Oktay Emir and Metin Kozak

Perceived importance of attributes on hotel guests' repeat visit intentions

Abstract

Based on the empirical evidence in the related literature, we can emphasize that customer satisfaction and repeat patronage in the hotel industry has been well researched. Over the past two decades, many researchers as well as businesses have conducted surveys on visitors' satisfaction in order to measure customer perceptions of quality attributes of hotel or hospitality services. However, there is a lack of research paying attention to the empirical investigation of the self-perceived direct influence of hotel attributes over the customers' intentions of repeat visitation. Thus, the aim of this study is to determine the perceived influence of facilities and services provided by hotel businesses over the guests' intentions of future repeat visits to the same service premises. As this paper encompasses the analysis of the likelihood of repeat visitation, data were collected from a sample of guests staying at various 5-star hotels in Antalya, Turkey. Two types of analysis were performed to reach this objective: exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Then, those factors obtained from EFA results were modelled through the utilisation of LISREL analysis. The paper identifies four major attributes as the most influential factors on the intention of tourist loyalty, namely front office services, employees, housekeeping, and food and beverage services. Discussion of findings leads to some suggestions for improvements for hotel services.

Key words:

hotel services; tourist loyalty; repeat visitation; revisit intention; customer satisfaction; service quality; Turkey

Introduction

For businesses operating in the globalizing world, expanding their market share through new products and hence increasing their reach to wider groups requires great efforts. Many new businesses in all sectors penetrate into the markets and this has an inevitable impact on competition to increase their market share (Porter, 1990; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). In addition, an increasing cost of advertising and promotion hampers the effective and competent promotion efforts for many businesses. In comparison to other businesses, motivating consumer groups for becoming loyal requires more effort and thereby the cost is high in tourism services. Therefore, as it has been in other sectors, the level of services offered in tourism and hospitality to maintain customer loyalty have also gained much importance both by the members of the academia carrying out empirical studies and those ruling power in the industry over the last two decades or so.

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In today's competitive world with a changing pattern of customer needs and wants, undertaking market research has become a necessity for businesses in order to discover new markets, investigate the profile of customers in terms of their needs and wants, and obtain the required information to develop new products (Hodgson, 1990; Kozak & Baloglu, 2011). Information obtained through market research guides managers to secure the future of their businesses. In doing so, businesses form an action plan which details effective public relations, quality products, relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, efficient use of resources, and effective promotional efforts. Besides, hotel businesses should perform effective marketing activities for better positioning their products. Businesses demonstrate advertising and product development as a part of their marketing activities. Their knowledge about effects of services for existing and potential customers on loyalty is a part of effective marketing.

Business activities that are considered to be influential in creating and maintaining customer loyalty can be listed as service quality, customer satisfaction and business image (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Gallarza & Saura, 2006; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). While these factors are influencing loyalty after the consumption or experience process has been complete, knowing the extent of service dimensions in creating customer loyalty plays an important role in business activities. Gaining loyal customers plays an active role in the survival of hotel businesses. Therefore, previous studies are also central to the analysis of a direct influence of hotel service factors on customer satisfaction, service quality, business image and investigation of their direct or indirect influence over customer loyalty (e.g. Choi & Chu, 2001; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; McCain, Jang & Hu, 2005; Su, 2004; Weber, 2001).

Based on the empirical evidence in the related literature, we can emphasize that customer satisfaction and repeat patronage in the hotel industry has been well researched. Over the past two decades, many researchers as well as hotels conducted surveys on visitors' satisfaction in order to measure customer perceptions of quality attributes of hotel or hospitality services. However, there is a lack of research paying attention to the empirical investigation of the self-perceived direct influence of hotel attributes over the customers' intentions of repeat visitation. Consequently, the present study was developed, using structural equation modeling, to address how hotel guests examined the perceived performance of hotel facilities and services on the extent to which they were likely to revisit the same hotel in the future. The paper begins with an overview of literature on customer loyalty and satisfaction to include evidence from the hotel industry. This is followed by a description of the research methods and presentation and discussion of study findings to note implications both for the theory and practice.

