

Islamic and Muslim tourism: service quality and theme parks in the UAE

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to identify dimensions of theme park quality from an Islamic perspective and develop a framework to examine the interrelationships between theme park service quality dimensions, visitor delight and visitor loyalty in theme parks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).*

Design/methodology/approach – *The study is based on a detailed literature review and analysis of visitors' comments on [TripAdvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com) about their experience in theme parks in the UAE.*

Findings – *Theme park service quality can be assessed across 4 main dimensions (physical environment, interaction, consumables and access) and 13 sub-dimensions. A relationship is proposed between these dimensions and visitors' delight, with visitor loyalty a consequence of visitor delight. Nationality is proposed to have a moderating effect on the delight-loyalty relationship.*

Originality/value – *This study attempts to propose a model for theme park service quality that reflects both traditional dimensions of service quality and dimensions related to Islamic attributes. It is one of very few attempts to investigate theme park visitors' perception of service quality and its relation to delight and loyalty in the UAE. It is also, as far as the authors are aware, the first study to investigate the moderating effect of nationality on the delight-loyalty relationship.*

Keywords *United Arab Emirates (UAE), Content analysis, Loyalty, TripAdvisor, Nationality, Delight, Islamic attributes, Theme park, Service quality*

Paper type *Conceptual paper*

摘要

目的：本文的目的是从伊斯兰世界的视角识别主题公园质量的维度，并建立一个可用以检验阿联酋主题公园服务质量维度、游客愉悦度和游客忠诚度之间的相互关系的框架。

设计/方法/办法：这项研究基于详细的文献回顾，以及对游客在[TripAdvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com)上分享的关于阿联酋主题公园体验的评论的分析。

发现：主题公园服务质量可以从四个主要维度（物理环境、互动、消耗品和可进入性）和13个子维度进行评估。本文提出了这些维度与游客愉悦感之间的关系，其中，游客忠诚是游客愉悦感的结果。国籍对快乐-忠诚关系有一定的调节作用。

关键词：本研究试图构建一个主题公园服务品质的模型，该模型既反映传统服务品质的维度，又反映与伊斯兰属性相关的维度。在调查主题公园游客对服务质量的感知，及其与阿联酋人的愉悦感和忠诚度的关系方面，本文也是学术界为数不多的尝试之一。据我们所知，本文也是第一个探讨国籍对快乐-忠诚关系的调节作用的研究。

关键词：主题公园，服务质量，快乐，忠诚度，伊斯兰特征，内容分析，猫途鹰评论，国籍，阿拉伯联合酋长国（阿联酋）

纸张类型：概念文件

Resumen :

Propósito: *El objeto de este artículo es identificar las dimensiones en la calidad de los parques temáticos desde una perspectiva islámica y desarrollar un marco, para examinar las interrelaciones entre las dimensiones de la calidad del servicio de los parques temáticos, el disfrute de los visitantes y la lealtad de los mismos, en los parques temáticos de los Emiratos Árabes Unidos.*

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Diseño/metodología/enfoque: El estudio se basa en una detallada revisión bibliográfica y un análisis de los comentarios de los visitantes en *TripAdvisor.com*, sobre su experiencia en parques temáticos en los Emiratos Árabes Unidos.

Resultados: La calidad del servicio en los parques temáticos, se puede evaluar en cuatro dimensiones principales (entorno físico, interacción, consumibles y acceso) y 13 dimensiones secundarias. Se propone una relación entre estas dimensiones y el disfrute de los visitantes, con la lealtad del visitante como consecuencia del disfrute. Se propone que la nacionalidad tenga un efecto moderador en la relación disfrute-lealtad.

Originalidad/valor: Este estudio intenta proponer un modelo para la calidad del servicio en parques temáticos, que refleje tanto las dimensiones tradicionales de la calidad del servicio, como las dimensiones relacionadas con los atributos islámicos. Es uno de los pocos trabajos que intenta investigar la percepción de los visitantes de los parques temáticos, sobre la calidad del servicio y su relación con el disfrute y lealtad en los EAU. También es, por lo que sabemos, el primer estudio que investiga el efecto moderador de la nacionalidad en la relación disfrute-lealtad.

