



THE EFFECT OF DESTINATION QUALITY ON TOURIST SATISFACTION: A CASE OF CHINESE TOURISTS IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study aims to find out what constitutes the quality of Sabah as a tourist destination and how destination quality affects the satisfaction of Chinese tourists. Influenced by COVID-19, an online self-administered questionnaire was used, and the questionnaire was distributed via prominent Chinese social media software (Douyin, Little Red Book, Weibo, WeChat, QQ, etc.). There were 374 valid questionnaires. Using IBM SPSS 26.0, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the components of perceived destination quality. Additionally, the proposed hypotheses were tested. The results confirmed that destination quality comprises core tourism experience, accommodation and food, accessibility, amenities, information, and destination image. Meanwhile, Chinese tourists' satisfaction was influenced by core tourism experience, accommodation and food, information, and destination image. This suggests that there is no positive effect of accessibility and amenities on satisfaction for Chinese tourists in Sabah. The results of the study provide valuable suggestions for managers and related stakeholders of tourist destinations with marine resources to improve the level of service and increase tourist satisfaction.

Keywords: Destination Quality, Tourists' Satisfaction, Chinese Tourists

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INTRODUCTION

Research on tourist satisfaction is crucial to the development of tourism destinations and marketing strategies planning (Eusébio & Vieira, 2013). It has been proved that in the tourism industry, satisfied customers will lead to positive Word-of-mouth, recommend others, and repeat visits, which will increase the economic income of all sectors of the tourism industry (Žabkar, Brenčič & Dmitrović, 2010; Oviedo, Vega, Castellanos & Orgaz, 2019).

Tourists from different cultural backgrounds differ in the evaluation of service quality. Therefore, the cross-cultural perspective is also a hot spot of research (Bowen & Clarke, 2002; Crotts & Erdmann, 2000; Turner, Reisinger & McQuilken, 2001). Tourists from different countries emphasize all aspects of travel services. They may have different perceptions of the same service. Therefore, understanding the different cultural backgrounds of tourists will help managers and operators formulate more targeted marketing strategies.

According to the 2019 report of the China Tourism Association (2019), China's outbound tourism showed a continuous growth trend in 2018. Compared with the number of Chinese outbound tourists in 2017, there was a 14.7 percent increase. As of 2018 statistics, China has been the world's number one source country for outbound tourism for many consecutive years. The number of outbound Chinese tourists reached 150 million. Chinese tourist tends to choose Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries that have abundant marine resources and suitable travel prices (Jiang, 2017). With a growing number of Chinese outbound tourists and the considerable benefits brought by them, some researchers have begun to pay attention to the outbound travel of Chinese tourists. Chiu, Zeng and Cheng (2016) recommended that destination managers should have a better understanding of Chinese tourists' choice of destinations and their loyalty.

Sabah has a natural advantage in developing tourism. Due to the geographical advantage of having three seas facing the Sabah coastline, marine resources are abundant in Sabah. As a result, the west coast region of Sabah is home to many large freshwater wetlands. Among them, the Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre is designated as a Ramsar Wetland. The Klias Peninsula in Sabah has large tracts of tidal wetlands. Moreover, Sabah's biodiversity provides the necessary conditions for Malaysia to be one of the world's 12 biodiversity centers (Sabah State Government, 2020). Sabah with its myriad of ethnic cultures offers diverse experiences for the culture-seeking traveller. Sabah is in the northeast corner of Borneo, with a strategic location. It is well-connected by air to major cities in the Asia-Pacific region. This determines that it is easy for tourists from numerous Asia-Pacific cities can visit Sabah (Corridor, S.D., 2009). Sabah's tourism industry plays a vital role in Sabah's economy. In 2018, a total of 3.9 million tourists arrived in Sabah, creating a gross domestic product (GDP) of 8.3

billion ringgit and the number of Chinese tourists is close to half of the total number of inbound tourists (Sabah Tourism Board, 2019).

