

# A Review of Visitors Satisfaction and Perception of Crowding

Somaskanthan Maruthaiah, and Rosmalina Abdul Rashid

**Abstract**—Tourist satisfaction is a main issue in the context of tourism because it involves the key measure in determining whether a tourist is satisfied with their visit and the effects it have on their surroundings. The problem of crowding have been seen as a major influence in few researches and are found to be affecting the overall satisfaction of visitors throughout their travel experiences. Few previously used theories in measuring tourist satisfaction will be used and adapted to create a new model of visitor satisfaction and perception of crowding. This model identifies tourist's satisfaction level based on destination image and attribute satisfaction. Secondly, this model can be used to compare between tourist's satisfaction level towards expectation and experience of tourists' recreational activities in Marine Parks. Third, this model is to be used to identify tourist acceptability of crowding in Marine Parks according to tourist groups. By these findings this model will be used to determine the tourist satisfaction based on the crowding perception in future studies.

**Keywords**—Tourist Satisfaction, Crowding, Crowding Model, Marine Parks, Crowding Perception

## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**OURIST satisfaction is a main issue in the context of tourism. According to Oxford dictionaries definition, satisfaction is defined as “fulfilment of one's wishes, expectations, or needs, or the pleasure derived from this”. These wishes, expectation or needs in tourism sector is explained by [1] which claim that a customer's overall satisfaction may be related to their assessment of not only service quality but also product features and price. Tourist satisfaction involves the key measure in determining whether a tourist is satisfied with their visitor not. Even though it is said that service quality and product features determine the satisfaction but the satisfaction levels are also determined even before a tourists makes a visit through expectation towards a place. This is because expectations are thought to create a frame of reference which is eventually used as a comparative judgment during the visit [2]. Expectations can generate a good or bad experience based on the visitors'. Experience

poorer than expected create a negative disconfirmation and create dissatisfaction. Meanwhile experiences better than expected create a positive disconfirmation and evaluated as satisfaction [2]. However the problem of crowding is seen as a negative influence to the satisfaction of tourists who visit a tourist attraction. Reference [3] found that perceptions of crowding seem to have a slight impact on visitors' satisfaction. Hence the importance of including the crowding factor as a possible effect towards overall satisfaction is stressed in this paper. This research investigates and proves the importance of crowding as an influence to the overall satisfaction level of tourists. The influences of these expectation, experience and crowding conclude to disconfirmation and loyalty. Negative disconfirmation usually occurs in negative loyalty which means the decision not to return or not to promote their experience in a positive way. Thus, tourist loyalty is assumed as one of the crucial elements in determining tourist satisfaction, as it influences the choice of destination and the decision to return [4]-[5], trust [6] and reputation [7]. Hence this paper discusses the framework which is suitable for the measurement of tourist satisfaction in tourist destinations with high density visitors.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return [8]. Several researchers have studied customer satisfaction and provided theories about tourism [9]-[2]-[10]-[11]-[12]-[13]-[14]. These theories and models have assessed customer satisfaction based on: expectancy/disconfirmation by [2] (refer figure I), equity [15]; importance-performance [9]; and perceived overall performance [16]. Other theories used in more recent studies include; [17] expectation-perception gap model, Oliver's expectancy-disconfirmation theory [18], Sirgy's congruity model [19]-[20], and the performance – only model [21]. These models have been used to measure tourist satisfaction with specific tourism destinations.

A framework which contains few important variables are included in this model to ensure all variables are taken into account when measuring tourist's satisfaction. The problem of crowding have been seen as a major influence in few researches and are found to be affecting the overall satisfaction of visitors throughout their travel experiences. [22] in his research suggested that the robust development of the tourism

