

# **An examination of the role of service quality and perceived value in visitor attraction experience**

## **Highlights**

- The study offers new understanding of the role of value in attraction experience.
- Value exerts relatively, more effect on other service constructs than service quality.
- Specifically, emotional value exerts most influence on satisfaction and intentions.
- Managers need to view the visitor experience holistically.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of service quality and perceived value in service experience in UK attraction context. Data was collected in the Midlands Region of the UK from two visitor attractions utilising mixed-mode survey approach. A total of 507 usable questionnaires were analysed using ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between the constructs. The findings confirm the cognitive-affective-conative order between the service constructs within the context of UK visitor attractions. This study has improved the understanding of the role of value in service experience, particularly attraction context, providing evidence that value exerts relatively more influence on satisfaction and behavioural intention than service quality. More specifically emotional value exerts more influence on satisfaction and behavioural intention than other forms of value. Managers need to view the visitor experience holistically rather than concentrating on one or two service construct(s).

Key words: Value, Service Quality, Satisfaction, Behavioural Intentions, Attractions

## **Introduction**

The number of studies that have been carried out on service quality and satisfaction in tourism and hospitality is indicative of the importance associated with the subject. Researchers have explored service quality in different contexts and relationships between service quality and variables including price, productivity, customer

satisfaction, benefits, well-being, profitability and behavioural intention (Cole et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2007; Nowacki, 2009; Spinks et al., 2005; Su, Swanson & Chen, 2016; Wu & Li, 2015; Zabkar et al., 2010) have also been explored. While much work has been done in other sectors such as retail, hotel and some areas of tourism such as cruise, golf tourism and medical tourism, empirical evidence of the relationship between these variables in the visitor attraction sector has only recently been expanding.

Gallarza and Saura (2006) noted that service quality and satisfaction have been dominating variables in the early studies of tourism service marketing. Consideration of the interaction of other variables such as perceived value in addition to service quality and customer satisfaction have been suggested as area of interest (Gonzalez et al., 2007; Zabkar et al., 2010). Satisfaction describes a visitor's experiences, which are the end state of a psychological process (Lee et al., 2007). Traditionally, the consumer is seen as a rational, information processing being. However, the findings of past research have established that satisfaction has some cognitive underpinnings (del Bosque & Martin, 2008). A more affective-encompassing definition put forward by Oliver (1997, p.13) states that: 'satisfaction is the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgement that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under or over fulfilment'. In similar vein, majority of studies in tourism employ the multi-attribute approach in evaluating service quality, which culminates to the development of service quality dimensions (Hall, Oriade & Robinson,

2016). This study uses both the cognitive and multi-attribute approaches to the study of service quality and conceptualises service quality as a form of attitude and a long-run evaluation of a product or service.

A partial exploration of service constructs (e.g. only satisfaction and/or service quality) in relation to behavioural intentions possibly offers inconclusive and partial representation of the relationship that exists in service experience (Cronin et al., 2000). Behavioural intention is an indicator that shows whether a customer will remain loyal to a provider or defect to another. Behavioural intentions have been measured variously in services marketing and tourism management. The measures obtainable in the literature include: recommending the product to others, remaining loyal to a provider and saying positive/negative things about a service and provider (Zabka et al., 2010). Others include paying a premium price and spending more on the provider's services (Alexandris et al., 2002). In essence, the elements of behavioural intentions can be grouped into four broad categories – re/purchase intention, word-of-mouth communication, price sensitivity and complaint behaviour.

It has been argued that behaviour intention is better understood when analysed through perceived value and evaluation of only satisfaction and/or service quality in determining behavioural intentions may be incomplete (Gallarza & Saura, 2006). There has been a renaissance of interest in the perceived value construct. Whilst perceived value had been previously, mostly, conceptualised as a unidimensional

construct (e.g. Zeithaml, 1988), a multidimensional perspective (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Petrick, 2002; Sanchez et al, 2006; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) has been advocated. A multidimensional scale can aid the understanding of the role of perceived value in service experience because value has been viewed (for example by Bolton & Drew, 1991) as a complex construct with traditional functional dimensions such as perceived risk, functionality, benefits and price, interacting with socio-psychological dimensions such as prestige, novelty and hedonism. Sanchez et al (2006) argue that tourism and related activities depend on fantasies, feelings and emotions to understand purchase behaviour. Hence broadening the scope of the value measurement will enable aspects other than functional dimensions to be captured.

