

Efficacy of Alternative Service Quality Measures to Predict Satisfaction and Future Intention

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Purpose: This research focuses on comparing various service quality measures including disconfirmation measures (performance-minus-importance and performance-minus-expectation), performance-only measure, and importance-weighted measures (importance-weighted performance-only and importance-weighted disconfirmation) in a festival setting. It also explores the relationship between the constructs of service quality and other variables including visitors' perceptions of overall service quality, overall satisfaction, and future intentions. Reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and predictive validity of five service quality measures are tested and compared. The result shows that the importance-weighted performance-only measure exhibits the highest reliability and validity.

Keywords: service quality measures, overall quality, overall satisfaction, future intention

Festivals have been an important tourism phenomenon and their potential benefits cannot be underestimated. From the tourism suppliers' point of view, festivals have been a significant factor contributing to tourism development, economic and community growth, social and cultural planning, and civic re-positioning. From the visitors' perspective, festivals provide opportunities to seek authentic and creative experiences, links to cultural or ethnic and religious roots, a chance to discover unfamiliar traditions, visit new places, meet new people, visit friends and relatives, and strengthen family ties (Prentice & Andersen, 2003).

Tourism providers have a vested interest in conducting festivals and making them an enduring success and, thus, we have seen a high level of sustained interest in evaluating and improving service quality. Service quality is critical to success in the delivery of tourism and leisure services and, therefore, it is assumed that the long-term success of festivals is also linked to service quality. It seems logical to speculate that improving service quality will result in an increase in visitors, retention of repeat visitors, increased revenues and, in the end, increased political support for the tourist provider.

The topic of service quality has been a prevailing research theme in the leisure and tourism and marketing literatures (Park & Jeong, 2019). The topic of service quality has become especially significant with the launch of a model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985; 1988). Their conceptualization and measurement of service quality through SERVQUAL has been very popular reference in the service quality literature. Two major contributions of SERVQUAL have been particularly important. One of the main contributions of SERVQUAL to the service quality literature is the issue of measurement. Parasuraman et al. (1988) identified the various "gaps" that affect service quality as perceived by consumers based on an

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expectancy-disconfirmation theory of satisfaction research. Among the gaps, the difference between customers' expectations of service and their perceptions of actual service is defined as perceived service quality. While the SERVQUAL measurement, the so-called gap score, has been extensively cited in the academic literature and has also been widely used in industry, several criticisms about its theoretical and operational problems have also emerged. Central issue related to the SERVQUAL measurement is its validity (Schneider & White, 2004).

In the field of marketing, the above issues are not completely resolved and comparisons of different measures of service quality have still earned a great deal of attention (Ghotbabadi, Feiz, & Baharun, 2015). Similar to the area of marketing, there is a considerable amount of literature on the measurement of service quality in the field of leisure and tourism; yet no consensus has been reached (S. Hudson, P. Hudson, & Miller, 2004). In response to the need of service quality measurement, this paper focuses on comparing various service quality measures including disconfirmation measures, performance-only measures, and importance-weighted measures in a festival setting. This study also explores the relationship between the constructs of service quality and other variables including visitors' perceptions of overall service quality, overall satisfaction, and behavioral intentions which are indications of whether visitors will return to the festival.

Literature Review

Disconfirmation Approach

Since service quality has been considered an important part of service evaluation, several operationalizations have been suggested in the fields of marketing, leisure, and tourism. One of the most common practices of service quality measurement is expectancy-disconfirmation, which is based on satisfaction theory. Satisfaction has been described as the process by which the meeting or exceeding of expectations has determined if tourists are satisfied or dissatisfied (C. F. Chen & F. S. Chen, 2010). Similarly, most service quality has been conceptualized as the customer's comparative judgment of the overall excellence or superiority of a service (Zeithaml, 1988). In particular, quality is defined as "the extent in which the service, the service process and the service organization can satisfy the expectations of the use" (Kasper, van Helsdingen, & de Vries, 1999, p. 188).