Literature review

An extensive review of the literature indicates that reflections of loyalty concept on tourism have been observed over the last two decades (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Hu, Toh & Strand, 1998; Oppermann, 1999; Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999; Weber, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as a promise about repur-

chasing the product in the future and becoming loyal customers, so it is repurchasing the same brand/product regardless of behavioural change caused by the situational influence and marketing initiatives. According to Lee and Cunningham (2001), the subject of loyalty is a customer's intention to buy the product again based on the evaluation of their past experiences and understanding their future expectations. In this direction, the expected outcome is that if customers are satisfied with the perceived performance of goods and services, they are likely to become loyal and will repurchase the same set of goods and services for their future consumption behavior.

Bowen and Chen (2001) hold the notion that there are three types of approach to define loyalty: behavioral measurement, attitudinal measurement and composite measurement. Loyalty defined by behavioral measurements means re-purchasing behavior. According to the behavioral approach, re-purchasing behavior does not always show psychological commitment and attitudes can be formed with operational activities (Tepeci, 1999). According to the attitudinal measurement, psychological and emotional bonds make up the attitudinal data in the core of loyalty construct. The attitudinal measurement is related to loyalty and commitment feelings. Although customers hold positive attitudes towards a hotel, they may not use its products (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Toh, Hu & Withiam, 1993). The composite measurement takes into account product preferences of customers, tendency of a brand change, frequency of purchasing, proximity of purchasing time and amount of purchasing (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Hunter, 1998; Pritchard & Howard, 1997; Wong, Dean & White, 1999). Using both attitudes and behavior measurements ensures a strong relationship with loyalty (Pritchard & Howard, 1997).

In many sectors, increasing the frequency of customer loyalty may create positive consequences over the present and future financial conditions of businesses. Specifically speaking, creating a loyalty at a 5% level may lead to an increase in profitability by 25-125%. Such an increase in profitability depends on lower sales-marketing costs, lower transaction costs, price premiums, positive word of mouth recommendation and revenue growth (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Lowder, 1997). Loyal customers constitute the heart of the most valuable groups of hotel businesses (Ganesh, Arnold & Reynolds, 2000, Skogland & Siguaw, 2004). In the relationship between businesses and customers, while loyalty brings price insensitivity as behavioral commitment (Weber, 2001), it causes customers to purchase the products again with a positive word-of-mouth, which is either direct or indirect consequence of loyalty (Oliver, 1999). Each loyal customer is estimated to circulate positive word-of-mouth recommendation to an average of 12 people about a hotel business where they purchase service and they recommend the hotel to their friends. Moreover, these loyal customers work for advertising on behalf of the hotel and also they are more motivated to inform the management about a potential problem (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998).

On the other hand, it is impossible to ensure loyalty without ensuring customer satisfaction. But only ensuring customer satisfaction may not be of help to lead to the intention of revisiting and acquiring loyalty (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). According

to Oliver (1999), there are six types of relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. First, customer satisfaction and loyalty is the two different elements of the same concept. Second, satisfaction is a basis for loyalty. Third, satisfaction is a relaxing part of loyalty and one of the components of loyalty. Fourth, one suggests that loyalty and satisfaction are a part of ultimate loyalty (eternal loyalty). As opposed to the statement that satisfaction leads to loyalty, the next one proposes that satisfaction is not essential for loyalty. Finally, customer satisfaction is a starting point of transition elements that are essential for loyalty. According to this statement, satisfaction can be regarded an independent element and thereby has no influence on loyalty.

Oliver (1999) suggests that customer-based loyalty consists of four stages: conceptual, emotional, behavioral and operational. In conceptual stage, customers have the knowledge to prefer a brand over its alternatives. In emotional loyalty, which is brought into use by conceptual phase, enjoyment or positive attitudes towards businesses are developed on the basis of an increased satisfaction level. In the stage called behavioral intention, the influence of repeat incidents influenced by the positive effect of a brand is the point. At this stage, there is a clear intention and promise against the re-purchasing behavior of the same brand. In operational loyalty, intentions which have been motivated during the previous loyalty case are converted into prepared motions. There is an additional desire at the point of overcoming the reasons which prevent movement.