Palabras clave : Emiratos Árabes Unidos (EAU), Análisis de contenido, Lealtad, *TripAdvisor*, Nacionalidad, Delicia, Atributos islámicos, parque temático, calidad de servicio

Tipo de papel : Papel conceptual

Introduction

Religion has been an important part of life around the world for many centuries. From as early as 1902, psychologists have stressed the importance of studying religion to better understand human nature and consumer behavior (Jeans, 1902; Mathras *et al.*, 2016). However, to date very few scholars have researched the effects of specific religious beliefs, rituals and values on consumer behavior (Mathras *et al.*, 2016). Most studies on religion have focused on the intensity to which an individual participates, and believes in their religion (Sigfusdottir *et al.*, 2007; Vitell, 2009) or what is sacred in modern life (Belk *et al.*, 1989). The study of religion in marketing has largely been confined to the topic of segmentation (Choi, 2010; Eid and El-Gohary, 2015). Studying the effect of religion on consumer behavior is important because consumers express their beliefs via their consumption choices (Coşgel and Minkler, 2004). For example, research has shown that religious affiliation and level of religiosity influence consumer product/store switching behavior (Choi, 2010). Religion (specifically Islam) also has the potential to influence destination choice (Battour *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019), and religious and cultural background affect the assessment of service quality (Gayatri and Chew, 2013).

Service quality is one of the most researched topics in marketing (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019; Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2018) because of its impact on success factors, such as perceived value (Wu *et al.*, 2018), customer satisfaction (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Ryu and Han, 2010; Shonk and Chelladurai, 2008), customer delight (Ali *et al.*, 2018) and loyalty (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2018). However, most service quality measurement models (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) have been developed in a western context and may not be suitable for generalizing to non-western and particularly Islamic contexts because of the differences in culture.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), where Islam is the predominant religion has firmly established itself as a global holiday destination. The total contribution of the travel and tourism sector to the UAE's GDP was US\$43.3bn in 2016 and this is forecast to rise by 4.9 per cent per annual to US\$72bn by 2027 (Government.ae, 2018). Theme parks are considered a good way to attract tourists, as well as providing leisure and recreation facilities for residents.

Milman (2009) suggested that the success of theme parks depends on good service quality. This study attempts to propose a model for theme park service quality reflecting both traditional dimensions of service quality and dimensions related to Islamic attributes. Traditionally, customer satisfaction has been seen as an important consequence of service quality and an antecedent of loyalty (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017). More

recently, however, researchers have shifted their focus toward the concept of customer delight and its effect on customer loyalty (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2018). The aim of this paper was:

- to identify Islamic dimensions of theme park quality;
- to develop a framework to examine the interrelationships between theme park service quality dimensions, customer delight and customer loyalty in theme parks in the UAE; and
- to examine the moderating effect of nationality on the relationship between delight and loyalty.

Literature review

Conceptualization and measurement of service quality

Service quality is the extent to which customers' perceptions of service satisfy and/or exceed their expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Several models have been proposed, such as Grönroos' (1984) two-dimensional model and a five-dimensional model called SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Modified versions of both models have been proposed (Tsang *et al.*, 2012). Brady and Cronin (2001, p. 36) defined service quality as: "either or all of a customer's perception regarding:

- an organization's technical and functional quality;
- the service product, service delivery and service environment; and
- the reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances and tangibles associated with a service experience."

Generic service quality models (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) have been widely used, including on theme park service quality (Tsang *et al.*, 2012). However, these models have some theoretical and practical problems. For example, the way that customers evaluate service quality depends on the service context, including service type and customer culture, and religion (Battour *et al.*, 2014). Generic models may also fail to consider information that is important in specific contexts (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012; Sumaedi and Yarmen, 2015). There may, therefore, be issues related to theme park service quality that are not covered by the generic models. One of the fundamental challenges for theme park operators is the culture and religion of their target customers. Islam is the second largest religion in the world (Pewresearch, 2017), and places some particular demands on its adherents, so theme parks may want to consider customer needs and service quality dimensions related to Islamic attributes.

