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6 February 2017

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/93933/>
MPRA Paper No. 93933, posted 22 May 2019 13:57 UTC

Delegate satisfaction from conference service quality and its impact on future behavioural intentions

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A previous version of this paper was published in: Proceedings of 5th International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues ICCMI, June 21-23, 2017 Thessaloniki, Greece, pp. 532-544.

Abstract

This study presents the development of a conceptual model that demonstrates the dynamic nature of the relationship between service quality and delegate satisfaction in the conference sector, based on theories derived from social psychology and previous research in the marketing, management, and services literature. The model was tested using sample data from delegates of four different academic conferences and was modified as a result of empirical results. The final model improves understanding of the relationship between service quality and delegate satisfaction because these constructs were examined from the process perspective of a conference experience; it portrays service quality and satisfaction in the context of a complete system.

Key words: conference marketing, delegate satisfaction, service quality, future behavioural intentions.

INTRODUCTION

Conferences have unique characteristics that differentiate them from other industries as well as from other hospitality products. Unlike other industries, which have their own distinct products or services, conferences usually contain multiple products or services, and these often involve the cooperation of several suppliers. Due to the intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability of a significant part of the conference product, it is not easy for delegates to evaluate the quality of conference services. However, monitoring their perceptions of quality is of vital importance to the viability of conference organisers; those conference staging organisations and companies that demonstrate a commitment to excellent service provision will almost certainly emerge as more viable entities than their competitors. The elements of service quality and satisfaction have both been central concerns in tourism and hospitality services marketing; improvement in guest satisfaction and service quality is assumed to result in increased profits for businesses and organisations operating in service sectors. Thus, practitioners in the conference management industry are interested in the roles of delegate satisfaction and service quality in influencing post-consumption behaviours (Prentice, Witt & Hamer, 1998; Samy, 2016). Factors as revisit intentions, word of mouth, and switching behaviour are of interest, as they enhance future conference revenues and assist the development of delegate loyalty.

Service quality and delegate satisfaction are key factors in winning market share in the conference industry; yet, it is not clear to conference organisers which of the two constructs is the means to an end, or even whether they are separate constructs (Haber & Lerner, 1998; Christou, 2003; Bazera & Gomes, 2015; Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016; Kido-Cruz, 2016). For example, if they are the same construct, conference managers need to focus on improving either delegate satisfaction or service quality. But, if they are two different constructs, conference businesses must understand the interrelationship between them—because, given limited resources, conference organisers might be unable to invest in improving both constructs simultaneously (Küçükaltan & Pirnar, 2016). Hence, a clear understanding of the relationship between the two constructs will enable hotels to know which of these factors is of greater significance in influencing the behavioural intentions of guests.

Both service quality and delegate satisfaction are important aspects of a conference service. The goal of conference marketers is to improve both service quality and the level of delegate satisfaction. However, it has been

recognised that service quality is an elusive concept for researchers and practitioners to understand (Brown, 1999). The relationship between service quality and delegate satisfaction is an important issue in conference marketing. Understanding the relationship between them is likely to assist organisations in determining those aspects of a conference service that should be measured, which procedures should be associated with measurement of the constructs, and which are most likely to best predict the behaviours of conference delegates.

The central focus of this study is to examine the relationship between service quality and satisfaction of conference delegates. The purpose of studying this is to understand the extent to which each of these concepts influences the intended future behaviour of delegates. The work carried out here is aimed at viewing overall service quality and overall delegate satisfaction as *different attitudes*. Thus, it aims to examine the process of how these attitudes are formed, the psychological processes that underlie them, and their behavioural consequences.

