ANALYZING TOURISTS' SATISFACTION TOWARDS SERVICE QUALITY OF TRAVELING COMPANIES TO DEVELOP THE SUSTAINABLE ECO-TOURISM IN MEKONG-DELTA, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Situated in Southeast Asia where tourism activities are vibrant, Vietnam has advantages in geographical, economical and international exchanges for tourism development in accordance with the regional and worldwide tendencies. Eco-tourism is considered as an attractive tourism product that attract most domestic and foreign visitors. A great potential to develop eco-tourism is Mekong Delta in Vietnam with wet land ecosystem and salt-marsh forests. It also provides tourists with the unique quality products as well as attributes to advertising the beauty of Vietnam country. In addition, Mekong Delta creates the indirect and direct employment for tourism industry, entailing the domestic export and developing economic-politic situation within the area. This paper was conducted to explore factors affecting to service quality of traveling companies along Mekong Delta to improve the tourism sustainable development for the tourism industry in Vietnam. The author used quantitative approach to collect and analyze the data basing on four factors such as Tourism Infrastructure, Quality of service, Quality of products, and Prices to find out the reality significance and tourism companies' competence to have possible solutions towards the tourism sustainable development for Mekong Delta, Vietnam.

Keywords: Development, Infrastructure, Service, Sustainability, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism is considered as the key factor of service industries, and becomes the non-smoked industry that brings the most benefits to many countries in the world. It helps create foreign exchange, generating revenues as well as creating jobs by diversified effects towards a nation's economy as well as creating demands for other sectors related to this industry (Samimi, Sadeghi, & Sadeghi, 2017).

Nowadays, Vietnam was chosen as one of the 20 must-see destinations in the world in 2015 by the UK magazine Telegraph. In addition, Capital of Vietnam - Ha Noi - and Da Nang are voted as two of the top 10 most tourism attractions in Asia. A global magazine chose Ha Long Bay, Nha Trang Resort City and Son Doong Cave as the 10 most must-see impressive destinations in Vietnam. The more tourists Vietnam has, the more challenges Vietnamese Tourism Industry must face.

Mekong Delta in Vietnam has the potential of specialized eco-tourism and ethnological culture of people along rivers. It has the potentials with a variety of tourism products to serve international tourists in Mekong Delta. It includes the main tourism products such as eco-tourism of salt-marsh region in Dong Thap Muoi, U Minh forest, eco-tourism of Tien river mouth, convalescent eco-tourism in Phu Quoc island, Tourism and Commerce in Ha Tien border gate in An Giang, Can Tho center, visiting the cultural-history work of arts in Tien Giang, going on a pilgrimage to An Giang, Ha Tien, traveling and visiting traditional vocational village and culinary culture in Ben Tre, Tien Giang, Vinh Long, etc.

In addition, foreign tourists are served with specialized culinary products, entertainment by their needs. However, the ability of serving high-quality products in tourism has not been paid attention and invested much from local government along Mekong Delta. Especially, advantaged tourism products such as cultural-festival tourisms have not been developed identically in provinces. It also needs an oriented model for the whole region in Mekong Delta to implement.

Although Mekong Delta has many advantages in the tourism industry, it also has many difficulties and challenges in developing the tourism industry in Vietnam. Therefore, this investigation is designed to

ascertain the problems and offer possible solutions for traveling companies located along Mekong Delta to improve their service quality and products for developing the sustainable tourism in this region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The needs of Eco-tourism and practice towards Sustainable Tourism

The significant development of tourism industry within 5 decades was regarded as the most remarkable phenomena economically and socially in the 20th century. Many international visitors' arrivals created a progression from only 2.0 million in 1950 to 963 million of 2010. The average rate of annual development with more than 7% was showed that the average annual rate in the same period of economic growth was done better and better. Tourism sector has been regarded as the outstanding performances over all other economic ones and became the most effective activity of economy in the world (Samimi, Sadeghi, & Sadeghi, 2017).

Tourism is regarded as the most significant source of collecting foreign currency in some countries as well as become the leading light industry in many countries as well as in Vietnam.

Nowadays, sustainable development is related to our community with an important issue. Sustainability focuses on the resource conservation. Economics, society, and environment were the three key elements of the present model of sustainable development (Kenny, 2017). Following this issue, the Tourism of Canada attached development of sustainable tourism to manage all resources to benefit needs of economy, society and aesthetics while retaining integration of culture, ecology and biology (Cruz, 2003). The objective of ecotourism is also considered as the same line with definition of sustainability. The first factor to concentrate on performing was the sustainability of eco-tourism for the best practice.

