
Using Importance-Performance Analysis in Evaluating Tourist Satisfaction. The case of Campania

1. Introduction

There is growing evidence that customer satisfaction is a driving force behind firm's business competitiveness and performance (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1996). This is absolutely true in the case of tourism, where there is a wide application of concepts, models and tools aimed to evaluate customer satisfaction. It is recognized in fact that, in order to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of a tourist destination and to improve its competitiveness, it is essential to "listen to the customer". Satisfaction is commonly considered the best indicator of the state of health of tourism, an industry that is difficult to evaluate in quantitative terms. Satisfaction, even for tourism, as well as for other industries, is also directly linked to the loyalty of "clients" and, therefore, to the sources of competitive advantage.

Since it is possible to view tourism as a service industry, this paper adopts the service marketing perspective to sustain the satisfaction measurement architecture as an integrated model and it proposes the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) as a tool for evaluating tourist satisfaction (Fuchs, Weirmair, 2003). Although the relevance of IPA as an instrument for the measurement of quality perceptions is well documented in the marketing literature (Ennew et. al, 1993; Slack, 1994; Matzler et al., 2003), still there is a lacking of research that provide empirical application to tourism destination management. The paper attempts to fill in this gap by proposing the IPA as a valuable and "demand-based" tool to ensure the continuous, dynamic and multi-perspective process of "review and validation" of tourism destination management practices.

The theoretical framework is enriched by an empirical case study: the IPA is used for assessing the perceptions of tourists arriving in Campania Region and for identifying the main factors and/or areas of intervention to improve tourist quality according to the tourists' perceptions. The survey has been designed and managed in a way to assure the representation of tourist flows, both in temporal and geographic terms.

2. Assessing Tourist Satisfaction: emerging issues from literature

Since tourism is a service industry, or more accurately «an amalgam of service industries» (Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003), it is widely diffused in the tourism literature the adoption of the service marketing perspective. In particular, the attention is traditionally focused on the marketing measurement tools aimed to assess the customer satisfaction, considering that satisfaction affects both expectations and intentions for next destination purchasing decisions.

Over the past decades, numerous contributions have discussed the limits and the problems of the researches in this field (Ryan 1995; Oh e Parks 1997; Pizam and

Ellis 1999; Bowen and Clarke, 2002; Yüksel and Yüksel 2001; Casarin and Andreani, 2002; Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003; Geng-Qing Chi and Qu, 2008; Del Bosque and San Martin, 2008), highlighting the necessity to consider the peculiarities of tourism in designing and managing tourist satisfaction surveys. It means that the simple transposition of general service marketing tools to the tourism industry does not always work (Casarin and Andreani, 2002) and some revisions are therefore required.

First of all, it is essential to make a distinction between the overall satisfaction with the tourist destination and the satisfaction with single components/attributes of the destination itself. More than an industry, tourism can be considered a “system”, with high interdependence-sub-sector interlinkages (Middleton and Clarke, 2001; Casarin and Andreani, 2003). Tourists experience is made up of a medley of services, such as hotels, restaurants, shops, transports etc.. Furthermore, besides the functional components, many contextual and environmental factors contribute to the self-evaluation of tourist experience. It is possible to think about the “social factors” (for instance, the human interactions leading to experiential benefits and responses) and the various elements of the “physical environment” (for instance, the nature, the landscape etc.) (Bitner, 1992; Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003, 2004). Tourists can evaluate each element separately, and the overall satisfaction with tourist experience is a function of satisfaction with the different elements/attributes of all products/services that make up the experience (Oliver, 1993; Pizam and Ellis, 1999; Geng-Qing Chi and Qu, 2008). According to Oliver (1993), in fact, attribute satisfaction has significant, positive and direct effects on overall satisfaction and it captures a significant amount of variation in overall satisfaction. It follows, therefore, that a survey focused just on one of the component (for instance, the hotel) may lead to a “paradox” (Casarin and Andreani, 2003), because a tourist could be satisfied with that specific product/service but he could be not satisfied with the other components and, consequently, not satisfied with the destination on the whole. To summarize, many variables, of different nature (functional, contextual and environmental), should be systematically included in tourist satisfaction surveys and the relation of them with the overall satisfaction should be analysed as well.