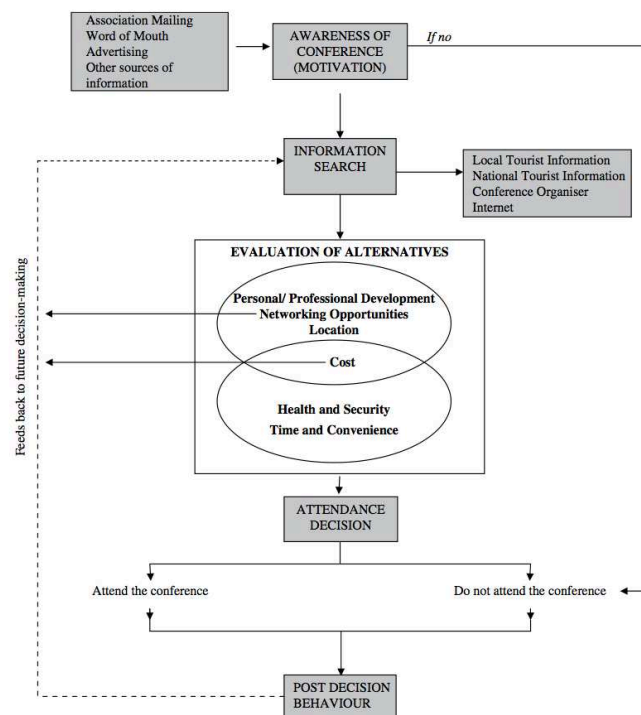
CONFERENCE MOTIVATION

A record number of 12.076 rotating meetings took place in 2015, 571 more meetings than 2014 confirming the growth pattern identified in International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) 50-year report, setting Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) Industry a prerequisite in the modern global market place (Hanly, 2012).

The MICE industry identifies business travellers as one of its biggest contributors due to the large amounts of money they spend while attending a conference. Thus, Professional Conference Organizers (PCOs) pay great attention on how attendees value their experience (Halim and Mokhtar, 2016) as unique and compelling (Wei et al., 2017), assess a conference's facilities and evaluate their intention to attend a future conference. Several studies focus on the factors that influence visitors' decision-making process.

Location seems to be one of the factors generally accepted by surveys conducted in a significant large period of time (Var et al., 1985, Witt et al., 1995, Jago and Deery, 2005, Mair and Thompson, 2009; Christou, 2010). In addition to location, networking, cost, social aspects, intervening opportunities, conference activities and self-enhancement are the key factors that influence an attendee when choosing a conference. The model developed by Mair and Thompson (2009) incorporates all the factors that lead to the attendance decision and formulate the post decision behaviour (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Conference attendance decision-making process (Mair & Thompson, 2009).



Attendee satisfaction is crucial both to the profits of hotels and PCOs as for the convention centers. As a consequence, it is of fundamental importance for the researchers to identify the factors used by attendees to assess the conference facilities, evaluate their satisfaction and ultimately identify their intention to revisit and recommend the conference (Severt et al., 2007). Much research on consumer behavior confirms that expectations, satisfaction and behavioral intentions are linked (Petrick et al., 2001).

Customer satisfaction in general is a topic investigated by numerous researchers in various areas of tourism research: travel agencies, cultural heritage monuments, recreational facilities, hotel services, international travel, restaurant services and mountain resorts (Petrick & Backmann, 2002, Theodorakis, et. al., 2013, Christou & Sigala, 2001). However, the combination of customer satisfaction and the intention to revisit with a conference venue is of limited research focus (Severt et al., 2007).

Service quality and satisfaction

A service is produced by the integration of various tangible and intangible components and involves several employees working with a purpose to satisfy the varying wants of potential customers (delegates, guests, visitors, travellers, internal customers, and so on). A conference service might be provided to a person, to an organisation, or to both. Hence, a service system can be conceptualised as a production system in which various inputs are processed, transformed, and value-added to produce outputs, which provide benefits to customers (Christou, 1999). Evaluations of service quality embrace not only the service delivered, but also the way it is delivered. Thus, Grönroos (1984) suggested that there are two types of performance quality to evaluate—*technical quality* and *functional quality*. The former refers to the performances that the customers receive, whereas the latter refers to the process of service delivery. Similarly, Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) proposed three quality dimensions—*physical quality*, *corporate quality*, and *interactive quality*. Whereas *physical quality* relates to the technical aspects of the service, the latter two dimensions emphasise the corporate image of the service organisation and the interactive processes that occur between a conference organiser and its delegates.