Nevertheless, models of the relationship between service constructs and behavioural intentions are often proposed without the inclusion of perceived value (see for instance Zabak et al., 2010). Where it is examined it is often assessed holistically with little attention given to its components parts such as functional (economic and quality), social, and emotional dimensions proposed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001). McDougall and Levesque (2000) and Duman and Mattila (2005) suggest that perceived value has a significant influence on customer satisfaction. Gallarza and Saura (2006) state that it is imperative this area is explored, particularly in visitor attraction studies, where little work has been done. Equally, little research has assessed the moderating role of various factors associated with perceived value (Lee, Jin & Lee, 2014).

In the light of the discussion above, there is a strong basis for research based upon the theoretical foundations of services marketing and management that empirically investigates attraction visitor experience by examining the relationships between service quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions. This study firstly formulates a model that examines the relationship between service quality, perceived value, visitor satisfaction and behavioural intention. Secondly, it investigates the role of attraction attributes and compares their effects on service quality and perceived value. Thirdly, it broadens the traditional research perspective on perceived value that focuses only on functional value by including social and emotional value in the investigation. Lastly, it tests the mediating effects of quality, value and satisfaction in the model.

### **Theoretical background**

Visitor attractions form the most crucial component of tourism product (Ram, Bjork & Weidenfeld, 2016). At the very basic level, they provide the focus, featuring a number of themes, for tourists thereby drawing visitors to a destination. Attraction products can be wide ranging in terms of theme, hence they may vary as much as the number of ideas that can be conceived by planners, managers, investors and other key players in the industry. Wanhill (2008a) describing theme as imagescape submits that it is the nerve centre of the attraction product. Given the importance of attraction competitiveness from a destination management perspective, several research (e.g. Milman, 2009; Pearce & Wu, 2016) have studied visitor evaluation of attractions

services. It is clear that performances of attraction attributes dictate the experience derived from visitations.

The Cognitive-Affective-Conative framework is adopted in this article as it offers an integrative model for understanding the relationship between perceptions and behaviour. The framework derives from the hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) explains that as the consumer becomes aware of a product and develops knowledge of its constituent components, the service encounter facilitates some sort of evaluations which evokes corresponding attitudes. These attitudes enable the consumer to decide and act. The Cognitive-Affective-Conative framework is considered suitable for this project as it accommodates all the elements (i.e. service quality, perceived value, visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions) in attraction visitors experience. It is noted that cognitive response such as perception of quality precede emotional (satisfaction) and conative (behavioural intentions) responses (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Due to the growth in the attraction industry, attraction service providers must compete based on the quality of their products/services since attraction visitors are becoming more discerning and demanding (Swarbrooke, 2001). Service quality has a significant role to play in the success or failure of tourism organisations (Ranjbarian & Pool, 2015) including those providing visitor attraction services. The concept of service quality has gained a wide interest in the literature in the past few decades and has

been defined variously. Researchers have examined the construct in different contexts and developed different types of measures to help in defining, measuring and improving understanding of the construct. However, the concept has generated much controversy amongst academics particularly whether there is a generic set of dimensions applicable to all service sectors (see Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988).

In the late 1980s and up to the early 1990s, marketing and tourism related literature often conceptualised quality as the discrepancy gap between consumer's expectation and perception of performance (after Parasuraman et al., 1988). However, this conceptualisation has been extensively criticised, and as a consequence a more valid measure is likely to be achieved by directly assessing perception of performance of service/product attributes such as promptness of services, staff's knowledge of products, access to souvenir store, parking facilities, availability of comfort facilities and host of others. Often service/product attributes form the basis of factor analysis in deriving service quality dimensions (Hall et al., 2016), operationalised in this study as attraction factors. The importance of attributes in establishing measures of service quality has been widely documented (e.g., Cole et al., 2002; Han et al., 2017; Zabkar et al., 2010). Cole et al. (2002) found that visitor perception of attribute performance positively influenced their perception of service quality. Hence, this discussion leads to the first hypothesis:

*H1: Service quality is positively related to the attraction attributes.*

Value on the other hand is commonly conceptualized as the trade-off between the multiple benefits consumers receive and the sacrifices they make in acquiring or consuming a product. According to Monroe (1990) perceived benefits are a

combination of physical attributes, service attributes and technical support available in relation to a particular use situation. The relationship between service attribute and value is rarely researched in the services context (Patterson & Spreng, 1997). However, several studies have since examined the effect of product/service attributes on value (e.g. Han, Meng & Kim, 2017; Kaenzig, Heinzle & Wustenhagen, 2013; Petterson & Spreng, 1997), with varying outcomes. Lin (2003) in a product quality study confirmed the linkages between a product's attribute levels and the consumer's perception of value; a significant relationship between product attributes and customer perceived value was found. In a business-to-business, service context, Patterson and Spreng (1997) found all the six performance attributes examined positively related to perceived value. Kaenzig et al. (2013) in an investigation of the relative importance of product attributes in creating customer value equally found a significant relationship. Han et al (2017) using more generic tourism attributes found a significant relationship between perceived value and attributes of bicycle tourism. It is essential to understand if the same condition found in product attributes is applicable to tourism service, particularly visitor attractions.