REPEAT VISIT INTENTIONS IN HOSPITALITY SERVICES

An extensive review of literature indicates three different determinants of customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. First, there appear to be an increasing number of empirical studies in hospitality services that have addressed the relationship between dimensions of service quality and repeat patronage (Barber, Goodman & Goh, 2011; Ladhari, 2009). Second, the level of customer satisfaction is positively associated with repeat visit intentions (e.g. Choi & Chu, 2001; Ladhari, 2009; Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Alegre & Garau, 2010; Ryu, Han & Kim, 2008). The findings of these studies confirm that, both, service quality and customer satisfaction have a direct and positive impact upon customers' intention of revisiting the same service setting. In addition, there has also been a substantial number of research examining the relationship between past visits (familiarity) in an hotel and the intention to revisit (e.g. Alegre & Cladera, 2009). This means that some customers are likely to come back to the same service setting they already visited earlier when the possible impacts of other variables are held constant.

On the other hand, Hanefors and Mossberg (1999) suggest a variety of loyalty types in tourism context such as travel agency loyalty, hotel loyalty, tour operator loyalty and destination loyalty. It may sometimes be impossible to expect a visitor to keep loyalty to all these elements of tourism at the same time. The visitor may switch to another tour operator or hotel while still visiting a particular destination. Or some visitors may tend to look for new experiences with new destinations, but keep their loyalty to their travel agency. This could be due to the reason that changing brands or destinations

in tourism does not cost the customer as much as it does in other industries such as health, education and insurance.

Hotel businesses should not only pay attention to service quality, customer satisfaction, creation of positive image but also they have to pay attention to customer loyalty to maintain the assets in the long-term and increase their profit margins. For instance, the cost of obtaining new customers is estimated to appear much more than that of retaining customer groups (Richard & Larry, 1996). Thus, a major part of the revenue of hotel businesses consists of room revenues in the first place, followed by food and beverage revenues (Horwath & Horwath, 1971). As well as subjects such as the quality of hotel services, customer satisfaction or implementation of loyalty programs are central to the discussion, the idea of total quality management is important in enhancing the overall perceived quality of services or products provided in a hotel organization (Kozak, 2004; Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). For instance, hotel guests are generally intolerant to lengthy waiting times either at the reception for check-in and check-out or at other service settings such as restaurants. As a result, this study is focused on finding proper answers as response to the following questions: What dimensions of operations are likely to contribute to the repeat visit intentions of guests staying at hotel businesses? Second, how is the order of such a contribution likely to vary between dimensions respectively?

Methodology

In parallel with the above-mentioned research questions, a self-administered survey was conducted on foreign tourists visiting Antalya, Turkey in the summer of 2009 (June 2009-September 2009). The sample was dominated by the two specific locations, namely Kundu and Lara. Located on the southern coast of Turkey, Antalya is a top tourist-receiving destination within the country. According to the data of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the total number of tourists visiting Antalya in 2008 was 8.564.514 and the number of five-star hotels was 177 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010). Using the formula suggested within the literature (Ozdamar, 2002), the sample size was calculated as a minimum of 554. A total 750 questionnaires were distributed among foreign respondents, out of which 682 were usable for analysis. The respondents were selected at 6 five-star hotels while waiting for departure back to the destination airport and approached by the assistance of the trained students on a face-to-face basis. The questionnaire was available in English, German and Russian, composed of 25 questions and structured into two parts. With its 8 questions, Part 1 covered socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, income, education, employment, travel experience, motivations, and repeat visitation.

An overview of literature indicates that service dimensions being significant for customers attracted to hotel businesses are dominated mainly by front office and housekeeping operations, food and beverages, and employees (Choi & Chu, 2001; Tsaur, Chiu & Huang, 2002; Lee & Lee, 2009; Tribe & Snaith, 1998). Taking these references as a departure point, Part 2 encompasses 17 items of the availability of facilities and services at sample hotels and their perceived influence over the guests' repeat visit

intentions. This part utilized a 5-point Likert scale varying from 5 (*very important*) to 1 (*not important at all*), which allowed to address how the hotel guests examined the perceived performance of facilities and services on the extent to which they were likely to revisit the same hotel in the future. This part is structured as "On my decision to stay at this hotel again on a future holiday, the speed of check-in & check-out services is '*very important*' (5) ...... '*not important at all*' (1)".