A consideration of the numerous approaches taken to explain the nature of service quality reveals that most of the work in the field has identified two major dimensions to quality—that of the service offering (as perceived by the service provider), and that of the received service (as perceived by, for example, the delegate of a conference) (Ekinici & Riley, 2001; Christou, 2016). This approach has subsequently been refined into the ‘gap’ concept of Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, (1985; Wu, 2013). Their notion identifies five discrepancies (or ‘gaps’) which can interfere with the service experience. A further refinement of the ‘gap’ concept was the development of the SERVQUAL model—an instrument that can be used as a research tool for more rigorous quality monitoring (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1991). Since then, several researchers have developed models that can be used for monitoring, measuring, or rating service quality (Kandampully & Butler, 1998; Tan & Pawitra, 2001; Krishnamurthy et al., 2010) or for assessing customer satisfaction (Theodorakis, Kambitsis & Laios, 2001; Wisniewski, 2001; Christou, 2011). Holbrook and Corfman (1985) and Zeithaml et al. (1996) emphasised the difference between objective and perceived quality. They said that consumers do not understand the term ‘quality’ in the same way as researchers and providers do—the latter often realising it too conceptually. The term ‘objective quality’ is normally used in the literature to illustrate the tangible technical superiority or excellence of goods or services. In contrast, the ‘perceived quality’ is the consumer's opinion of an entity's overall excellence or ascendancy.

Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996, p. 17) stated that customer satisfaction can be also defined as ‘... an overall affective state that is the emotional reaction to a product or service experience’. More specifically, this overall affective state is influenced by a consumer's satisfaction with the product or service itself (attribute satisfaction) and with the information used in choosing a product or service (information satisfaction) (Spreng & Droge, 2001). According to Spreng MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996, p. 17) ‘... attribute and information satisfaction are themselves produced by a customer's assessment of the degree to which a product performance is perceived to have met or exceeded his or her desires and expectations (expectation–disconfirmation)’. However, many other researchers (for example, Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins, 1987; Mattila, 2001; Chen & Chen, 2010; Liu et al., 2015; Volgger et al., 2017) have argued that this customer satisfaction is usually operationalised at a global level, as well as at an attribute level.

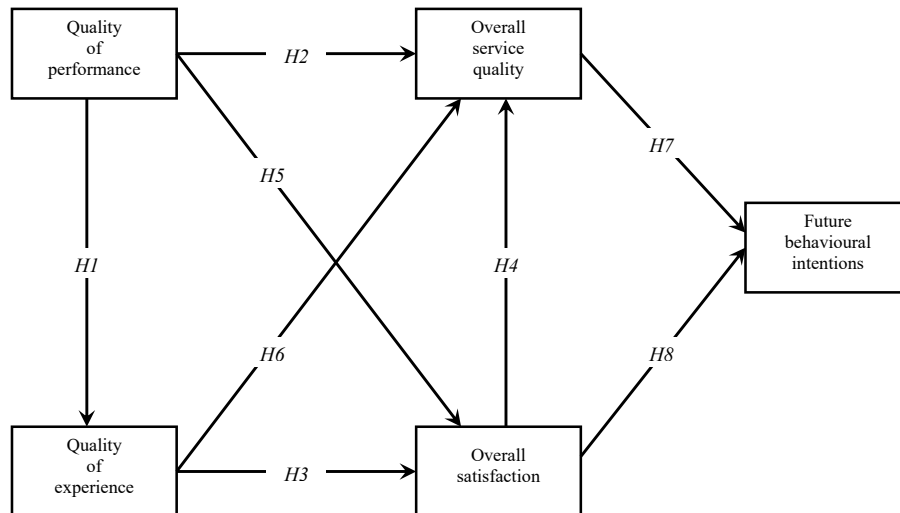
The literature suggests that satisfaction can be described as either an end state or a process (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Schofield, 1999). Both views of satisfaction (as a *state* or as an *appraisal process*) involve a comparative framework by which perceived reality is compared to expectations. They differ in that the former emphasises the outcome of the experience process, whereas the latter focuses upon the unique components of each of the stages in the experience process that combine to generate satisfaction (Lee, 1991; Vikas, Jerome & Pankaj, 2001; Zabkar et al., 2010; Christou, 2015; George, 2017). The present study has adopted the *end state perspective* when defining satisfaction with a specific transaction (that is, quality of experience), and has adopted the *process perspective* in depicting overall satisfaction.

Formulation of hypotheses

The proposed model (see Figure 2) suggests that, before delegates attend a conference, they have two kinds of expectations—*desired* and *predicted* expectations. In literature, expectations are considered to be pre-experience beliefs or evaluative beliefs about the service or product (Oliver & Winer, 1987; Zhao et al., 2012). Thus, delegates’ desired service expectations and predicted service expectations co-exist, but they are independent of each other.