According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism was related to as a travel to a natural region with responsibility for the conservation and the impact of environment as well as benefiting local people's culture, economy, society, and political landscape. It also met for tourist's enjoyment as well as his or her appreciation for the environment and education (Drumm & Moore, 2005; Kaur, 2006).

In addition, ecotourism was defined and has been misinterpreted as the currently ecotourism was considered as the main exploratory tour in a natural area, which has less concerning to conserve and sustain the environment (Lascurain, 2006). This is related to not having specific measures to instruct tourist' activities. Therefore, indicators which were the important tools needed for the sustainable tourism development (Jaini, Anuar & Daim, 2012).

According to the definitions of the terms related to ecotourism and its principles, the findings of Ziffer's study (1989) showed that only two ecotourism operators meeting all the criteria selected in this evaluation. Based on the same spectrum, 81% of the ecotourism operators which was surveyed in La Paz Bay in Mexico had reached reasonable standards of operation classified towards the ecotourism side of the field and provided direct benefits to the conservation of protected areas through minimum impact activities as well as building environmental awareness and being involved in research programs. Therefore, the concerning ecotourism operators addressed their expectations towards the different government and non-government institutions mentioned during interviews. The level of involvement of tour operators in either environmental education or research programs is quite complicated though the present survey confirmed that ecotourism was providing benefits to the conservation of the protected areas and fulfilled the expectations of the different stakeholders involved in ecotourism (Lopez, 2005).

There needs to be indicators to implement sustainable tourism by performing a clear instruction towards ecotourism practice. For these indicators, they are utilized to direct an effective system for monitoring activities related to environment (UN, 2007). A universal tourism indicator was developed by World Tourism Organization, which was applied to operate as a basis tool for sustainable tourism (Dymond, 1997). The eleven core indicators related to the three important elements such as society, economics, and environment towards sustainable tourism were stated clearly in these indicators. Complying with the elements of sustainable tourism are many indicators of WTO which are perceived as a basis system used as a beginning phase in developing the sustainable tourism (Jaini, Anuar, & Daim, 2012).

Sustainability of tourism is a complex process when both ensuring the long-term preservation of charm and guaranteeing that business firms investing in tourism could have their return on investment and growth of results in their organization. In a long process, the sustainable tourism development must be achieved the durable execution ecologically and economically as well as getting social and ethical fair related to the local population. The development of sustainable tourism identically must satisfy tourists' and locals' necessities and protect and expand any future possibilities. Based on the above concepts, sustainability can manage the resources in a way that people can fulfill human being's aspects towards economics, society, and aesthetics. At the same time, it may also have to reserve movements of basic ecology, diversity of biology as well as life-sustaining systems or integration of different culture from many countries as well as the ethnic groups. Again, this connection is complicated, interactive and associated among visitors, local population, business enterprises, natural tourism attractions (David, 2011).

Tourism development is related to the sustainability, if it makes possible to renew natural resources by considering the potentials of the given natural destination. Moreover, the management of destinations must perceive important segments towards tourism products that concern locals, habits, and ways of life as well as the local communities must advance equivalently to economic effects positively from tourism industry. The development of sustainable tourism should consider tourism as the oriented development connecting local people's interests and desires. The view of sustainability is regarded as tourism sector itself sustainably towards the given area. For example, the developing stage does not relate to the unfavorable alterations socially or physically though being accepted for considering tourism as an economic field. Normally, the balance ensured that tourism does not present other economic activities with competition for the natural resources within the destination (David, 2011).

Sustainable tourism emphasizes an increase or development without exploiting nature and constructing the natural environment as well as preserving the local communities' values related to culture, inheritance and creativity. Rules of developing the sustainable tourism are regarded as the continuous

and future usages towards resources of tourism towards the natural, historical, and cultural heritages, in which they will be applied to preserve in a manner so that they also bring benefits to the present societies as well. The important sectors of sustainable tourism are to depend on tourist attractions, and activities connecting to given locations for protecting natural environment, historical and cultural resources. If these issues were demolished or not focused suitably, the tourism sectors might not be flourished well. There may be no severe issues related to environment or socio-economics due to the result of tourism development within a destination or an area. In addition, when consumption of energy or production of wastes as well as the sustaining biodiversity are deduced, these can also help tourism managers and policy makers achieve this goal. People must pay attention to quality of the world sustained environment of the tourism regions, where it is able to be improved and developed. Many travelers in all over the world want to travel to the impressive, unpolluted and clean places to relax or discover the nature. To maintain and develop suitable conditions for tourism industry, local administrators should find suitable strategies to support and re-invest in resources. Each level of environmental quality is considered as the vital factor for local community. At the same level, visitors' satisfaction level must be maintained in a way that tourism attractions can bring back for their popularity and market value.

