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## **Satisfaction Components in Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Settings**

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### **Introduction**

Tourists form expectations of a destination based upon advertising and promotional campaigns, past experience, word-of-mouth that, in turn, may influence demand for tourism destinations. The quality of the service and the quality of the facility and its perceived value also directly affect the quality of recreation and tourism experiences and thus the level of future demand. Further, the level of satisfaction that the tourist feels is also dependent upon the ability of the destination to deliver the type of experience, that it has marketed as a function of its facilities and programs (Fesenmaier and Uysal 1991; Ryan 1995).

The objective of this paper is to review and examine the components of satisfaction in outdoor recreation and tourism settings. Measuring quality and service is premised on what Manning (1985, p. 6) refers to as “evaluative communication between visitors and managers.”

### **Theoretical Foundation - Instrumental and Expressive Attributes**

The problem of specification in measurement is essential to understanding an attitude of satisfaction. For example, the measurement model adopted in the National Park surveys assumes a direct approach for determining satisfaction (Noe, 1999). The model is specified in such a way that the scale items ask the respondent to make a series of judgments about their experience in terms of satisfaction. The action or behavior is first broken down into component parts. Specific services, facilities, personnel, and programs are the identified component parts which facilitate achieving a pleasurable end.

Functional theorists, in part, emphasize actions to obtain specific ends that are more rationally defined. These are called “instrumental action.” These facilitating service actions include detailed components of a tourist situation such as the available transportation and communication services, facilities providing rest, relief, and refreshment, and provider roles offering direction and information. Instrumental attributes are means used by the tourist to achieve some desired end such as dining, driving, parking, etc, while the goal-oriented attributes are the psychological or social benefits derived from participating in a recreational goal such as fishing, swimming, sightseeing, taking a boat tour, etc.

Satisfaction is not only influenced by the above specific facilitating attributes but also by less concrete possibilities that are tourist goals bringing subjective rewards. Borrowing again from the functionalists, the term “expressive action” refers to the internal states of respondents designating more subjective emotional responses. Csikszentmihalyi (1981, p. 332) comes closest to identifying leisure pursuits such as travel for pleasure as an expressive activity that provides immediate “intrinsic rewards as opposed to delayed gratification.” In the strictest sense,

expressiveness could be interpreted as the behavioral result of some subjective inner emotional state. Iso-Ahola (1980, p. 231) too stresses the importance of intrinsic rewards that are built into the activity, such as “gratification in winning or losing a game, pursuit of happiness, and self-actualization.” Emphasis is directed to the psychological or subjective state as the respondents in the surveys interpret them. Expectations or actions defining the central purpose of the activity, such as touring an historic fort, fishing, visiting a beach, or participating in a river floating event, are actions that are meant to gratify the tourist with positive reinforcement. In specifying scale attributes the concepts of instrumental and expressive are adapted to the tourist situation of touring a national park.

But many satisfaction studies are more limiting in their analysis and stress either the expressive or instrumental dimensions of behavior. A study by Lounsbury and Polik (1992) evaluates four expressive related needs adopted from Beards and Ragheb’s leisure motivation scale relating to vacation behavior. The intellectual, social, competence-mastery, and stimulus avoidance attributes are measured in relationship to reported satisfaction. All four expressive attributes are positively related to satisfaction. In such cases, expressive attributes are commonly compared and evaluated with respect to each other. The reported satisfaction of residents, for example, adjacent to Moore Park in Metro Toronto is based more on a visual appreciation rather than actual recreational use (Bornstein, Milliken, and Fitzgibbon, 1985). A sense of refuge symbolized in the visual experience of the landscape typography offers greater expressive satisfaction for adjacent residents than having to engage in physical activity such as walking or hiking that would lead to another but more active expressive experience.

Research studies also emphasize instrumental attributes, such as dealing with facility restrooms, fencing, lighting, shade, or building conditions (Bartlett and Einert, 1992). These studies usually assess the facilities and the services that park management directly control, such as the study by Vaske, Donnelly, and Williamson (1991) that monitors the quality of service in a New Hampshire state park, stressing the instrumental dimension of satisfaction. Instrumental behavior is important not only for understanding physical and contextual environmental conditions, but also how role performances are managed between the service worker and the customer in a tourist situation. Successful management of those interactions in the service situation is “crucial” for maximizing “customer satisfaction” (Mahoney, 1987). In short, expressive indicators involve core experiences representing the major intent of an act; in this case, seeking a satisfactory outdoor experience in a park (swimming, sightseeing, camping, hiking a nature trail, touring a fort, floating a river etc.). Instrumental indicators serve as actions or behaviors toward facilitating that desired end (parking, rental services, restrooms, concession services etc.).

In summarizing the above findings, a pattern of expressive attributes take the lead in providing satisfaction ratings while instrumental attributes seem to take the lead in providing corresponding dissatisfaction ratings. These attribute distinctions are not to be thought of as categorically distinct but rather as working together to reflect an overall evaluation. The last case study in this series has now begun the process of investigating the interaction between the expressive and instrumental attributes.

## **Conclusion**

This paper primarily focused on satisfaction in outdoor recreation and tourism settings by reviewing existing research in literature. Some expressive attributes are the behavioral results of

inner emotional states. These attributes are the essence of travel motivation in the first place, representing the demand side of the equation. The responses to demand side and/or expressive attributes, including benefits-sought at the destinations, would then naturally represent the supply side of travel experience. Therefore, the instrumental are maintenance attributes without which one may not achieve some degree of satisfaction on a measurement scale from the experience. Providers of services and products need to make sure that they have the minimum level of desired performance of services and products, which may be considered critical in the psychological interpretation of such services or products. The degree to which managers control this commonality between instrumental performance and the psychological interpretation of such performance will eventually influence satisfaction and the corresponding development of successful programs, facilities, and management and monitoring mechanisms.

The demand side of the equation harbors the notion of value that tourists attach to their leisure and recreation experiences. This value may take on either the perceived importance of service or benefit(s) to be received and the transaction value of the service being rendered. Heskett et al (1997) suggest that service value to most customers (or all customers) can be enhanced by increasing either results delivered or process quality, or both, while reducing either prices or service acquisition costs, or both. Managers and destination promoters must be aware of variations that may result from mediating variables in order to attract segments of tourists with differing expectations and provide the level and type of performance that would enhance rather than detract from the experience.

Monitoring visitors' satisfaction with facilities, programs and services is important in maintaining a sustained and successful business. Monitoring should not only include pre-travel experience but also post-travel experience. The generation of consistent longitudinal data is essential in enhancing and managing tourists' experiences in outdoor recreation and tourism settings. The delivery of tourism goods and services on-site should be carried out in such a way that tourists' expectations can be confirmed so that they are in conformity to the expressive and instrumental dispositions imposed by the visiting tourists.

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