After delegates interact with the service, they perceive what the actual service performance is. The difference between delegates' predicted expectations and their perceptions of actual performance constitutes disconfirmation, contributing to delegates' levels of satisfaction (Oliver & Bearden, 1985; Nella & Christou, 2016).

Figure 2. Hypotheses tested in the study



After delegates interact with the conference service, they perceive what the actual service performance is. If the perceived performance is different from what they had predicted, disconfirmation is likely to occur. The difference between the delegates' predicted expectations and their perceptions of actual performance constitutes disconfirmation—which, in turn, contributes to the delegates' levels of satisfaction. In satisfaction processes, disconfirmation is a subjective assessment that '... reflects the degree of perceptual distortion inherent in consumers' own judgements of perceived reality' (Oliver & Bearden, 1985, p. 79). It is not just a difference in numerical scores between expectations and performance; rather, it is an independent psychological state (Oliver, 1980; Zafiroopoulos et al., 2015; Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). Delegates compare their perceptions of actual service performance with their notion of a desired service performance, and the resulting discrepancy directs the delegates' perceptions of quality of performance—that is, their evaluations of individual service attributes of a service. After conference delegates compare their perceptions of actual performance of the service with their predicted expectations, the resulting predicted disconfirmation leads to delegates' assessments of quality of experience—which is the psychological outcome that delegates obtain during their conference-participation experience (Tse & Wilton, 1988; Jhandir, 2012; Valeri, 2016; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Delegates' feelings of how much psychological benefit they get during the conference participation depend on how much disconfirmation emerges from their comparison of prior expectations with what they receive from the conference service. If delegates perceive quality of performance to be high, they are likely to receive more psychological benefits. Hence, *quality of performance positively influences delegates' quality of conference experience* (hypothesis 1).

Delegates' perceptions of performance quality on each attribute determine their overall perceptions of conference service quality, whereas quality of conference experience (which is benefit-specific satisfaction) leads to overall delegate satisfaction (Lue, 1992; Theodorakis et al., 2013; Martins, 2016). Like quality of experience and overall satisfaction, *quality of performance* and *overall service quality* are two distinct constructs. Quality of experience is the specific benefits which delegates obtain during their participation at a conference, whereas overall satisfaction is the delegates' level of satisfaction towards their total experience with the conference service (that is, it is the summation of the specific benefits). Hence, the quality of performance relates to evaluation of specific service attributes, whereas overall service quality is the evaluation of the quality of the service in general, rather than that of the attributes (Christou & Kassianidis, 2002; Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2009; AbuKhalifeh & AlBattat, 2015; Ma et al., 2017). Over time, the summation of delegates' evaluative beliefs about individual service attributes will contribute to their overall evaluation of the service quality of the conference product. Similarly, the overall satisfaction of conference delegates must be a summary state of all their psychological outcomes. As Bitner and Hubbert (1994) pointed out, multiple positive and/or negative experiences, which occur within the conference participation, will lead to a high (or low) level of overall satisfaction. Hence, *perceptions of the quality of individual conference attribute performance influence perceptions of overall service quality* (hypothesis 2). In addition, it can be proposed that *perceptions of quality of conference experience with individual facets influence overall satisfaction* (hypothesis 3).

It is proposed to consider overall conference service quality and overall conference participation satisfaction as two different attitudes; following the conceptualisation of the relationship between service quality and

satisfaction (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996; Ona et al., 2013; Slak Valek, 2015), the proposed model predicts that, at the global level, delegates' levels of satisfaction contribute to their attitudes towards overall service quality. Although they are not the same construct, overall service quality and overall delegate satisfaction can be highly correlated. Delegates' high levels of satisfaction lead to perceptions of high service quality, whereas low levels of satisfaction result in perceptions of low service quality. Support for conceptualising overall conference satisfaction as an antecedent to overall conference service quality stems from the notion that service quality at the global level appears to have a wider scope than satisfaction (Teas, 1993; Christou, 2002; Wu, 2013; Revilla Hernández et al., 2016). Overall service-quality perceptions can result from any dimension, irrespective of whether they are experience-related. In contrast, delegates' levels of satisfaction are purely experiential. Thus, *overall conference satisfaction influences overall conference service quality* (hypothesis 4).