After the disconfirmation measure of service quality was introduced, this operationalization was extensively used in various areas of study. Many studies pointed out that disconfirmation approaches provide greater problem solving value to the practitioners by identifying service deficiencies and allocating resources for the improvement (Carrillat, Jaramillo, & Mulki, 2007; Hsu, Lin, & Chen, 2011; Jonkisz, Karniej, & Krasowska, 2021). In particular, Parasuraman et al. (1994) reaffirmed that expectation was an essential component in the measurement of service quality. They defended their gap model by providing information supporting the necessity of using expectation for measuring service quality as well as showing its superiority as a diagnostic tool for pinpointing deficiencies in the real world. Similarly, many researchers strongly supported the disconfirmation measurement approach that its model can be more effective to a range of recreation and hospitality settings if the service attributes are carefully selected (Absher, 1998; Howat, Murray, & Crilley, 1999; Lee et al., 2016). Even though several researchers have raised psychometric problems associated with this disconfirmation measurement (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; 1994), it has still been a leading service quality evaluation tool.

Performance-Only Approach

While the disconfirmation measure has been extensively cited in the academic literature, criticisms about operational problems have also emerged (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1993). Ambiguous questions in the survey and inflexible administration are the problems in using this measure (Teas, 1993). As an alternative to the disconfirmation-based SERVQUAL, Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed a performance-only measurement, SERVPERF. Using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, they suggested that SERVPERF provides more construct-valid explication of service quality than SERVQUAL. They also insisted that fewer items (by excluding the expectation measurement) provide better efficiency.

In the field of leisure and tourism, criticism of disconfirmation has increased and many researchers have supported the superiority of simple performance-based measures of service quality. Crompton and Love (1995) tested the predictive validity of several alternative operationalizations of service quality in the context of a festival. They included importance-weights to improve predictive validity of the measures. Results showed that respondents did not form meaningful expectations against which they measured performance to determine quality. With a similar rationale, many researchers used a performance-only approach to measure service quality (Dortyol, Varinli, & Kitapci, 2013). Consensus has not yet been reached about the argument between disconfirmation and a performance-only approach but it is generally believed that each measure is valid and adequate in measuring service quality depending upon the purpose of the study (Carrillat et al., 2007).

Roles of Importance Weights in Service Quality Measures

While the service quality measure focuses mainly on the concepts of performance and expectation, several researchers have indicated that more attention should be paid to the importance-weights in the service setting. Carman (1990) emphasized that importance would be relevant to the evaluation of overall quality. He also argued that importance, expectation, and perception can play different roles in overall quality and suggested that a disconfirmation approach should include all three variables in data collection.

Another support for importance in service quality measurement comes from "adequacy-importance" theory, which is considered to be an effective measure of attitude (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). They have suggested that service quality can measure attitude and predict future intention or actual behavior. Therefore, an importance-weighted evaluation of the performance would capture the attitudinal concept of service quality. Similarly, in a festival setting, Crompton and Love (1995) used an importance-weighted approach to measure service quality. By weighting the concept of importance on both disconfirmation and a perception-only approach, they emphasized that importance may provide useful insights and contribute to the diagnostic value of the service quality measure.

The purpose of this study is to compare various service quality measures including disconfirmation measures, performance-only measures, and importance-weighted measures in a festival setting. Also, the study examines the relationship between the constructs of service quality and other dependent variables including overall service quality, overall satisfaction, and future intention.

Methods

The study was conducted at the annual springtime festival in Florida. A total of 258 visitors participated in the survey. A majority of the respondents were Caucasian and female (approximately 85% and 56%)

respectively). More than one-half (51%) of the respondents have earned a four-year college degree or higher. Approximately 43% of the respondents were 30 years of age or younger; the average age of the respondents was 37 years.

The questionnaire was developed with three primary attributes of service quality measures: importance, expectation, and performance. Additional questions were included to ask the respondents about overall quality, overall satisfaction, and future intentions. Items measuring service quality were adapted and modified from previous studies (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Crompton & Love, 1995). A total of 15 items were used to represent three factors of festival quality: general features, specific features, and comfort amenities. Respondents were first asked how important each item was in contributing to the quality of their festival experience. The same items were repeated on the next page, asking the respondents to indicate the extent to which they expect the festival to provide these service characteristics. The final service quality measure was actual performance, designed to ask the respondents if the festival provided the characteristics of service quality.

The last section of the questionnaire contained items to measure three dependent variables. A 10-point scale was used to measure overall quality ranging from poor quality (1) to excellent quality (10). Visitors were then asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the festival experience. Future intention was the third dependent variable used to explore the relationship with service quality measures.

