

Experience Quality, Experience Consumption Value and Behavioral Intention: Convention Attendees' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the various services provided by a convention center and their own quality affect attendees' experiential values, and how it can lead to the attendees' overall satisfaction and loyalty. This research adopts Schmitt's (1999b) experiential marketing dimensions - individual (sense and feel) and shared (act and relate) experiential consumption values. Also, in the light of the characteristics of the Phoenix Convention Center, four dimensions of service attributes- added value services, facility services, spatial attribute services, and staff services- are established based on the previous literature. The sample consisted of 217 convention attendees at Phoenix Convention Center (PCC) in Arizona, representing a response rate of 54%. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized model. Results indicate that the perceived quality of the added-value, facility and staff services influence attendees' individual experiential value (sense & feel) while the quality of spatial attribute and staff services have an impact on attendees' shared experiential value (act & relate). The evoked individual and shared experience value have a significant effect on the overall satisfaction of the convention center which leads to strengthen the loyalty toward to the Phoenix Convention Center.

Key Words: Convention facility, Experience Quality, Experience Consumption Value, Behavioral Intention

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid growth of the convention industry, it has been recognized not only as an important resource for regional tourism but also as an essential contributor to economic development in destinations. According to the 2014 Economic Significance Study (ESS), approximately 1.87 million meetings took place in the United States and attended by 225 million people by 2012. These meeting events generated \$280 billion in direct spending and contributed to GDP, providing more than \$115 billion. Also, the industry stimulated more than 1.78 million jobs with almost \$67 billion in labor income (Convention Industry Council, 2014). Compared to 2009, the number of participants at meetings and events increased by 10%, and in turn, the industry contributed to almost 9% higher GDP in the US economy.

Today, there are more than 400 convention centers across the US ("Convention Center Directory," n.d.). Given the intensified competitiveness within the convention industry, the differentiation of the services providing the enhanced convention facilities and quality improvement has become critical factors in convention market. Along with that, an understanding of service performance (quality) perceived by convention delegates has become more significant than ever. Recent convention studies not only focus on convention center's facilities and services, but also examine attendees' needs, perceived service performance, and behavioral intention (Breiter & Milman, 2006; Jung, 2005; Lee & Park, 2002; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Beriter, 2007; Wu & Weber, 2005). Understating how convention attendees experience the services provided by the convention center is essential for developing promotional marketing strategies to strengthen its competitive advantage. However, little research has examined the relationship among attendees' perceived service quality, their experiential consumption value, satisfaction, and loyalty in the context of the convention center's facilities and services. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate 1) how the various services provided by a convention center and their own quality affect attendees' experiential values, and 2) how it can lead to the attendees' overall satisfaction and loyalty, adopting Schmitt's (1999b) experiential marketing dimensions - individual (sense and feel) and shared (act and relate) experiential consumption values. It is important for convention centers to develop their marketing strategies with attention to the relationship between service attributes and customers' experiential consumption values. Furthermore, to implement a strategic approach, they need to understand how their customers perceive the key factors of service performance.

LITURATURE REVIEWS

Service attributes in convention industry

Along with the size of the convention center, Jago and Deery (2005) revealed that the quality of service, food, and audio-visual equipment were considered as important factors in selecting of the convention venue. Considering a number of studies have proved that convention delegates are one of key players in venue decision-making (Jago & Deery, 2005; Robinson & Callan, 2001, 2005), both academia and industry need to identify attendees' needs and service priorities in order to promote convention centers more effectively (Breiter & Milman, 2006; Lee & Park, 2002). Bitner (1992) indicates that physical service environments (servicescapes) influence customers' cognitive, emotional, and physiological responses, and behaviors. With attention to servicescapes, the dimensions of the physical environments in convention centers cover all of the objective physical elements such as ambient conditions (e.g., temperature, and air quality), spatial layout and functionality (e.g., layout, equipment, and furnishings), and signs, symbols, and artifacts (e.g., signage, artwork, and style of décor) (Bitner, 1992; Siu, Wan, & Dong, 2012). In an effort to identify convention service factors used by customers, Lee and Park (2002) define 'convention service' as the sum of all the services that convention attendees experience from their arrival to the departure. It embraces convention-related facilities and services, including the combination of tangible (physical facilities) and intangible services (human services). In addition, Crouch and Louviere (2004) claimed that extra-conference services (in this study, named as added value service) such as entertainment and sightseeing opportunities are important, same as are physical convention attributes. Furthermore, Wu and Weber (2005) identify convention center facility services into 5 categories such as accessibility, food and beverage, convention facility and services, public facilities and services, and staff services, while Breiter and Milman (2006) divide convention services into facility services (e.g., overall maintenances and staff services) and facility feature (e.g., signage, cell phone signal, and food outlet).

