satisfaction (S) = above mean	Clutched up (Standardized Beta Coefficient (0.5), Sad (0.4), Anticipation (−0.4) and Warmhearted (0.3)
* Shopping and Lunch/Ethnic Restaurant—2 hours S = below mean	Active (0.6), Playful (0.5), Quality of Facilities/Food (−0.5), and Anticipation (−0.3)
Travel—2 hours	Rest—no measurements taken
* Tour of Glass Factory—1 hour S = near mean	Tired (0.8), Bored (0.6), and Quality of Program (−0.3)
Travel—1 hour	Rest—no measurements taken

Table 1 (Cont'd)

<i>Schedule Components</i>	<i>Independent Variables</i>
DAY 1 (Cont'd)	
Dinner and Entertainment/ Country Style Restaurant—2 hours S = near mean	Peaceful (0.4), Carefree (0.4), and Quality of Service (0.3)
DAY 2	
* Breakfast/Country Style Restaurant—1 hour S = above mean	Active (0.6), Anticipation (−0.5), Sluggish (−0.5), and Quality of Service (0.4)
Travel—2 hours	Rest—no measurements taken
Historic Tour/Home—1 hour S = below mean	Bored (0.4), Quality of Program (−0.4), Tired (0.3)
Travel/Games and Songs—2 hours S = near mean	Defiant (0.5), Vigorous (0.3), and Skeptical (−0.2)
Arrival, Check-In, and Lunch on Own	Rest—no measurements taken
* Historic Tour/Home—1 hour S = above mean	Quality of Program (0.7), Pleased (0.6), Concentrating (0.6), and Skeptical (−0.4)
Demonstration of Crafts—2 hours S = near mean	Tired (0.5), Bored (0.4), and Quality of Program (0.4)
Free Time	Rest—no measurements taken
Dinner/Cookout—1 hour S = near mean	Quality of Facilities/Food (0.5), Lighthearted (0.4), and Carefree (0.4)
* Night Club—2 hours S = above mean	Active (0.7), Playful (0.7), Witty (0.5), and Tired (−0.5)
DAY 3	
* Breakfast/Dutch Style Restaurant —1 hour S = above mean	Fearful (−0.9), Energetic (0.7), Warmhearted (0.7), Quality of Facilities (0.5), and Quality of Service (0.5)
* Visit to a Theme Park—4 hours S = near mean	Lighthearted (0.7), Quality of Service (0.7), Skeptical (−0.5), and Rebellious (0.3)
Lunch/Fast Food Restaurant —½ hour S = below mean	Angry (0.5), Suspicious (0.4), Active (−0.4), and Quality of Facility/Food (0.3)
Free time	Rest—no measurements taken
* Shopping/Discount Store—1½ hours S = above mean	Quality of Facility/Merchandise (0.8), Quality of Service (−0.4), Peaceful (0.4), and Kindly (0.3)

Table 1 (Cont'd)

<i>Schedule Components</i>	<i>Independent Variables</i>
DAY 3 (Cont'd)	
* Dinner Theater/Theme Party -2 hours S = above mean	Quality of Program (0.5), Lighthearted (0.5), Pleased (0.4), Sluggish (-0.3), and Intent (0.3)
DAY 4	
* Breakfast/Colonial Inn-1 hour S = above mean	Regretful (0.7), Intent (0.6), Clutched up (0.5), and Quality of Service (0.5)
Historic Parkway/Battle Re-enactment-3 hours S = below mean	Drowsy (-0.8), Vigorous (0.5), Quality of Service (0.4), and Tired (0.4)
Lunch/Colonial Inn-1 hour S=near mean	Quality of Facilities/Food (0.5), Quality of Service (0.3), and Tired (0.3)
Boat Trip into High Country for Tour-2½ hours S = near mean	Quality of Program (0.8), Peaceful (0.7), and Warmhearted (0.4)
Dinner on Boat-1½ hours S = above mean	Active (0.5), Pleased (0.4), and Warmhearted (0.3)
* Singing and Dancing-1 hour S = above mean	Playful (0.8), Warmhearted (0.5), Energetic (0.4), and Quality of Service (0.2)
DAY 5	
Breakfast/Fast Food Restaurant -½ hour S = below mean	Quality of Facility/Food (-0.7), Affectionate (0.5), and Warmhearted (0.4)
Travel-2 hours	Rest-no measurements taken
Shopping at Exclusive Mall-1 hour S = near mean	Clutched up (0.4), Regretful (0.4), Rebellious (0.2)
Travel-2 hours	Rest-no measurements taken
Lunch/Family Style Restaurant -1 hour S = near mean	Affectionate (0.8), Quality of Facility/Food (0.7), and Kindly (0.4)
Travel-2 hours	Rest-no measurements taken
Dinner/Fast Food Restaurant -½ hour S = below mean	Quality of Facilities/Food (-0.5), Warmhearted (0.3), and Affectionate (0.2)
* Travel-3 hours	Rest-no measurements taken
* Arrival S = above mean	Warmhearted (0.7), Affectionate (0.5), Clutched up (0.5), and Sad (0.4)