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industry and the high level of tourist arrivals are seen to degrade the quality of the parks' ecosystem. Meanwhile, in a similar research proposed in the marine park, [3] found the difference in visitor's age and group size when measuring visitor density. Their findings also state the visitors of Haliig Hooe Island tend to tolerate high levels of visitor activity during their visit. Besides that, a study at Pulau Payar by [23] found that the social carrying capacity with respect to crowding is reached due to high number of visitors to the island when majority of tourists surveyed (64.47%) found it crowded at the marine park. Although an increase in visitor numbers may not necessarily result in visitor dissatisfaction [24], 73.97% of respondents felt that an increase in visitor numbers would affect their enjoyment of Pulau Payar Marine Park [23]. In contrary to that, the emphasis is no longer on user numbers as there is no fixed value for any recreational settings when it is researched about social carrying capacity. [25] has said that, the determination of social carrying capacity is ultimately value judgments that need to be made by the managers based on the nature of the various experiences that managers wish to provide for visitors and the standards by which managers have chosen to measure those experiences. This is further supported by [26] where he said that the descriptive component of social carrying capacity focuses on the objective characteristic of recreation use, whereas the evaluation component focuses on determining the level of impacts in the recreational experience which are acceptable in the area. These contradictions have resulted in the need of further studies in the term of social carrying capacity and crowding in tourist satisfaction levels. This framework is to measure tourist satisfaction from different level of perspectives and create an understanding on factors that may influence tourist satisfaction.

### III. REVIEW OF EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCES OF TOURISTS

Expectations are actions anticipated by the consumers regarding a product or place and service in particular performances at a certain destination [27]-[28]-[29]. Many studies have been encountered using the expectation as a variable in determining satisfaction. Researches on tourism perception and tourists motivation has demonstrated that expectation have a pivotal role in motivating and determining preferred destination of visit, but the questions remain on how expectation influences satisfaction. The answer of the question lies on one of the early papers on the relationship between expectation and experiences by [2] who researched about the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions. This study has been used widely and also most comprehensively studied by [30] who investigated the causes and effects of customer satisfaction using Oliver's model. In this paper, Oliver's Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (Figure I) will be adapted and used to represent the relationship of expectation-disconfirmation.

This theory is chosen because it states that a visitors' satisfaction is determined from the very beginning of even before the visit in the form of expectation. Users are said to

form expectation or believes based on their intellectual abilities and information gained. Then they form post-visit perceptions about the experience gained from the initial visit and make comparisons between expectation and the experiences which is known as disconfirmation of expectations [31]-[32]-[2]. A positive disconfirmation means the performance was better than expected, and negative disconfirmation brings the meaning of performance was worse than expected [2]-[33]-[34]-[35]. Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory suggests that the better performance is, or the more positive the disconfirmation, the greater the satisfaction for visitors [36].

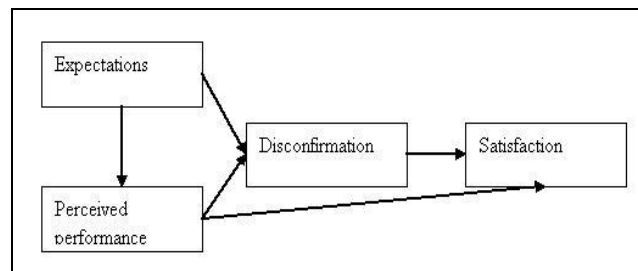


Fig. 1 Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory

Source: [2]

The expectation of product performance as a satisfaction decision is always seen at an adaptation level [2] In other words the more adaptive the person is, the more satisfied one gets. Expectations are influenced by the factors that [37] suggested in his discussion of adaptation phenomena, where first, the product itself including one's prior experience, brand commotions, and symbolic elements, second, the context including the content of communications from salespeople and social referents, and third, individual characteristics including persuasibility and perceptual distortion, all give effect towards the expectation level of different individuals. Meanwhile, [30] in a more recent study have grouped these variables into two main group which are perceived quality and perceived value which are associated towards expectations. Specifically, significant expectation effects have been observed in [38]-[39]-[28]-[40]-[41]-[42] where research has been done prior to the products exposure towards tourist. These researches show that the positive relationship between expectation and satisfaction was positively proven in various concepts. In a more recent study by [43] it was demonstrated that tourist satisfaction was positively affected by tourist expectation.

### IV. CROWDING THEORIES

The crowding factor in this framework is adapted from [44] The crowding model in figure 2 summarizes the variables which are included in the way to show crowding and its effects towards satisfaction. Three main factors influence satisfaction according to the model by [44]. First, there is interaction, then perceived crowding and personal, social, wilderness and other confounding factors which make up to the effect towards satisfaction. Encounters or interaction arise from density of the crowd. The more density a crowd is, the more interaction will

a visitor face in a particular place. Perceived crowding meanwhile is effected by density, interaction and individual preferences in a crowding place. Hence all these three variables conclude to function as to satisfaction.

