SERVICE QUALITY, RECREATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS, AND WILLINGNESS TO RETURN: CULTURAL PARKS IN TAIWAN

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ABSTRACT

The cultural industry has been the most popular issue for research and discussion around the world in recent years and has become included in the policies for social and economic development in advanced countries. Governments and private institutions concerned with “globalization” and “localization” promote the development of the cultural industry and combine the humanities and the economy in order to add value. Taiwanese local governments and cities have played important roles in the development of culture and art. In recent years, local governments and cities have invested greatly in cultural and artistic activities and spatial creativity. Culture has increasingly been the major appeal for local development and has been the optimal strategy for raising local publicity. In addition, culture has assisted in the transformation of the cultural industry and been taken into consideration when planning and developing local leisure and tourism industries. Moreover, culture promotes the planning and discussion of communities, local areas, and cultural industries as well as the industrialization of culture and culturalization of industries to help market local cultures on a global scale. The results of this study show that the tangibility and reactivity dimensions in service quality are the main factors influencing the relaxing dimension in recreational attractiveness. In addition, the tangibility dimension in service quality is the main factor influencing tourists’ willingness to return. Lastly, the relaxing dimension in recreational attractiveness is the main factor influencing tourists’ willingness to return. Therefore, the results of this study provide suggestions for relevant authorities when promoting cultural parks, such as, strengthening physical facilities and service-providing equipment and training staff’s problem-solving and consulting skills in order to improve tourist’s image of the park. Moreover, a variety of cultural activities can be held in the park in order to add to the story behind products and improve tourist interactions so that tourists can relax and experience the park and will be more willing to return to the park.

KEY WORDS: service quality; recreational attractiveness; willingness to return.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural experiences have become mainstream in Taiwan in recent years due to increasing awareness of local cultures. The cultural industry has become included in the policies for social and economic development in advanced countries. Yet in the process of developing cultural industries, the globalization and localization trends must be considered and the development of cultural industries must be promoted in order to integrate the humanities and the economy to further add value.

The government actively promotes the Challenge 2008 – National Development Plan realize the mainstream idea “think globally, act locally," in which the cultural and creative industries were one of the important development
projects. By combining art and business, products with local features can be created to enhance the public’s cultural recognition and add value to the industry. This was the first time cultural software was seen as a national construction project in Taiwan.

Efforts by governments and private institutions shed light on issues related to the cultural industry. As a leisure industry, local culture displays its unique, aesthetic, pleasant, and local values, and is no longer limited to cultural products, yet emphasizes the intangible values of pleasantness and beauty. Local governments and cities in Taiwan play key roles in the development of cultural arts. There are 25 municipal units in Taiwan (including Taipei, Kaohsiung, Kinmen, and Matsu) that have dedicated a great amount of money and effort to the cultural arts and creation of cultural space. Culture has become the main appeal for local development and the optimal strategy to improve the visibility of a place.

With changes in lifestyle and the implementation of weekends, people have started to enrich their spiritual lives as well as their material lives, bringing rise to the leisure industry. The leisure industry, in turn, brings economic benefits to local societies and helps preserve the local culture. To comply with Taiwan’s membership in the World Trade Organization and help local culture industries transform, a local leisure tourism industry was planned and developed, promotional events for communities, local areas, and cultural industries were organized, and the industrialization of culture and culturalization of industries were promoted to help market local cultures on a global scale.

Service quality is the main appeal of the service industry. The service industry provides intangible services; thus, service quality is of the utmost importance. There are various ways to investigate how customers feel about service quality and this data is used to understand customers’ understanding of the service. Managers then make modifications to their business strategies based on survey data and monitor the quality in order to improve service quality and performance. Parasurman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) pointed out that services are intangible, indivisible, unstorable, and heterogeneous [1]. Therefore, customers cannot see or try the service beforehand, which may cause customers to feel uncertain and insecure.

However, maintaining good and quality relationship with customers can reduce their uncertainty and influence their expectations towards future interactions and transactions [2]. Therefore, building good rapport with customers is the priority in the service industry and maintaining quality relationships is also an important issue. This study used service quality to examine tourists’ satisfaction towards cultural parks and whether service quality was a main factor for their willingness to return to the park.