Service quality models for theme parks

Several researchers have investigated theme park service quality. Some used SERVQUAL (O'Neill and Palmer, 2003) and others developed models covering specific characteristics of theme parks. For example, Tsang *et al.* (2012) proposed a theme park service quality scale (THEMEQUAL). However, these models have tended to cover dimensions reflecting traditional aspects of service quality, and did not consider any specifically Muslim customer needs. Gayatri and Chew (2013) suggested that Muslim service quality models should involve both general and Islamic service quality dimensions.

Service quality covers physical environment, interaction and outcome quality "image" (Brady and Cronin, 2001). Physical environment quality describes the tangible aspects of the service (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013). Interaction quality relates to the two-way flow of information between customers and service providers (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013). Grönroos (1984, p. 38) stated that outcome quality "image" is "what the customer is left with when the production process is finished."

This exploratory study, therefore, considered the service quality of theme parks in the Middle East. It viewed quality as a multi-dimensional and diverse construct, and covering: physical environment, interaction, consumables and access. Physical environment and consumables quality included both traditional and Islamic aspects of service quality.

Customer delight

Traditionally, researchers have considered customer satisfaction as an important antecedent of loyalty (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2018). However, customer delight may be a more effective antecedent (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2018). This has been defined in three ways as follows: first, is based on the confirmation–disconfirmation paradigm, where the experience goes beyond satisfaction and involves a pleasurable experience (Patterson, 1997); second, it stresses the emotional components. Finn (2005) defined customer delight as an emotional response resulting from surprising and positive levels of performance; and the last definition emphasizes human needs, suggesting that delight is a function of the satisfaction of three human needs, namely, security, justice and self-esteem (Schneider and Bowen, 1999). Customer delight seems to occur as a result of memorable, positive reproducible events, and has a stronger influence than satisfaction on customer loyalty and intention to repeat purchase (Torres *et al.*, 2014).

Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is an important aspect of service marketing and has been studied across different industries (Ali *et al.*, 2018). Ryu *et al.* (2012) suggested that it develops when people believe that they are receiving the best possible service. Han and Ryu (2009) identified two dimensions, namely, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is a psychological (decision-making or evaluative) commitment toward the service provider and behavioral is consistent repeat patronage or repeat purchase frequency (Han *et al.*, 2008).

Online travel reviews

Social media websites including blogs and social networks offer opportunities to share travel experience online with videos, photos and reviews (Litvin and Dowling, 2018; Yu *et al.*, 2017). Online review websites are popular because there is an increasing demand for unbiased travel information (Yu *et al.*, 2017). Online reviews have a strong impact on travelers' decisions and are often considered in making travel arrangements (Yu *et al.*, 2017). They have also been used extensively as a source of information for research (Litvin and Dowling, 2018). We decided to analyze online reviews to determine service quality dimensions for theme park visitors in the Middle East.

Methodology

Data collection and data analysis

We used TripAdvisor as a source of reviews because it is the largest database of online theme park reviews. We selected the six highest-rated TripAdvisor theme parks in the UAE, to ensure that there were enough reviews for analysis. The online reviews on these six theme parks were downloaded from TripAdvisor between June and August 2017. In total, there were 151 excellent, 73 average and 23 very poor reviews.

Content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). This approach was considered appropriate for this study because it can be used on all types of written text (Lune and Berg, 2016). The review content was manually coded and analyzed across the four main service quality dimensions (physical environment, interaction, consumables and access).