While these previous studies have classified services factors based on its own study context, there were common service attributes along with the definition of convention services. Therefore, given an understanding of comprehensive convention service factors, four dimensions of service attributes- added value services, facility services, spatial attribute services, and staff services-can be established in the light of the characteristics of the Phoenix Convention Center, referring to the previous literature (Bitner, 1992; Breiter & Milman, 2006; Crouch &

Louviere, 2004; Jago & Deery, 2005; Lee & Park, 2002; Siu, Wan, & Dong, 2012; Wu & Weber, 2005) (See Table 1). Furthermore, when the services are perceived by consumers, these service attributes can be counted as service quality from the consumer perspective. In other words, convention service qualities are reflected by an assessment of service performances evaluated by convention attendees. Since the weight of previous studies supports performance-only measure that considers only the customer's perception of the service performance, this paper implements performance-only as a service quality measurement (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fullerton & Taylor, 2002; Olorunniwo, Hsu, & Udo, 2006).

Table 1 Service Attributes in the Phoenix Convention Center (PCC)

Added value services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of nightlife • Unique architecture design • Availability of special food • Availability of tourist information • Availability of light rail near the PCC
Facility services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall cleanliness • Maintenance of meeting facilities • Safety and security around the PCC
Spatial attribute services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities for disabled access • Convenience of parking • Directional road signage around the PCC • Designated smoking areas
Staff services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpfulness of staff • Friendliness of staff

Sources: Adapted from Bitner (1992), Breiter & Milman (2006), Crouch & Louviere (2004), Lee & Park (2002), Siu, Wan, & Dong (2012), and Wu & Weber (2005).

In view of the increased competition in convention industry, an understanding of the importance of specific venue's service attributes can be vital to develop better services to delegates. Those services provided by an organization have a direct and an indirect effect on attendees' experience, and in turn influence their behavioral intention (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Ryu & Han, 2010; Ryu & Jang, 2007). Adding to delivering quality services, understanding how attendees experience these services is critical for establishing marketing strategies to satisfy consumers. Therefore, this study incorporates Schmitt's (1999a, 1999b, 1999c) experiential marketing concepts in order to examine the relationship between the service performances evaluated by convention delegates, their perceived experience consumption, and satisfaction and behavioral intention.

Experiential consumption value

Experiences can occur in a variety of settings. In service fields, experiences arise when a consumer interacts with atmospheric variables and personnel of service organizations (Boulding, Karla, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993; Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Hui & Bateson, 1991). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argue that customers' consumption is regarded as a "primarily subjective state of consciousness" (p.132). From the 'experiential view', they posit that various environmental and consumer inputs (e.g., individual difference, type of involvement, and search activity) are processed by cognitive, affect, and behavior responses within intervening response system. Since then, consumption experience, including feelings, emotions, imagery, and fantasies has been critical for marketing practitioners to develop effective strategies for goods and services (Arnould & Price, 1993; Holt, 1995; Joy & Sherry, 2003).

Putting the consumer experience concept into more practically applicable theorization, Schmitt (1999a, 1999b) had put forth the term 'experiential marketing' that proposed the five experiential components of consumers such as sense, feel, think, act, and relate. According to Schmitt (1999b), customers receive each type of experiential stimulation (e.g., sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, or relational value) via the process of experiencing services or products (i.e., direct observation and/or participation in events). The 'Sense' experience refers to how consumers perceive sensory qualities from sight, sound, taste, and touch, while the 'Feel' experience focuses more on its affective side such as moods and emotions. The 'Think' experience that makes consumers engage creative thinking appeals to the customers' convergent and divergent thinking which are common for new technology. Therefore, in the context of the services operated by convention center, the think experience is not considered in this study. On the other hand, the 'Act' experience targets customers' physical and behavioral experiences, which could

enrich their lifestyles and behaviors. Finally, the 'Relate' experience refers to social experiences such as the connection with other people and group (Schmitt, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c).