The analysis of this study consisted of following steps. First, the reliability of the constructs was calculated. The service quality items in five different quality measures were factor-analyzed. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for all five quality measures determined the internal consistency of the quality measures. The reliability of all five measures was in acceptable range from 0.68 to 0.92. Second, the validity of the constructs was measured. Two dimensions of construct validity are convergent and discriminant validity. Initially, the convergent validity of the measures was assessed by analyzing the factor loadings corresponding to the items and the factors for significance. If the factor loadings between items and their respective factors are statistically significant, convergent validity can be achieved (Agarwal, 2013). The loadings for all service quality measures ranged from 0.39 to 0.87 on all the loadings and were all statistically significant. Then, discriminant validity was calculated by comparing the average variances extracted to the shared variances between constructs (Voorhees, Brady, Calantone, & Ramirez, 2016). Average variance extracted for all measures (except the performance-only measure) exceeded Fornell and Larcker's (1981) standard for assessing discriminant validity. Finally, a multiple regression approach was used to examine the relative contribution of service quality dimensions on overall quality, overall satisfaction, and future intention. It is suggested that the relative weights of the several service dimensions in predicting overall quality and other variables are beneficial to managers (Schneider & White, 2004).

Results

Comparison of Alternative Measures of Service Quality

The analysis focused on assessing the relationship between quality measures and overall quality (Table 1). Comparing five service quality measures to overall quality, the importance-weighted performance-only measure was the strongest model to predict overall quality. Overall, 37% of the total variance of overall quality was explained by three dimensions of the importance-weighted performance-only measure. Comfort amenities was the strongest indicator to overall quality in the importance-weighted performance-only measure ($\beta = 0.45$,

p < 0.001). In the performance-only measure, general features was the strongest predictor of overall quality ($\beta = 0.37$, p < 0.001), while specific features and comfort amenities were not important predictors. Overall, 21% of variance in the performance-only quality measure was accounted for by three independent variables. Two disconfirmation measures and the importance-weighted disconfirmation measure were not strong models to predict overall quality. Although these models were significant, the total variances to explain the overall quality were less than 0.10. Comfort amenities was an important predictor in the performance-minus-importance quality measure ($\beta = 0.18$, p < 0.05). The dimensions of specific features and comfort amenities were significantly related to overall quality in both the performance-minus-expectation measure and the importance-minus-expectation measure.

Table 1

Results of Multiple Regressions of the Five Quality Measures with Overall Quality, Overall Satisfaction, and Future Intention

	Performance			Performance - Importance			Performance – Expectation			Importance* Performance			Importance* (Performance – Expectation)		
	Beta	\mathbb{R}^2	F value	Beta	\mathbb{R}^2	F value	Beta	\mathbb{R}^2	F value	Beta	\mathbb{R}^2	F value	Beta	R ²	F value
Overall Quality General Features Specific Features Comfort Amenities	.37*** .06 10	.21	20.54***	.05 02 18*	.04	2.84*	06 .19** 16*	.07	5.55***	.17 .05 45***	.37	21.84***	07 .23** 15*	.08	6.36***
Overall Satisfaction General Features Specific Features Comfort Amenities	.40*** .03 .07	.21	20.00***	.09 08 .24*	.07	5.36*	03 .20** .10	.07	5.53***	.25* .16 .19	.28	14.14***	.03 .21** .09	.07	5.93***
Future Intention General Features Specific Features Comfort Amenities	.25*** .08 .05	.11	9.24***	.14* 08 .07	.03	2.04	.05 11 .05	.01	.91	.12 .10 .26*	.17	7.75***	.02 05 .04	.00	.23

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The results of multiple regressions of five quality measures predicting overall satisfaction were somewhat similar to the previous multiple regressions with overall quality (Table 1). In the importance-weighted performance-only measure, the general features dimension was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction (β = 0.25, p < 0.05), while specific features and comfort amenities did not influence overall satisfaction. Overall, 28% of variance in overall satisfaction was accounted for by three independent variables in the importance-weighted performance-only measure. The performance-only measure showed a similar pattern as that of the importance-weighted performance-only quality measure. The general features dimension was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction ($\beta = 0.40$, p < 0.001) and 21% of the total variance was explained by three dimensions. Conversely, the dimension of comfort amenities was an important predictor in the performance-importance quality measure ($\beta = 0.24$, p < 0.05) while general features and specific features were not significant in predicting overall satisfaction. Totally, 7% of variance in overall satisfaction was accounted for by three variables in the performance-importance measure. Lastly, the specific features dimension was a significant predictor of overall satisfaction in both the performance-minus-expectation measure and the importance-weighted disconfirmation measure. Only 7% of variance in overall satisfaction was explained by three variables in the performance-expectation quality measure and the importance-weighted disconfirmation measure.

