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Satisfaction with Amusement Parks

Henk Roest
Rik Pieters
Kitty Koelemeijer

Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Although customers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction (CS/D) results from their comparison of costs and benefits of the purchase to themselves, relative to anticipated consequences, most prior research focuses on the role of benefits in CS/D (Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Ellis and Witt 1994), or only scantily considers the influence of costs (Dunn Ross and Iso-Ahola 1991; Geva and Goldman 1991). Furthermore, prior research tends to assume the set of benefits to be similar and fixed for all consumers in a particular purchase situation (Oliver 1981; Tse and Wilton 1988).

Attributes of services, either benefits or costs, can be distinguished into search, experience, or credence (Darby and Karni 1973; Nelson 1970). Search attributes (e.g., tangibles) can be ascertained before an actual purchase decision is made. Experience attributes (e.g., responsiveness) on the other hand can only be ascertained during or after experiencing the service. Credence attributes (e.g., reliability) can not even be ascertained after consumption. They will often remain expectations even after the consumption experience. Services generally possess many experience and credence attributes due to being basically intangible. A high degree of the experience and credence properties impedes consumers' ability to form prior expectations on services. Because search and experience attributes (costs and benefits) are distinguished by the degree to which they can be

ascertained before purchase, it is supposed that their role in customer satisfaction assessment will be different. As search costs and benefits are easily testable before purchase, they might be independent antecedents of CS/D. On the other hand, experience costs and benefits, being more "ongoing" and abstract attributes, and difficult by nature, might be more interdependent antecedents of CS/D.

Despite the fact that many organizations such as hotels, banks, insurance companies, restaurants, and amusement parks offer services to more than a single segment and deliver more than a single service, and despite their prevalence in the marketplace, little is known about CS/D formation in such multiservice-multisegment operations. Amusement parks, for example, frequently offer several staged performance services (Deighton 1992), such as watching sports events, participating in sports activities like wildwater rafting, horse-back riding, show performances, and festivities. These different staged services will likely appeal to different customer segments. In addition to such core staged services, amusement parks offer services such as restaurants, bathroom facilities, and the like which influence the CS/D assessment. Preference for a variety of performance services will probably vary with characteristics such as age, or more generally, stage in the family life cycle (Thach and Axinn 1994). A park manager once stated "We try to get people to visit our park at least three times in their lives: as a child, as a parent with a child, and as a grandparent with a child".

To investigate the role of costs and benefits in CS/D in multiservice-multisegment operations, the authors collected data from visitors to amusement parks. During four consecutive summer weekends, randomly selected visitors of each of five major family amusement parks in The Netherlands (Efteling, Duinrell, and Slagharen) and Belgium (Bobbejaanland and Walibi) were invited immediately before entering a particular park to participate in a telephone study (90% agreed to participate). The two segments distinguished consisted of families with children aged between 3 and 17 years old (70–75% of the population of amusement park visitors in The Netherlands), and singles aged between 17 and 35 years old (20–25% of the visitor population). Telephone interviews comprising questions (5-point scales) on the desired costs and benefits, the actual costs and benefits, and CS/D, were held within two weeks after the customers visited the park. The final sample comprised 150 completed questionnaires, 30 for each park.

Using principal components analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation on 15 desired attribute items, three factors explaining 34.5% of total variance were distinguished. The first factor (eigenvalue=3.26; coefficient $\alpha=0.606$) refers to the "search benefits" of amusement parks including the presence of animals, self-participating activities, and circus or magician shows. The second factor (eigenvalue=2.11; coefficient $\alpha=0.637$) refers to the "search costs and conditions" including the entrance fee, driving distance to the park, and the presence of arrangements for bad weather. The third factor (eigenvalue=1.88; coefficient $\alpha=0.583$), labeled "experience costs and benefits", includes items like neatness and cleanliness of the park and waiting times. In a similar fashion as the desired costs and benefits, three subscales of actual costs and benefits were constructed.

Differences in costs and benefits among amusement parks and among visitor segments were tested with $3 \times 5 \times 2$ ANOVA's (Table 1). The main interest here is in differences among segments (Fodness 1994), and in the interaction between parks and segments. The results indicate that families with young children differ from singles in desired search benefits; parents explicitly seek benefits for their children. They also seem to attach greater

Table 1. Customer Segment and Park Effects with Respect to Benefits and Costs

Variation Sources	Desired Costs and Benefits		Actual Costs and Benefits	
	<i>F</i> -value	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i> -value	<i>p</i>
Segment Effects:	<i>(df=1)</i>		<i>(df=1)</i>	
Search Benefits	15.477	0.000	3.454	0.065
Search Costs and Conditions	12.466	0.001	0.137	0.712
Experience Costs and Benefits	3.608	0.060	4.220	0.042
Park Effects:	<i>(df=4)</i>		<i>(df=4)</i>	
Search Benefits	3.017	0.020	9.116	0.000
Search Costs and Conditions	2.073	0.088	5.949	0.000
Experience Costs and Benefits	0.798	0.528	3.853	0.005
Interaction Effects:	<i>(df=4)</i>		<i>(df=4)</i>	
Search Benefits	1.345	0.256	0.671	0.613
Search Costs and Conditions	0.481	0.750	0.445	0.776
Experience Costs and Benefits	1.748	0.084	1.430	0.227

importance to low costs and facilities for rainy days. With respect to desired search benefits, a significant park effect exists. An explanation for this finding is that choice of an amusement park is determined by desired search benefits, on which the amusement parks in the study differ with respect to deliverability. This was confirmed by discriminant analysis where desired search benefits was the most important factor in park selection. Family visitors rate experience costs and benefits delivered by the amusement park more positively than singles do. Amusement parks differ with respect to delivery of all benefit categories as well as costs (Table 1).

