5 The complexity of satisfaction measurement

Aims and objectives

This chapter addresses the complexity of satisfaction measurement in an experiential context. It first presents several conceptualisations of satisfaction and then addresses the particularities of this concept in the consumption of tourism products and services. It looks in particular at the possibilities that achieving tourist satisfaction might involve consumers' personal strategies, and questions the inability that consumers might have in voicing clear expectations. The concepts of flow and immersion are reviewed to provide a deeper understanding of what lies at the heart of the consumer experience. The different steps structuring the experience are then analysed, highlighted with an example based on a whale-watching experience.

After studying this chapter readers should be able to:

- Compare and contrast the different definitions of satisfaction.
- Appreciate the particularities of evaluating satisfaction in the specific context of tourism.
- Understand the complexity of the processes that shape services' evaluations in the specific tourism context.
- Define and understand what the flow experience entails and the conditions that prevail for its occurrence.
- Contrast the notions of flow and immersion and understand their respective role in the construction of a satisfying experience.

The third and fourth chapters of this book have listed the approaches in service quality that aim to analyse how consumers evaluate different elements in a service delivery. As we have already mentioned, satisfaction is a complex issue in tourism because of its experiential nature which requires the integration of emotional dimensions as well. As a result, tangible dimensions are only one side of the equation and we will see in this chapter that many studies in the marketing and tourism research fields show that what lies at the heart of satisfaction is to be found more within the individual and is of an intense experiential and emotional nature (Chapter 2). However, the tangible dimensions cannot just be ignored since they necessarily impact on the satisfaction with the service provided. It is this interplay between tangible and experiential dimensions that needs to be investigated and conceptualised, as we will discuss at the end of the chapter.

◼ The complex notion of satisfaction

Authors in marketing and consumer behaviour literature have studied the concept of customer satisfaction in different consumption fields (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Abdeldayem and Khanfar, 2007; Cronin and Taylor, 1992), and various approaches have been used by marketing and consumer researchers to define and measure customer satisfaction. In the tourism field, the number of studies focusing on the concept of customer satisfaction in hospitality, travel and recreation is increasing due to the relevance of this concept. In this sense, researchers have frequently focused on identifying the factors or facts which explain tourists' satisfaction judgements and which might contribute to tourists' total satisfaction (Tian-Cole and Cromption, 2003; Geva and Goldman, 1991; Thach and Axinn, 1994). Thus, customer satisfaction always appears at the top of the list of important issues that must be addressed by marketers, because it is essential to products' and destinations' survival (Pizam and Ellis, 1999).

☐ How can we define satisfaction?

There are significant differences in the conceptualization of consumer/tourist satisfaction (Bosque and Martin, 2008; Casarin and Andreani, 2003). The concept of satisfaction is multidimensional and may be defined in various ways. Fundamentally, as Dubrovski (2001) argued, consumer satisfaction is located at the centre of marketing theory and is based on the premise that the profit is made through the process of satisfying consumers' demands (Wicks and Roethlein, 2009). Beyond the cognitive definition of consumer/tourist satisfaction that has been addressed in Chapter 3, there is a set of studies that consider satisfaction as an emotional response derived from a consumption experience. Thus, satisfaction is defined as an individual's cognitive-affective state derived both from the

individual's cognitive judgements and emotions related to the tourist experience (Bosque and Martin, 2008; Oliver, 1993).

Drawing on the cultural and the experiential perspectives, consumer/tourist satisfaction can also be defined as an emotional response (joy, fear, happiness, etc.) derived from a consumption/tourism experience (Spreng *et al.*, 1996). Indeed, the consumption experience of satisfaction, enjoyment, fun and other hedonic aspects has been widely accepted as the essence of play and other leisure activities (Unger and Kernan, 1983). Marketers see defining and measuring customer satisfaction as an important task for tourism professionals and planners, which directly links to repeat business (Wong and Law, 2003). According to Yi (1990), a basic definitional inconsistency is evident by the debate of whether satisfaction is a process or an outcome. Indeed, consumer satisfaction definitions have either emphasized an evaluation process (Fornell, 1992; Hunt ,1977; Oliver, 1981) or a response to an evaluation process (Halstead *et al.*, 1994).

Table 5.1 shows a summary of the definitions of the concept of satisfaction in marketing and tourism studies.

Table 5.1: Consumer/tourist satisfaction definitions in marketing and tourism

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'Consumer satisfaction with a retail establishment may be viewed as an individual's emotional reaction to his or her evaluation of the total set of experiences realised from patronising the retailer' (Westbrook, 1980).

'Consumer satisfaction is located at the centre of marketing theory and is based on the premise that the profit is made through the process of satisfaction of consumers' demands ' (Wicks and Roethlein, 2009; Dubrovski, 2001).

'The overlapping concepts of customer satisfaction and service quality are based upon the relationship between expectations and perceptions' (Churchill and Surprenant, 1982).

'Satisfaction is a major outcome of marketing activity and serves to link processes culminating in purchase and consumption with post purchase phenomena such as attitude change, repeat purchase, and brand loyalty. The centrality of the concept is reflected by its inclusion in the marketing concept that profits are generated through the satisfaction of consumer needs and wants'(Churchill and Surprenant, 1982).

'Conceptually, satisfaction is an outcome of purchase and use resulting from the buyer's comparison of the rewards and costs of the purchase in relation to the anticipated consequences'(Churchill and Surprenant, 1982).

LaTour and Peat (1979) assert that 'the primary distinction between satisfaction and attitude derives from temporal positioning: attitude is positioned as a predecision construct and satisfaction is a postdecision construct'.