* indicates significant R^2 value

Table 2. List of Most Frequent Variables in Equations with Largest Absolute Standardized Beta Coefficients

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1. Quality of Facilities
 2. Quality of Service
 3. Quality of Program
 4. Tired
 5. Active
 6. Clutched up
 7. Warmhearted
 8. Bored
-

Variables occurring most frequently in the equations and having the largest standardized beta coefficients are the variables having the greatest influence upon satisfaction. Therefore, an analysis was made in order to identify the number of times which variables appeared in the equations or identified those with the greatest influence upon satisfaction. Energy level was the most important variable (Table 2). There was a cyclic movement between active vs. tired and enthusiastic vs. bored.

The final analysis was a correlation between the satisfaction index (Post 1) and the behavioral followup (Post 2) ($r = 0.7$). The results indicate there was a significant relationship between individual satisfaction with the trip and his/her willingness to make a commitment to return and/or recommend this tour to friends and acquaintances.

IMPLICATIONS

This study was developed as a result of trying to answer the question: What components of a particular tour are and are not most effective and why? A stable tour was sought that had received high evaluations by its participants.

The variables that were directly related to satisfaction were those segments involved in the primary days of the tour. This suggests that overall satisfaction is directly correlated to the destination and its impact upon the individual. The other major trend in the results was that traveling is an auxiliary experience and either added or detracted from the experience. The most important factors at the point of destination were activities associated with shopping and the restaurants. The main theme through each of the significant factors related to satisfaction was the entertainment value. Those components that involved the tour of the area did not have a significant impact on satisfaction, especially if it did not have interpretive and action components. The historic element was the dimension advertised and it only had a transitory value in providing satisfaction. This particular group was more immediate than long-range oriented in their outcomes. The balance, therefore, of the tour should be centered on providing short-term outcomes.

Those program segments that could be improved were related to activities that were under-programmed and were at a point in the day when the individuals were tired or in need of free time. The other major dimension related to satisfaction in certain segments was quality of services and facilities. The problem with the restaurants was the quality of the food and the problem with the historic sites was a lack of interpretive skills to help the participants understand the basic value of the areas.

In the analysis of anticipation and mood, the momentum started out high and waned as the initial travel began and moved back to a position near the starting height as the arrival in the area began and progressed. There was a lowering of the momentum near the end of the trip and slowly declining toward the end as the travelers started toward home. The anticipation level was too high and it was downhill in relation to the entire experience. This did not cause problems with this particular tour but if the anticipations had been somewhat less than expected it would have caused greater dissatisfaction because of the high expectations.

The trend for this tour with senior citizens was toward the entertainment value of the experience which lends credence to a very active, heavily interpreted tour [21-23]. This is as opposed to a more self-directed touring model. Extrinsic motivation factor is an extremely critical issue. Another important point is the pre-advertisement phase and the development of realistic expectations before a tour begins. There needs to be a better synthesis related to anticipation during the marketing phase and the actual outcomes of the program [24]. Another important phase is post-programming to help refine and clarify the value of the trip. The basic nature of the model being recommended is the dividing of the experience into phases and the providing of tour counseling during each of those phases to come to realistic expectations or help interpret the experience for this particular audience [4].

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