Research model and hypothesis

After having in-depth interview with tourism experts and collecting data from visitors of traveling companies located along Mekong Delta, the author proposed the research model and hypothesis as following:

Figure 1: The proposed research model – Author generated
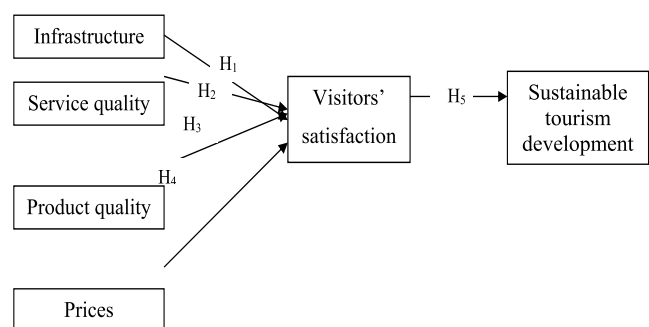
Hypothesis:

H$_1$: There is a positive effect between tourism infrastructure and visitors' satisfaction.

H$_2$: There is a positive effect between service quality and visitors' satisfaction.

H$_3$: There is a positive effect between quality of tourism products and visitors' satisfaction.

H$_4$: There is a positive effect between prices and visitors' satisfaction.

H$_5$: What is the relationship between visitors' satisfaction and sustainable tourism development?

METHODOLOGY

Research method

In this paper, the author applied the quantitative approach and the collected data analysis' technique is utilized to determine the validity and reliability of variables, analyzing the relationship between factors influencing service quality of traveling companies as well as using regression analysis and some descriptive statistical analysis through SPSS 20.0 to ascertain the research results for this study.

Measuring components

Table 1: Measuring components of the study

Coding	Factors
Tourism infrastructure	
TI1	Availability of airport, bus-station, wharf and port in Mekong Delta for tourists.
TI2	Convenience of facilities in public areas, sidewalks and rivers in Mekong Delta.
TI3	Sufficiency of free wi-fi installed in public places for tourists.
TI4	Sufficiency of tourism information centers for visitors in public places.
TI5	Having direction signs and quality of information for tourists.
TI6	The public transportation system in Mekong Delta for tourists and locals.
TI7	Road signs and directions to major tourist attractions with clear marks.
Service Quality	
SQ1	Behavior and professionalism of the Vietnamese tourist guides making tourists feel safe.
SQ2	Tourist guides' friendliness and enthusiasm
SQ3	Facilities at hotels making tourists comfortable and pleased during their holiday.
SQ4	Modern facilities of hotels in Mekong Delta.
SQ5	Good knowledge and fluency in foreign language of guides.
SQ6	Cleanliness and maintenance regularly of hotels in Mekong Delta.
SQ7	Variety of tourism attractions for tourists to choose.
SQ8	Friendliness and help from local people to visitors.
Coding	**Factors**
Product quality	
PQ1	Shortage of 4-5-star hotels for foreign visitors in Mekong Delta.
PQ2	Impoverishment towards tourism products of traveling companies in Mekong Delta.
PQ3	Paying attention to cultural and riverine activities of local people.
PQ4	Lack of special tourism products in Mekong Delta decreasing the attraction towards visitors.
PQ5	Need of innovative tours and re-training tour guides in traveling companies in Mekong Delta.
PQ6	High prices for tourism cultural activities without high-qualified services affecting tourists' choice.
PQ7	Competition of tour price creating poor services towards visitors.
Prices	
PR1	Rationality of tourism services towards foreign visitors.
PR2	Discrimination of prices between local visitors and foreign ones.
PR3	Differences towards prices of transportation, accommodation, and foods in provinces in Mekong Delta.
PR4	Having fixed prices when visitors join in local cultural activities.
PR5	Traveling companies offering low prices with high-quality services
PR6	Organizing inbound tours with higher price than outbound tours.
PR7	Traveling companies adding many fees for Mekong Delta tours.