The relationships between three quality measures and future intention are shown in Table 1. As with the previous results, the importance-weighted performance-only quality measure showed the strongest relationship with future intention. Overall, 17% of the total variance in future intention was explained by the three dimensions. Comfort amenities was the strongest predictor of future intention ($\beta = 0.26$, p < 0.05). Likewise, general features was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction in the performance-only quality measure ($\beta = 0.25$, p < 0.001), while specific features and comfort amenities did not influence overall satisfaction. Overall, 11% of variance in future intention was accounted for by the three independent variables in the performance-only quality measure. The pattern of the results of the performance-only measure and the importance-weighted performance-only measure was similar to those of the previous analysis of other dependent variables. On the contrary, the other three quality measures—performance-importance, performance-expectation, and importance-weighted disconfirmation—were not significant in predicting future intention.

Discussion and Implications

This study had two primary objectives: (1) to compare the efficacy of five different measures of service quality, and (2) to examine the relationship between the constructs of service quality and other variables. Five service quality measures were compared including: performance-only; performance-minus-importance; performance-minus-expectation; importance-weighted-performance-only; and importance-weighted disconfirmation. The objectives of this study were accomplished by conducting surveys of visitors attending a large, community-wide festival.

The results of this study show that two of the five service quality measures are strong models for predicting overall quality. The importance-weighted performance-only measure produced the highest reliability and validity and was the strongest predictor of overall quality ($R^2 = 0.37$ and 0.21 respectively). This service quality measure is very useful to festival providers who are interested in examining visitors' perceptions of actual performance according to the level of importance that visitors attach to the various festival features and amenities. Knowing the level of importance that visitors attach to certain services (e.g., high importance on adequate and clean portable toilets and sufficient places to sit and rest; low importance on Kids' Park) is critical information that festival providers can use in setting priorities and directing resources to improve festival performance. One limitation in using the importance-weighted performance-only measure in management decision-making is that although visitors may desire a high level of service quality due to festival conditions that they have grown accustomed to (e.g., crowding, few places to sit and rest comfortably, inconvenient parking).

The performance-only measure was also a strong predictor of overall service quality ($R^2 = 0.21$ and 0.20 respectively) and showed high reliability. This service quality measure lends itself well in visitor surveys that are administered in festival settings. During large, community-wide festivals visitors are busy watching live performances, looking at arts & crafts exhibits, enjoying sights and sounds, eating, drinking, and conversing with family and friends, and they are not inclined to participate in time-consuming surveys that require critical thinking. Surveys designed with the performance-only measure require visitors to rate only one set of service quality items associated with the three dimensions of general features, specific features, and comfort amenities. In adopting the performance-only measure, festival managers may have a better chance of achieving a higher

response rate and possibly a more accurate assessment of service quality since visitors are focused solely on items related to how well the festival performed.

Adopting the performance-only measure for assessing service quality in a festival setting also has its shortcomings. Festival providers may need more diagnostic information that would enable them to make better decisions about allocating resources. The performance-only measure does not assess the level of service quality "desired" by visitors and therefore festival providers will not obtain information related to whether visitors would tolerate a minimum level of service quality on certain services and programs. This piece of information may be important if resources are limited and managers are making funding decisions on whether to increase, decrease, or maintain the same level of service quality.

According to previous studies, the perception-only measure showed the higher predictive power over gap-based measures of service quality (Brandon-Jones & Silvestro, 2010; Crompton & Love, 1995). However, in this study the variances of overall service quality explained by service quality measures indicate that the importance-weighted performance-only measure has the highest predictive validity followed by the performance-only measure ($R^2 = 0.37$ and 0.21 respectively). The other three service quality measures used in this study explained only 4-8% of the variation in overall service quality.

