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Standard Resort Hospitality Elements: A Performance and Impact Analysis

by

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Abstract

When customers decide which resort to visit for vacation or leisure needs, their choice is primarily purpose or activity driven. This fact has dictated a research program focusing primarily on understanding these principal attributes. However, recent research has shown that secondary elements standard across resort typologies can also serve an important role in a guests' experience. In order to build upon our understanding of these complementary resort features, this study utilizes a modified importance performance analysis methodology. By taking into consideration attribute salience, loyalty determinance internal and relative performance, traditional importance-performance results are segmented and accompanied by specific recommendations. Results provide a breakdown of 18 standard resort hospitality elements (SRHE) into 16 categories of the modified IPA and how resort managers can redirect attention to attributes that are performing below expected levels or reposition better than expected performing attributes. Discussion focuses on further understanding the results of the study with potential applications in future research.

Introduction

Providing quality customer experiences can be significantly influenced by a multitude of factors including consumers themselves, the physical location of the property and the amenities or activities provided by the resort. While management may have limited control over many of these factors, from an operational viewpoint they directly control one of the most important and influential aspects of the resort experience: activities (Costa, Glinia, Goudas, & Panagiotis, 2004). Our current understanding of this important component has primarily focused on specific resort segments, such as winter resorts (Bojanic & Warnick, 1995), or amenity-driven properties such as health or spa resorts (Naylor & Kleiser, 2002). This narrow focus, in combination with a propensity for research to focus on singular properties or develop factors posteriori based upon those amenities (Johanson, Woods, & Sciarini, 2001; Knutson, Beck, & Yen, 2004), has led to an abundance of primary amenities research. However, scholars have identified that while primary activities play an important role in resort selection, tertiary features which are not directly related to primary activities, also contribute to the overall experience (Ferrand & Vecchiattini, 2002).

Recent research has supported the idea that while the activity driven concept plays an important role in resorts, tertiary elements or standard resort hospitality elements (SRHE) also represent important property

factors. Through an extensive literature review, 18 universal elements were developed to address the complementary hospitality aspects at resorts, regardless of resort type or location (Brey, Klenosky, Lehto, & Morrison, 2008). This included features previously identified, ranging from geographic location to customer service quality (Ormiston, Gilbert, & Manning, 1998; Uysal, Howard, & Jamrozy, 1992), that consumers consider as important when visiting a resort. However, while this study established a valuable understanding of these elements, further insight into SRHE is needed. Given that understanding loyalty is a key consideration for the resort industry (Choi, 2009), and that the relationship between resort satisfaction and customer loyalty is a function of attribute importance and corresponding performance (Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008), the first objective of this study is to build upon current tertiary element understanding by using the developed SRHE scale and examining the importance-performance of these elements.

In order to provide additional insight and establish an understanding of expectations and satisfaction, importance-performance analysis (IPA) is used. IPA, as an appropriate tool to understanding performance used extensively within hospitality and tourism (Oh, 2001), has also been used successfully to understand consumer related issues at resorts. It is plagued, however, by a range of issues such as definitional and conceptual confusion (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Ryan & Cessford, 2003), along

with an inability to consider performance vis-à-vis competitors and an attributes influence in consumer choice (Keyt, Yavas, & Riecken, 1994). In order to address these issues while providing greater insight for practitioners, importance is evaluated via two dimensions: attribute salience and loyalty determinance. Similarly, performance is evaluated using traditional performance (customer satisfaction) and relative performance when compared to a primary competitor. By using this methodology to obtain results, the second objective, which is to apply an alternative and replicable IPA model that provides specific recommendations using an industry-friendly research technique, is realized.

By taking a further look into SRHE using a modified IPA technique, this study contributes significantly to our understanding of the resort industry while providing insight into special applications of IPA. From a conceptual perspective, it generates a deeper understanding of standard resort hospitality elements while continuing to shift the focus of research towards understanding elements common across resort types rather than specific amenities or features (Brey, Morrison, & Mills, 2007). Furthermore, insight into an alternative application of IPA where additional and specific recommendations can be made based upon loyalty, salience, satisfaction and competition while mitigating application ineffectiveness is presented. From an applied perspective, results build our understanding of tertiary resort elements importance by providing specific recommendations based upon 16 potential actions when comparing importance and performance. Moreover, these same recommendations and actions can be applied to general hospitality and leisure businesses, along with other service industries.