At transaction level, quality of performance is service quality, whereas quality of experience is delegate satisfaction; transaction-specific service quality and satisfaction contribute to long-term attitudes of delegates towards the conference service (Moreno et al., 2015; Christou & Nella, 2010). Therefore, quality of performance not only influences overall service quality, but also influences overall delegate satisfaction. Similarly, delegates' quality of experience influences their perception of overall service quality and contributes to overall satisfaction. When delegates perceive high quality-of-service attributes, they tend to have high levels of overall satisfaction with the conference service; the more psychological benefits which delegates obtain from the visit, the more positive the attitude that they are likely to have towards overall service quality (Nella & Christou, 2014a). Hence, *quality of performance positively affects delegates' levels of overall conference satisfaction* (hypothesis 5). In addition, it is suggested that *quality of experience positively affects delegates' perceptions of overall conference service quality* (hypothesis 6).

Once delegates form an overall attitude towards conference service quality and towards overall conference satisfaction, it is suggested that these attitudes should affect delegates' future behavioural intentions. Thus, when a delegate perceives a conference to have high overall service quality, he/she is likely to say positive things about this conference, and to come back and attend it again. Similarly, if a delegate's overall level of satisfaction with the conference is high, the individual is likely to disseminate positive word-of-mouth recommendation about the conference, and is likely to attend it again. Thus, *overall conference service quality is positively associated with delegates' behavioural intentions* (hypothesis 7), and *overall conference satisfaction is positively associated with delegates' behavioural intentions* (hypothesis 8). All hypotheses developed here are summarised in Figure 1.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the need of the survey reported here, four different conferences were selected, all of them taking place in Greece (two in Thessaloniki, one at Athens and one at Rhodes); the target population was delegates to these four conferences. A convenience sample of 400 (100 at each conference) was considered sufficient for valid and reliable analyses to be conducted; regarding data analysis, a sample of 200 is the minimum required for the use of structural equation modelling technique (Bollen, 1989). The sample was contacted by personal interviews and the research instrument was a questionnaire; there was surveyed every tenth delegate who exited from each conference plenary session. The delegates were approached and asked to assist in the survey. Participants were requested to answer specific questions which were written in a questionnaire. The responses to questions were recorded on the questionnaires by the interviewers.

The items and scales included in the questionnaire were adapted by a variety of sources. For measuring quality of performance, items were adapted by SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988), while the measurement of quality of experience was based on scales adapted from the Recreation Experience Preference scales which have been used in past research on leisure and tourism benefits (Manfredo, Driver & Tarrant, 1996; Nella & Christou, 2014b; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017). Since overall service quality was operationalised as an attitude towards the conference, it was measured with a one-item scale which asked about the respondents' perceptions of overall quality of the service attributes at the conference. A 10-point scale was used to provide a wide range of variance; The scale ranged from 1 = 'extremely low quality' to 10 = 'extremely high quality'. Delegates' overall satisfaction was also operationalised as an attitude towards the conference. However, it was postulated to be a different attitude from overall service quality. The measure for overall satisfaction was a 4-item, 7-point modified semantic differential scale (satisfied–dissatisfied, pleased–displeased, favourable–unfavourable, positive–negative). This scale was originally adapted from Crosby and Stephens (1987) who measured consumer satisfaction with the insurance industry. Later, the scale was used in the tourism field by Childress and Crompton (1997) and found to be very reliable—with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.98. Last, a 7-item, 7-point likelihood scale was used to measure delegates' future behavioural intentions; Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) originally developed this scale. Baker and Crompton (1998) modified the scale and applied it in the context of a festival.

The data collected were first examined by descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The purpose was to develop profiles of the total sample and to identify distributions of the variables. These descriptive analyses demonstrated: (i) the demographic characteristics of respondents, including their age, gender, education level, work status, annual household income, and country of residence; (ii) their conference delegate characteristics, such as the number of times they had attended the conference, and their group type; and

(iii) respondents' perceptions of service attributes and overall service quality of the conference, psychological benefits they obtained from attending the conference, levels of their overall satisfaction, and their behavioural intentions.