Proposition development

Impact of physical environment quality on delight

Evaluation of perceived service quality is significantly affected by customers' perceptions of the physical environment (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017). Physical environment includes both the tangible attributes of service encounters (e.g. facilities, layout and design) and intangible aspects like ambiance (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013). Studies have also shown that Muslim consumers are influenced by specific environmental factors such as segregated facilities for prayer and ablution (Gayatri and Chew, 2013; Sumaedi and Yarmen, 2015). For example, Battour *et al.* (2014) found that availability of prayer facilities was important for Muslim tourists. Availability of gender-segregated prayer rooms in shopping malls, hotels and attractions improved the overall image of South Korea for Muslim visitors (Han *et al.*, 2019). In this study, therefore, physical environment quality includes both general dimensions (e.g. ambiance, multisensory, layout and design, and functionality) and aspects important for Muslim visitors (e.g. prayer rooms). Table I shows the physical environment quality dimensions with a brief description of each and some examples.

Various studies have shown that physical environment can elicit positive and negative emotions (Ali *et al.*, 2016), including for hotels (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019), sports events (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017) and airports (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013). Physical environment is likely to have a significant effect on guests' evaluation of service quality in theme parks, as providers of entertainment (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Slåtten *et al.*, 2009). That is, because guests spend longer in the physical environment (Ali *et al.*, 2018) in these places.

A number of studies have emphasized the importance of physical environment in evaluating service quality, but more research is needed on the effect of physical environment (including Islamic attributes) on customers' delight. This relationship has been even less studied in the context of theme parks, especially in the Middle East. This study proposes that visitors' perceptions of the physical environment attributes/elements in a theme park will be significant predictors of their delight:

P1. Physical environment quality in a theme park has an effect on customer delight.

Impact of interaction quality on delight

Interaction quality includes staff efficiency and the venue's ability to recognize customer needs. Slåtten *et al.* (2009, p. 727) defined interaction quality as affected by "period[s] during a visit in which a customer interacts with the service provider." Many studies on tourism and the hospitality industry have discussed the importance of interactions with staff during a service encounter (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2011). Walls *et al.* (2011) identified three aspects of interaction with staff, namely, attitude, professional behavior and proactive service. Table I describes the interaction quality dimensions for theme park visitors in the UAE.

Employees who are particularly helpful, show empathy and are very friendly may induce a greater level of pleasure (Slåtten *et al.*, 2009). Ali *et al.* (2018) studied theme parks and found that interaction with staff has a significant impact on customer delight. It, therefore, seems likely that customers' general perception of their interaction with staff in theme parks is linked to their delight and the second proposition is:

P2. Interaction quality in a theme park has an effect on customer delight.

Impact of consumables quality on delight

Consumables include food and beverages and merchandise. In hospitality services, food is an important part of service quality evaluation (Wong and Fong, 2012). Services such as

Table I Description of proposed service quality dimensions and TripAdvisor comments