One-way ANOVA on the satisfaction scores revealed significant differences across segments ($F=4.048$, $p=0.046$). Families with children are more satisfied with their visit (mean 4.120) than singles (mean 3.827). Satisfaction scores do not differ significantly across amusement parks for the whole sample ($F=1.953$, $p=0.105$), nor within each segment ($F=0.988$, $p=0.420$ for families with children; $F=1.185$, $p=0.325$ for singles). Stepwise regression analysis was performed to determine the effects of actual costs and actual benefits on CS/D. The results indicate that actual search benefits, as well as actual experience costs and benefits have a strong effect on CS/D (Table 2). Search benefits are highly significant for both the

Table 2. Regression Analysis of Visitor CS/D on Actual Benefits and Costs

Independent Variable	Overall		Families with Kids		Singles	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Search Benefits*	0.206	0.020	0.523	0.000	-0.083	0.533
Search Costs and Conditions	0.133	0.294	-0.114	0.468	0.300	0.116
Experience Costs and Benefits	0.674	0.000	0.186	0.365	0.889	0.000
R^2 (adj. R^2)	0.272 (0.257)		0.324 (0.296)		0.344 (0.317)	
<i>F</i> -value (<i>p</i>)	18.18 (0.000)		11.36 (0.000)		12.43 (0.000)	

*Only benefits available in all parks were included in the analysis.

sample as a whole, and the segment consisting of families with children. The amusement parks' performance on experience costs and benefits as perceived by visitors has a significant effect on the sample as a whole and the singles segment. In addition, for the sample as a whole, it appears that the more important experience costs and benefits are, the lower satisfaction will be. Actual search costs and conditions did not affect CS/D.

In sum, the results of the study indicate that search costs and search benefits are independent antecedents of consumers' evaluations of amusement parks. Experience costs and experience benefits seem to be instant tradeoffs. Visitor segments differ in the benefits sought and in the costs avoided when visiting amusement parks. This appears to be true for search benefits, search costs and conditions, and experience costs and benefits. As one might expect, amusement parks differ in performance with respect to these factors. Different consumers of amusement park services search for different cost-benefit combinations and, therefore, they evaluate parks on a unique set of characteristics associated with its offerings. Although sociodemographic variables are often considered to be "out of date" as a segmentation basis, this study shows these variables to be very important.

Whereas the distinct impact of search costs and conditions, search benefits, and experience costs and benefits in the choice of an amusement park is highly significant, the distinct effect of search costs and conditions on CS/D is not. Apparently, customers of the park have accepted the search costs and conditions as they are actual visitors. The finding that search benefits do significantly affect CS/D can be explained by the fact that search benefits are also, or again, experienced during the visit. Whereas singles' satisfaction is primarily determined by post-purchase encounters, the results indicate that satisfaction formation by families with children is determined in pre-purchase encounters. Customers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction is ultimately the key to the long term success of amusement parks. Hence, it is important to understand the various search and experience costs and benefits that customers of amusement parks encounter, and how these costs and benefits drive CS/D. The study reveals clear differences between customer segments in satisfaction formation. The approach and results may stimulate further research, as they stress the importance of understanding customers' cost-benefit analyses. □ □

Henk Roest: Department of Marketing and Market Research, Tilburg University, PO Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands. Email h.l.a.roest@kub.nl.

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Targeting Airline Advertising Copy

William G. Browne
Oregon State University, USA

Rex S. Toh
Seattle University, USA

There are three tourism markets, each requiring different promotional appeals: pleasure trips to visit friends and relatives, business trips, and holiday trips to visit tourism destinations. Holiday and pleasure tourists fly less frequently than their business counterparts and have greater control over their destinations and flight timing. They are also more likely to look for low fares, given that they are spending personal funds. Thus, magazine advertisements directed towards pleasure tourists should emphasize discounted fares, ease of connections, and airline expertise; advertisements directed towards business tourists should emphasize superior ground and in-flight services, frequent and good connections, and on-time service; advertisements directed toward holidaymakers should emphasize resort services, holiday destinations, assistance from travel agents, and discount vacation packages. Therefore, it is hypothesized that airline magazine advertising directed towards pleasure, business, and holiday tourists will differ in promotional appeals. In addition, since the United States airline industry was deregulated in 1978, one would expect changes in advertising copy to reflect new freedoms in pricing and routing. Thus, one also hypothesizes that airline magazine advertising copy has changed since deregulation.