Next, the hypotheses proposed earlier in the study were tested. A structural equation modelling (SEM) procedure was employed to test these hypotheses. SEM is an approach that can be used for the analysis of causal models with multiple indicators of latent variables of measurement errors (Bollen, 1989; Chenet, Tynan & Money, 2000; Christou, 2006; Hernandez et al., 2016). The constructs under study—such as quality of performance, quality of experience, overall delegate satisfaction, and behavioural intentions—are all unobservable concepts, the measurement of which is dependent on manifest indicators.

RESULTS AND TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

To test the hypotheses, the AMOS extension in the SPSS program was used. The analysis procedure followed up a two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Hatcher (1994). With this approach, the first step involved the conducting of confirmatory analysis to examine the fitness of the measurement model to the data, and to see if the indicator variables really were measuring the underlying constructs of interest. The second step was to test the fitness of the theoretical model (the structural model) to the data. The structural model specifies causal relationships between the latent variables themselves. The path analysis with these latent variables provided evidence of whether each hypothesis could be supported or not. The final structural model is presented in Figure 3; fit indices and Parameter estimates for the final structural model are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. The summary of outcomes of the hypotheses' testing is presented in Table 3.

Results showed that when delegates perceive higher quality of individual service attributes, the benefits received from the experience are perceived as higher. At each service encounter, delegates first evaluate the quality of service; the outcome of this evaluation directly contributes to the quality of a delegate's experience from attending the conference. Quality of performance is taken to be delegates' evaluations of individual service attributes, and is therefore cognitive in nature. Quality of experience describes delegates' psychological benefits received from interaction with the service attributes, and is affective in nature. The support for Hypothesis 1 has provided empirical support of appraisal theories, which postulate that cognition strongly influences affect.

The results of the study supported both Hypotheses 2 and 3; however, the results showed that the influence of quality of performance on overall service quality was much stronger than that of quality of experience on overall satisfaction (total effects of 0.72 and 0.23, respectively). The results provided evidence to support the conceptualisation of service quality and satisfaction at different levels. The recognition of both transaction-specific and overall service quality and satisfaction helps to clarify confusion in the conceptualisation of the relationship between the two constructs. This study tested effectively the framework proposed by others (Dabholkar, Thorpe & Rentz, 1996; Baker & Crompton, 1998) that both service quality and satisfaction can be viewed at the transaction and global levels.

Figure 3. Final structural model and standardised parameter estimates

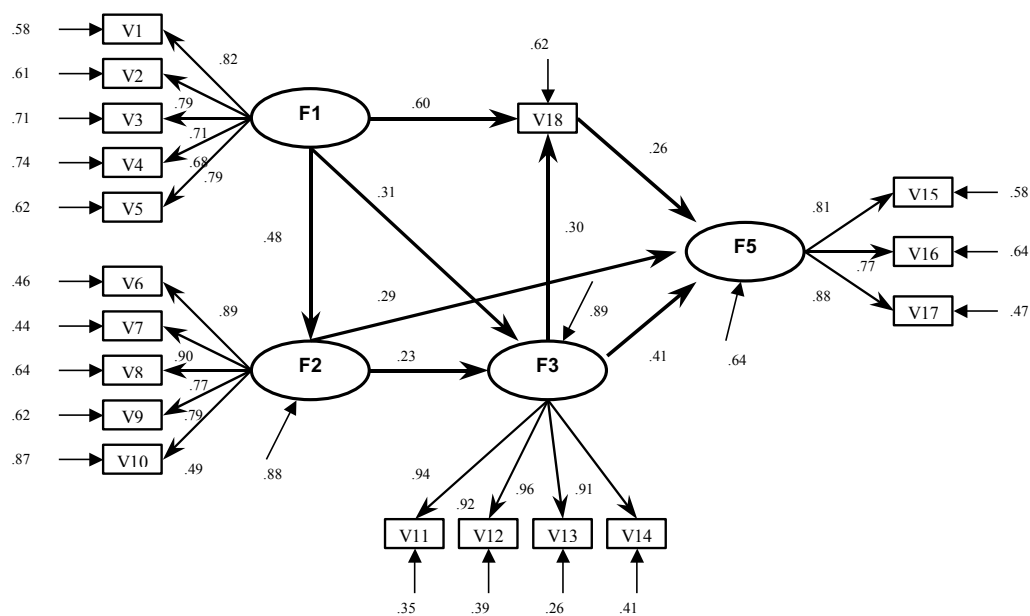


Table 1. Fit indices for the final structural model

<i>Fit Index</i>	<i>Value</i>
Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)	0.92
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.94
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.86
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	0.81
Parsimonious NFI	0.73
RNFI	0.99
Chi-Square Test	$X^2 = 291.74$ $df = 124$ $p = 0.0001$