*H2: Perceived value is positively related to the attraction attributes*

Another contention in services management literature is that value is a more complete antecedent to satisfaction than quality (see Gallarza & Saura, 2006 and McDougall & Levesque, 2000). The results of Lee et al's (2007) empirical investigation of dark visitor attractions in Korea indicated that all underlying dimensions of tourist's perceived value had a significant effect on satisfaction. However, Brady et al's (2001)



cross-cultural study of Americans and Ecuadorian fast-food restaurant customers revealed that value-satisfaction relationship will vary from culture to culture. Service value-customer satisfaction path was found applicable in the American context and not applicable to the Ecuadorians. Therefore, this study tests the validity of the perceived value-visitor satisfaction path in the visitor attraction context in the UK through the following hypothesis:

*H3: Visitor satisfaction is positively related to the perceived value of the attraction*

The impression given by the opposing opinions in the literature indicates no consensus on the causal order of service quality and visitor satisfaction: satisfaction-service quality or service quality-satisfaction. The weight of evidence supports the service quality-satisfaction order in general services management (see Cronin et al., 2000; Shamdasani, et al., 2008) and in tourism (see Gonzalez, et al., 2007; Zabka et al., 2010). To this end, the fourth hypothesis in this study is:

*H4: Visitor satisfaction is positively related to the perceived quality of the attraction.*

Mittal et al. (2001) in a study investigating attribute performance and customer satisfaction over time suggested that future research should focus on understanding why the relationship between attribute performance and overall customer satisfaction is strong or weak in different situations for the same product or for the same customer and over time. Mittal et al. (2001) argued that this is likely to provide better understanding of issues related to attribute performance and satisfaction. It was also noted that the antecedents of these two constructs are likely to be different.

However, a number of studies (e.g. Bojanic, 1996; McDougall & Levesque, 2000) have found that perceived value is a significant driver of customer satisfaction. In a more recent study Han et al., (2017), in bicycle tourism context, found that perceived value completely mediates the relationship between product attributes and satisfaction. This arguably may not be applicable in attraction context. It is therefore important to examine the influence of perceived value in the relationship between satisfaction and attraction attribute performance hence the fifth hypothesis is:

*H5: The influence of attraction attribute on visitor satisfaction is mediated by the perceived value of the attraction*

Studies have inferred the likelihood of variables intervening in the relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions. Services management literature has been hypothesising perceived value as a prominent mediator of behavioural intentions (for example see Petrick, 2002; Chen, 2012). Monroe (1990) found perceived value as a precursor to a person's willingness to buy and as an outcome of perceived product quality and perceived sacrifice. The results of Brady et al's (2001) study indicated that there is no direct path between customers' service quality evaluation and their behavioural intentions rather it was submitted that the effect is indirect through the consumer's service value assessment.

This leads to the sixth hypothesis:

*H6: The influence of perceived service quality on behavioural intentions is mediated by perceived value of the attraction*

Perceived value has gained increased recognition as a reliable variable in predicting behavioural intentions (Heillier et al., 2003). Value has been argued to be critical indicator of repurchase intentions (Chen & Chen, 2010; Lee, Petrick, & Crompton, 2007). Zeithaml's (1988) conceptualisation of the perceived value of a service revealed that perceived value leads to purchase intentions. Sweeney *et al.* (1997) concluded that overall value had the greatest influence on willingness to buy than functional, technical and product quality. Pura (2005) and Lee et al (2014), in studies of effect of customer perceived value on attitudinal and behavioural component of loyalty concluded that behavioural intentions were significantly influenced by customer perceived value.

*H7: Behavioural intention is positively related to the perceived value of the attraction*

A number of scholars (e.g. Baker & Crompton, 2000; Ranjbarian & Pool, 2015; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000), and industry practitioners, particularly in the visitor attractions sector, often assume that improving quality service will increase sales. Zeithalm (1988) suggests that this assertion should be modelled and tested. In response to this call, many studies have been conducted to assess this assertion in both wider service marketing research (see for example Wu et al., 2014; Zeithalm et al., 1996; Zeithalm, 2000; Zhao et al., 2012) and the tourism and hospitality field (see for example Howat and Assaker, 2013; Lee, Jin & Lee, 2014; Yuan & Jang, 2007; Zabka

et al., 2010). Even though there have been several examinations of this relationship, there are still contentions. For instance, Olorunniwo & Hsu (2006) noted that there are mixed opinions on the existence of a direct relationship between perceived quality and behavioural intentions in all service contexts. Whilst Cronin et al. (2000) found a significant direct link between perceived quality and behavioural intentions in six service sectors: fast food, entertainment, spectator sports, participative sports, health care and long haulage ground transport, it was however noted that when data from individual sectors was tested separately health care and long haulage ground transport sectors did not display a direct link between perceived quality and behavioural intentions. In the Cronin et al. (2000) work, sectors that displayed direct link between perceived quality and behavioural intentions are closely related to the tourism industry. This close affinity might explain the identified relationship. Given this, it is therefore important to test whether there is a direct relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions in themed attraction context. In view of this it is proposed that:

