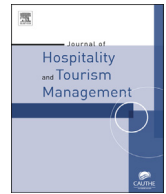




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Synthesizing the effects of experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction on experiential loyalty for the golf industry: The case of Hainan Island

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ABSTRACT

There is a conceptual gap in the services marketing literature, as to date there has been no published empirical research on experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction and experiential loyalty for the golf industry. This study attempts to fill the conceptual gap by identifying the dimensions of experiential quality and empirically examining the interrelationships among the experiential quality dimensions, experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction and experiential loyalty. A multidimensional and hierarchical model is used as a framework to synthesize the effects of experiential quality, excitement, equity and experiential satisfaction on the experiential loyalty of golf tourists. Statistical support is found for four primary dimensions and 13 subdimensions of experiential quality for the golf industry. The hypothesized paths between the higher order constructs—experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction and experiential loyalty—are confirmed. The analysis results contribute to the services marketing theory by providing additional insights into experiential loyalty, experiential satisfaction, equity, excitement, experiential quality, and the dimensions of experiential quality. The results of this study will also assist golf management in developing and implementing market-oriented service strategies to increase experiential quality and excitement, enhance equity and experiential satisfaction, and create experiential loyalty.

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1. Introduction

Golfing in China is one of the growing tourism industries, with numerous golf courses being established, especially on Hainan Island. Hainan Island, often referred to as “China’s Hawaii” for its unblemished beaches, volcanic mountains and tropical vegetation, is one of the world’s hottest areas for golf course development (The A Position, 2015). According to Tang (2010), China’s golf tourism industry is still in the beginning stage and has huge potential to be developed. Therefore, Hainan Province aims to become China’s golf capital and one of the world’s major tourist destinations for golf tourists (People’s Daily Online, 2010). The golf industry on Hainan Island attracts foreign investment, and

overseas golf tourists from such countries as Australia, South Korea and Japan. Therefore, China attempts to build Hainan Province into one of the world’s major golf tourism destinations (Moody, Jiang, & Liu, 2015).

Golfing, like other leisure and tourism activities, has been viewed to a great extent as an experiential consumption. Therefore, the quality golf tourists perceive is much more associated with their experiences during the process of golfing than services per se provided by the golf courses (Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009). Unlike service quality, however, there is still little research shedding light on the experiential quality of specific tourism participation such as golfing (Chen & Chen, 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2009). To increase golf tourists’ experiential loyalty, golf managers should set their priorities to provide high experiential quality and experiential satisfaction and increasing golf tourists’ excitement and their perceptions of equity for the golf industry (e.g. Budiarti, Djumilah, & Djumahir, 2013; Chen &

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Chen, 2010; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Kao, Huang, & Wu, 2008; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007; Wu & Li, 2014, 2015). Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) propose that satisfaction can be associated with the feeling of excitement. Khalid, Mahmood, Abbas, and Hussain (2011) indicate that quality has been considered to be a predictor of excitement. On the other hand, Jayawardhena and Wright (2009) indicate that the attributes of quality collectively influence excitement, which plays a key role in increasing loyalty. Hutchinson et al. (2009) and Nam, Ekinci, and Whyatt (2011) reveal that quality has a significant influence on equity, which in turn results in satisfaction and loyalty respectively. Aziz, Ariffin, Osmar, and Evin (2012) propose that the two variables – experiential quality and experiential satisfaction – affect customers' loyalty. However, experiential quality affects loyalty through experiential satisfaction (e.g. Hutchinson et al., 2009; Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015; Wu & Ai, 2015; Wu & Li, 2014; Wu & Mohi, 2015; Wu, Ai, Yang, & Li, 2015). According to several researchers (e.g. Aziz et al., 2012; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Jin et al., 2015; Wu & Li, 2014, 2015; Yuan & Wu, 2008), very few studies examine the quality of experiences in a golf context, including diverse psychological and physical aspects, and the simultaneous links among experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction and experiential loyalty.