<i>Service quality dimension</i>	<i>Sub-dimension</i>	<i>Description of dimension</i>	<i>TripAdvisor comments</i>
Physical environment quality	Ambiance	Level of cleanliness, comfort, air quality and lighting of the theme park	"Water and facilities are clean. There was a 1 h stop on the rides to clean the water – a good sign, we thought" (Aquaventure Water Park visitor)
	Multisensory	Impact on the senses. May cover color, odor, temperature and humidity, noise and music	"It is a cool place in the summertime because it is totally covered with air conditioning" (IMG World of Adventure visitor) "No music playing or even people buzzing with excitement, just a stranded atmosphere" (IMG World of Adventure visitor)
	Layout and design	Architectural layout, space maintenance and equipment	"Quite small theme park, it is expected, as it is indoors" (IMG World of Adventure visitor)
	Functionality	Availability of seating areas and internet/Wi-Fi connection	"Easy and smooth transaction with entertainer app, free Wi-Fi" (Ferrari World visitor)
	Islamic-compliant physical environment	Gender segregated facilities such as prayer rooms, toilets and ablution (washing facility before prayers) areas	"All facilities were ready for the visitors from restrooms, restaurants, praying place and shops" (IMG World of Adventure visitor) "Although I did not visit on a lady's night as I would not be allowed, I like the idea of a fun place for ladies to enjoy their night that is safe and clean" (Yas Waterworld visitor)
Interaction quality	Attitude	Friendly, caring and helpful behavior of theme park staff toward visitors	"Staff were friendly and flexible. Being a hot day, they were still serving with a smile" (Yas Waterworld visitor)
	Professional behavior	Skills and qualifications of staff to deal with visitors' needs	"Staff were polite and accommodating. They went out of their way to find answers for any questions we had about other tourist attractions in the area" (Yas Waterworld visitor)
	Proactive service	Extent to which visitors are being paid individual attention with respect and dignity	"The whole thing was organized by the staff here and they did a brilliant job" (IMG World of Adventure visitor)
Consumables quality	Food and beverages quality	Taste, quality, variety, number of restaurants and food outlets and food and beverage prices. The availability of Halal food for Muslim customers	"Food selection is very good compared to the awful Disney food selections we experienced" (IMG World of Adventure visitor) "Food and drinks are pricey, but they always are at these places" (Wild Wadi Water Park visitor) "All kinds of food all Halal too. In addition, free parking" (IMG World of Adventure visitor) "All food that is on the premises is Halal, so that is not an issue with Muslim patrons" (Yas Waterworld visitor)
	Souvenir quality	Quality, variety, number of outlets and souvenir/products price	"The souvenirs are worth purchasing, they make amazing gifts and most of them have a practical use" (IMG World of Adventure visitor) "The souvenir, gift and clothes shop will lighten your wallet" (Ferrari World visitor) "After every ride, there is a gift shop themed to the ride" (IMG World of Adventure visitor)
Access quality	Convenient access	Convenience of location and operating hours of the theme park and availability of parking areas	"Wild Wadi is a great location and easy to visit" (Wild Wadi Water Park visitor) "Public transportation is bad for going there" (IMG World of Adventure visitor) "Opening hour is too late" (Dubai Park and Resorts visitor)
	Guidance	The quality of directional signage	"I will say the park is very poorly signposted, hard to find different slides" (Aquaventure Waterpark visitor)
	Waiting time and crowd management	Time required to buy tickets and line-up at the food court. It also covers crowd management within the park	"It was quiet, so there were not any long waits for rides and we did each ride about six times" (Ferrari World visitor)

theme parks always offer some catering options. Theme park operators have realized that consumers need food and drink during their visit, and dining has become part of the experience for theme park patrons. Food quality has, therefore, been linked to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Wong and Fong, 2012). Wong and Fong (2012) developed scales for service quality in casinos, and included a dimension on the quality of food, drink and merchandise, covering quality, price and variety.

Muslims are required to consume only food and drinks that are permitted by Allah (God), known as Halal food (Battour *et al.*, 2014). It is, therefore, important for theme park operators to provide kitchens and restaurants that prepare Halal food and have food labeling regulations to protect Halal certifications. They must also ensure that food labels are accurate. Table I describes the consumables quality dimensions in theme parks.

Ryu and Han (2010) suggested that the quality of food is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction in fast food and casual restaurants. Availability of Halal food had a significant impact on customer satisfaction (Battour *et al.*, 2014) and was the most critical factor for Muslim travelers in South Korea (Han *et al.*, 2019). Very few studies have emphasized the importance of consumables quality in customer satisfaction, so there is a need to examine the relationship between consumables quality and delight in theme parks. The third proposition is:

P3. Consumables quality in a theme park has an effect on customer delight.

Impact of access quality on delight

Shonk and Chelladurai (2008, p. 529) defined accessibility as “the ease and speed with which the tourist can reach the desired location.” It is an important element in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Shonk and Chelladurai, 2008; Wu *et al.*, 2018). Accessibility includes issues such as parking, public transport and signage. Table I shows the dimensions of access quality with examples from TripAdvisor reviews.

Theme park visitors are more likely to perceive the quality of their experience is better when they can easily access their preferred places and activities. Theme parks are usually located outside larger urban areas, so good signage and infrastructure are important to facilitate travel. Accessibility can provoke both positive and negative emotions and levels of satisfaction (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013; Shonk and Chelladurai, 2008). Wu *et al.* (2018) found that access quality is one of the most important dimensions of an overall assessment of quality. Shonk and Chelladurai (2008) and Wu *et al.* (2018) found that an assessment of quality depends on whether it is easy for visitors to reach their destination by car or public transport. Signs should also be displayed at transport nodes to indicate points of interest. Ahrholdt *et al.* (2017) found that accessibility at sporting events had a significant influence on customer delight. However, few other researchers have considered the effect of accessibility on delight and the fourth proposition is:

P4. Access quality in a theme park has an effect on customer delight.