Different perspectives and theories have been proposed in tourism literature to assess tourist satisfaction. Most of the studies have utilized models of expectation-disconfirmation, according to which consumers develop expectations about a product/service before purchasing it and subsequently they compare actual performance with those expectations (Oliver, 1980). If the performance is better than the expectations, the consumer has a positive disconfirmation, which means that he/she is satisfied and he/she will be more willing to repeat the purchase. If the performance is worse than the expectations, the consumer has a negative disconfirmation, which means that he/she is unsatisfied and he/she will look for alternatives for the next purchase. Applying such model to tourism, it follows that satisfaction is «the result of a comparison between [tourist] previous images of the destination and what he/she actually sees, feels and achieves at the destination» (Chon, 1989). Other contributions criticize the use of expectations in tourist satisfaction surveys, because of the difficulties in obtaining a realistic measure of tourists expectations. For example, it has been argued by Casarin and Andreani (2003) that the time and space dimensions play a relevant role in the development

of the expectations and such dimension should be adequately considered in designing tourist satisfaction surveys. Tourists, in fact, build up their expectations before leaving and in their own place of origin; it follows that the evaluation of the expectations at the destination (after the interaction with the first service encounter) may lead to a distortion of the data and, furthermore, tourists could not remember exactly the expectations they had before leaving. Similarly, tourists assess their overall satisfaction with the experience after they return to their own place of origin, where they can assimilate the social, cultural and psychological inputs of the experience in their daily life and share them with others; it follows that the evaluation of the performance perceptions at the destination (when the interaction with the all the service encounter is not finished yet) may lead to a distortion of the data. The necessity to have two different evaluations of the expectations (before leaving) and performance (after being back) is discussed in several theoretical contributions (for example, Pizam e Milman, 1993), but it is very difficult (and, therefore, rare) in the empirical analysis. As noted by Yoon and Uysal (2005), some contributions suggest to make use of a “norm” or “comparison standard” instead of expectations as reference points to have a disconfirmation process (Francken and van Raaij,1981; Cadotte et al., 1987). For example, tourists could compare current travel destination with other alternative destinations or places visited in the past; the difference between present and past experiences can be a norm or comparison point to evaluate tourist satisfaction. Other contributions suggest to make use only of the actual perceived performance, avoiding any kind of comparative element (Tse and Wilton, 1988; Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003). According to such approach, the actual performance and initial expectations should be considered independently; the evaluation of tourists satisfaction with their experience is considered regardless of their expectations and of their past experience. In such a way, all the methodological problems related to the evaluation of expectations are avoided, but, at the same time, it is impossible to interpret high levels of satisfaction as the result of low expectations or superior quality of service provider (Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003).

There are also significant differences in the conceptualization of tourist satisfaction (Casarin and Andreani, 2003; Del Bosque and San Martin, 2008). Most studies in the past have used a cognitive approach, defining tourist satisfaction as a post consumption evaluation that a chosen alternative at least meets or exceeds expectations. According to this view, satisfaction is the consumer’s response to the congruence between performance and comparison standard (Oliver, 1980) and the expectation-disconfirmation model is therefore the most applied (Del Bosque and San Martin, 2008). Other studies consider satisfaction as an emotional response derived from a consumption experience. Recently the cognitive-affective nature has been widely recognized in literature and, according to this most recent view, 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 (Oliver, 1993). Satisfaction is therefore influenced by cognitive evaluations (such as expectations and disconfirmation) and, furthermore, by positive and negative emotions that contribute independently to satisfaction. Emotions derive from evaluations and determine the individual’s overall responses: it follows that «the more positive the disconfirmation of tourist expectations, the more frequent the positive emotions»

(Del Bosque and San Martin, 2008) and, as a consequence, the higher will be the loyalty or commitment with the destination.

Arising from the above review of the literature, it is evident that customer surveys in tourism are useful and reliable only if they are meticulously designed and carefully administered. Besides the conceptual construct and the theoretical model adopted, decisions such as the choice of the interview method, the sample design, the timing and placing are all highly critical issues in tourism satisfaction surveys that may invalidate the results «if improperly chosen and/or managed» (Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003). Given these limits and possibilities of tourism satisfaction research, our paper, by proposing the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) (Martilla, James, 1977) as a “low-cost/easily managed” tool for evaluating tourists satisfaction, is part of the expectation-disconfirmation branch of literature. We use however indirect measures to infer importance scores, avoiding all the methodological problems related to the direct measure of the expectations and, at the same time, not losing the possibility to interpret the satisfaction as the result of low expectations or superior performance. The IPA seems to provide significant support to policy-makers, both as forward-looking instrument aiming to audit the state of health of the tourist destination and to define the main area of intervention (*ex-ante evaluation*), and as backward-looking instrument aiming to evaluate the impact of the programs and strategies implemented (*ex-post evaluation*).