The demographic profiles show that males (55.7%) were represented slightly higher than females (44.3%). There was no much difference in the distribution of subjects' age levels. Thus, all age levels were almost equally represented (between 20% - 30%). The subjects' educational background was primarily dominated by those with a degree of university (50.1%), followed by a high school (37.1%). In terms of profession, respondents were dominated by three groups: employees (32.8%), self-employed (24.5%) and employers (21.4%). The economic profile of respondents corresponded to a monthly income between €1,000 and €2,000 (34.2%). They were single while travelling to the destination in Turkey (37.7%), followed by families (36.8%) and colleagues (25.5%). The visitor's main motivation encompassed the experience of all-inclusive accommodation (38.6%), followed by relaxation-entertainment (20.7%), playing golf (15.8%), spa-wellness (12.0%) and convention and congress (12.9%). The frequency of taking holidays was represented as follows: more than once a year (40.1%), once a year (39.8%), and once a month (20.1%). Almost one-third of the respondents were most likely to return as repeat tourists and recommend to friends and relatives as their destination choice (37.5%) and another one-third was just likely to return and recommend (36.5%).

Results and discussion

The Exploratory Factor Analysis *(*EFA) has extracted four factors: Front office services, employees, housekeeping/rooms, and food and beverage services. The total variance explaining ratio of these factors is 64%. When the alpha values are examined, it can be seen that all the reliability coefficients of the dimensions are high enough (Table 1). We have modeled these factors via LISREL and obtained the relationship between the factors and among the items on factors. As it can be seen from Figure 1, the maximum correlation is between housekeeping/rooms and employees (0.73) whereas the minimum correlation appears between front office services and employees (0.61), and also between front office services and housekeeping/rooms (0.61).
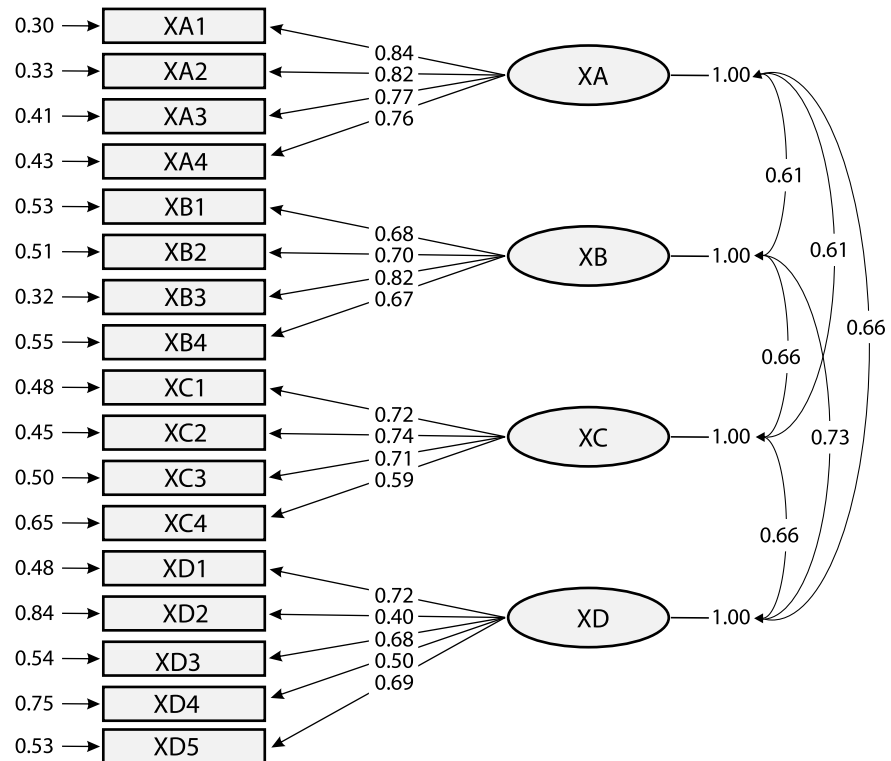
Table 1
EFA RESULTS AND CRONBACH'S α