Standard Resort Hospitality Elements

When consumers determine which resort they visit for vacation, people often patronize properties to engage in a particular activity or set of activities (Brey & Lehto, 2007). For instance, when consumers seek to enjoy sun, sea, and sand they ultimately choose properties that provide these amenities. However, recent research has identified that while the activity driven concept plays an important role in resort selection, tertiary features or standard resort hospitality elements (SRHE) also represent important property factors (Brey et al., 2008). In their initial study of these secondary elements, three factors emerged from the 18 universal hospitality elements at resorts. First, feature-based components, such as ambiance and consumer service, were considered the most important. Second, activity-based components, such as

indoor recreation and the need for diverse activities options were deemed significant to customers. Third, business components, such as technology accessibility and business services were rated least important. Results also discussed impacts of psychographic and demographic perspectives on importance ratings.

While it has been determined that SRHE play an important role at resorts, a deeper understanding of these elements is needed to grasp their overall scope and depth. While more than 325 previous studies were examined, 6 studies were instrumental in determining the 18 universal attributes. These studies were identified due to their extensive level of testing not present in other studies examining resort attributes and they provided a variety of activities needed to determine a list of elements universal to all resorts. Table 1 provides a breakdown of article contribution to the SRHE scale, segmented by attribute factor membership.

The first examination into resort amenity importance was the establishment and testing of the Resort Soft Amenity Scale (Verhoven & Masterson, 1996). This seminal study, originally published in 1992, focused on understanding timeshare owners and their perceived level of importance placed on soft amenities. Outcomes of the research established 18 primary factors based upon importance ratings of 125 attributes (Masterson, 1992). With a succinct focus on the unique demands of timeshare operations, not all factors were applicable to a non-timeshare resort. Factors evaluating interval ownership or the purchasing process did not have direct relevancy. However, multiple factors were important in the development of the SRHE as support for nine variables, such as lodging features and the availability of family attractions was provided.

Accessing available research examining attributes and amenities specific to resort types, specifically winter resorts, provided additional insight and support. In his examination of ski resorts, Ormiston (1998) evaluated a multitude of ski resort features. Ski resort aspects, such as cost and location related to the resort's residence, factored prominently in SRHE development. Scale input was also provided from other ski oriented studies. Uysal, Howard and Jamrozny (1992) in their importance-performance analysis of resort attributes, tested the relevant attributes of resort feel/ambiance to health related attributes, such as spas. Finally, in Hudson and Shephard's (1998) measurement of service quality, approximately half of the RSC variables were supported. Specifically ambiance, value, and entertainment variables previously

Table 1: Standard Hospitality Elements Research¹

	Verhoven and Masterson (1996)	Ormiston, Gilbert, and Manning (1998)	Uysal, Howard, and Jam- rozy (1992)	Hudson and Shepherd (1998)	Johanson, Woods and Sciarini (2001)	Knutson, Beck, and Yen (2004)
Feature-based						
Ambiance				•		
Marketing information			•	•	•	
Physical condition		•	•	•	•	
Lodging features	•	•	•	•		
Location		•				
Reputation						•
Service quality	•	•	•	•	•	
Community					•	
Value		•		•	•	
Food & beverage	•	•	•	•		•
Activity-based						
Family	•	•			•	•
Indoor recreation	•		•	•	•	•
Outdoor recreation	•	•	•	•	•	•
Health services	•		•			
Activity diversity	•	•			•	
Entertainment	•		•	•	•	•
Business						
Business services						•
Technology	•				•	

¹Adapted from Brey, Klenosky, Lehto and Morrison. 2008. Standard Hospitality Elements at Resorts: An Empirical Assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47(2): 249.

not supported by literature were included. From these studies, a total of nine, eleven and nine variables to be tested were supported.

Additional support was also provided via regionally relevant resort studies (i.e., Midwest) including research by Johanson, Woods, and Sciarini which assessed baby-boomer needs at resorts (2001). This study provided substantial variable support for 13 SRHE elements, ranging from ambiance and reputation to availability of technology (i.e., renting a VCR) and outdoor recreation (i.e., golf, bicycle and boat rentals). Knutson, Beck, and Yen's (2004) evaluation provided additional support for seven variables, through direct support such as outdoor recreation or indirect support, such as individual items used to construct study factors (i.e., brand image, escapism features).