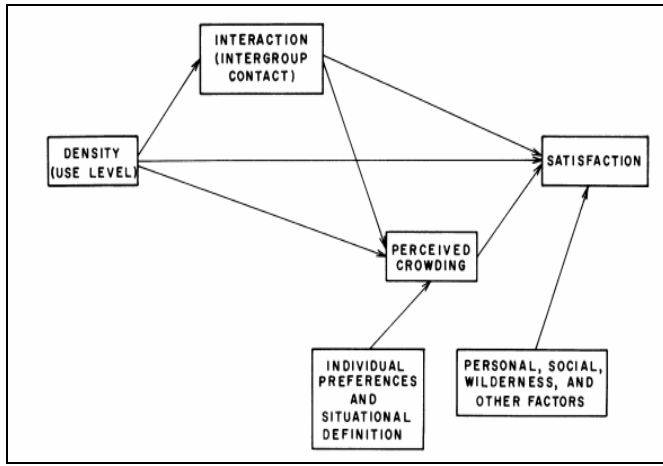


Fig. 2 A Comprehensive Crowding Model  
Source: [44]

V. LOYALTY

Loyalty is the factor that determines whether a visitor is truly satisfied or not. Thus, tourist loyalty is assumed as one of the crucial elements in tourist satisfaction, as it influences the choice of destination and the decision to return [4]-[5], reputation [7] and trust [6]. Satisfied tourists tend to revisit or recommend it to others. This is because loyalty can be enhanced through satisfaction [45]. There are few variables that tend to impact the intention to return and intention to recommend. Reference [8] found that destination attractiveness had the strongest impact on the intention to return and recommend to others. Even though some attributes could be substantial for enhancing overall satisfaction, but they could not be core elements for sustaining repeat visits and providing positive word-of-mouth communication. Nonetheless, there was a relationship between tourist perception of overall satisfaction with the destination and their intentions to recommend it to others. Some satisfied tourists are more likely to recommend holidays than to repeat their visits [8]-[5] found that tourist destination loyalty is positively affected by tourist satisfaction with their experiences hence supports the relationship between satisfaction and destination loyalty at significant level. The behavioural and financial consequence of service quality model (Figure 3) is adapted in this term for loyalty issue from [46].

VI. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF VISITORS SATISFACTION AND PERCEPTION OF CROWDING

Figure IV is a conceptual model that depicts the overall relationship in determining visitor’s satisfaction and perception of crowding. The model starts form the left to right and depict the actual activity in a visitors visit. Starting from expectation to experience and after experience variables are

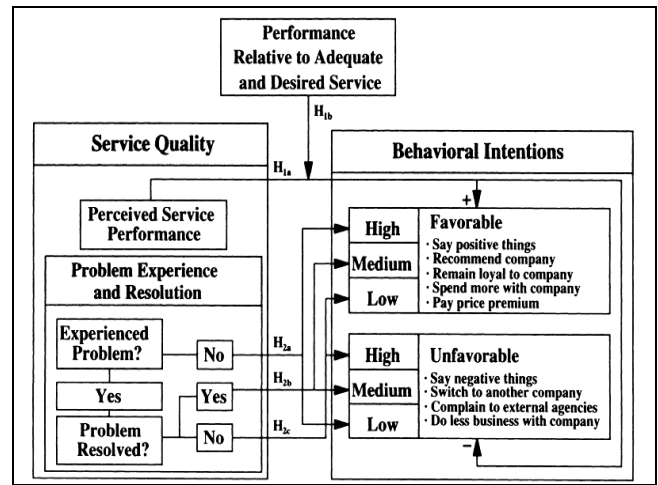


Fig. 3 Hypothesized Effects Of Service Quality On Behavioral Intentions  
Source: [46]

shown in the figure. Crowding acts as an independent variable where it can influence the experience of visitors and also the overall satisfaction. Disconfirmation also decreases the level of satisfaction and loyalty is determined by the variables. The differences in these variables are divided according to demographic status to find out if there are differences in the study according to different type of visitors. In this research, a model is proposed in term of usage for determining visitors satisfaction and perception of crowding in areas where crowding is seen as a major factor in terms of its effect towards overall satisfaction of visitors.

