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# Destination service quality, affective image and revisit intention: The moderating role of past experience



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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the moderating role of past experience on the relationship between destination service quality, destination affective image and re-visit intention. With Alanya, Turkey, serving as the destination context, the study population comprises of 539 survey responses from foreign tourists. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data with the moderating effect of past experience analyzed using multiple group analysis. In light of the study's findings, perceptions related to language, accommodation, hospitality and activity services were found to have a positive and significant effect on the perception of the destination's affective image. Accordingly, destination management organizations (DMOs) are advised to adopt strategies to ensure that quality perceptions of tourists regarding language, accommodation, hospitality and activity services are addressed. In addition, evidence from the study suggests that accommodation-based service-quality perceptions on destination affective image, and destination affective image perceptions on revisit intention, provide a more robust determinant for repeat visitors to the destination than for first-time visitors. The paper closes by arguing that DMOs should therefore pay more attention to accommodation services that may positively affect the destination affective image (DAI) perceptions of repeat tourists.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourist destinations are highly competitive, with their further improvement and diversification frequently enhancing the overall competitiveness of the international tourism marketplace (Kester & Croce, 2011). While many factors contribute to the competitiveness of destinations (see Richie & Crouch, 2003), destination service quality (DSQ) is increasingly being viewed as important for the attainment of competitive advantage. In this regard, Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) argue that service quality and image components are significant in terms of destination assessments of tourists. It can therefore be argued that touristic destinations are able to achieve an advantage over their rivals by enhancing the quality level of the services they provide (Ghobadian, Speller, & Jones, 1994). It is argued that a better quality of a service or good brings with it a more positive purchasing experience. In other words, the buying experience of consumers will be positive if they have a positive opinion about the service or good prior to its purchase

(see Baloglu, 2001; Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2006). Similarly, tourists who already have a positive image about a destination will demonstrate a positive perception about how their experiences influence that particular destination (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010).

The effect of destination image on the perception of service quality has been analyzed in various studies on destination image to date (see Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013; Lee et al., 2005). For example, in the study by Bigne et al. (2001) it was found that the destination perception of tourists has a positive effect on both their perception of destination quality and the behavioral intentions of visitors. A different study by Lee et al. (2005), conducted on foreign visitors to the 2002 FIFA Soccer World Cup, examined the relationship between destination image and DSQ. The study concluded only 'attractions' and 'value for money' positively affect service quality at the destination level. Similarly, the study by Kim et al. (2013) on Orlando in Central Florida concluded that if the destination image perceptions of tourists are positive, DSQ perceptions will, in turn, be positively affected. The findings from these studies suggest that tourists who have a positive perception of the destination image will also perceive service quality in the same manner. That being said, the

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perceptions of tourists regarding destination image may in fact change after having actually experienced the destination (see Bigne et al., 2001; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gunn, 1988).

It may thus be argued that the DSQ perceptions of tourists after having actually experienced the destination first-hand may in fact have an important impact on destination perception. Consequently, destination image plays an important role in terms of both the investigation of traveling attitudes and developing efficient tourism marketing strategies (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). This may then suggest that image is an effective factor in the decision-making process of tourist destination choice (Mayo, 1975) and destination revisit intentions of consumers (Öztürk & Qu, 2008). That is to say, affective components gained from experiences in a specific destination can be more meaningful when considering tourists' revisit intentions than the destination itself (Gitelson & Crompton, 1984). In this regard, previous experience has been found to be the most effective influence on 'destination' revisit intentions of tourists (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Petrick, Morais, & Norman, 2001). It is, however, argued that tourists' DSQ perceptions (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Lee & Beeler, 2007), destination affective image (DAI) perceptions (Kaplanidou, 2007) and revisit intentions (Yüksel, 2001) differ according to whether a tourist is a first-timer or repeat visitor. Furthermore, the effect of DSQ perception on DAI and the effect of DAI on re-visit intention may differ according to whether the tourists are first-timers or repeaters (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2013).