Beyond these core studies, additional support bolstered the inclusions of peripheral elements. For example, the overall effects of geographic location have been found to impact resort perception (Howard, Barry, & Gengler, 1998). Furthermore, different levels of importance have also been placed on resort attributes such as comfort levels and the scope of available resort facilities (Brayley, 1992). But even these investigations, partnered with establishing and exploring SRHE, are inadequate in understanding the scope of complementary resort components. Given the potential importance in consumer decisions that these features play partnered with the current dearth of understanding, a significant need exists to further explore these attributes. Therefore, this study's objective is to better understand specific SRHE features by examining attribute salience, loyalty determinance, performance (customer satisfaction) and relative performance when compared to a primary competitor.

Importance Performance Analysis

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) is a two-dimensional technique based on attribute placement of customer-perceived importance and performance that translates customers' satisfaction and expectations into managerial recommendations (Beldona & Cobanoglu, 2007; Tonge & Moore, 2006). By plotting results along a two dimensional grid, the four quadrants matrix assists organizations to identify areas for improvement to minimize the gap between performance and importance and which attributes should be leveraged as high performers. This methodology is particularly useful in assisting decision makers determine where attribute-improvement focus should be placed. By initially

determining what attributes or features are important to the consumer and then comparing results to organizational performance, easily applicable business intelligence is gathered. For instance, results from this analysis creates easily identifiable solutions, such as where attention can be redirected to attributes that are performing below expected levels or how operators can reposition attributes that performing better than expected in the minds of the traveler (Sanders, White, & Pennington-Gray, 2001). In addition to enabling management to allocate resources, IPA also provides a low-cost method of data collection while providing an ease of understanding that does not exist with other techniques used in understanding consumer sentiment (Baloglu & Love, 2003; Bruyere, Rodriguez, & Vaske, 2002).

However, scholars have debated the IPA framework applicability as conceptual and practical issues exist. For instance, from a conceptual perspective, Lowenstein (1995) suggests that the direct method demonstrates self-stated customer opinions reflecting potential social desirability or awareness bias, and might neglect to fully consider importance of attributes that a customer was unaware of or refuses to admit. Rather, importance might be more accurately identified through other statistical methods, such as the indirect method (Crompton & Adams, 1985). The proponents of the indirect measurement suggest that applied coefficients, the estimations from a multiple regression or simple correlation analysis such as standardized regression coefficients (Taylor, 1997), might uncover customer perceptions more accurately. Furthermore, simple survey errors where some customers' importance rating are uniformly high or vice versa, can generate biases under the direct method (Bacon, 2003).

From a practical perspective, issues such as inconsistent results due to the location of the axes or "cross-hair" points of the grid exist. Researchers have primarily adopted the mean values of importance and performance ratings to determine IPA grid axes. By using the scale mean, it provides a simple comparison of importance and performance (Tonge & Moore, 2006). Others suggest that the correct placement depends on the variables and objectives in formulating a particular action grid (Huan, Beaman, & Shelby, 2003). Researchers have even proposed the use of diagonal lines to separate regions in order to identify areas identified as high improvement priorities (Kristensen, Kanji, & Dahlgaard, 1992). These iso-rating lines were meant to identify where importance

equals performance, where attributes below the line must be given even greater importance (Bacon, 2003).

Given the existent conceptual and practical concerns, previous studies have sought to mitigate these and similar issues through technique modifications. For instance, in the Keyt et al. (1994) study of restaurant positioning, conceptual issues were mitigated by incorporating determinance and relative performance. By including these perspectives, results limited the issue of customer opinion identification. Similarly, from a practical perspective, Huan (2002) used extended visual representations to demonstrate differences between international visitor markets. Through multiple segmentation use, a better understanding of specific markets and their independent requirements were established. However, while these modifications provide deeper meaning, a key benefit of providing specific business intelligence that managers can apply is still limited. Given the potential advantages from the IPA, further exploration of a modified IPA model where conceptual and practical concerns are minimized is required. Therefore, the objective of this study was to explore an IPA model that addresses these concerns by evaluating attribute salience, loyalty determinance, internal and relative performance to provide business intelligence for resort managers that limits uncertainty and provides clarity to action consequences.