Attractiveness is the most important part of tourism; it provides tourists with the motivation to travel and is the core of tourism products. Walsh-Heron and Stevens (1990) stated that attractiveness is an idea about an area that focuses on an region, place, or activity [3]. Therefore, recreational attractiveness entices tourists and local residents to visit the place by arranging exhibitions. Moreover, providing fun and pleasant experiences allows customers to pass leisure time. Finally, the facilities and services provided cater to tourists’ demands and interests. Thus, this study also investigated whether recreational attractiveness influences tourists’ willingness to return to cultural parks.

Recent literature on the cultural industry has focused on the development of the cultural industry [4], the cultural and creative industry [5], operational performance [6], cultural marketing [7, 8], the Hakka culture industry [9], and leisure benefits from the tourists’ perspective [10]. However, there is little literature concerning the relationship between cultural park operations and tourists’ experiences. Thus, the present study investigated how service quality and recreational attractiveness influence tourists’ satisfaction and willingness to return. The results can serve as a reference for relative industries and governments in policy making for cultural park operations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality And Willingness To Return

Lee, Hsieh, and Kao (2000) stated that the service quality customers experienced at theme park influences their intention to return to the park. In other words, staff performance, reliable inquiry services, thoughtful care and the state of the facilities influence customers’ intentions [11]. Ho and Lee (2007) claimed that digital travel services also influence customers’ intentions [12].

Choi and Chu (2001) and Lin and Chen (2009) found that service quality leaves an impression on tourists, establishes a good reputation, and increases willingness to return [13, 14]. The National Scenic Area Administration can use these dimensions to make effective plans to meet tourists’ demands. That is, service quality directly affects behavioral intentions [15]. Therefore, this study proposed the hypothesis that service quality is significantly correlated to willingness to return.

Service Quality And Recreational Attractiveness

Liao (2003) found that service quality of the Dongfeng Green Corridor influences recreational attractiveness [16]. In other words, service quality in recreational areas, such as the planning and seclusion of bicycle paths, the construction of service facilities, and managerial implementation and promotion, all influence recreational attractiveness.

Chang and Lin (2007) concluded that the service quality of leisure farms influences recreational attractiveness [17]. In other words, when tourists think that a leisure farm has the recreational attractiveness of “relieving pressure and stress,” tourists have better impressions of the farm’s cleanliness, beauty, scenery, and service quality [18]. Therefore, the second hypothesis was that service quality is significantly correlated with recreational attractiveness.
**Recreational attractiveness and willingness to return**

Recreational attractiveness is unique incentive for recreational activities that appeals to tourists. Bigné and Andreu (2004) claimed that unique recreational attractiveness is the power to attract tourists [19]. Chapman et al. (2005) stated that when an organization has unique attractiveness, the staff’s willingness to work will increase [20].

Chen and Lee (2006) and Liu and Shih (2009) found that the attractiveness of festival activities incites the willingness to return in tourists [21, 22]. In other words, the attractiveness of a scenic area is a combination of the scenery, participation, memories, and services and facilities capable of satisfying tourists which makes tourists willing to return. Chou (2008) concluded that recreational attractiveness influences tourists’ willingness to return [23]; therefore, the third hypothesis in this study was that recreational attractiveness is significantly correlated with willingness to return.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

**Framework**

This research framework and the variables included are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research framework

![Research framework](image)

**Definition of variables**

**Service quality**

Most scholars believe that most services are intangible and that services are a type of performance, not an object [1]. Service quality implies that as production and consumption are simultaneous, the service provider is affected by different people, events, times, places, and objects; thus, customers have different demands and impressions of service quality. Hsu (2000) stated that service quality evaluates the satisfaction of customers’ service expectations [24].

**Recreational attractiveness**

Hu and Ritchie (1993) and Gao (1995) pointed out that the attractiveness of a travel destination is the feeling, perspective, and opinion that an individual destination can meet tourists’ expectations and demands [25, 26]. Lee, Tsaur, and Chang (1995) stated that the attractiveness of tourism resources is the natural scenery and facilities that can bring in tourists [27].

**Willingness to return**

The willingness to return is a subjective judgement of future actions or the possible actions or behavior of a consumer based on their attitude toward a product [28]. Simply put, willingness is a person’s possible actions that can be used to predict human behavior. Folkes (1988) concluded that willingness is a person’s subjective judgement of possible future actions [29].