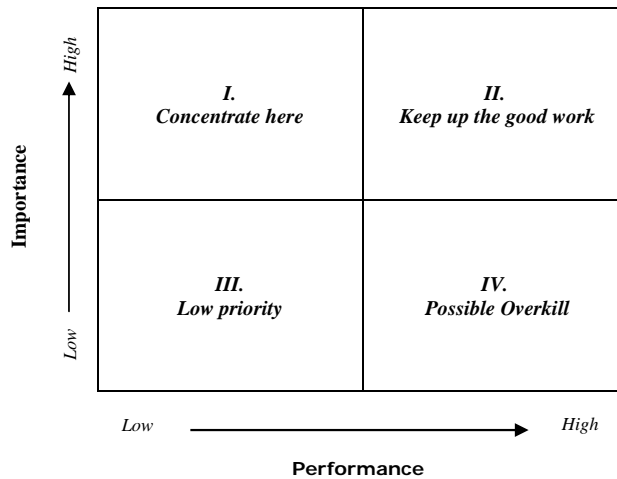
3. The IPA scheme

The IPA is a tool in line with the expectations-performance approach to the measure of quality perceptions and it is well documented in the marketing literature (Ennew et. al, 1993; Slack, 1994; Matzler et al., 2003); it is commonly used to provide directions for making strategic marketing decisions. Although the use of IPA lost favour in the last few years as consequence of the development of more complex quantitative methods (Duke, Mount, 1996), since this approach was proposed by Martilla and James (1977), academic literature is replete of studies which provide empirical application in several service settings, such as transportation (Huang, Hsu, 1996), banks (Josepph et al., 2005), universities (Pike, 2004), hospitality (Janes, Wisnom, 2003) and tourism (Fuchs, Weiermair, 2003). In particular, it has been argued that «for tourist destinations with rather little market research experience, Importance-Performance Analysis in its purest form can be used as a very powerful tool in marketing planning» (Hudson and Shephard, 1998).

In its typical version, IPA involves assessing different aspects of an organization's features in terms of customers' perceptions of performance and of the importance of these performance. Usually such features are represented in a 2x2 grid, where each quadrant can be summarized into a specific suggestion for management (Table 1): in particular, poor performance on extremely important dimensions indicate high priority in intervention for improvement (“Concentrate here” quadrant); excellent performance on highly important features represent opportunities for gaining or maintaining a competitive advantage (“Keep up the good work” quadrant); slightly important features that are excellent in performance imply that resources would be better employed elsewhere (“Possible

Overkill” quadrant); finally, fair performance on slightly important features suggest that it may not be necessary to focus additional effort to these attributes (“Low priority” quadrant).

Figure 1 – The IPA Scheme



Although the application of IPA has always been considered very simple and intuitive, over the years several different approaches to inferring priorities and measuring importance have emerged in the literature (Bacon, 2003; Fuchs, Weiermair, 2003). First, as noted by Bacon (2003), in most published IPA studies importance is evaluated through the use of direct ratings (e.g. 7-point scales anchored to “not at all important” and “extremely important”), while other studies estimate importance of services attributes through indirect measures such as standardised/unstandardised regression coefficients or simple correlation coefficients. As discussed above, in our research we decided to use indirect measures to infer importance scores, with an overall performance measure as the dependent variable and the performance scores of single features as the independent variables. Such approach is consistent with previous research (Lowenstain, 1995) and seems more suitable to reflect fully the importance of attributes that the consumers would not admit to or is not aware of and to avoid the important methodological problems of timing and placing discussed in the previous paragraph.

Second, positioning the vertical and horizontal axes on the grid is matter of judgment (Martilla, James, 1977, Bacon, 2003); specifically, in some applications the point where the quadrant lines cross is placed in the centre of the scale used (“scale-centred approach”), while in other studies the cross point is posited at the centre of data (“data-centred approach”) (Bacon, 2003). In our study the cross-point was set at the mean importance and mean performance values. Such approach is consistent with suggestions provided by Martilla and James in their seminal work (1977), arguing that «the value of this approach is in identifying relative than absolute levels of importance and performance».