The above studies, along with a wider review of the literature, suggest that although the relationship between destination image and service quality perception by tourists has been widely studied, this is not so with regard to the effect of DSQ components on DAI or the effect of DAI on revisit intention. This paper will, therefore, focus on the effect DSQ perceptions have on DAI perceptions and the decisiveness of DAI on revisit intentions of tourists according to whether a tourist is a first-timer or repeat visitor. Additionally, the concept of DSQ has been examined in the wider scope of destination cognitive image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen, Chen, & Okumus, 2013) and in the form of destination quality with a single dimension (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Zabkar, Brencic, & Dmitrovic, 2010) in destination-related studies. The latter is of particular interest considering that DSQ is essentially comprised of many sub-dimensions. The positive effect of destination cognitive image on DAI has, meanwhile, been stressed in several studies. There seems, however, to be a paucity of evidence on how sub-dimensions of DSQ, as one of the sub-elements of destination cognitive image, actually affect DAI. In this context, and working under the assumption that current consumer attitudes occur as a consequence of hierarchical causal relationships of cognitive, affective and conative elements (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2013; Chaudhuri, 2006; Gartner, 1994) or are based on the traditional-effect hierarchy assumption of Lavidge and Steiner (1961), this study examines the effect of the dimensions of DSQ on DAI and the influence of DAI on revisit intention. The study seeks to explain two important points: (i) how each of the dimensions of DSQ as cognitive elements affect the perception of DAI as an affective element; and (ii) whether the perception of DAI positively or negatively influences revisit intention as a conative element. The primary aim of this study is, therefore, twofold. Firstly, it is to explore the relationships between DSQ components, DAI and revisit intention. Secondly, it is to investigate the possible moderating role of past experience on the relationship between DSQ components, DAI and revisit intention. In fulfilling this purpose, the study will contribute to knowledge by adding to the various theoretical and pertinent industry implications, along with practical guidelines for decision makers. Before proceeding further, however, the following section seeks to clarify

those concepts central to the study, namely DSQ, DAI and revisit intention.

## 2. Literature review

In the course of researching perceptions of service quality and affective image in relation to repeat visitors, it seems quite natural to ask for a definition of each. As such de Vaus (1996, p. 48) argues, 'concepts that do not have real or set meanings can lead to conceptual anarchy, a problem with no entirely satisfactory solution. The most practical action is to clarify how a concept has been defined and to keep this definition clearly in mind when drawing conclusions and comparing the findings with those of other researchers'. The following sections seek to clarify understanding of the concepts central to this study.

### 2.1. Destination service quality and destination affective image

Service quality, as a generic concept of marketing and consumer behavior studies, has been variously defined and explained by different scholars to achieve the aims of their research. For example, service quality can be defined as comparing the expectations of customers related to services and performance of services after they have been utilized (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). That is to say, service quality is seen as 'the outcome of an evaluation process, where the consumer compares his expectations with the service he perceives he has received' (Grönroos, 1984, p. 37). However, following criticisms about the measurement at the stage of service quality expectation (see Babakus & Boller, 1992; Cronin & Taylor, 1992), Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe (2000) argue that concentrating on measuring only service performance will increase the usefulness of such studies. In this context, Page and Spreng (2002) argue that performance is a much stronger indicator of service quality than expectations. Taking this discussion into account, the concept of service quality may be defined as 'the overall evaluation of service performance' (Santos, 2003, p. 235) or 'an overall evaluation of the goodness or badness of a product or service' (Athiyaman, 1997, p. 539). The notion of DSQ is a part of the 'parental' concept of service quality in marketing studies. In general, it is considered as 'perceptions of the quality of services experienced during a stay measured by use of services remain in the minds of tourists' (Kayat & Hai, 2014, p. 3). In other words, it is all about the tourist's valuation of the performance of services consumed in a given tourist destination. It may be useful to note that in the relevant studies the concepts of DSQ and destination natural quality are used interchangeably. Similarly, destination quality and destination components are used as substitutes for each other (see Chen, Chen & Lee, 2011; Kayat & Hai, 2014; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Zabkar et al., 2010). However, some scholars have rightly explored these concepts in more depth arguing that there are clear differentials between them. For example, Buhalis (2000) examines destination components under six categories. These are 'attractions', 'accessibility', 'amenities', 'available packages', 'activities' and 'ancillary services'. Kozak and Rimmington (1998), meanwhile, stated that the components of a tourism destination can be analyzed under five categories: 'attractions', 'facilities and services', 'infrastructure', 'hospitality' and 'cost'. Before this, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) stated that a destination can be assessed in terms of 'transportation', 'price level' and 'accommodation types' while the destination can also be evaluated according to psychological properties, such as 'sincerity level', 'security', 'reputation' and 'expected level of service quality'. It can thus be seen that service quality and the properties of a destination are interlocked. That being said, destination quality can be sub-divided further into DSQ and destination natural quality

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