Impact of customer delight on customer loyalty

Satisfied customers are not necessarily loyal or committed (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Torres *et al.*, 2014). Consumer delight stresses emotional attachment, and is often associated with loyalty, recommendations, and repeat purchase intention (Pine *et al.*, 1999; Torres and Kline, 2006). Only a few studies, however, have examined the relationship between delight and loyalty. For example, Ahrholdt *et al.* (2017) investigated the extent to which delight influences customer loyalty to sporting events. Torres *et al.* (2014) noted that delight influences customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. Bufquin *et al.* (2018) found a relationship between delight and loyalty in the hotel industry. However, few studies have examined the relationship between delight and loyalty in theme parks (Ali *et al.*, 2018;

Jin *et al.*, 2016a; Slåtten *et al.*, 2009). However, TripAdvisor reviews suggest that there may be a significant relationship, with examples of comments including:

We had mega wet fun; the place was full of surprises. We are planning a comeback. We really had fun, when you are through all you want to do is sleep" (Yas Waterworld visitor).

We enjoy a lot! I experience the round-trip rides for almost one day. Me and my sister enjoys a lot when it is allowed to do the rides again. Very unforgettable experience! We will come again for sure (Wild Wadi Water Park visitor).

The fifth proposition is, therefore:

P5. Customer delight has an effect on customer loyalty to theme parks.

Moderating effect of nationality on the delight–loyalty relationship

In the past few decades, the tourism sector has become an important contributor to the UAE's GDP. The number of international visitors increased from 15.79 million in 2017 to 15.92 million in 2018, and they came from a number of different countries including India, Saudi Arabia and Germany (Visit Dubai, 2018).

Previous studies on the relationship between customer satisfaction/delight and loyalty have largely neglected moderator variables (Homburg and Giering, 2001). The high number of international visitors to the UAE means that it is important to consider nationality in the analysis of service quality perceptions. Nationality may affect behaviors, beliefs, motivations or perceptions (Hammad *et al.*, 2017; Jin *et al.*, 2016b). For example, Torres *et al.* (2014) examined the drivers of customer delight among international guests and concluded that there are some universal service elements, but guests from different cultures may be delighted by different services and amenities. The sixth proposition is, therefore:

P6. Nationality moderates the relationship between customer delight and customer loyalty to theme parks.

Proposed framework for theme park service quality

This study has identified four major areas through which visitors perceive or evaluate the quality of services in theme parks in the Middle East. These are physical environment, interaction, consumables and access. A further 13 sub-dimensions of perceived service quality in theme parks have been identified under these four broad areas:

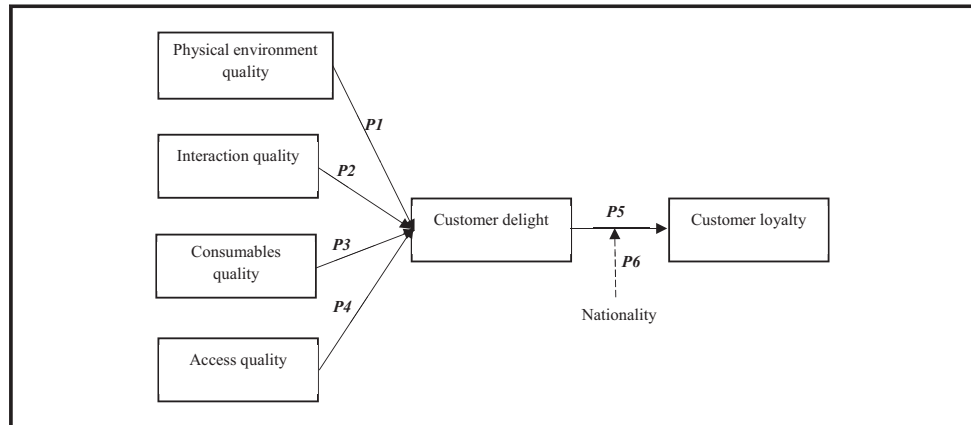
- *Physical environment*: ambiance, multisensory, layout and design, functionality and Islamic-compliant physical environment;
- *Interaction*: attitude, professional behavior and proactive service;
- *Consumables*: food and beverage quality and souvenir quality; and
- *Access*: convenient access, guidance, waiting time and crowd management.