4. Using the IPA in evaluating tourist satisfaction in Campania: methodology and results

We used the IPA for assessing tourists' perceptions of the region of Campania and the management priorities to be considered by policy makers in order to improve the destination attractiveness. The methodology of the empirical research was articulated in three main steps: (a) selection of variables to be included in the Importance-Performance analysis; (b) definition and execution of the survey; (c) data-analysis and presentation of results.

Commento [MRN1]: Campania Region

SELECTION OF VARIABLES

As for the selection of the determinants of tourist satisfaction, the choice has been made on the basis of previous literature (Chadee, Mattsson, 1996; Tribe, Snaith, 1998; Kozak, 2001; Fuchs, Weiermair, 2003); as result we decided to focus on the following attributes:

- 1) Accommodation and restaurants: it includes the comfort and cleaning of the hotel, the efficiency of contact personnel, the quality and variety of restaurants and the typicality of food and wine proposals;
- 2) Accessibility: it includes the efficiency and adequacy of parking, public transportation, car and walking streets
- 3) Tourism services: it includes the efficiency of tourism offices, infopoint and tourist indications
- 4) Entertainment facilities: it includes the quality of entertainment and shopping facilities
- 5) Quality of life: it includes the perceived level of personal safety, crowdedness and cleanliness
- 6) Heritage and cultural services: it includes the state of maintenance and protection of the historical items, the quality of routes and historical attractions for tourists, quality of initiatives and events aiming to promote the historical and artistic patrimony of the destination within tourists and residents.

SAMPLE AND QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey was conducted in 13 tourism destination in the region of Campania (Italy) during the summer-winter 2007. A sample of national and international tourists were intercepted while they were leaving the hotel for departure. As tourists had just completed their holiday visit, their perception of the facilities, attractions and customer services were still fresh in their minds. All individuals, including every member of a group or individual tourists were approached by professional interviewers and informed about the purpose of the study and then asked if they would participate in the survey.

A structured questionnaire was used as research instrument; according to previous studies conducted with analogous purposes, it consisted of three main sections:

- 1) visiting and consumption behaviours in Campania (i.e. frequency, motivations etc.);
- 2) perception of the tourism services and facilities provided in the region;
- 3) general demographic information (i.e. age, sex, occupation etc.).

All the items were adapted from scales developed in similar studies (Chadee, Mattsson, 1996; Kozak, 2001; Truong, Foster, 2006); besides to evaluate the single factors, visitors were also asked to provide an overall evaluation of the overall perceived satisfaction of their visit. All the evaluations were measured through a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

At the end of the period of the survey (July-December 2007) a total of 1.922 questionnaires were usable for data analysis. Sampled individuals were representative of the different visitors profile.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to obtain the IPA scheme, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were performed on available data; descriptive results are reported in Table 1. Perceived performance of the different items were obtained through the average scores reported from tourists' evaluations, while correlation coefficients between the single environmental factors and the overall perceived satisfaction were used as an implicit measure of the related importance. All the items identified have a positive impact on the perceived satisfaction, with significant level of correlation.

Commento [MRN2]: Perché non inserire maggiori dettagli sul campionamento???

Commento [MRN3]: .