Table 1: Sabah Tourist Arrival by Nationality 2017 and 2018

Nationality	2017	2018
China	431,026	593,623
South Korea	310,802	337,100
Indonesia	115,105	109,771
Brunei	94,797	56,259
Taiwan, China	62,121	49,771
Philippines	32,159	33,245
UK & Ireland	31,793	28,611
Singapore	23,016	25,102
Australia	24,010	21,482
Japan	22,079	19,357

Source : Sabah Tourism Board, 2019

LITERATURE REVIEW

In tourism research, quality is usually defined as the gap between tourists' expectations and their perception of actual performance. This is because definitions of quality are mainly based on service marketing theory. Using the gap between expected and actual performance to evaluate quality in tourism research can be problematic. As compared to frequently purchased services, tourism services may not be produced as frequently. Therefore, it seems doubtful that tourists will develop precise evaluation criteria for tourism services or destinations. It may also be difficult for tourists to distinguish between expected and actual performance during or after a vacation, possibly because tourists take longer vacations (Kozak, 2000; Meyer & Westerberkey, 1996). Additionally, there is controversy over the use of the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL model may not be universally applicable. It has been criticized for being too general and only partially applicable to some industries (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993; Bhat, 2012; Park, Yi, & Lee, 2021; Baharum, Haron, Ishak, & Mansor, 2019).

Destination Quality

Seakhoa, Augustyn and Mason (2020) attempted to define destination quality from a holistic analytical perspective. In their viewpoint, tourism destinations should be evaluated as a whole unit, and that destination quality is determined by the sum of the individual components and the degree to which each component

contributes to the whole. However, the empirical evidence currently supporting this view is extremely limited. Le (2016) defines perceived destination quality as the experience, feelings, and overall evaluation of the destination by tourists. From a holistic perspective, Tosun, Dedeoğlu and Fyall (2015) suggest destination quality includes not only physical products but also services, and it can sub-divide further into destination service quality and destination natural quality.

Narayan, Rajendran, Sai and Gopalan (2009) identify dimensions of service quality (SQ) and their corresponding measurement variables in the tourism industry by focusing on India. They proposed service quality in tourism comprises 10 dimensions, namely core-tourism experience, information, hospitality, fairness of price, hygiene, amenities, value for money, logistics, food, and security. Tosun et al. (2015) proposed a two-dimensional destination quality. In other words, destination quality is composed of destination service quality and destination natural quality. Similarly, Dedeoğlu (2019) in his study subdivided destination quality into destination service quality and destination natural quality. The findings of Mukherjee, Adhikari and Datta (2018) confirmed that destination quality is composed of three sub-dimensions, namely quality of service (QSR), quality of destination feature (QDF) and quality of experience (QEX). Rajaratnam, Munikrishnan, Sharif and Nair (2014) proposed eight dimensions (Amenities, Accessibility and Logistics, Core Tourism Experience, Hygiene, Information, Security, Value for Money, and Hospitality) of service quality. Le (2016) conceptualizes destination quality as a formative construct consisting of five dimensions (transport, destination brand, attractions, hospitality, and entertainment). Seakhwa et al. (2020) reveal tourist destination quality should be authentic, safe, affordable, well-preserved, informative, relaxing, uncrowded, diverse, hospitable, all-weather, novel, and suitable for children.

Recent research, especially following 2020, has focused on both the changing nature of destination image and tourist expectations. Wang and Karl (2021), pointed to increasing concern about perceptions of safety and hygiene at destinations due to international health crises. Also, Albayrak et al. (2021) examined how a reduced density of tourism has meant 'quality of experience' is defined by how immersive and less crowded the experience is. All of this demonstrates that the need for destination-specific and updated models of satisfaction will continue, such as the one proposed for the case of Sabah.

Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction can be defined as the cognitive-affective state resulting from a tourist's experience at a destination (San, Herrero & García, 2019). A growing number of studies have rejected the cognitive perspective and argued that customers' emotional states can represent tourist satisfaction (Brunner, Peters &

Strobl, 2012). That is, satisfaction can refer to a psychological outcome of a tourist's experience at a destination (Lee, Lee, & Park, 2014; Oviedo et al., 2019). Satisfaction is considered in some studies as a customer response to product or service satisfaction, emphasizing customer emotions and is a psychological concept (Chi & Qu, 2008). According to Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur and Leistriz, (2013, p. 95) tourist satisfaction is defined as “the overall contented feeling that a tourist felt from visiting a destination, which fulfilled his travel expectations and needs”. Chiu et al. (2016) proposed that tourist satisfaction is the result of comparing tourists' expectations of a destination with their actual experience. Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt (2011) mentioned that there are two common expressions of satisfaction, the former is transient (transaction-specific) satisfaction, which refers to the evaluation of an activity or behaviour when a single service transaction occurs, and the satisfaction at this moment should be investigated immediately after each transaction activity occurs. Another term for overall satisfaction or what can be called cumulative satisfaction refers to the assessment of service encounters after all purchase behaviours have been completed.

Hypotheses

Narayan et al. (2009) defines core tourism experience (CTE) as the common benefits that most tourists may need to enjoy. Tourists can authentically experience the natural environment, life, culture and atmosphere of the destination, or visitors can explore nature in exciting ways, such as hiking, visiting waterfalls or forests, some visitors may have a keen interest in various landmarks, etc. Rajaratnam et al. (2015) confirmed that core tourism experience is an important factor influencing tourist satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes:

H1. There is a positive impact of core tourism experience (CTE) on tourist satisfaction.

Accommodation services are one of the basic tourism activities. It is essential for a quality destination to be able to provide standard accommodation, particularly for out-of-country tourists. In study on tourism in Malaysia, Abdullah and Lui (2016) noted that the quality of accommodations is an important factor in determining the satisfaction of tourists. Tosun et al. (2015) argued that the quality of accommodation in a destination should be measured in terms of indicators such as cleanliness, safety situation, service level, staff service attitude, and speed of check-in and check-out. In perceived destination quality, accommodation is considered as one of the measurements. Accommodation is an important determinant of tourist satisfaction, and it has been tested in several

studies (Tosun et al., 2015; Le & Dong, 2017; Chin et al., 2018). Cuisine enables tourists to experience the food culture of a destination and engage in pleasurable sensory experiences, all of which can contribute to the formation of unforgettable memories. As an essential aspect of attracting tourists to a destination, cuisine not only affects tourist satisfaction but is also a key factor in a destination's success (Babolian, 2016). Biswas, Deb, Hasan and Khandakar (2021) suggest that destination managers should pay attention to accommodation and food in the destination. Previous studies have confirmed that accommodation and food (AAF) services have a significant impact on satisfaction (Hui et al., 2007; Le & Dong, 2017; Biswas et al., 2021). Hence, this study proposes:

H2. There is a positive impact of accommodation and food (AAF) on tourist satisfaction.

Accessibility at the destination is important to tourists (Zabkar et al., 2010). Tourists are concerned about the transportation and logistics of their destinations (Kozak, 2001). Some researchers have used "transportation" instead of "accessibility" in measuring destination quality (Le & Dong, 2017; Tosun et al., 2015; Le, 2015), but in essence, both are measures of the accessibility of a destination. The accessibility of transportation, for example, the frequency of local transportation services, is also represented by assessing the accessibility of local transportation. Previous studies also highlight the important role of transport safety in their assessment (Le, 2015; Le & Dong, 2017). Hence, this study proposes:

H3. There is a positive effect of accessibility (ACC) on tourist satisfaction.