**Data collection**

This study used convenience sampling to select ten existing cultural parks in northern, central and southern Taiwan at which to distribute questionnaires. After explaining the research project to each participant, the questionnaires were completed via interviews with participants’ consent.

**Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire was divided into four parts: service quality, recreational attractiveness, willingness to return, and participants’ basic information.

- Service quality: The service quality scale proposed by Parasuraman et al. [1] was adopted and measured using a Likert scale.
- Recreational attractiveness: The questions were designed on the basis of recreational motivation and cognitive value and measured using a Likert scale.
- Willingness to return: The willingness to return scale proposed by Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal [30] was adopted and measured using a Likert scale.
- Participants’ basic information: Gender, age, level of education, and number of visits.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

This study investigated the relationships between the service quality, recreational attractiveness, and willingness to return as they pertain to cultural parks. This section
discusses the statistical analysis conducted to verify or disprove the hypotheses made in this study.

**Descriptive statistics**

This study collected 156 of the 160 questionnaires distributed for an effective response rate of 91.8%. The results are shown in Table 1. Descriptive statistics for individual variables revealed that most of the participants were female (63.5%), between the ages of 21 and 30 (60.9%), college educated (57.1%), and had visited the cultural park two or more times (53.2%).

**Service quality**

Service quality was divided into five factors after factor analysis.

- **Factor 1:** Includes 3 questions and named “care.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.829. Involves concern for customers and personalized service.
- **Factor 2:** Includes 3 questions and named “guarantee.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.818. Involves staff’s knowledge, politeness, and ability to gain customers’ trust through service.
- **Factor 3:** Includes 3 questions and named “reliability.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.795. Involves the ability to accurately and reliably fulfill service promises.
- **Factor 4:** Includes 3 questions and named “responsiveness.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.773. Involves the willingness to help customers and the ability to provide speedy service.
- **Factor 5:** Includes 2 questions and named “tangibility.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.770. Involves physical facilities, equipment for providing services, and staff appearance.

**Recreational attractiveness**

Recreational attractiveness was divided into four factors after factor analysis.

- **Factor 1:** Includes 5 questions and named “relaxing.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.945. Implies that tourists can relax, strengthen relationships, relieve pressure, and experience recreational activities in the park.
- **Factor 2:** Includes 2 questions and named “recreational space.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.910. Implies that the park has wide open spaces for leisure activities.
- **Factor 3:** Includes 2 questions and named “convenience.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.834. Involves the travel distance, cost and time.
- **Factor 4:** Includes 2 questions and named “facilities.” The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.784. Includes public facilities, such as clean toilets, safe seating, souvenir shops, etc. throughout the park.

**Factor analysis**

In order to further examine the hypotheses, factor analysis was used to simplify service quality and recreational attractiveness into several main factors. Principal components analysis (PCA) was used to extract the main factors. Factors with an eigenvalue over 1 were extracted and then varimax rotation was used to select the components with a factor loading absolute value greater than 0.5. Finally, each factor was named according to the nature of the variable.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 yr or under</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 yr</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 yr</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 yr</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior high school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior college</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of visits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice or more</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correlation analysis of service quality and recreational attractiveness

This study employed canonical analysis to analyze the data (Table 2). Table 2 shows that the canonical correlation coefficient reached the level of significance, $\sigma^2 = 0.403225$ ($p<0.05$). This indicates that the service quality canonical factor $\lambda_1$ can explain the recreational attractiveness canonical factor $\eta_1$ total variation of 40.3. The results indicated that service quality is significantly correlated with recreational attractiveness, which supports hypothesis one.

The results show that service quality and recreational attractiveness have significant effects. Further analysis showed that there are five factors in service quality: care, guarantee, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibility. Tangibility and responsiveness were the most influential factors for recreational attractiveness, followed by guarantee, care, and reliability. Analysis of influencing factors of service quality on recreational attractiveness showed that relaxing was the most influential, followed by recreational space, facilities, and finally, convenience.

Thus, tourists visiting cultural parks are more likely to feel relaxed when they approve of the facilities and service-providing equipment in the park and park staff can quickly solve problems without ignoring tourists’ feelings. Moreover, when tourists think that the staff cares about the tourists and the staff provides individualized service, is knowledgeable and polite, and can gain tourists’ trust, then tourists will be able to relax more.