Methodology

The data for this study were collected via electronic survey using e-mail sent from two competitive resorts. Both properties are within close proximity within the Upper Midwest, are family oriented based water-park resorts, and are considered intermediate resorts. These properties are the primary reason to visit a destination, provide substantial recreation and leisure space while being removed from major population centers, and provide multiple primary and secondary amenities to engage customers (Brey, 2010). Considering each resort's procedural and operational discrepancies, sampling methods differed with an average response rate of 19%, far above average electronic survey response rates. A total of 618 responses were collected from visitors who stayed at the resorts during the previous six months. It should be noted that no statistical differences in sample characteristics or importance ratings were found among respondents based on resort location, methods, or timeline of data collection.

In order to develop an understanding of SRHE, the survey collected information via four sections. The first section collected respondents' trip characteristics including; travel party composition, primary trip purpose, and timeline of visit to provide insight into the sample's travel motivations. The second section explored the 18 SRHE developed from the review of literature to develop attribute salience, own and relative performance. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of each criterion on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all important* (1) to *extremely important* (5). The third section examined various aspects of consumer loyalty which were used to establish loyalty determinance. The final section collected respondents' socio-demographic information including gender, age, marital status, annual household income, occupation, and educational levels to provide insight into sample composition.

The 18 SRHE elements were developed based on an extensive review of literature and then validated via three methods. The first, web site verification, was conducted by verifying developed factors presence during a review of 10 random destination resort web sites. The second, through industry expert input, was collected by interviewing 52 resort executives during property visits. Finally, during the interview testing process, all resort visitors were asked if additional resort elements were perceived as significant to them. No additional items were produced during the validation stage. In addition to survey distribution, two pilot tests were conducted to ensure clarity, reliability, and comprehensiveness of the study instrument. The initial pilot test consisted of 35 resort visitors. During this phase, the cognitive interview approach was used to assess survey clarity. As a result, some wordings and modifications to the questionnaire were identified, and then applied prior to distribution. A second pilot test, consisting of 200 e-mail survey respondents, was conducted to ensure proper function of the online survey system. Following the successful test, the survey questionnaire was distributed to the entire study population.

Findings

In this study, Importance-performance analysis (IPA) was applied to determine competitive strategic decisions with adjustments to overcome weaknesses of traditional IPA. As Martilla and James (1977) emphasized, traditional IPA can present both importance and performance data and strategic suggestions with relative ease. However, the methodology has been controversial

due to its straightforward evaluation of importance and performance that provides somewhat vague results to assist resort operators. In order to provide specific management recommendations, importance (attribute salience, loyalty determinance) and performance (own, relative) were further segmented.

In order to examine importance, attribute salience and loyalty determinance were examined. Attribute salience is believed as being an important specific component in a purchase (or visit) decision (Kaplan & Fishbein, 1969). Given that traditional importance-performance analysis does not recognize the determinance of an attribute, which discriminates well among competing factors (Engle, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1990) and directly influence consumer decision (Keyt et al, 1994), identifying these factors were extremely important. To identify salient factors, the grand mean, or mean for all the attributes taken collectively, was calculated. Each SRHE mean value was compared to the grand mean with positive score were considered to be salient attributes, while negative score factors considered as non-salient elements. To further understand importance by examining long-term effects, loyalty as a function of attribute importance and corresponding performance (Meng et al., 2008), was then examined. Regression analysis determined whether positive or negative indicators existed between the 18 SRHE and the repurchase intentions factor, with specific focus on determining relationship significance (Malhotra, 2007). By using this methodology, insight into which factors could be considered as loyalty determinance factors was identified. It should be noted that all factors were identified as impacting loyalty, either positively or negatively, with only six factors being identified as significant impacts.

In order to understand performance, traditional and relative performance analyses were conducted. By examining relative performance, the inherent traditional importance-performance weakness of ignoring performance relative to competitors was overcome. This research considered a resort's own performance in traditional terms alongside relative performance as a better determinant of performance (Keyt et al, 1994). By subtracting a competitor's performance score from the internal performance score of the subject resort, a positive result suggests better performance relative to the competing resort and vice versa. In addition, the internal or traditional performance analyses, in terms of the 18 SRHE elements, were also assessed by subtracting internal importance mean score from internal mean performance.