Amenities, used by some researchers as one of the measures of tourists' perceptions of the quality of the destination. In addition to food, accommodation, and transportation, there are some needs that are inevitable for tourists, especially for international tourists, such as telecommunications and Internet services, currency exchange in major locations, and some banking services, and tourists may also need to buy some medicines or daily necessities (Narayan et al., 2009). In addition, some essential public facilities, such as toilets, are also indispensable for travellers. Amenities or facilities are one of the elements of a tourist destination that can satisfy the temporary needs of tourists in the destination (Hermawan, Wijayanti & Nugroho 2019). Therefore, this study proposes:

H4. There is a positive effect of amenities (AME) on tourist satisfaction.

Information on how to get to the destination, where to eat, and where to stay all has an impact on the visitor's experience. Seakhwa et al. (2020) identified information to mean that a quality tourism destination is a place that has tourist-friendly information and communication. In previous studies, it was found that a portion of the studies used information as a dimension of perceived quality (Narayan et al., 2009; Rajaratnam et al., 2014; 2015; Seakhwa et al., 2020; Mukherjee et al., 2018). Narayan et al. (2009) mentioned airports, places to stay, and attractions, which are relatively more important for tourists to get information. Also, most of the tourists expect the services of a guide to explain the landmarks and buildings. Seakhwa et al. (2020) mentioned that the signage of tourist attractions should be clear. Besides, language is the most direct and important way to get information. Narayan et al. (2009) and Seakhwa et al. (2020) both emphasize the importance of language when assessing the dimension of information. Tosun et al., (2015) used language as one of the dimensions of perceived service quality. Therefore, this study proposes:

H5. There is a positive effect of information (INF) on tourist satisfaction.

The destination image dimension represents the overall impression of a destination (cleanliness and safety) and the evaluation of the hospitality of the people at the destination. Hui, Wan, and Ho (2007) and Ragavan, Subramonian, and Sharif (2014) use image and local people as dimensions to measure perceived destination quality. Le (2015) assessed destination brand by detecting the hospitality, elegance, and friendliness of local people when measuring destination quality. Le and Dong (2017) found that at the destination level, the friendliness and hospitality of locals had the greatest impact on European tourists' satisfaction. Hui et al. (2007) also confirmed that cleanliness and safety of a destination have a positive impact on tourist satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes:

H6. There is a positive effect of destination image (DIM) on tourist satisfaction.

