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FACTORS AFFECTING TOURIST SATISFACTION IN SAMARKAND

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Abstract. The level of tourist satisfaction is one of the main drivers of the competitiveness and sustainable development of tourism destinations. The city of Samarkand, being an important historical site in Uzbekistan, attracts tourists both from abroad and from within the country due to architectural landmarks, culture, cuisine, and hospitality. However, the level of tourist satisfaction is determined by many factors such as the level of attractiveness of the historical sites, the quality of services provided, the type of accommodation, transportation, prices, safety, cleanliness, interaction with locals. This paper studies the major factors of tourist satisfaction in Samarkand. In particular, this research is based on the author's previous works on the topic of gastronomic tourism and electronic word-of-mouth communication and scholarly literature on the issues of tourism satisfaction, destination image, and service quality. Special attention will be paid to the cultural aspects, local food experience, hospitality, infrastructure, and information in the digital sphere as determinants of tourists' perceptions. The paper also identifies the potential problems affecting tourists' visits to Samarkand and provides some recommendations about the ways of improving the tourism services. It is argued that high-quality services and positive experience in cultural tourism can help in creating good tourists' perception of Samarkand.

Keywords: tourist satisfaction, Samarkand, destination image, service quality, cultural heritage, gastronomic tourism, hospitality, e-WOM, sustainable tourism.

Introduction

The sphere of tourism is one of the major components of the service sector of the world. It generates a number of opportunities for employment, investment, cultural exchange, and region development in general. On the other hand, the effectiveness of a tourist destination depends not only on the amount of tourists, but

also on the nature of their experience. That is why, the satisfaction level is one of the most important issues for tourism organizations, destination managers and local authorities.

A tourist satisfaction is an estimation made by the visitor about his travel experience in comparison with his expectations. In case if the tourists believe that a destination satisfies their expectations or even exceeds them, they tend to recommend the destination to others and to return again in future. At the same time a number of elements, such as poor services, high prices, transport problems or negative travel experience can affect tourist satisfaction, in spite of the existence of cultural heritage at the destination place.

Samarkand is one of the best places for cultural tourism of Uzbekistan. The importance of this place is connected with the fact that it is associated with the ancient Silk Road, which provided trade and cultural exchange between different regions. Such attractions as Registan square, Gur-e-Amir mausoleum, Shah-i-Zinda are interesting for tourists.

Nevertheless, there are certain elements apart from monuments of Samarkand, which influence the tourist experience.

Traditional Uzbek cuisine forms one of the dimensions of tourism in Samarkand. Plov, samsa, manti, and lagman dishes can become an experience of engaging with the local culture for travelers. Moreover, modern travelers tend to form pre-judgment based on online reviews and social media comments and travel blog posts, which affect their evaluations after arriving to the destination point.

The aim of this paper is to find out what are the main determinants of the tourists' satisfaction in Samarkand and suggest ways to improve the quality of tourism services in the city.

Methodology

In the current study the qualitative literature-based approach will be used in order to define the key determinants of the tourists' satisfaction in Samarkand. In the framework of the paper the previous research by the author titled "Promoting Gastronomic Tourism via E-WOM in Uzbekistan" as well as the research titled "Impact of Tourism on the Economic Development of Samarkand" and academic literature on the topic of destination image, quality of service and tourist satisfaction will be used.

Six main dimensions of the topic under investigation will be discussed, namely, cultural-historical attractions, quality of service and hospitality, culinary experience, transportation and infrastructural facilities, perceived value and security, and electronic word of mouth.

The theoretical discussion of the topic in the framework of the paper is based on the sources by Silverman (2001), Tosun et al. (2015), and Zhu et al. (2024) and other empirical research works that discuss the destination attributes and tourists' satisfaction.

This article has a more conceptual character and does not pretend to contain original survey results from tourists in Samarkand. Therefore, the listed factors have been revealed from already existing scientific sources. Further research with the involvement of tourists’ surveys and evaluation of the level of the services provided

is necessary in order to establish what factors influence tourists' decisions most powerfully.

Cultural and Historical Attractions

Cultural and historical attractions are one of the main motivations for traveling to Samarkand. Unique architectural monuments, historical sites, as well as association with the Silk Road form certain special experiences and can influence the perception of tourists. The special role is played by Registan Square because the monumental architecture of this square is an integral part of the historical heritage of Samarkand. In addition, the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum and Shah-i-Zinda give the tourists the opportunity to learn more about architectural traditions and history of this city.