Factors/ Items	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Explained Variance (%)	α
XA Front Office Services		6.727	17.988	0.871
XA1. Welcome and provision of information	0.845			
XA2. Speed of check-in & check-out services	0.839			
XA3. Individual attention and respect	0.751			
XA4. Providing rooms according to customers' request	0.683			

Table 1 **CONTINUED**

Factors/ Items	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Explained Variance (%)	α
XB Employees		1.427	16.450	0.809
XB1. Employees are dressed clean	0.671			
XB2. Employees are reassuring	0.776			
XB3. Employees are kind and respectful	0.706			
XB4. Employees have a better command of a foreign language	0.663			
XC Housekeeping/Rooms		1.328	15.375	0.781
XC1. Comfort of rooms	0.665			
XC2. Quality of furniture	0.769			
XC3. Cleanliness of rooms	0.709			
XC4. Provision of laundry services	0.669			
XD Food and beverage services		1.238	13.249	0.646
XD1. Presentation of food and beverages	0.508			
XD2. Cleanliness of restaurants and bars	0.658			
XD3. Variety of food and beverages	0.597			
XD4. Sufficiency of diet food and beverages	0.664			
XD5. Attention of service employees	0.630			

Figure 1
THE MODEL OF CFA VIA LISREL

Chi-square=661.27, df=113, p-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.084

The standardized loadings, t values, R2 values, means and the standard deviations of the items in each factor are given in Table 2. As the results of the analysis, all the loadings of the model are statistically meaningful. The RMSEA value of the analysis is 0.84 which shows an acceptable fitness. The highest loadings are "welcome and provision of information" (0.84), and "speed of check-in & check-out services" (0.82) and "employees are always kind and respectful" (0.82). The highest mean scores are related to such items as "cleanliness" (4.01) and "providing rooms according to customers' request" (4.01). The lowest mean scores are related to another set of items such as "sufficiency of diet foods and beverages" (3.49) and "employees have a better command of speaking a foreign language" (3.52).

Table 2

CFA RESULTS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Factors/ Items	Standardized Loadings	T	R^2	Mean	Standard Deviation
XA Front office services					
XA1. Welcome and provision of information	0.84	25.88	0.70	3.87	0.81
XA2. Speed of check-in & check-out services	0.82	25.06	0.67	3.73	0.83
XA3. Individual attention and respect	0.77	22.74	0.59	3.86	0.82
XA4. Providing rooms according to customers' request	0.75	22.11	0.56	4.01	0.85
XB Employees					
XB1. Employees are dressed clean	0.68	18.89	0.46	3.91	0.75
XB2. Employees are reassuring	0.70	19.48	0.49	3.75	0.79
XB3. Employees are kind and respectful	0.82	24.39	0.67	3.87	0.84
XB4. Employees have a better command of speaking a foreign language	0.67	18.44	0.45	3.52	0.88
XC Housekeeping/Rooms					
XC1. Comfort of rooms	0.72	19.99	0.51	3.95	0.79
XC2. Quality of furniture	0.74	20.62	0.54	3.76	0.78
XC3. Cleanliness of rooms	0.71	19.34	0.50	3.94	0.86
XC4. Provision of laundry services	0.59	15.41	0.34	3.55	0.80
XD Food and beverage services					
XD1. Presentation of food and beverages	0.72	19.87	0.51	3.82	0.77
XD2. Cleanliness of restaurants and bars	0.40	9.83	0.16	4.01	1.89
XD3. Variety of food and beverages	0.68	18.30	0.46	3.77	0.84
XD4. Sufficiency of diet food and beverages	0.50	12.64	0.25	3.49	0.83
XD5. Attitudes of service employees	0.69	18.64	0.47	3.77	0.80

From a specific point of view, when the related results of the analysis are examined, the division of front office services has become the most significant factor on customer loyalty. This result corresponds with Lewis and McCann's (2004) study that has the evidence to stress the importance of reception services (as the location to have the first contact with hotel visitors) in forming the first impression of customers about the hotel business and the level of their revisit intentions. In the same study, the authors point out that friendly, polite and efficient approach of front office employees and the speed of hotel check-in & check-out services have a significant role in meeting the

expected desires of customers (Lewis & McCann, 2004). As a key point in the hotel business, the front office is central to customers' interaction with employees upon their arrival at the hotel as well as on their departure at the end of their vacations (Jaszay & Dunk, 2006; Gray & Liguori, 2001).