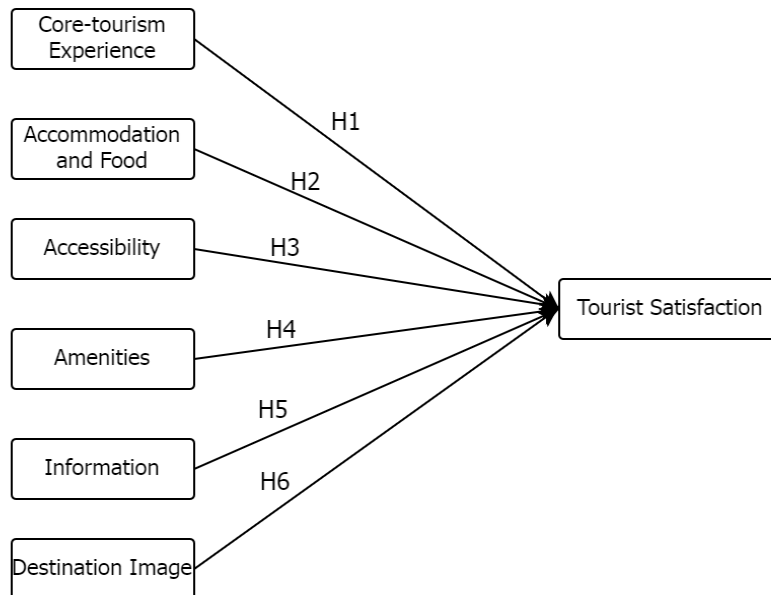


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Procedure

This study focuses on Chinese tourists. Before COVID-19, the proportion of Chinese tourists was close to half of the total tourist arrivals in 2017 and 2018. This indicates that the Chinese market is an important submarket for the tourism industry in Sabah. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend Chinese tourists' perceptions of tourism in Sabah and to assess the factors influencing the satisfaction of Chinese tourists. To test the proposed hypothesis, a sample of Chinese tourists who are over 18 years old and have visited Sabah at least once was surveyed. Due to the impact of COVID-19, we chose to distribute the questionnaire online, and the distribution period was from October 2022 to February 2023. Respondents of this study consisted of mainland Chinese tourists who visited Sabah in 2017 and were included in the study. A convenient sampling method was used, and the questionnaires were distributed on Chinese social media (Douyin, Little Red Book, Weibo, WeChat, QQ, etc.). Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire to collect data. This study utilized a convenience sampling method to distribute a self-administered online questionnaire via major Chinese social media platforms. While this approach was pragmatic given the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, it presents certain

limitations. First, convenience sampling has implications for sample representativeness, which has implications for the generalization of the research findings exclusively to the overall target population of Chinese tourists who had visited Sabah. Secondly, the participants were mainland Chinese tourists who visited Sabah prior to the period of data collection of between October 2022 through to February 2023 (with some respondents, visiting as early as 2017). Accordingly, the answers can reflect the retrospective recall bias associated with the tourist's prior experience. The tourist's memory of their experience may have diminished or have subsequently been affected which would have an influence on their judgment of their perceived destination quality, and, satisfaction rationale.

In the present investigation, 450 questionnaires were distributed and 392 were returned, giving an 87.11% response rate. There were 374 valid questionnaires returned, with an effective return rate of 83.11%. All ethical standards related to academic research were strictly adhered to in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the online self-administered questionnaire. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and all data were anonymous, with confidentiality preserved. As the data collection was anonymous and online, institutional ethical clearance was not formally sought, as the data collected were non-sensitive and anonymous, compliant with norms for research of this nature.

Measure of the Constructs

Destination Quality

The present study proposes six dimensions of perceived destination quality adapted from previous studies (Zain, Zahari, Hanafiah & Zulkifly, 2016; Narayan et al., 2009; Le & Dong, 2017; Tosun et al., 2015; Seakhwa et al., 2020), namely core destination experience, food and accommodation, accessibility, amenities, information, and destination image. CTE is measured by eight items; AAF is measured by seven items; ACC is measured by four items; AME is measured by five items; INF is measured by five items; DIM is measured by four items. The study adopted a 5-point Likert scale (from completely disagree to agree) to measure perceived destination quality.

Tourist Satisfaction

In this study, satisfaction was measured using five question items mainly based on the understanding of satisfaction by Zabkar et al. (2010), Le (2016), and Eid (2015). These items are marked on how much the tourists agree with the following question items: "I feel delighted about this destination", "I am satisfied with my decision to visit Sabah", "Compared to my expectations, I was satisfied

with my trip to Sabah”, “This experience is exactly what I needed”, “This was a pleasant visit”.

Data Analysis

This study used descriptive statistics (both frequency and distribution) to present the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This study used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to detect dimensional components of destination quality. Regression analysis used IBM SPSS 26.0 was conducted to test the research model and the hypotheses proposed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

The results (Table 2) indicate that 154 males and 220 females were interviewed, accounting for 42.1% and 58.8% of the total number of interviewees, respectively. In terms of age, the number of Chinese tourists between 18 to 28 years old was the highest, totaling 193 and accounting for 51.6% of the total population; the number of Chinese tourists between 29 to 39 years old accounted for 40.1% of the total population; and the population over 40 years old accounted for the smallest proportion, 8.3%, of the total population. In terms of marital status, the number of unmarried individuals is considerable, constituting 64.4% of the population. In terms of education, the number of Chinese tourists with undergraduate and graduate degrees is higher, accounting for 44.1% and 43% respectively; the number of Junior College graduates accounts for 9.1%, and those with less than a high school diploma account for 3.5%.