Given Schmitt's claim that consumer's consumption is changed from goods and services to experience, experiential consumption focuses more on holistic experience that a company creates for customers (Schmitt, 1999a). Those above five experiential values are further categorized into individual (i.e., sense, feel, and think) and shared (i.e., act and relate) consumption values. Nemours previous research found that individual experiential elements play an important role in perceiving and evaluating service quality (Kandampully, 1998; Lee, Hsiao, & Yang, 2010; Palmer, 2010; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Also, it was revealed by the past research that facilities, atmosphere of the place, and their overall service environment which can be perceived as the individual experiential values, affect customers' emotional response (De Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999; Yoo, Park, & MacInnis, 1998).

Although the majority of convention facility services appeals to attendees' individual experiential value, staff services and added value services (e.g., availability of night life, tour information, and special food) relevant to the social experiences could appeal to attendees' shared experience. In this sense, the current study emphasize on individual (sense and feel), and shared (act and relate) consumption values, investigating how the service performances evaluated by convention delegates are connected to their perceived experience consumption, and satisfaction and loyalty.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty

The previous research demonstrates that delivering high-quality service can lead to the customers' satisfaction and loyalty (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Barsky & Nash, 2003; Kim, Lee, & Yoo, 2006; Ryu & Han, 2010; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Cronin and Taylor (1992) have found that service quality is an antecedent of satisfaction. The findings from Lee and colleagues (2004) not only support Cronin and Taylor's findings but also determine that satisfaction can be a mediator between service quality and behavioral intentions such as loyalty. Likewise, service quality and satisfaction can be critical factors predicting attendees' loyalty.

Furthermore, the experiential value obtained during the consumption of experiencing services is critical to induce customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Lee, Hsiao, & Yang, 2010; Lin & Chiang, 2010). Supportively, Lin and Chiang (2010) confirm that the perceived experiential value which is reinforced by overall perceived quality, can positively affect customers' behavioral intention. In addition, Lee, Hsiao and Yang's study (2010) ascertain that customers' perceived service quality, driven from their experiential consumption of the product or service, significantly have an impact on the customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Wang and Lin (2010) also claim that tourists' experiential marketing and their satisfaction have a positive relationship.

Given these aspects, delivering attractive physical surroundings and high-quality service can not only have a strong appeal to convention delegates through the experience consumption process, but also be conducive to stimulating their positive attitude (e.g., satisfaction and loyalty). However, there is little research to examine the whole relationship among attendees' perceived service quality, their experiential consumption values, satisfaction, and loyalty in the light of the convention center's facilities and services. Therefore, this study sheds light on how service performances provided by the convention facility affect attendees' individual (sense and feel) and shared (act and relate) experiential consumption values, and in turn how it can lead to their satisfaction and loyalty to the convention facility.

METHOD

The study data was collected in the Phoenix Convention Center (PCC) when the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) annual meeting was held there. As a result, the population of this study was comprised of ICMA meeting attendees, who were randomly invited to participate in the surveys. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to attendees, and 217 usable responses were generated, representing 54 percent of response rate. Service quality items for a convention facility were examined based on the past literature review. Eventually, 14 service quality items of a convention facility were adopted and pretested with six managers who pretested it to categorize the 14 services into the four-factor structure such as add-value service, facility service, spatial service and staff service factors. The current study also investigates the experiential consumption values, which consist of first 5 items measuring the individual experiential values, and the other 5 items assessing the shared experiential values which are driven by previous studies (Schmitt, 1999b; Tsaur, Chiu, & Wang, 2007; Yuan & Wu, 2008) and modified in the context of the Phoenix Convention Center (PCC). Further, the rest of 6 items investigate attendees' overall satisfaction and loyalty to the convention center. For satisfaction, it is common to measure the overall satisfaction and positive consumption emotion of atmosphere (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). As a result, this

study investigates customer satisfaction by examining three items: customers' overall satisfaction with PCC, joyfulness staying at PCC, and pleasantness of visiting PCC. When examining the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intention, three items are adopted from the previous study (Lee et al, 2004) following as; "I am going to say positive things about the PCC", "I will recommend the PCC" and "I will come back to the PCC in the future". All items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale. The last section consists of five questions to elicit attendees' socio-demographic information.