Study findings indicate employees as the second highest effective factor on customer loyalty. This result supports previous studies suggesting a close relationship among the influence of employees' behaviors, service quality, customer loyalty and customer satisfaction (Kozak, 2001a; Weber, 2001; Varini, Engelmann, Claessen & Schleusener, 2003; Özdemir & Çulha, 2009; Wilkins, Merrilees & Herington, 2010). In a specific reference to the level of hospitality (welcoming attitudes or behaviors of local people and employees towards visitors) and harassment (negative attitudes or behaviors of local people and employees towards visitors) while on a vacation in a destination, there has been empirical evidence to support the statement that hospitality has a positive influence over customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kozak, 2001a; Öztürk & Qu, 2008) while harassment leads to customer dissatisfaction and has a negative influence over customer loyalty (Kozak, 2007). When findings of the current study and those of its earlier counterparts are combined, we may suggest that the form of communication between employees and customers will be significant factors in the revisiting behavior of customers in the context of hospitality services.

The division of housekeeping services has appeared as the third most important element. Using structural equation modeling, specifically the "quality of furniture" is the most influential element on customer loyalty. These results are parallel to those of an earlier study conducted by Vallen and Vallen (2005). In their study, the authors express that the provision of room services is regarded as the core product of a hotel and out of these services the furniture quality has of significance in obtaining customer satisfaction and subsequently leading to creating customer loyalty. Similarly, on a relevant study by Juwaheer (2004), the attractiveness and decoration of hotel rooms has appeared as the additional factor, in addition to employees' attitudes, reliability, and food and beverage services. As a result, decoration tasks such as making a decision about the type of color and interior design is an appealing factor to meet customer expectations.

Finally, food and beverage services have appeared as the last factor that plays a significant role in creating customer loyalty for hotel organizations. Specifically, the sufficiency of diet food and beverages is the most influential element within this factor group. In respect of the hotel's food and beverage department, Gray and Liguori (2001) indicate that a qualified presentation of food and beverage services is extremely important in developing an effective advertising campaign. Findings of this study are parallel to those of previous studies indicating that, subject to its quality, the presentation of food and beverage services has an influence over the revisiting intention of customers (Gray & Liguori, 2001; Öztürk & Qu, 2008). Linking back to these results, from a practical point of view, we suggest creating a menu of food and drinks by taking into consideration the expectations of customers and even their cultural or economic differences (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Kozak, 2001b; Namkung & Jang, 2009).

Conclusion and implications

From a broader perspective of emphasizing the contribution of study findings to the service research, the present study has shed light on various attributes of hotel services and their perceived direct influence over the intention of repeat visitation as experienced by hotel guests in a series of 5-star hotels operating in Antalya, Turkey. The present findings suggest the need for hotel managers to see the significance of front office and housekeeping services, ability of employees, and food and beverage operations to provide high quality that also leads to a higher intention of repeat visitation. As emphasized in the part of results and discussion, this study also has the empirical evidence to highlight the value of earlier empirical studies from the perspective of both academic and managerial perspectives. As a result of the high level of customer turnover, there is a need in service management and marketing to consider needs, wants and demands of actual or potential visitors who may arrange their first visits to the hospitality service setting. This requires a continuous administration of product development and improvement studies as well as a continuous measurement of the current performance of hospitality services on the basis of various indicators of service quality.

Finally, this study has some limitations that allow us to propose an avenue for future research. First, this stay has taken into consideration the intention to return as the outcome / dependent variable rather than the actual return of the respondents. Second, it is important to note that the survey was answered exclusively by English, German and Russian speaking nations. Thus, the study needs replication using a wider sample of consumers that represent a greater diversity of nationalities in order to generalize the results. Third, the survey might have included more independent (e.g. spa centres and animation etc) and dependent (e.g. overall satisfaction and future behavioural intentions for different periods etc). Last but not the least, as being an example that has been applied in the context of business level, future studies could also consider the application of this line of research into measuring the quality performance of tourist destinations from a broader perspective.

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