The scores with negative discrepancy were labeled as failing; while positive score factors were labeled as exceeding. These items were labeled as the level of performance satisfaction as the differences between importance and performance is an indicator of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Martilla & James, 1977). Table 2 provides visual representation of how these important performance features specifically impact recommendations. In order to provide a comparison of results, a traditional importance-performance analysis was also conducted.

Sample Demographics

The demographic profile of the sample is presented in Table 3. Respondents were slightly skewed with more than half being female (61%). The dominant age group was between 40 and 49 (33.7%), followed by the 30 to 39 (28.8%) and the 50 and 59 (13.3%) age group. Senior citizens made up only 9.7% while people younger than 30 constituted 5.2%. In terms of education, less than half of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree (45.9%). A small percentage of the sample did not graduate from high school (0.1%), while 10.7% of respondents had high school diploma and 33.8% of respondents had some college experience. Regarding household income, 24.4% of respondent had gross income of more than \$100,000 per year (24.4%), while 21.6% earned between \$75,000 and \$99,999 and 26.1% earned between \$50,000 and \$74,999. Married respondents dominated the marital status category as 74.1%. The major category of respondents were employed full-time (65.4%), followed by 7.9% of part-time employment. The sample was dominated by Caucasian (84.1%).

The trip characteristics profile is presented in Table 4. The dominant purpose for a visit was a mix of both leisure and business (46.5%) with 42.6% of respondents whose primary trip purpose was leisure, followed by 7.6% visiting for business. The majority of respondents were visiting with spouse or partner (72.3%), while 68.7% of respondents reported traveling with children. More than half of respondents identified themselves as the primary decision maker, and 22.1% of respondents reported a joint decision with their partners. Regarding the period of visit, 44.1% of respondents were weekend visitors, followed by 39.3% of during summer and 36.4% of weekday visitors.

Table 2: Modified Importance-Performance Matrix

Attribute Saliency	Loyalty Determinance	Performance Performance	Relative Performance	Outcome
Salient	Determinant	Pass	Better	Long-Term Leverage
			Worse	Important Competitive Concern
		Fail	Better	Expectations Maintenance
			Worse	Priority Improvement
	Non-Determinant	Pass	Better	Instant Advantage
			Worse	Apparent Concern
		Fail	Better	Operational Opportunity
			Worse	Competitive Disadvantage
Non-Salient	Determinant	Pass	Better	Prolonged Potential
			Worse	Enduring Competitive Issue
		Fail	Better	False Sustained Benefit
			Worse	Reserved Alert
	Non-Determinant	Pass	Better	Illusionary Advantage
			Worse	Artificial Shortcoming
		Fail	Better	Simulated Advantage
			Worse	False Alarm

**Adapted from Keyt et al, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 22, 5, 35-40: 1994.

Table 3: Respondent Profiles: Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	%	Variable	Frequency	%
Gender			Marital status		
Male	199	29.7	Living with partner	22	3.3
Female	409	61.0	Married	497	74.1
Age			Separated/divorced	43	6.4
18-29	35	5.2	Single, never married	42	6.3
30-39	193	28.8	Widowed	4	0.6
40-49	226	33.7	Employment Status		
50-59	89	13.3	Homemaker	48	7.2
60-69	45	6.7	Student	3	0.4
70+	20	3.0	Retired	37	5.5
Education			Disabled	4	0.6
Less than high school	1	0.1	Unemployed	5	0.7
High school graduate	72	10.7	Part-time	53	7.9
College courses	137	20.4	Full-time	438	65.3
Associate's degree	90	13.4	Ethnic Background		
Bachelor's degree	168	25.0	African American	5	0.7
Postgraduate courses	43	6.4	Asian American	4	0.6
Postgraduate degree	97	14.5	Caucasian	564	84.1
Household Income			Hispanic	9	1.3
< \$25,000	16	2.4	Native American	8	1.2
\$25,000 - \$49,999	108	16.1	Non-identified	18	2.7
\$50,000 - \$74,999	175	26.1			
\$75,000 - \$99,999	145	21.6			
>\$100,000	164	24.4			