However, such sights can increase the degree of tourist satisfaction and provide educational experiences, opportunities for shooting and exploring the history of the city only if the attractions are well-managed. Clear information, high-quality guide, comfortable conditions for the visitors and maintenance of historical objects can positively affect the visit process. On the other hand, crowds, poor signage, low interpretation level and access to information can worsen this process.

The studies in the sphere of destination attributes support the necessity to assess the destinations in different aspects instead of analyzing separate attractions. Eusébio and Vieira (2013) analyzed the influence of the destination attributes, tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

As for Samarkand, it means that there should be the proper balance between the preservation of historical objects and the good service of the tourists in terms of providing them with historical information in different languages and organizing guided tours for tourists.

Service quality and hospitality

Service quality is also an aspect which can influence tourists' satisfaction. Regardless of excellent cultural facilities and amenities, visitors can have a bad experience when services they are offered are of poor quality.

In Samarkand, service quality is related to hotels and guesthouses, restaurants, tour operators, transportation providers and guided tours. Tourists might consider factors such as reliability, responsiveness, cleanliness, professional approach, communication skills and readiness of employees to help them.

The study by Tosun, Dedeoğlu and Fyall (2015) explored the relationships among destination service quality, affective destination image and revisiting intention through examining 539 foreign tourists to Alanya, Turkey. It has been found that the service quality related to language, accommodations, hospitality, and activity had a statistically significant influence on destination image. Though it has been carried out for another destination, results of this research can be considered to be helpful in theoretical context regarding the role of service quality in Samarkand.

It seems that hospitality plays an important role in the country where visitors are welcome and where tourists learn about local traditions and culture in an active way. Friendly communication, respectful attitude towards tourists and giving good recommendations can make impression positively.

However, language barrier might be an issue. Employees who are fluent in English and other appropriate languages might be able to explain services and directions.

Providing training in customer services, communications, cultural awareness and hospitality would be useful for tourism enterprises. Besides, consistency is important – all businesses have to offer tourists reliable services during their visit.

Gastronomic Experiences and Food Quality

Food is an essential aspect of tourism because it allows tourists to interact with local traditions in terms of food quality, preparation methods, and dining settings. Traditional cuisine in Samarkand can play a significant role in shaping the image of this city as a cultural destination.

The tourists might want to try dishes like plov, samsa, manti, lagman, and other regional dishes. The overall level of satisfaction of tourists depends on food quality, freshness, flavor, hygiene, portion size, price, restaurant atmosphere, and service quality.

As mentioned in the author's previous paper, Promoting Gastronomic Tourism via E-Word of Mouth in Uzbekistan, online reviews, social media, and shared experiences can help promote Uzbek cuisine and attract travelers interested in it. This article touches upon the issue of the connection between food experiences and destination image.

In addition to that, there is scholarly research by Zhu, Zhu, and Weng (2024) that examines the connections between the perceived value of food experiences, destination image, and revisit intentions. The authors have conducted research based on 458 valid questionnaires taken in the restaurant that serves Nanjing cuisine in China. They found that the functional, social, emotional, cultural, and health values of food experiences positively affect both destination image and revisit intentions.

This means that food satisfaction includes aspects other than just taste. Tourists might appreciate the chance to interact with unknown traditions, share a meal with other people, learn more about local culture, and experience unique atmosphere.

Samarkand restaurants and food enterprises could increase the level of tourists' satisfaction by maintaining high hygienic standards, providing clear menus and prices, explaining traditions related to the dishes served, and providing consistent service. Food workshops, food tours, and market visits could make the tourist experience even richer.

However, one cannot consider the conclusions made in the Nanjing research as direct evidence of the tourists' behavior in Samarkand. The local research is needed to understand what aspects of Samarkand cuisine are valued by the tourists.

Transportation and Tourism Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure influences the possibility to visit various attractions and navigate throughout the place. It might become an obstacle to having positive cultural experiences due to bad transport connection, lack of orientation possibilities, poor service or facilities etc.

For example, tourists coming to Samarkand have to travel between railway stations, hotels, historical landmarks, cafes and markets. Proper transport will definitely simplify tourists' navigation.

Infrastructure consists of public restrooms, waste management, benches, security of pedestrians, Wi-Fi zones and accessibility to disabled people. Though, it can't be compared to the significance of historical monuments in terms of importance, but still it makes its own contribution to the visitor experience.While developing the infrastructure, one should consider local people as well. Well-developed infrastructure will bring good for both visitors and local population and vice versa. Overconcentration of people in the place is inconvenient for both of sides.

Development of convenient transport and infrastructure for Samarkand might consist of multilingual information about transportation routes and time, opening hours, location of various attractions.