Table 2: Canonical analysis of service quality and recreational attractiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variable (X variable)</th>
<th>Canonical factor ($\lambda_1$)</th>
<th>Criterion variables (Y variable)</th>
<th>Canonical factor ($\eta_1$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>-0.752*</td>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>-0.921*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarantee</td>
<td>-0.799*</td>
<td>Recreational space</td>
<td>-0.698*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>-0.673*</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>-0.405*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>-0.826*</td>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>-0.638*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibility</td>
<td>-0.853*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracted variance (%)</td>
<td>0.477</td>
<td>Extracted variance (%)</td>
<td>0.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlapping number (%)</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>Overlapping number (%)</td>
<td>0.248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regression analysis of service quality and willingness to return

This study conducted regression analysis using service quality as the independent variable and willingness to return as the dependent variable. As shown in Table 3, service quality is significantly correlated with willingness to return and the explanatory power is 30.8%, supporting hypothesis two.

Further analysis revealed that tangibility is the main influencing factor for satisfaction followed by responsiveness. In other words, good physical facilities and service-providing equipment and staff able to quickly solve problems will increase tourists’ willingness to return.

Regression analysis of recreational attractiveness and willingness to return

The study also conducted a regression analysis with recreational attractiveness as the independent variable and willingness to return as the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, recreational attractiveness is significantly correlated with willingness to return and its explanatory power is 37.1%. Thus, recreational attractiveness influences willingness to return, supporting hypothesis three.
Table 3: Regression analysis for service quality and willingness to return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Willingness to return (Standardized beta coefficients)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service quality</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>-0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guarantee</td>
<td>0.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>0.247*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tangibility</td>
<td>0.297**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>0.308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-test</td>
<td>14.813**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

Further analysis revealed that relaxing was the main factor influencing tourists’ willingness to return, followed by recreational space. In other words, when tourists feel relaxed, stress-free, and friendly, their willingness to return to the cultural park will increase. In addition, a park with recreational space will also increase willingness to return.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study investigated the relationships among service quality, recreational attractiveness, and willingness to return. After analyzing the effects of service quality on recreational attractiveness, the findings supported the first hypothesis and were similar to past findings. Moreover, the tangibility and responsiveness dimensions of service quality had the most influence on recreational attractiveness, followed by guarantee, care, and reliability. The relaxing dimensions of recreational attractiveness had the most influence on willingness to return, followed by recreational space, facilities, and convenience. In other words, tourists visiting cultural parks are more likely to feel relaxed when they approve of the facilities and service-providing equipment in the park and park staff can quickly solve problems without ignoring tourists’ feelings. Moreover, when tourists think that the staff cares about the tourists and the staff provides individualized service, is knowledgeable and polite, and can gain tourists’ trust, then tourists will be able to relax more.

Secondly, analysis of service quality and willingness to return supported the second hypothesis and were consistent with past literature. Tangibility was the main factor influencing willingness to return, followed by responsiveness. In other words, tourists value staff’s appearance and the time needed to solve problems. In addition, good physical facilities in the cultural park, service-providing equipment, and problem-solving abilities make tourists more willing to return to the cultural park.

Table 4: Regression analysis for recreational attractiveness and willingness to return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Willingness to return (Standardized beta coefficients)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreational attractiveness</td>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>0.457**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recreational space</td>
<td>0.174*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>0.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-test</td>
<td>23.289**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<0.05, **P<0.01
Third, analysis of recreational attractiveness and willingness to return supported the third hypothesis and was consistent with past literature. Further analysis revealed that relaxing was the main factor influencing tourists’ willingness to return, followed by recreational space. In other words, tourists value the experiences and ability to relax offered the park. Convenience is not the most important factor in this regard. When feel relaxed and surrounded by friends, tourists’ willingness to return to the park will increase.

Therefore, according to the results of this study, when cultural parks are promoted, the facilities and equipment that provide services should be stressed, and staff should be trained to solve problems and answer questions in order to improve tourists’ image of the park. Moreover, a variety of cultural activities can be held at the park in order to add to the story behind the products and improve tourist interactions so that tourists will be more willing to return to the park.

REFERENCES