Table 2: Demographic Information (n=374)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	154	41.2
Female	220	58.8
Age		
18 to 28 years	193	51.6
29 to 39 years	150	40.1
40 to 50 years	31	8.3
Marital Status		
Unmarried	241	64.4
Married	133	35.6

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Academic Qualifications		
Below high school	4	1.1
High school and Technical Secondary School	10	2.7
Junior College	34	9.1
Bachelor's Degree	165	44.1
Postgraduate and above	161	43

Source: Author's calculation

Factor Analysis and Validity and Reliability of Destination Quality

Before testing the relationship between perceived destination quality and tourist satisfaction, the dimensions of perceived destination quality need to be tested, Exploratory factor analysis was employed in this study. According to Kaiser (1974), KMO values less than 0.5 indicate unsuitable data for exploratory factor analysis. The KMO value of destination quality is 0.934, which indicates that the data are appropriate for exploratory factor analysis. The total variance explanation indicates that there are six characteristic roots extracted greater than 1; the cumulative variance explanation is 75.379, which is greater than 50%. The factor loading value of INF1 (Availability of tourist information center at place of stay) was less than 0.5. Other than that, all the question items were loaded on the proposed dimensions. The results of the exploratory factor analysis indicate good validity of the scale for measuring perceived destination quality.

The most prevalent method for measuring reliability is the Cronbach's reliability coefficient method. Cronbach's coefficient of reliability must be between 0 and 1, and a larger coefficient indicates greater reliability. In this study, the reliability of each variable of the formal research was examined using SPSS 26.0. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all six dimensions of destination quality are greater than 0.8, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis for Destination Quality

Factors	Factor loading	Eigen value	cumulative explained variance	Cronbach (α) value
Factor 1: Core-tourism Experience		14.944	45.286	0.941
(CTE1) Natural and unique marine resources	0.897			
(CTE2) Comfortable weather and climate	0.747			
(CTE3) Marine activities	0.881			
(CTE4) Enjoy the marine activities	0.855			

Factors	Factor loading	Eigen value	cumulative explained variance	Cronbach (α) value
(CTE5) Various landmarks	0.732			
(CTE6) Cultural heritage	0.689			
(CTE7) Get close to nature	0.871			
(CTE8) Opportunities for adventure activities	0.804			
Factor 2: Accommodation and Food		4.079	57.648	0.95
(AAF1) Accommodation is comfortable	0.797			
(AAF2) Accommodation is clean	0.767			
(AAF3) Attitude of the service staff	0.789			
(AAF4) Room safety	0.757			
(AAF5) Reasonable accommodation prices	0.733			
(AAF6) Food variety	0.718			
(AAF7) Reasonable food price	0.665			
Factor 3: Accessibility		2.002	63.715	0.928
(ACC1) Local transportation accessibility	0.826			
(ACC2) service attitude of drivers	0.809			
(ACC3) Transport safety	0.826			
(ACC4) Price worthiness of transport	0.736			
Factor 4: Amenities		1.504	68.383	0.888
(AME1) Internet connection is smooth	0.572			
(AME2) Bank facilities are easy to find	0.558			
(AME3) Toilet facilities are adequate	0.809			
(AME4) Cleanliness of toilets	0.731			
(AME5) Mobile payment	0.768			
Factor 5: Information		1.367	72.525	0.902
(INF1) Tourist information centre				
(INF2) Clear signs at attractions	0.706			
(INF3) Communicate in a common language (e.g. English)	0.742			

Factors	Factor loading	Eigen value	cumulative explained variance	Cronbach (α) value
(INF4) Service staff can speak Chinese	0.776			
(INF5) Tourist information can understand	0.799			
Factor 6: Destination Image		1.061	75.739	0.912
(DIM1) Safe place	0.651			
(DIM2) Clean place	0.65			
(DIM3) Friendly	0.809			
(DIM4) Hospitable	0.783			
Factor 4: Amenities		1.504	68.383	0.888
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(DIM3) Friendly	0.809			
(DIM4) Hospitable	0.783			

Note: KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy .934.

Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < .001$)

Hypotheses Testing

Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate the results of the hypotheses of perceived destination quality on tourist satisfaction. The R^2 value of 0.535 in Table 4 indicates that the dimension of perceived destination quality explains 53.5% of tourist satisfaction, while the R^2 value after adjustment is 0.527. The model is significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that at least one of the six dimensions of perceived destination quality affects tourism satisfaction. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.628 is close to 2, indicating that the samples are independent. According to Lewis-Beck and Lewis-Beck (2015), a VIF less than three indicates the absence of multicollinearity. Table 5 reveals that all VIF values are less than three, indicating that there is no multicollinearity issue.

Table 4: Parametric Test

R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate	DW	F	Sig.
0.731	0.535	0.527	0.56	1.628	70.306	0

Source: Author's calculation

Table 5 shows the results of the hypothesis. The dimensions of perceived destination quality, namely core tourism experience (CTE), accommodation and food (AF), information (INF), and image (IM), all passed the significance test at a significance level of 0.5, indicating that these dimensions have a significant influence on tourist satisfaction.

H1 of this study proposed that there is a positive influence of core tourism experience on tourist satisfaction. The results supported H1 ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.05$), that is, the core tourism experience was confirmed to have a significant positive impact on tourist satisfaction (Rajaratnam et al., 2015). Accommodation and food have been shown to have a significant positive impact on tourist satisfaction (Hui et al., 2007; Le & Dong, 2017). The results support the H2 that there is a significant positive effect of accommodation and food on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast to previous findings (Ozturk & Gogtas, 2016; Vareiro, Ribeiro, & Remoaldo, 2017; Biswas & Rashid, 2020), the result rejected H3. The result showed that there is no effect of accessibility on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = -0.04$, $p > 0.05$). Hermawan et al. (2019) confirmed that there is a significant positive effect of amenities on tourist satisfaction. However, H4 was rejected. Thus, it was concluded that there is no positive effect of amenities on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.038$, $p > 0.05$). The information dimension was confirmed to have a positive effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.05$) and therefore H5 was supported. H6 proposed that there is a positive effect of destination image on tourist satisfaction. The results support H6 ($\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.05$), which suggests that there is a positive effect of destination image on tourist satisfaction (Hui et al., 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Le & Dong, 2017).

The rejection of H3 (Accessibility) and H4 (Amenities) provides important information regarding the planning of Sabah as a destination. There is no positive effect of these two factors on the satisfaction of Chinese tourists. This is the opposite of several past studies. It indicates that, for this market segment, these two factors are regarded as basic 'hygiene factors', or basic necessities and not satisfies. In other words, very poor accessibility or amenities would cause dissatisfaction, but simply meeting a minimum standard would provide no added value to overall satisfaction level. This conclusion leads to a few potential underlying explanations such as: (a) Considering that tourists travel to Sabah, a place known for one of its core tourism assets, i.e., natural marine environment resources, any assessments of accessibility and general public facility should have been muted as expectations towards local and public transport accessibility to core tourism experiences compared to developed urban tourist cities; (b) The travel experience for most Chinese tourists to destinations is organized group travel, with travel logistics (accessibility) and core destination facility augmentation (amenities) primarily organized in advance without being individually assessed. Thus, accessibility and amenities would be regarded as minimum tourist satisfaction variables. Tourists prioritize the Core Tourism Experience and Destination Image (DIM) of Sabah. If so, then destination managers should inform resource investment decisions to prioritize core uniqueness on enhancement of marine activities and friendliness image 18 of safety, rather than sinking excessive resources.