In addition, development of infrastructure for historic area has to take into account preservation.

Price, Perceived Value, and Safety

Tourist satisfaction also depends on the degree to which visitors find the received benefits worthy of the costs spent on them. This evaluation is known as perceived value.

Tourists evaluate the costs of accommodation, meals, transportation, tour guide service, souvenir purchasing, and visits to attractions regarding their quality. Low prices are not the only thing leading to satisfaction, as high prices do not lead to dissatisfaction as well. What matters is whether tourists perceive the services they received as worth paying for.

Unexpected fees, lack of price transparency, service inconsistencies, and false information can cause negative perceptions. Price transparency and good communication can assist the tourism enterprises in building trust.

Another important factor influencing travelers' experience is safety. As a rule, tourists require feeling safe in public places, knowing the local laws, and having the ability to get help in case of necessity. Good road safety, pedestrian conditions, availability of tourism information, and accessible assistance are the factors of safety.

According to research in the Revisit Intention and Satisfaction: The Role of Destination Image, Perceived Risk, and Cultural Contact by international tourists in Vietnam, tourists' satisfaction depends on destination attractiveness, accommodation and food services, cultural contact, and perceived risk. It has been tested among 405 international tourists in Binh Thuan province, Vietnam.

The presented study shows that satisfaction depends not only on positive perception but also on perceived risk. Applied to Samarkand, it means the need for transparent business practices, price transparency, safety, and assistance.However, it is necessary to find out the importance of price and safety among tourists who visit Samarkand.

Destination Image and Tourists' Expectations

Destination image refers to the ideas, impressions, and perceptions people have about a particular place. It is shaped through both pre-trip information and through experiences obtained during and after the trip.

The main features of Samarkand include its connection to the Silk Road, historical architecture, Islamic scholarship, craft traditions, and Uzbek hospitality. Such features can draw tourists interested in history, architecture, culture, and cuisine.However, travelers often form expectations based on travel websites, social media, pictures, documentaries, and peer recommendations. The satisfaction of tourists is dependent on how their expectations match the real experiences.

If online descriptions highlight historical beauty and cultural authenticity, then tourists might expect well-maintained monuments, tours with interesting information, authentic food, and the possibility to get involved in the local culture. Differences between such expectations and real experiences may impact the evaluation of destinations.

According to empirical studies conducted by Tosun et al. (2015), there is a link between service quality and destination image and revisit intention. Meanwhile, Zhu et al. (2024) stress the importance of food-related value for destination image formation and behavioral intention.

Taken together, these results suggest that the destination image of Samarkand should be based on the quality of tourism services. While good promotion may attract tourists, their satisfaction will depend on their experiences.Thus, tourism organizations should coordinate their promotional activities with the services provided.

Digital Marketing and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) refers to the exchange of opinions, recommendations, and evaluations online among consumers. Electronic word of mouth has become an important element of tourism communication since people usually look through reviews before deciding on what destination or service they want to use.

Promoting Gastronomic Tourism via E-Word of Mouth in Uzbekistan is the title of the author's first article where electronic communication is considered as a means of increasing the visibility of the Uzbek national cuisine and encouraging tourists to get involved in gastronomy tourism activities. The article pays attention to the importance of social media posts, online evaluation and sharing experience of previous visitors as ways to develop gastronomic tourism.

Silverman (2001) also talks about the role of word-of-mouth marketing and the importance of recommendations for the decision making process.

In the case of Samarkand, online review can influence tourists' attitudes towards hotels, restaurants, tour guides, attractions and transport. The positive experience of past visitors can increase trust while the repeated complaints can draw the attention of enterprises to the service problems.

The online platforms also offer chances to small tourism businesses with limited budget to advertise their services. For example, restaurants can post the menu, guesthouses can provide accommodation information and tour guides can describe their services to potential customers. However, the usefulness of online

reviews depends on the credibility and relevance of them. The business should not make false statements and should improve the service quality instead of gaining good reviews.

The useful approach for Samarkand is the combination of digital marketing and feedback collecting. The tourism enterprises can analyze the comments of their customers, find out the most common problems and respond professionally. This will allow using the feedback as the source of information to improve services.

The feedback online should be perceived only as the part of the information about customer satisfaction.

Challenges Impacting Tourists' Satisfaction in Samarkand

In spite of considerable tourism potential, there are a number of challenges impacting tourists' experiences. They include the following. First, the quality of service can be different across various enterprises due to diverse training programs, language skills, hygiene conditions, and communication with customers. Second, tourists might face challenges associated with transportation, information provision, and wayfinding between tourist attractions. This challenge can be particularly relevant for tourists unfamiliar with the city. Third, overcrowdedness in the historical area can decrease tourists' comfort and reduce the possibility to appreciate cultural tourism attractions; effective visitor management and promotion of less known sites can address this problem.