Description of respondents' demographic characteristics

Table 2: Description of respondents' background information

Visitors	Nationality		Age			Monthly income		
	N	%	20-30	31-40	Over 40	$1,500.00	$2,000.00	<$2,500.00
Foreigners	165	55%	20	50	95	12	90	63
Vietnamese	135	45%	15	70	50	60	42	33
Total:	300	100%	35	120	145	72	132	126

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Describing samples

After collecting and analyzing the data, there were 300 accepted samples satisfying conditions to test measuring scale and the analyzed factors. As a result, there were 55% of foreign visitors and 45% of remainders being Vietnamese visitors. In addition, 11.7% of respondents are in the age from 20 to 30 years old, 40% of them from 31 to 40 years old, and 48.3% of remainders over 40 years old. Their monthly incomes also presented the trend of traveling habits when 42% of respondents can earn over $2,500 a month, 44% of them earning from $2,000 to $2,500 while the remainder (14%) have income from $1,500 to $2,000 a month.

Analyzing the measuring scale

The variables in the pilot run contained 31 items. The first computation in the pilot test resulted in the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.944. This is a good coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha values. However, Item-Total Correlation Statistics disqualified item IF3 with the value of -0.246 so that it was removed for the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to increase.

At the second computation for checking Cronbach's Alpha of components four main factors of tourism such as Tourism Infrastructure, Service Quality, Product Quality, and Prices, all factors have the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient bigger than 0.7. In detail, the Cronbach's Alpha factor of Tourism infrastructure was 0.896; Service quality was 0.885; Product quality was 0.909; and Prices was 0.914. Therefore, all the variables met the requirements and grouped into factors for the next step of analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

After analyzing the collected data, the result of EFA was conducted by 4 independent factors such as Tourism Infrastructure, Service Quality, Product Quality, and Prices after removing item TI3 (because the factor loading of these items was smaller than 0.3). These four factors were extracted with Eigenvalue at 8.778 and Variance Explained was 64.04%. Therefore, the Average Variance Extracted was accepted. At this point of time, all factor loading coefficients of factors were bigger than 0.5 (the smallest one was 0.612). The difference of factor loading of any variable among factors was bigger than 0.3. KMO coefficient was 0.879 (>0.5) and Barlett Test of Sphericity had statistic meaning (Sig = 0.000). Therefore, the result of EFA was passed and accepted.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.879
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5157.747
	df	378
	Sig.	0.000

Table 3: Model of summary of the study
Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.891[a]	0.794	0.791	0.099	1.078

a. Predictors: (Constant), TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICE QUALITY, PRODUCT QUALITY PRICES
b. Dependent Variable: I'm quite satisfied with the service quality of traveling companies in Mekong Delta.

Testing hypothesis of the research model

Table 4: The Coefficience among factors
Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.166	0.054		3.057	0.002		
INFRASTRUCTURE	0.234	0.013	0.485	18.068	0.000	0.970	1.031
SERVICE QUALITY	0.224	0.012	0.509	18.612	0.000	0.933	1.072
PRODUCT QUALITY	0.219	0.016	0.375	13.927	0.000	0.965	1.036
PRICES	0.239	0.013	0.518	18.867	0.000	0.927	1.078

a. Dependent Variable: I'm quite satisfied with service quality of traveling companies in Mekong Delta.

From the Table 4 above, it can be drawn out that hypothesis H_1 was accepted and good tourism infrastructure affected positively to travelers' satisfaction (β=0.485). Good tourism infrastructure will create visitors' perception and satisfaction towards service quality of tourism organizations. In other hands, modern and good infrastructure for tourism sector will also attract more foreign visitors as well as investors for Mekong Delta to develop this non-smoke industry. Therefore, local governments and traveling companies must revise their long-term strategies for the sustainable tourism development in Mekong Delta.

Hypothesis H_2 was also accepted, it meant that good service quality of traveling companies affected positively to visitors' satisfaction with β=0.509. In Vietnam, the tourism industry has been developed so fast that local governments and traveling companies could not catch up with new needs from visitors and society. Visitors also believed that a tourism brand name of any organization who has a good service quality was regarded as a reliable supplier. In addition, a good service quality brings a good impression to travelers about the landscape, culture, foods at that region as well as they might decide to return to travel

there.

Hypothesis H_3 was accepted. It meant that good quality of tourism products affected positively to visitors' satisfaction (β=0.375). It can be explained that when visitors received better tourism products, they would share information of products and tours to others with their real experience. Therefore, Mekong Delta will be the must-see destination for tourists all over the world.

The reasonable prices for tours in Mekong Delta affected positively to visitors' satisfaction most (β=0.518), therefore, H_4 was accepted. Service quality and prices of tourism organizations in Mekong Delta were regarded as the most effective factors towards travelers' belief and satisfaction. Therefore, if travelers believe and satisfy with services of traveling companies, they will immediately image about the brand name as well as introduce that brand name to their friends and others to the attractive tourism destinations. In the service industry in general and tourism sector, the most important issue is to create a good relationship with customers for a long time, remaining customers to use services in the future as well as attract more new customers for a brand name to create jobs, benefits for local community towards sustainable tourism development.