Results showed that the psychological benefits delegates obtained from attending the conference did not contribute to their attitude of service quality in a major way. Benefits obtained by delegates contributed to overall service quality only indirectly—through overall delegate satisfaction (indirect effect of 0.07). This demonstrated that overall service quality is a cognitive-based attitude because, although evaluative quality of performance directly contributed to overall service quality (direct effect of 0.60), quality of experience did not directly influence overall service quality. Quality of experience refers to benefit outcomes, and is therefore subjective. In contrast, overall service quality is delegates' relatively objective evaluations, and is therefore not easily changed by their affect. This finding of the study contradicts the position of those service-quality researchers who insist on the influence of transaction-specific satisfaction on attitude towards service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991). One explanation for this contradiction lies in the different conceptualisations of satisfaction at the transaction level. The present study viewed satisfaction at the transaction level as an affective response, whereas service-quality researchers usually consider it as an evaluation of individual service attributes (Bolton & Drew, 1991), or as overall satisfaction with the service (Bitner 1990). The difference between the conceptualisations of satisfaction in this study and those in other studies (such as those conducted by the researchers described above) is that the present study distinguished satisfaction at both the transaction and global levels. In addition, the present study emphasised the affective aspects of transaction-specific satisfaction and the attitudinal characteristic of overall satisfaction; whereas service-quality researchers have viewed satisfaction as being only transaction-specific.

The hypothesised relationship between quality of performance and overall satisfaction was supported. Delegates' perceptions of quality of performance directly contribute to their levels of overall satisfaction. When delegates perceive high quality of service attributes, they tend to report a high level of satisfaction with their overall experience from attending the conference. The influence of quality of performance on overall satisfaction (total effects of 0.42) was stronger than that of quality of experience on overall satisfaction (total effects of 0.23). This shows that both cognition and affect are immediate determinants of overall satisfaction. However, evaluation contributed more to satisfaction attitude than affect. Thus, overall satisfaction as an attitude consists of both cognitive and affective elements, but is mainly a cognitive-based attitude.

Table 2. Parameter estimates for the final structural model

Parameter	Unstandardised	Standard	t value	R ²
	Estimate	Error		
L1	0.978	0.06	17.78	0.67
L2	0.895	0.05	16.35	0.62
L3	0.936	0.07	13.61	0.50
L4	0.806	0.07	12.23	0.46
L5	1.054	0.06	16.93	0.62
L6	1.008	0.04	23.19	0.79
L7	1.155	0.05	24.95	0.81
L8	0.917	0.06	16.28	0.59
L9	1.092	0.06	18.04	0.62
L10	0.726	0.09	7.78	0.24
L11	1.012	0.04	24.25	0.88
L12	0.939	0.04	23.02	0.85
L13	0.949	0.04	26.49	0.93
LI4	0.913	0.04	22.34	0.83
L15	0.918	0.05	18.07	0.66

L16	1.294	0.06	22.11	0.60
L17	1.183	0.05	23.36	0.77
B1	1.088	0.09	12.49	
82	0.632	0.09	7.29	
B3	0.300	0.11	2.82	
B4	0.320	0.06	5.46	
B5	0.264	0.06	4.57	
B6	0.525	0.14	3.85	
B7	0.173	0.05	3.79	
B8	0.288	0.05	5.98	
F2				0.23
F3				0.21
V18				0.61
F5				0.59