Table 4: Respondent Profiles: Trip Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	%	Variable	Frequency	%
Primary Purpose			Primary Decision Maker		
Leisure	286	42.6	Children	23	3.4
Business	51	7.6	Club/Organization	30	4.5
Mix of Both	312	46.5	Company	16	2.4
Travel Party Composition			Friend	16	2.4
Spouse/partner	485	72.3	Joint decision /partner	148	22.1
Children	461	68.7	Joint decision/kids	41	6.1
Parents	53	7.9	Other family	25	3.7
Distant relatives	23	3.4	Spouse/partner	19	2.8
Grandparents	12	1.8	Travel agent	2	0.3
Friends	108	16.1	Yourself	348	51.9
Business associates	24	3.6	Period of Visit		
Club members	19	2.8	Holiday	56	8.3
Fellow siblings	54	8.0	Weekend	296	44.1
Spouse's family	21	3.1	Weekday	244	36.4
			Spring	25	3.7
			Summer	264	39.3
			Fall	195	29.1
			Winter	43	6.4

Results of Importance Performance Applications

Based upon the results of the traditional importance-performance analysis, where the SRHE were placed into traditional four quadrants (concentrate here, maintain, low priority, and potential overkill), no elements were identified as 'potential overkill' where properties were over delivering on customer expectations. Elements classified as 'concentrate here' where properties should focus on improving overall service levels to meet customer expectations included food & beverage and overall value. Low priority elements, where customers did not perceive relative importance and resorts were not performing at a high level, included outdoor recreation, entertainment, family services, technology, business and health services attributes. The remaining attributes were classified as maintain, where resorts were performing at levels in-line with customer expectations, and included customer service, indoor activities, lodging, community, reputation, diverse options, physical condition, information accuracy, location, and overall ambiance.

Using this traditional important performance analysis, only two areas were identified as needing improvement with the majority of features being identified

as maintain, typically feature-based components, where activity-based components were generally identified as low priority. If literature suggestions are followed, where one factor should be forced into each quadrant, only family-driven services would be changed to overkill where the resort is over-exceeding customer expectations. Regardless of this forced categorization, which is typically not followed in hospitality and tourism (Hudson, Hudson, & Miller, 2004), and when these results are compared to the modified IPA methodology, differences exist between the recommendations provided to management based upon methodology.

Modified IPA Analysis

In order to apply a modified IPA analysis, each SRHE were evaluated based upon attribute salience, loyalty determinance, customer satisfaction and relative performance. Evaluating importance and performance in these terms provides additional insight and ultimately more specific recommendations for management. Table 5 provides values to illustrate elemental performance within each category.

Table 5: Modified Data Analysis

Attribute	Attribute Salience ^a	Loyalty Determinance	Performance Satisfaction ^c	Relative Performance ^d
Ambiance	0.59	0.162 ^b	-0.37	0.16
Lodging features	0.66	0.161 ^b	-0.46	0.65
Service quality	0.64	-0.013	-0.57	0.29
Value	0.50	-0.014	-0.89	-0.17
Physical condition	0.51	-0.018	-0.23	0.17
Marketing information	0.50	-0.047	-0.20	0.15
Reputation	0.48	0.140 ^b	-0.30	0.64
Location	0.30	0.058 ^b	0.10	0.47
Food & beverage	0.14	0.012	-0.34	0.51
Community	0.24	0.018	0.19	0.75
Outdoor recreation	-0.53	0.061 ^b	0.32	0.33
Indoor recreation	0.38	-0.069 ^b	0.16	0.14
Activity diversity	0.11	0.026	0.03	0.68
Entertainment	-0.53	0.007	0.28	-0.39
Health services	-0.79	0.021	0.40	-0.46
Family	-0.51	0.023	0.52	0.38
Technology	-1.08	-0.004	0.76	0.16
Business Services	-1.60	-0.008	1.20	0.17

**Values based upon Likert Scale where 5 = very important to 1 = unimportant

^a Value of importance grand mean (3.97) – attribute importance score

^b Significant loyalty predictor at the .05 level (R=.266, F=10.956, .000)

^c Own performance based upon importance – performance

^d Relative performance based upon internal performance – competitor performance

From these results, more than half of the elements are considered salient or important considerations for resorts. This indicates that lower perceived importance values, such as technology and business services, significantly lowered the overall mean to unbalance a theoretically balanced equation when compared to the grand mean.