To measure factors' impact, standardized coefficients were used. The standardized coefficients which affected directly, indirectly and synthetically to variables in the research model were presented in Table 4. The mediated impact was one of variables affecting to a mediated variable before affecting to the next variable. In the author's research model, visitors' satisfaction was the mediated component.

Therefore, component of sustainable tourism development was affected directly from component of Infrastructure (β=0.485), Service quality (β=0.509), Product quality (β=0.375), and Prices (β=0.518). While visitors' satisfaction had the most positive effect to the sustainable tourism development. However, component of the sustainable tourism development was affected indirectly from Service quality (β=0.509) and Prices (β=0.518) strongly. The indirect effect of Product quality towards the sustainable tourism development was not significant (β=0.375). The result showed that direct effect of Infrastructure, Service Quality, Product Quality, and Prices to components of visitors' satisfaction was stronger than its effect to the development of tourism industry.

Therefore, enhancing the development of the sustainable tourism, local communities must start from the core main factors. That is the Infrastructure, Service Quality, Product Quality, and Prices and through these issues traveling companies and local governments can improve visitors' satisfaction and the sustainable tourism development for Vietnamese tourism industry as well as develop the Mekong Delta.

CONCLUSIONS

1. From the results of the investigation, Local Governments in Mekong Delta, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Mekong Delta as well as tourism companies, hotel managers, tourism attraction, transportation agencies must create and carry out high quality professional assessments of the current service quality of the tourism industry and implement the following policies:

   - Perfecting the basic infrastructure such as: transportation, power supply, telecommunication, financial banking system, insurance, and business enterprises including hotels, tourism companies, especially managing tourism locations in Mekong Delta.
   - Attracting the investment capital from domestic and foreign investors, transforming the economic structure to change tourism into the key economic influence for Mekong Delta.
   - Improving the tourism environment, changing to a new system of waste treatment in visitor attractions, providing food stands into a suitable place that are clean and green for the environment.
   - Planning and building the cultural, ecological tourism forms as well as protecting Mekong Delta's environment.
   - Local authority needs to organize programs aimed at introducing and promoting Mekong Delta's image and its typical tourism products at professional village fairs, tourism fairs, international tourism exhibitions, and marine festivals, as well as, encourage the participation of local cultural activities from communities.

2. Improve the training of the current work-force, upgrade the local people's education as well as promoting Mekong Delta tourism in websites and global tourism magazines, etc. as a must-see destination in the western region in Vietnam.

3. In addition, local governments along Mekong Delta should also compose a directing tourism board to increase cooperation between travelling companies and relevant agencies. This management board must carry out projects to re-invest in environment, improve human resources and implement the local strategy as well as help supervise tourism service quality of travel companies located in Mekong Delta.

4. Local governments and travel companies must be active in participating in international tourism fairs to promote Mekong Delta's image in the international market as well as create more tourism products, train and re-train human resources to serve the sustainable development projects in the future.

5. Quality of training programs for local human resources must meet the tourists' needs and society. Tourism training program needs to be improved professionally and practically. Therefore, local governments must pay attention to invest more in vocational schools and colleges in Mekong Delta to have skilled workers as well as high qualified work forces and good tour guides to serve tourism industry for this area.

6. The Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in Mekong Delta should organize more "Riverine Festival", "Traditional Culture events", and "Local cultural events" regularly to attract more visitors in the country as well as foreign tourists to advertise local cultural unique characteristics and help Mekong Delta become an attractive tourism destination in Vietnam as well as in the world.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDY

Future studies should be conducted with a more diversified sample of respondents from local tourists and foreign ones as well as economic experts to get valuable assessments of the effectiveness of tourism business which affect towards natural environment in Mekong Delta. Furthermore, this study was only based on the four main factors Infrastructure, Service Quality, Product Quality and Prices to evaluate the service quality of traveling companies locating in three provinces along Mekong Delta. Therefore, the author recommends that in future, researchers should evaluate service quality of tourism with other factors such as Perception, Forms of service, Government's support, and Competitive competence to have additional judgments to develop the sustainable tourism in Mekong Delta.

Moreover, this study was conducted to get information from domestic visitors and foreign ones coming to visit Mekong Delta, so the result may not be applied in other tourism provinces and cities in Vietnam with different tourism characteristics. In the future, the researcher recommends that other studies should compare the service quality of traveling companies along Mekong Delta with other tourism cities in Vietnam to have a general view of service quality in tourism industry to improve the sustainable tourism development in Vietnam.

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