Fourth, there can be some inconsistency between offered services and tourists' experiences, including vague prices, inaccurate information on the Internet, and unreliable delivery of services. Fifth, lack of possibilities for tourists to leave feedbacks on the quality of services can prevent the identification of the most important service problems by business owners and authorities.

Sixth, tourism has to be managed in such a way that needs of both locals and the historical environment could be taken into consideration; otherwise, negative consequences such as trash, congestion, and strain on infrastructure can arise. These challenges have to be studied systematically and cannot be considered as general findings about visitors' experience.

More precise understanding of the degree of occurrence and importance of these challenges will allow the tourism managers to prioritize their improvement.

Recommendations for Increasing Tourists' Satisfaction

Based on literature review and the characteristics of Samarkand as a cultural tourism destination, the following recommendations can be suggested. First, increase the quality of services; enterprises of hospitality industry and transport should invest in training of their employees, professional communication, hygiene, and consistent quality of services. Second, develop historical interpretation; multilingual signage, experienced guides, good information about visitors, and organized tours can help tourists understand the historical significance of Samarkand's tourism attractions. Third, develop gastronomic tourism; enterprises of the food industry should take care of hygiene of the facilities, provide clear information about prices, serve authentic meals and inform tourists about the cuisine of Uzbekistan. Fourth, develop transportation and accessibility; tourists should receive clear information about routes, reliable signage, pedestrian areas, and

accessibility of facilities. Fifth, ensure transparency of pricing and reliability of information; tourism enterprises have to provide correct descriptions of their services, clear information about additional expenses, and up-to-date information.

Conclusion

Tourist satisfaction depends on a combination of cultural, service-related, economic, infrastructural, and informational aspects. In the case of Samarkand, historical sights create a good basis for tourism; nevertheless, the entire visitor experience also depends on such things as quality of accommodation, hospitality, traditional food, transport, security, clear pricing, and access to reliable information.

The reviewed literature shows a connection between service quality and destination image as well as tourists' behavioral intentions related to this place in the future. The research on food experience proves that functional, emotional, social, cultural, and health value of local food can improve the destination image and make visitors more likely to come back.

The author's previous research on electronic word-of-mouth is relevant in terms of understanding how online reviews and shared experience can contribute to tourism promotion in Uzbekistan. However, digital marketing works effectively only in cases when it is based on real visitor experience and reliable services.

In order to increase tourist satisfaction in Samarkand, it is necessary to cooperate tourism business, local authorities, cultural and educational institutions. Special attention should be paid to professional training, convenient infrastructure, culture preservation, food quality, clear pricing, and regular feedback collection from tourists.

In general, increasing tourist satisfaction in Samarkand will help the city to create a good international reputation, recommendations and repeat visits, and develop tourism industry sustainably. Additional empirical research with the use of surveys of tourists will help to understand what factors have the most impact on tourist satisfaction in Samarkand.

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THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN UZBEKISTAN'S HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Abstract: Digital technologies have become an integral part of hotel operations worldwide, reshaping how hotels manage resources, interact with guests, and compete. This study examines the role of digital technologies in Uzbekistan's hotel industry, focusing on their effects on operational efficiency, customer interaction, service quality, and competitiveness. Based on a review of international and local literature, the paper analyses online booking systems, mobile and self-service check-in, digital room keys, AI-powered chatbots, personalization tools, and data analytics, and considers their contribution to guest satisfaction and loyalty. The findings indicate that digital solutions reduce waiting times, automate routine tasks, minimize human error, and allow staff to concentrate on high-value guest services. However, adoption remains unchanged: small and medium-sized hotels face high costs, limited digital infrastructure, insufficient staff skills, and data security concerns, while existing national platforms are still poorly integrated. The paper concludes with recommendations, including staff training, stronger data protection, guest personalization, affordable digital solutions and financial support for smaller hotels, regular evaluation of digital tools, and a balance between automation and human interaction.

Keywords: Digital infrastructure, AI-powered chatbots, Uzbekistan, hotel industry, online booking, guest satisfaction, service quality, digital transformation, automation, artificial intelligence, hospitality

Introduction

Over the past decade, digital technology has become deeply embedded in how hotels operate. Online booking systems, property management software, digital payment platforms, social media, customer relationship management (CRM) tools, and mobile applications now sit at the centre of everyday hotel work. Together, they