The study has also tried to develop a conceptual framework (Figure 1) for the relationships between the four dimensions of perceived service quality and customer delight (P1-P4) and customer delight and customer loyalty (P5) in theme parks in the UAE, as well as the moderating effect of nationality (P6). The framework suggests that the four dimensions of perceived service quality act as antecedents of visitors' delight, and this, in turn, influences visitor behavioral and attitudinal loyalty toward theme parks, moderated by nationality.

Conclusion

Research in the area of service quality and delight in theme parks has only recently developed (Ali *et al.*, 2018). However, the tourism industry is always looking for ways to

Figure 1 The four-quality framework for perceived service quality, visitor delight and visitor loyalty for theme parks



expand. One way to do so is to target groups with particular needs such as older or disabled people or “religious tourists” (Battour *et al.*, 2014). This exploratory study, therefore, provides new insights into important aspects of consumer behavior in theme parks in the Middle East and particularly the antecedents of customer delight. Understanding how visitors evaluate both traditional and religious (Islamic) aspects of perceived service quality in theme parks is important for operators and marketers because repeat patronage and recommendations are critical to the success of theme parks. This suggests that theme parks in the UAE should aim to delight, rather than simply satisfy customers, through enhanced service delivery.

Theoretical and managerial implications

Theoretical implications

This is a conceptual study, but it makes several contributions to the service quality literature. First, it provides a comprehensive model of service quality dimensions for theme park visitors in the Middle East. The study proposes a framework of service quality in theme parks with 4 primary dimensions and 13 sub-dimensions. These are as follows:

- physical environment quality, which includes general and Islamic issues;
- interaction quality;
- consumables quality, including general food and beverages quality and availability and quality of Halal food; and
- access quality.

Ahmed *et al.* (2019, p. 16) suggested that consumer behavior studies in the Middle East region “add new insight and fresh evidence to the existing cross-cultural research on consumer behavior research that is still in its infancy.” A few scholars have identified customer delight as a consequence of service quality and the antecedent of loyalty in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2018). This study contributes to the literature by extending the research on the relationship between service quality dimensions and delight to cover theme parks in the Middle East. By examining “nationality” as a moderator in the relationship between delight and loyalty, this study fills a gap of moderator effects that has often been neglected in the literature (Homburg and Giering, 2001). Future studies may want to consider the moderating effect of nationality on the relationship between delight and loyalty, perhaps, by examining different market segments.

Managerial implications

This study raises some fundamental implications for theme parks. First, recognition of the importance of Islamic aspects of service quality could enable theme parks to develop more sophisticated positioning strategies. This has substantial implications for marketing strategies. For example, theme park operators might add Islamic-compliant services and facilities (e.g. prayer rooms and Halal food). [Eid and El-Gohary \(2015, p. 54\)](#) emphasized the importance of Islamic services, stating that “such initiatives illustrate the potential tourism companies have in establishing and developing forms of hospitality and tourism ground in principle and behavioral codes that represent national society and culture.” This could be a competitive strategy for theme parks operators elsewhere to adopt to improve their theme parks’ attractiveness to Muslim tourists: “merging attributes of the conservative Islamic lifestyle with the modern tourism industry could present new tourism options and spheres” ([Eid and El-Gohary, 2015, p. 54](#)). It is important for theme park managers to understand and address cultural differences by providing services that reflect customers’ country of origin. This study, therefore, offers a market segmentation tool that will be useful for serving overseas markets especially Muslim visitors.

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