Table 5: Regression Model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std.Error	β			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.543	0.199		2.726	0.007		
CTE	0.157	0.044	0.149	3.594	0.000	0.737	1.356
AAF	0.289	0.056	0.298	5.171	0.000	0.381	2.626
ACC	-0.035	0.043	-0.04	0.812	0.417	0.517	1.936
AME	0.039	0.055	0.038	0.71	0.478	0.439	2.28
INF	0.194	0.057	0.179	3.407	0.001	0.459	2.178
DIM	0.288	0.059	0.264	4.911	0.000	0.438	2.283

Notes: CTE: Core Tourism Experience; AAF: Accommodation and Food; ACC: Accessibility; AME: Amenities; INF: Information; DIM: Destination Image
Source: Author's calculation

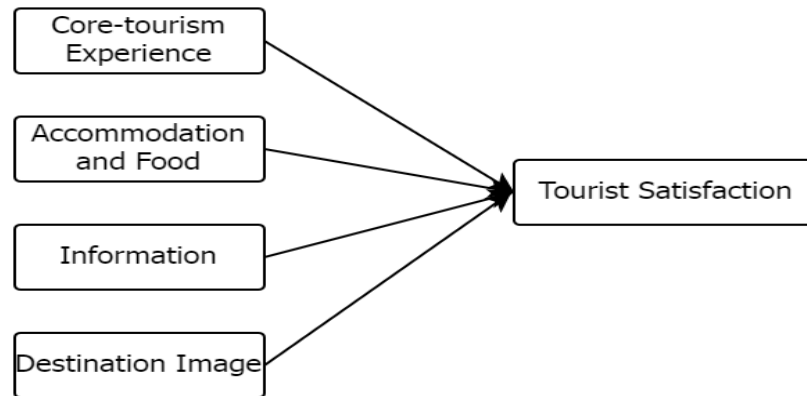


Figure 2: Revised Conceptual Framework

CONCLUSION

This study tested the components of perceived destination quality through exploratory factor analysis. The results found that perceived destination quality was composed of six dimensions (core tourism experience, accommodation and food, accessibility, amenities, information, and destination image). The measurement scale of Sabah as a tourist destination needs to highlight the uniqueness of Sabah's tourism resources and cannot be directly applied to the current measurement scale of perceived destination quality proposed by a particular scholar. Reviewing the literature related to perceived destination quality as well as the literature on tourism research in Malaysia, this study proposes a measurement scale for Sabah as a tourist destination. The second point is that the important role of perceived destination quality on destination tourism development is recognized and reconfirmed. The empirical results of this study reconfirm that the quality of a destination has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, particularly for certain tourist destinations with marine resources. For these destination tourism managers and related stakeholders, it is more important in practice to explore the tourism characteristics of the destination, to improve the core tourism experience, to improve the quality of accommodation and the dissemination of food culture and the service capacity of related industries. Managers also need to improve the destination's ability to provide effective information and need to initiate positive interactions between citizens and tourists to improve and maintain a good image of the destination. Specifically, this can be done in the following ways. Using a sample of Chinese visitors in Sabah, this study examined the relationship between perceived destination quality and tourist satisfaction. Future research can be applied to additional marine resource-based destinations to evaluate the proposed

destination quality dimensions and to determine which factors influence the satisfaction of Chinese tourists.

This study offers a well-timed insight and distinctive contribution to the literature on tourism satisfaction, by creating and validating a six-dimensional perceived destination quality scale for a marine-based destination, Sabah. Significantly, this study's empirical results reveal the most important dimensions of satisfaction (core tourism experience, accommodation and food, information, and destination image) for the highly valued market of Chinese tourists. Considerably, this study's empirical results highlight the non-significance of accessibility and amenities for this unique market and provides actionable and targeted insights for the branding of the destination and the recovery of the destination after the pandemic. It assists managers in focusing resources on experiential, image and service-based dimensions rather than resource-heavy infrastructure or logistics which is vital for enhancing Chinese tourist satisfaction and ultimately achieving sustainable market recovery after COVID-19.

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