Destination image and attribute satisfaction are two main important criteria that determines tourist satisfaction. Destination image has also been acknowledged to affect tourist satisfaction based on subjective perception, consequent behaviour, and destination choice [47]-[48]-[49]-[50]. Hence, the image will influence tourist future intentions and evaluation of the trip [13]. Meanwhile, attribute satisfaction has an overall variation in term of satisfaction and has significant effects on overall satisfaction [51]-[34]-[52]. Overall satisfaction is in doubt received through various components of the destination [8], with individual attributes of attribute satisfaction playing a part and have a notable effect on tourist satisfaction [53]. Both destination image and attribute satisfaction is a must measure quantity when it comes to tourist satisfaction, hence this model deceits to identify tourist’s satisfaction level based on destination image and attribute satisfaction.

In this conceptual model, expectations are defined as previous prediction or needs in term of actual experience before making a visit to a place [54]-[55]-[56]. Reference [40] suggests that when the quality of service is based on perceptions of excellence, so it is logical to believe that perceived quality is influenced by the expectation. Other researches have also proved the positive relationship between expectation and experiences [33]-[57]-[56]-[58] where it can be concluded that expectations influence experiences and have a major say on overall satisfaction.

In terms of crowding, different tourists have different acceptability towards crowding. Tourists travelling in an organised group would be more tolerant of crowds than the independent traveller [3]. Reference [3] also showed that visitors' age group and size influence the preferences for a certain visitor density. The variety of tourists preferences are also seen in crowded area where respondents reported a very low level of perceived crowding even though encounter level was perceived as highly during weekends and holidays [26] Hence the importance of identifying tourist acceptability of crowding in marine parks according to tourist group is an important part in future researches.

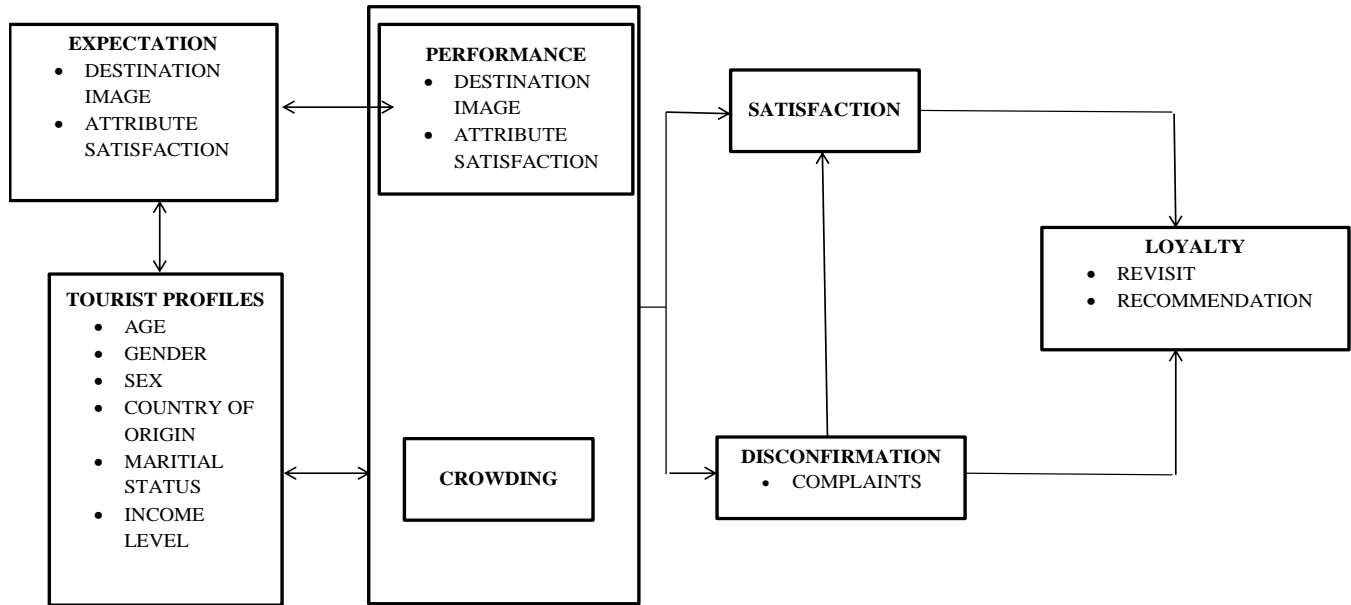


Fig. 5 A Model of Visitors Satisfaction And Perception of Crowding

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