In measuring loyalty determinance, which considers the long-term impacts on repeat visitation, six elements were of special interest. These hospitality elements, from ambiance to reputation, are identified because of their significance in modeling impacts on revisitation. Perplexing is the indoor recreation element, which is significant in loyalty, except from a negative perspective. This has potentially important indications for resort operations that will be discussed in the strategic implications section. Performance satisfaction, values representing the more traditional IPA methodology, identified approximately 8 elements performing below expected levels. The majority of these elements are

feature-based, identified as the most important tertiary resort elements (Brey et al., 2008). Finally, relative performance provided an alternative attribute evaluation as performance was compared against a competitive resort. Only three elements were identified as performing at a lower level than the resort's evaluated competitor.

Strategic Management Outcomes

Although resort managers are responsible for guest satisfaction and providing quality experiences, they often find little guidance determining whether they have delivered a satisfactory service experience (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998). Partner this responsibility with recent economic turmoil where limited resources have increased pressure to provide higher return on investments, and the modified IPA model (Table 6) provides specific recommendations for managers to make informed and strategic decisions to provide the greatest impact on the bottom line.

Table 6: Results Summary

Outcome	Standard Resort Hospitality Elements
Long-Term Leverage	Community, Activity diversity, Location
Important Competitive Concern	
Satisfaction Maintenance	Lodging features, Food & Beverage, Reputation Ambiance
Priority Improvement	
Salient Advantage	Indoor Recreation
Apparent Concern	
Operational Opportunity	Service Quality, Physical Condition, Marketing Information
Competitive Disadvantage	Value
Prolonged Potential	Outdoor Recreation, Family
Enduring Competitive Issue	Entertainment, Health Services
False Sustained Benefit	
Reserved Alert	
Illusionary Advantage	Technology, Business Services
Artificial Shortcoming	
Simulated Advantage	
False Alarm	

Of the 16 categories established in this study to provide deeper insight for management decision making, SRHE were catalogued within 8 of the outcomes. The first, long-term leverage included the elements of community, activity diversity and location. This categorization is the truest form of maintaining the status quo as they indicate salient selection factors that promote long-term loyalty. These resort features have exceeded customer expectations while performing at a higher level than their competition to provide important leverage. The second, expectations maintenance, included the elements of lodging features, food and beverage, reputation and ambiance. Features in this category represent a similar outcome as they are performing better than their competition except these elements are failing to meet customer service expectations.

The indoor recreation hospitality element categorized as a salient advantage represents an attribute exceeding customer expectations and competitive

comparisons. Even though consumers identify it for short-term importance, elements in this category are not as important for long-term sustainability and do not carry the same importance as previously identified elements. Similarly, service quality, physical condition, and marketing information elements are operational opportunity factors. These SRHE are salient items performing at levels higher than the competition but are not meeting customer quality expectations. Value, as a competitive disadvantage, represents a category where the competition is performing better and where a resort is not meeting expectations. This is an important category as it represents a significant weakness that competition can leverage to gain market share.

Non-salient categories, such as prolonged potential which contains the elements of outdoor recreation and family services, may not be salient in consumer determinations but currently perform at a high level in both regards while providing long-term leverage in

maintaining customers. This contrasts somewhat with the enduring competitive issues of entertainment activities and health-related services. While these elements are similar in their loyalty determinance and meeting customer expectations, elements are performing below competitors levels. Even as these elements can be a focus of improvement, they contrast starkly with the final group of SRHE, illusionary advantage. Technology and business services, elements that exceed customer expectations and competition, are not important from long and short-term perspectives even though they perform at a high level.

