

# Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction within Festival and Special Event

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## ABSTRACT

*The concept of customer satisfaction and service quality are notably two important concepts in marketing. Indeed, the two concepts are important in addressing theoretical as well as practical issue for marketers and consumer researchers. Numerous researches have been found discussing various issues related to the two constructs in various field areas. Midst all the debates, there is an existing discussion on a conceptualization of relationship between satisfaction and service quality that is argued to be relevant especially to the field of festival and special event and generally to other tourism and recreation fields. The conceptualizations seemed to receive supports from a number of event researchers and thus adapted and further examined in their studies. This paper presents a review on the service quality and satisfaction constructs and their relationship illustrated by Crompton and Love (1995), Childress and Crompton (1997), and Baker and Crompton (2000). Examples of past studies that have supported and further investigated the conceptualization are also included.*

### Keywords

Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Festival, Special Event

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction and service quality are no doubt two most discussed concepts in theory and also practice. This is because the two related concepts are the key to sustaining one's competitive advantage in today's world of intense business competition (Shemwell, Yavas & Bilgin, 1998). Business organizations would want to make sure their product in superior quality that will in turn satisfy their customers. Marketing researchers and practitioners alike have widely recognized the issue of quality service as critical importance for business success (O'Neill, 2005). Ranges of literatures of various field areas can be found on the topic of quality and also its relationship with satisfaction.

Among many, the study of expectation, performance and the consequent disconfirmation has been the dominant theory in customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and service quality studies. The expectancy disconfirmation theory was initially proposed by Richard Oliver (Oliver, 1980). While Oliver (1980) posited that satisfaction/dissatisfaction is the product of interaction between the consumer's pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase evaluation, Parasuraman et al. (1985) believed service quality to be the result of the difference between expectation and perception of service performance levels along the quality dimensions. Yet, it is common to find ambiguous distinctions between service quality and customer satisfaction in the literature. Part of the confusion is attributable to the most widely accepted conceptualization of both constructs being derived from the same theoretical source - the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980). Consequently, this has resulted in confusion to the point the two constructs are recurrently used interchangeably by management. Nevertheless, reviews of literature, however posits that satisfaction and service quality are actually separate constructs, though appear to have high interrelation with each other

Similar to areas of marketing and consumer behavior, a strong contemplation on the constructs of service quality and customer satisfaction has also evolved independently in the tourism and recreation field. The earliest literature reported to relate to satisfaction dated at least as far back as 1962 of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission reports (Manning, 1986). Since then, global tourism and its related industries have started to focus on improving effective service quality and customer satisfaction. The objective of this paper is to present a review on a conceptualization of relationship between service quality and satisfaction constructs explained by several event researchers primarily by Crompton and Love (1995), Childress and Crompton (1997), and Baker and Crompton (2000). In addition, this paper is also highlighting previous studies that have supported and further investigated the conceptualization within

the settings of festivals or special events. Measurement dimensions and items evaluating event performance quality and most importantly findings of the researches were included.

## 2.0 SERVICE QUALITY AND SATISFACTION WITHIN EVENT SETTING

Midst of all the vigorous debates regarding the conceptualization of the relationship between the constructs of satisfaction and quality, a detailed discussion of the definitions and nature of these two constructs, and how they differ and relate has been introduced within the festival and special event literatures. The idea was first instigated by Brown (1988) in his review of outdoor recreation literatures. It was then supported by Crompton and Love (1995) and further discussed by Childress and Crompton (1997). Over the years, their conceptualization of the constructs was adapted in several studies in tourism-related field (i.e. Cole & Illum, 2006; Hong, 2003; Thrane, 2002; Tomas, Scott & Crompton, 2002; Baker & Crompton, 2000).

The explanations of the nature and relationship of the two constructs presented by Crompton and his colleagues have taken unique approach from marketing field's standard of comparison in disconfirmation of expectations (Baker & Crompton, 2000). In contrast to the global opinion of service quality and satisfaction, Crompton and his colleagues distinguished service quality as '*quality of performance*' and satisfaction as '*quality of experience*' at transaction/attribute level. Service quality at the transaction/attribute level refers to rating of service attributes (Cole & Illum, 2006). Whereas, satisfaction at the same transaction/attribute level should be better understood as psychological benefits received by the customers (Cole & Illum, 2006).

According to Crompton and colleagues, quality of performance or else also known as *quality of opportunity* basically refers to quality of tourism opportunities or resources supplied by service providers or available at a destination. Precisely, performance quality of event attributes or features (i.e. activities, programs, facilities, etc) available at a festival is the output of the festival management and organizer. As being the output of the organizer necessarily means the quality of performance is primarily under the control of the organizer. As Brown (1988) had noted "Quality can be affected by management ... through its manipulation of information and opportunities for recreation" (cited in Childress & Crompton, 1997, p.412). Hence, to evaluate the quality of performance essentially means to evaluate the festival visitors' or audiences'

perceptions of the performance of the service provider.

In contrast, satisfaction at the transaction level or termed as *quality of experience* refers to "the psychological outcome resulting from their participation in tourism activities" (Crompton and Love, 1995) or "an emotional state of mind after exposure" to the performance (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Consistent with Brown's (1988) conceptualization of satisfaction, festival or any other tourism and recreational activities are forms of human experiences that based on "intrinsically rewarding voluntary engagements during nonobligated time". Most satisfaction researches are looking at subjective nature of reactions and differences within the reactions to recreation opportunities. Mannel and Kleiber (1997) have reported that researchers have been focusing on 'psychological outcomes and benefits' when describing the social psychological process of satisfaction. Mannel and Iso-Ahola (1987) stated quality of experience as a psychological outcome. Consequently, visitor satisfaction is established by the degree to which desired intrinsic outcomes derived largely from interaction with the festival's attributes realized by visitors (Cole & Crompton, 2003).

Compared to quality of performance, it is posited that satisfaction or quality of experience is beyond the control of festival organizers. According to Crompton and Love (1995), quality of experience is not only affected by the attributes – services/ activities/ programs/ facilities – provided and manipulated by the promoting organization. The authors maintained that level of satisfaction is also depended on a host of factors that may affect the visitors that are beyond organizers' control. In fact, factors such as the visitors' social-psychological state they brings to the festival (i.e. mood, disposition, needs) and superfluous matters/events (i.e. climate, social group interactions) are suggested to also contribute to the quality of visitors' experience at festivals (Baker & Crompton, 2000). These variables may intervene during the visitors' experience process as to result in a low level of satisfaction even though the service attributes is perceived to be of high quality. On the other hand, such variables may adequately affect the visitors' experience, thus producing high satisfaction even with low service quality. In short, the end capacity for a visitor to enjoy the expected psychological benefits while attending the festival is not under complete control of the festival organizers (Cole & Illum, 2006).

According to Brown (1988), the creation of a event experience would necessarily include mutually visitors and certain raw tourism resources. Subsequently, the quality of the tourism resources would shape the sum benefit and satisfaction the visitors receive (Cole & Crompton, 2003). While the