RESULTS

Discriminant validity is examined in order to define the relationships between a measure of one theoretical construct and measures of different theoretical constructs that fall within the nomological network of the construct (Chronbach & Meehl, 1955). Discriminant validity can be confirmed when the estimated correlations of the constructs are not excessively high ($> .85$) or excessively low ($< .10$) (Kline, 1998). Based on the value of all the correlation estimates between the associated constructs, all values fell in the acceptable range, which indicated that the discriminant validity of the constructs was supported. At the same time, the internal consistency reliability (ICR) of each construct was examined by computing the composite reliability coefficients. The composite reliability test is used to determine whether its attributes constitute a reliable measurement. As shown Table 1, the internal consistency reliability values ranged from .81 (Added-values service factors) to .91 (Satisfaction of the service quality provided by PCC), which indicated that all composite reliabilities are above the .70 cut-off value (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), then it can be concluded the scale was reliable.

The hypothesized relationships were tested by the structural equation modeling (SEM) using Amos 22.0 (Arbuckle, 2007). The measurement model was examined using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which consist of eight constructs; five variables for added-value service items, three variables for facility service items, four variables for spatial service items, two variables for staff services. Further, it has been developed five variables for individual experiential consumption values while the other five variables for shared experiential consumption values. Finally, each three variables were used for measuring the overall satisfaction and intention to visit to PCC (Phoenix convention center) respectively. As the result of the CFA, all pattern coefficients of the measured variables were significant, and all loadings were above or close to the recommended .60 threshold (Chin, 1998), indicating that all latent variables were adequately measured by their respective indicators.

Table 1. Reliability, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	Added-value services	Facility services	Spatial services	Staff services	Individual experiential values	Shared experiential values	Satisfaction	C.R.
Added-value services								.81
Facility services	.51**							.83
Spatial services	.61**	.38**						.82
Staff services	.31**	.46**	.25**					.88
Individual experiential values	.54**	.55**	.31**	.41**				.87
Shared experiential values	.41**	.40**	.44**	.23**	.49**			.87
Satisfaction	.44**	.56**	.27**	.52**	.76**	.53**		.92
Intend to visit PCC	.44*	.46**	.35**	.45**	.65**	.57**	.79**	.87

Note: C.R. is Composite Reliability, ** $p < .01$.

After performing a CFA, the measurement model showed clearly satisfactory goodness of fit indices ($\chi^2/df=1.9$, CFI=.92, GFI=.90, IFI=.92, RMSEA=.064). In addition, The structural model for this study also provided a good fit to the data, with scaled $\chi^2/df=1.9$, CFI=.92, GFI=.90, IFI=.92, RMSEA=.064, validating the hypothesized relationships (Table 2.), which assumes that the added-value, facility, spatial and staff service factors have an influence on individual and shared experiential consumption values which can have an effect on the overall satisfaction of the PCC (Phoenix convention center), further it can enhance the loyalty toward to PCC.

Table 2. Goodness-of-Fit Indices

	χ^2/df	CFI	IFI	GFI	RMSEA
Measurement Model	1.9	.92	.92	.90	.064
Structural Model	1.9	.92	.92	.90	.064
Suggested Value*	≤ 3	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	$\leq .08$

Suggested values were based on Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2006).

Moreover, the regression coefficient of each proposed path coefficient was positive and significant as shown in Figure 1, which indicated that most hypothesized relationships between constructs were supported in this study. More specifically, the perceived quality of the added-value, facility and staff services have an influence on individual experiential value (sense & feel) ($\beta=.47$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.29$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.28$, $p<.01$), whereas the quality of spatial attribute and staff services have an impact on attendees' shared experiential value (act & relate) ($\beta=.33$, $p<.05$, $\beta=.18$, $p<.05$). The evoked individual and shared experience value have a significant effect on the overall satisfaction of the convention center ($\beta=.78$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.17$, $p<.01$) which leads to strengthen the loyalty toward to the Phoenix Convention Center ($\beta=.89$, $p<.01$).

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

The results indicate that overall high service performances significantly influence delegates' experiential values, and in turn positively influence on the overall satisfaction. Also, the enhanced satisfaction strengthens the customers' loyalty to the Phoenix Convention Center. Along with previous research (De Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999; Lee, Hsiao, & Yang, 2010; Lin & Chiang, 2010; Palmer, 2010; Yoo, Park, & MacInnis, 1998; Yuan & Wu, 2008), the current study supports that perceiving service quality have a positive impact on the experiential values and it also confirms that the process of experiencing services is critical to induce customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, the findings of the study specify which service attributes are capable to encourage the process of experiential consumption value. More specifically, the current study indicated that added-value, facility and staff services are conducive to impact convention attendees' sense and feeling (individual experience values), while spatial attribute services such as parking, signage, and disabled access, and staff services are significantly related to attendees' act and relate experience (shared experience values). Thus, the study contribute on the extend of the literature review showing that consumption experiential values are differently perceived depending on the service attributes; for example, it presents that convention centers' spatial services specifically have an impact on customers' shared experiences rather than their individual experiences. More interestingly, only staff services impact both individual and shared experience significantly. In this sense, delivering high quality staff service is primarily important in developing the most effective strategy to appeal to customers.