In this study the disconfirmation measure did not perform well as a model for predicting overall service quality. A couple of reasons why this may have occurred can be offered. Low validity of the disconfirmation measure may possibly be explained by contrast/assimilation theory. La Tour and Peat's (1979) suggest that distortion takes place in order to make people's perceptions consistent with their expectations. If the distortion is not very large, they form a denial mechanism, dismissing the discrepancies and either decreasing or increasing their expectations to match the performance (Williams, 1988). This is common in recreation and tourism where visitors tend to negotiate the discrepancy to meet their experience.

Additionally, low validity of two of the disconfirmation measures used in this study (performance-minus-expectation and importance-weighted performance-expectation) may result due to different standards of expectation that visitors form. When visitors are asked to rate their expectations, some may develop a "desired" level of expectation while others may form adequate or acceptable levels of expectation (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993).

The second objective examined the relationship between different service measures and other dependent variables. The effects of service quality on satisfaction and future intentions have been an important focus of organizations and academic researchers. First, positive relations between satisfaction and service quality were found from previous studies (An, Harada, & Sato, 2020; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Canny, 2013; C. M. Chen, Lee, S. H. Chen, & Huang, 2011). The results of the current study also support this relationship and it was significant for all service quality measures. In particular, among the five quality measures, the importance-weighted performance-only measure accounted for the highest variance of overall satisfaction and the general features was the strongest predictor. In addition, the theoretical framework and empirical evidence support the positive relationship between service quality and future intention (An et al., 2020; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Canny, 2013; Chen et al., 2011). The findings of the study suggest that only two measures, performance-only and importance-weighted performance-only measure, about 17% of the total variance of future intention was explained by service quality and the strongest predictor was comfort amenities. The total effect of service quality on future intention was also significant but marginal for the performance-only quality measure. The

results of the second objective provide additional advocacy for the superiority of the importance-weighted perception-only measure for service quality.

On the basis of the above discussion, it is clear that weighting importance on perception is the strongest service quality measure that the managers and academicians should support in a festival setting. However, it is important to mention that other service quality measures have also displayed adequate levels of reliability and validity. In addition, each service measure contains different managerial values and characteristics of service quality that managers may find beneficial. For example, the performance-only measure is beneficial to managers because the short questionnaires would reduce the respondents' burden. The performance-expectation and performance-importance measures capture conceptual richness and diagnostic value that can help managers develop a strategic plan for service quality improvement. The importance-weighted disconfirmation measure seems to be the least preferred since its validity is not as high as that of other measures. However, it provides conceptual diversity that academicians should pay attention to.

Limitations and Suggestions

Several limitations and suggestions are offered for future research using service quality measures for visitor studies. One of the limitations of this study was the sampling method used for identifying visitors at the festival for inclusion in the study. More effort must be directed to adopting a systematic sampling procedure so that the results can be generalized to the population of festival visitors. Festival providers can accomplish this by calculating the sample size and then choosing every Nth visitor as they pass by established data collection stations established at the festival site. Also, attention should be given to increasing the number of visitors responding to the surveys.

Another drawback of this study was the fact that the design of the study required visitors to rate all five service quality measures on one questionnaire during the festival. That is, they were asked to rate the level of importance for various programs and services offered at the festival on the front side of the survey and rate their perceptions of expectations and actual performance on the back side. It is possible that the results would be different if the ratings of importance and expectations were made by respondents before entering the festival site, and the ratings of actual performance occurred after the festival experience. This could be accomplished by administering both on site survey and post survey. The first survey containing the measures for importance and expectations could be conducted on-site before the respondents entered the festival area. At that time, researchers could obtain the email addresses of those willing to participate in the follow-up survey. The second survey containing items related to actual performance could be emailed to respondents after the festival.

Researchers must also give much attention to carefully crafting questionnaires containing multiple service quality measures. The subtle differences in terms such as expectation, importance, and performance can become very confusing to respondents and researchers must make every effort to develop surveys that are user-friendly and define service quality measures in a meaningful way for average visitors.

Another recommendation relates to the need to develop a better understanding of the various dimensions and attributes that comprise service quality. In this study only 37% of the variance was accounted for by any one of the service quality measures. The various dimensions and attributes need to be tested in different festival settings (e.g., arts festivals, chili cook-offs) as well as in other sectors of leisure and tourism services and with different types of business.

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