In marketing literature, there has been confusion in differentiating the concepts of overall service quality and overall customer satisfaction. Several studies which tried to differentiate the two constructs at the global level failed to find supporting empirical evidence (Spreng & Olshavsky, 1993; Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Dabholkar, 1995; Imrie, Cadogan & McNaughton, 2002; Chatzigeorgiou & Simeli, 2017). For example, Spreng and Olshavsky (1993) studied overall satisfaction and service-quality perceptions, but did not find any discriminant validity between the two constructs. However, the present study did find discriminant validity between overall service quality and overall satisfaction; results showed that the total effect of overall satisfaction on overall service quality was relatively low (0.30). This implied that, although they are correlated, overall service quality and overall satisfaction are not the same construct. A more detailed analysis showed that evaluative quality of performance had stronger influence on overall service quality (total effects of 0.72) than on overall satisfaction (total effects of 0.42). Affective quality of experience had stronger influence on overall satisfaction (total effects of 0.23) than on overall service quality (total effects of 0.07). Overall service quality and overall satisfaction should therefore be viewed as different attitudes. Although both attitudes consist of cognition and affect, overall service quality is more cognitively based, whereas overall satisfaction is more affectively based.

Results of the study supported the hypotheses relating to the influence of overall service quality and overall satisfaction on delegates' future behavioural intentions. High levels of delegate satisfaction, and/or perceptions of high service quality, are both likely to reinforce delegates' intentions of attending the conference again in the future and their engaging in positive word-of-mouth communications with their family and friends. These findings confirmed the predicative power of overall service quality and satisfaction on delegates' future behavioural intentions—as has been reported in previous studies (Baker & Crompton, 1998, 2000). However, the influence of overall service quality on behavioural intentions was found to be much weaker than that of overall satisfaction. In fact, results showed that, of all the variables examined, overall service quality contributed the least to behavioural intentions (total effects of 0.26).

Table 3. Summary of hypotheses tested and results

Number	Hypothesis	Results
H1	Quality of performance positively influences delegates' quality of experience.	Supported
H2	Perceptions of the quality of individual attribute performance influence perceptions of overall service quality.	Supported
H3	Perceptions of quality of experience with individual facets influence overall satisfaction.	Supported
H4	Overall satisfaction influences overall service quality.	Supported
H5	Quality of performance positively affects delegates' levels of overall satisfaction.	Supported
H6	Quality of experience positively affects delegates' perceptions of overall service quality.	Not Supported
H7	Overall service quality is positively associated with delegates' behavioural intentions.	Supported
H8	Overall satisfaction is positively associated with delegates' behavioural intentions.	Supported

In a specific service encounter, delegates' perception of quality of performance is a deciding factor in the experiential benefits (that is, satisfaction) received from attending the conference. Because delegate satisfaction at the transaction level is affective in nature, it is a relatively short-term effect. Delegates' satisfaction with a service experience eventually contributes to their long-term satisfaction with the service in general.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Two aspects of the present study are of great importance to conference marketers. First, the study has confirmed that improved service quality and delegate satisfaction can result in repeat conference attendance and positive word-of-mouth—which might increase the profits of conference organisers. Secondly, the study clarified the relationship between service quality and satisfaction, finding that each construct has an independent effect on delegates' future behavioural intentions. Conference managers should recognise that delegate satisfaction and service quality are *not* the same thing. The relationship between the satisfaction and service quality does *not* imply that practitioners should focus only on improving service quality—because, as this study has demonstrated, overall service quality and satisfaction can each contribute independently to delegates' future behavioural intentions. In fact, the influence of overall satisfaction on behavioural intentions is stronger than that of overall service quality.

This study suggests that two factors which directly influence delegates' overall satisfaction are quality of performance and quality of experience. To increase the level of satisfaction, conference organisers need to improve the performance of the individual service attributes. This will assist delegates to increase the benefits they receive from the service experience. Overall service quality and satisfaction are *attitudes*. A change in attitude starts with changes in perceptions of quality of performance and quality of experience. Thus, the priority of conference managers should be on the transaction level of service quality and satisfaction.

The major contribution of the present study is that it developed a conceptual model that demonstrates the dynamic nature of the relationship between service quality and conference delegate satisfaction based on theories derived from social psychology and previous research in the marketing, recreation, hospitality and tourism literature. The model was tested using sample data from delegates of four conferences in Greece, and was modified because of empirical findings. Follow-up studies on the issue are strongly encouraged. Refinement of the instruments used in the study, and their replication in other tourism, travel and hospitality settings, will enable both researchers and managers to understand the relationship between service quality and satisfaction more fully.

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