Table 1 – Importance-Performance scores

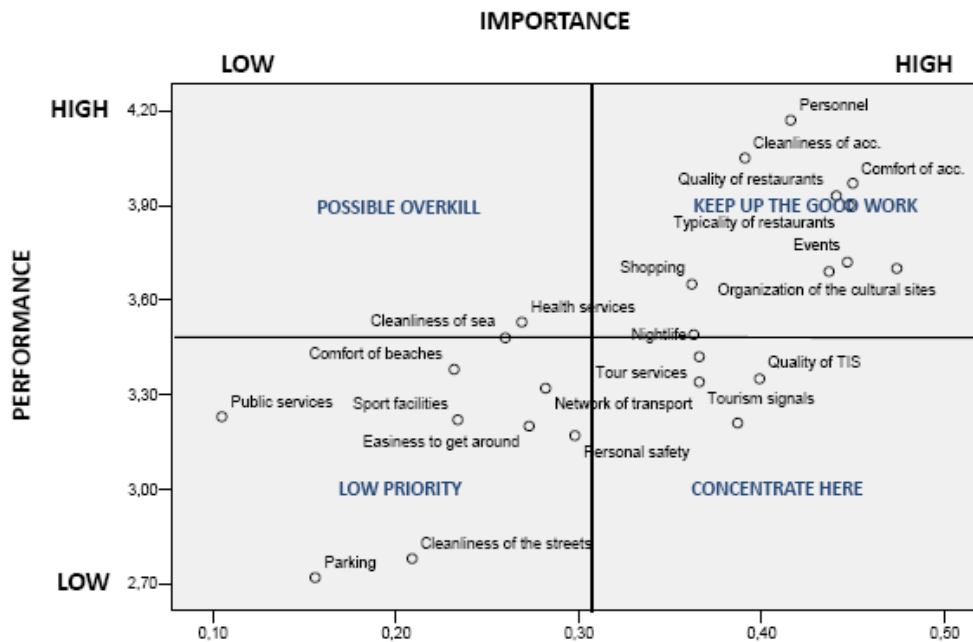
Item	Average Score	Dev. Standard	Corr. Pearson
Comfort of accommodation	3,97	0,913	0,450 (**)
Cleanliness of accommodation	4,05	0,898	0,391 (**)
Accommodation personnel friendliness and competence	4,17	0,875	0,416 (**)
Quality and variety of restaurants	3,93	0,942	0,441 (**)
Typicality of food and restaurants	3,90	0,956	0,448 (**)
Quality of public transport services	3,21	1,032	0,387 (**)
Network of local transport services	3,32	1,038	0,282 (**)
Easiness to get around	3,20	1,047	0,273 (**)
Quality of tourism information services	3,35	0,879	0,399 (**)
Availability of tourism signals	3,34	0,943	0,366 (**)
Availability of daily tour services	3,42	0,958	0,366 (**)
Comfort of beaches	3,38	1,047	0,232 (**)
Cleanliness of sea	3,48	1,020	0,260 (**)
Availability of health services and facilities	3,53	1,037	0,269 (**)
Sustainability of nightlife and entertainment	3,49	0,916	0,363 (**)
Availability of shopping facilities	3,65	0,931	0,362 (**)
Availability of sport facilities and activities	3,22	1,023	0,234 (**)
Historic and artistic heritage maintenance	3,70	0,964	0,474 (**)
Overall quality and organization of the cultural and historical sites	3,69	0,950	0,437 (**)
Availability and quality of events	3,72	0,890	0,447 (**)
Feeling of personal safety and security	3,17	1,067	0,298 (**)
Availability of parking	2,72	1,084	0,156 (**)
Overall cleanliness of the streets and public places	2,78	1,123	0,209 (**)
Availability of public services and facilities (i.e. toilette, banks, etc.)	3,23	0,958	0,105 (**)
Overall satisfaction toward the destination	3,84	0,875	-

(**)Significant Correlation at 0,01 level

Importance/Performance matrix is represented in figure 2. The average scores of importance and performance were used as reference in the grid. As shown in the

matrix, several items falls into the “Keep up the good work” quadrant: contact personnel, quality of accommodations and restaurants, entertainment opportunities, quality of events, maintenance and organization of cultural sites. On the other hand, the items falling into the “Concentrate here” quadrant include the quality of tourism information and touring services, the availability of tourism signals, and the concern for personal safety. On these elements local policy makers should concentrate their prior attention in order to improve the perceived tourism satisfaction.

Figure 2 – Importance-Performance matrix



5. Conclusions and implications

This study has significant implications both for practitioners and for academics. From the management prospective our results may provide a clear guidance for the improvement of tourist offer, by identifying the main area of intervention according to the tourists’ perceptions. In particular, in the case of Campania policy makers should devote more efforts to the enhancement of basic tourism services, such as information, signals and

tours. Such services are rated high in importance so they are perceived as relevant determinants of tourism experience. Moreover the concern for personal safety seems also a significant area for intervention.

The same framework used for the Region of Campania could be used in other tourist destination, as a benchmarking tool.

From the research prospective, this study Support the adoption of the IPA as an alternative/integrative framework for evaluating tourist satisfaction. Such framework can be utilized in further research on tourist satisfaction; for example new studies could investigate the impact of the selected tools on different segments (for example national vs. international tourists) and on different outputs (for example service quality, behavioural outcomes, etc.).

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