The primary and sub dimensions of quality perceived by customers have been applied in different industries, using multidimensional and hierarchical modeling as a robust and testable framework (e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001; Clemes, Brush, & Collins, 2011; Clemes, Gan, & Kao, 2007; Clemes, Gan, & Ren, 2011; Clemes, Shu, & Gan, 2014; Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996; Wu & Hsu, 2012; Wu, Cheng, & Hsu, 2014). However, despite the contribution golfing makes to the tourism industry, no empirical studies have identified the primary and sub dimensions of experiential quality and linked these constructs to experiential loyalty using a multidimensional and hierarchical model (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Kao et al., 2008; Wilkins, Merrilees, & Herington, 2006; Wu & Li, 2014). Nor have any studies explored the relative importance of the primary and sub dimensions of experiential quality as perceived by golf tourists when they evaluate their overall experiences in a golf course (e.g. Hutchinson et al., 2009; Kao et al., 2008; Wu & Li, 2014; Yuan & Wu, 2008).

In this study, there are three research objectives. The first objective is to identify the dimensions of experiential quality as perceived by golf tourists using a multidimensional and hierarchical framework. The second objective is to examine the interrelationships among experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction and experiential loyalty as perceived by golf tourists. The third objective is to identify the least and most important dimensions of experiential quality as perceived by golf tourists.

The contribution of this study is twofold. First, this study contributes to the marketing literature by providing an examination of several services marketing constructs. This is an important contribution because it provides a better understanding of golf tourists' perceptions of experiential quality, excitement, equity, experiential satisfaction and experiential loyalty. Second, this study conceptualizes and measures golf tourists' perceptions of experiential quality using a multidimensional and hierarchical approach. This approach helps to overcome some of the weaknesses of traditional SERVQUAL (a disconfirmation-based measure of service quality) and SERVPERF (a performance-based measure of service quality) scales and thus provides a more accurate approach to assessing golf tourists' perceptions of experiential quality.

2. Literature review

2.1. Service quality

Service quality has been defined by a number of researchers under their own theoretical assumptions. Bitner and Hubbert (1994) define service quality as “the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services” (p. 77). Conceptualization of service quality should include the service delivery process (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) and the service outcomes (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991). SERVQUAL was developed in 1985 by the marketing research team of Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml and is one of the most widely used scales to measure service quality (Brown, Churchill, & Peter, 1993). This scale measures the gap between customer's expectations for excellence and their perceptions of actual service delivery. The resulting multiple-item scale for measuring service quality, SERVQUAL, lists five dimensions or determinants of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Notwithstanding its popularity and widespread application, SERVQUAL has been subjected to a number of theoretical and operational criticisms (e.g. Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). Buttle (1996) divides these criticisms and controversies into theoretical and operational parts. First, theoretical parts include paradigmatic objections, gaps model, process orientation and dimensionality. Second, operational parts cover expectations, item composition, moment of truth, polarity, scale points, two administrations and variance extracted. Major criticisms of this scale include its length, the validity of its five generic service quality dimensions, and the predictive power of this scale to subsequent consumer purchases (Carman, 1990; Finn & Lamb, 1991).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) introduce SERVPERF, arguing that customer preferences are more relevant to a long-term service quality than impending differences in expectations and performance. Cronin and Taylor (1992) suggest that the performance-based scale SERVPERF is more efficient than the SERVQUAL scale, since it reduces the number of items that must be measured from 44 to 22. Unlike SERVQUAL, SERVPERF does not differentiate service quality from customer satisfaction. SERVQUAL measures performance based on the gap between expectations and perceptions while SERVPERF measures actual performance based on customer satisfaction. SERVPERF consists of the 22 perception items in the SERVQUAL scale, and therefore excludes any consideration of expectations. Cronin and Taylor (1992) have found that SERVPERF explains more of the variance in an overall measure of service quality than SERVQUAL. However, the five dimensions of SERVPERF cannot be confirmed (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005). In terms of the evaluation of the validity and reliability of SERVPERF, it is not an effective measurement scale (Robledo, 2001).

2.2. Experiential quality

Customer experience is conceptualized as the customer's subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the organization, and customers' experiential quality as its perceived excellence or superiority (Lemke, Clark, & Wilson, 2011). Lemke et al. (2011) refer to experiential quality as a perceived judgment about the excellence or superiority of the customer experience. In a tourism context, several researchers (Chen & Chen, 2010; Cole & Scott, 2004; Crompton & Love, 1995) have identified experiential quality as a psychological outcome accorded to tourists who participate in tourism activities. In general, service quality is referred to as service performance at the attribute level while experiential quality refers to the psychological outcome resulting

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