Discussion

Whereas traditional IPA provides four primary recommendations, the modified IPA model is similar to a decision tree analysis and can offer highly deliberate recommendations for resorts. Via this systematic examination of multiple importance and performance attributes, strategic decisions can be made concerning where efforts should be focused to improve service. By using this methodology, additional insight into results when compared to the original IPA model are provided. For instance, in the original IPA model, it was recommended that food and beverage along with perceived value were areas of concentration. Using the modified method identified value as an area of concentration, but not the food & beverage element. In the modified version, this element was determined a satisfaction maintenance variable, where scaled emphasis should be placed. This is an important differentiation between models as the modified version provides more specific insights into which areas need the most concentration on.

With multiple variables demonstrating a similar shift in focus, such as the move from a maintained recommendation for marketing information to an operational opportunity classification, category explanations to provide management implications and future applications outside of this study are needed. Elements classified as long-term leverage (community, activity diversity, location) are significant on both importance dynamics and are performing above expectations. From an operations and marketability stance, these are important points of pride that can be used to drive customer interest and should be maintained at the highest level. In the satisfaction maintenance category (lodging features, food and beverage, reputation), elements are important to consumers and this particular resort is exceeding its competition in these areas. However, the resort is not meeting guest expectations and management needs to focus on improving these features. The recommendation for these elements is to understand guest

expectations better, regardless of the investment, as these elements are important from both saliency and loyalty perspectives.

The salient advantage category (indoor recreation), is a category that includes variables that provide advantages against competitors from a saliency or immediacy perspective. These serve in attracting guests but are not identified with creating long-term loyalty. It is because of this short-term focus that properties can focus on attracting guests with these amenities and focusing on other areas to increase long-term loyalty from current guests. This recommendation is strongly supported in the SRHE instance as indoor recreation has an inverse relationship to loyalty. Similarly, operational opportunities (service quality, physical condition, and marketing information) also provide an opportunity for management to focus on non-determinant elements not meeting expectations. These take on additional importance as they can be considered a point of pride as they perform well against competitors. Unfortunately, they are not meeting the expectations of resort guests. These attributes can be used to steal market share by luring a competitor's guests in a 'we are better than they are' manner.

The competitive disadvantage category (value) contains variables that urgently need to be addressed as they are performing below appropriate levels from both perspectives. This is the second most urgent category behind the priority improvement group as they contain salient attributes and loyalty determinant variables. Management should seek to immediately improve the value perception or performance as this has become an increasingly important component. While all of these previous categories provided attribute salience, or those with immediacy impacts, the prolonged potential group lacks this impact. Prolonged attributes (outdoor recreation, family) are elements performing well on both levels and are important in loyalty determinacy. This indicates that while having something for everyone may not be salient, performing well helps create a returning customer base. These attributes would be a key focus for properties focusing on creating loyalty from their guests, particularly properties that rely upon return visitation to remain successful.

Coincidentally, enduring competitive issues (entertainment, health services) are similar to prolonged attributes except they are performing at a lower level within this resort. Attributes such as entertainment that may not be salient in customer consideration are of significantly lesser interest except in environments where the potential of loyal customers switching occurs. The

final category, illusory advantage (technology, business services), contains variables that are performing well against expectations and the competition. However, these are illusory advantages as technology and business services lack both saliency and loyalty determinacy indicating less importance than other categories. Operationally it is positive to be at a higher level than expectations but these are areas that should be given the least amount of consideration except for properties where business meetings and conventions are a considerable portion of business.

Future Research

Despite the IPA's effectiveness on managerial decision-making, conceptual and practical limitations exist as traditional applications do not consider saliency, loyalty, and competitive influence. By modifying traditional IPA to increase analysis depth, greater insight into the perceived importance and performance of standard resort hospitality elements is provided. Operators have more specific guidance into increasing satisfaction while academicians have an alternative in providing deeper insight into hospitality, tourism and recreation issues. Even though greater SRHE insight is provided, future research should take into consideration current weaknesses of the study. First, to complement our understanding of importance (saliency, loyalty) and performance (satisfaction, competition) on consumers, research should examine specific operational attributes such as financial outcomes or return on investment. For instance, which element is tied to higher profit margins or how can increases in overall performance be tied to financial outcomes. Second, there needs to be a better understanding of potential interaction between primary amenities and SRHE elements. This study, along with previous research, has focused on isolating these interrelated elements to establish preliminary understanding of these attributes. Finally, research should further examine potential applications of a modified IPA model. This study utilized secondary data and limited additional tests that could be conducted in validation of this methodology.

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