Also, findings from the study provide important insights with respect to the relationship between convention service attributes and attendees' experience consumption process in terms of enhancing their competitiveness. For example, the location of the convention center itself is beyond the control compared to the convention center staffs; however, they can place an emphasis on identifying distinctive services and venue facilities, providing service excellence, and in turn, creating the different level of customers' memorable experiences intensifying competitiveness with other convention centers. This study has certain limitations in that it only investigated one specific convention center (Phoenix Convention Center) and services provided by PCC. In addition, other convention centers could focus on other service attributes such as in-house food and beverage outlet which is not considered in this study. Therefore, further research is needed to examine more various service attributes provided by different convention centers, identifying which service attributes influence on customers' different experiential consumption values. In general, the current study enriches the literatures by examining the relationships among the service performances evaluated by convention delegates, their perceived experience consumption, and satisfaction and loyalty. As convention industry has grown rapidly, understanding customers and their experiences should be a priority to develop effective promotional strategies and lead to gain a competitive advantage over other convention centers.

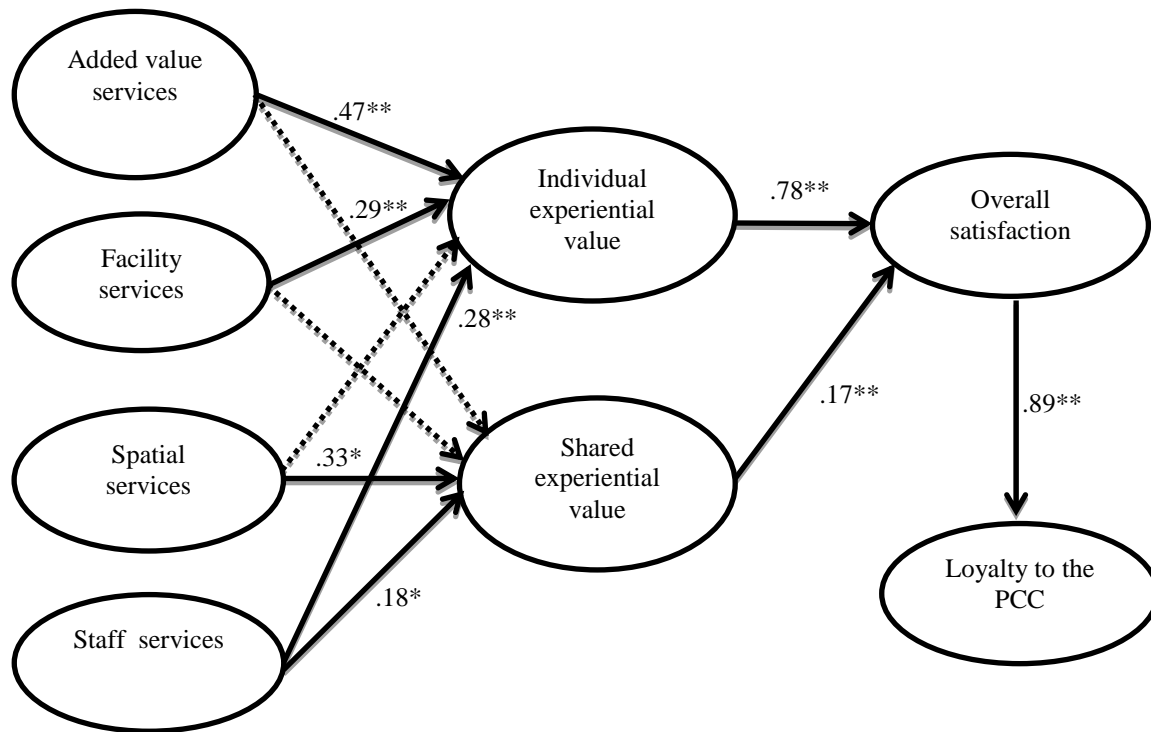


Figure 1. Estimates of the Structural Model

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