*H8 Behavioural intention is positively related to the perceived service quality of the attraction*

Whilst it has been established that satisfaction is a powerful predictor of behavioural intention as it represents a universal evaluation and general attitudinal construct (Mittal et al., 2001; Wu & Li, 2015; Yuan & Jang, 2007), the understanding of the relationship between service quality and behavioural intention has been fuzzy. Yuan and Jang, (2007) in their exploratory study of a wine festival conclude that quality

does not directly influence behavioural intentions but has an indirect effect through satisfaction. Woodside et al. (1989) also found an indirect relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions. However, as stated in *H8* above other scholars have found direct relationship between the two concepts. In the same vein, relationship between perceived value and behavioural intention has been contentious. Lee et al. (2007), in an examination of the perceived value for tourism at a Korean war-related tourist site found that perceived value has an indirect effect on intention. In view of this, Lee *et al.* (2007) concluded that war-related tourist site satisfaction mediates the relationship between tourist perceived value of the site and tour recommendation. Howat and Assaker (2013) in an outdoor aquatic centre context found that satisfaction fully mediates the impact of perceived quality and perceived value on behavioural intentions. Su, Swanson and Chen (2016) found specifically that satisfaction fully mediates the impact of perceived quality on intentions. Based on these scenarios, *H9 (a)* and *H9 (b)* were formulated:

*H9 (a): The influence of quality on behavioural intention is mediated by visitor satisfaction*

*H9 (b): The influence of value on behavioural intention is mediated by visitor satisfaction.*

The relationship between the constructs and hypotheses based on previous research are shown in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

## **Research design**

### ***Data collection***

Data was collected in the Midland Region of the UK. Two visitor attractions, Blists Hill Victorian Town (BHVT) and Alton Towers (AT), were selected because of their popularity in the region. Alton Towers is owned by Merlin Entertainments and a part of the Alton Towers Resort. It is situated in Staffordshire, United Kingdom. The park welcomes over two million visitors yearly. On the other hand, Blists Hill Victorian Town is an open-air museum with themed enactment of Victoria era living, located in neighbouring county – Shropshire, to Staffordshire. It is a part of the Iron Bridge Gorge Museums Trust. The Trust Museums welcome over 545,000 visitors annually (Shropshire Star, 2016). No doubt attractions vary in terms of the level of facility and service provision. The two attractions used in this study fall into the man-made and cultural attractions category. The two visitor attractions were chosen based on the fact they offer an extensive attraction service. Also two different types of attractions were chosen to assess whether the model formulated is applicable to a variety of attraction settings.

Having been given an approval to collect data at the Blists Hill Victorian Town site the questionnaire administration took place at the exit of the site. Exiting visitors were approached at this location and encouraged to participate in the survey. Exit surveys often have a convenience sampling element, even if by design it is to gather data by

random sampling. It is often impractical to intercept, engage and receive the cooperation of exiting potential participants at attractions, malls or destinations in a perfectly random manner (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002). Data were collected by intercepting visitors who were leaving the site, explaining the purpose of the study and seeking their cooperation in participating in the survey. Each questionnaire took roughly 15 minutes to complete. A total of 247 questionnaires were completed for BHVT.

The authors could not gain access to collect data, physically, at the Alton Towers site hence an alternative method was considered. Stanton (1998) found that online data are comparable to the paper and pencil data in terms of item variability. Data for Alton Towers was wholly collected from online sources. Five Alton Towers' online forums were contacted to seek approval for their members to participate in the survey. The names of the five forums would not be mentioned as permission was not sought in this regard. The five forums' profiles are as follows: AATAX (2149 members), CTNY (5480 members), ETTW with 4130 membership, GMMV (membership size not known) and IMHZ (1716 members). It was envisaged that access will be gained to sample respondents randomly. This was not, however, achieved due to privacy issues, hence a convenience sampling approach was also adopted here. Information as to how many people did or did not agree to participate in the survey was not ascertained. No checks could be made to determine non-response bias. For the Alton Towers survey, a total of 323 completed questionnaires were collected.

### ***Scale development***

The perceived quality scale used was developed in another research by the authors using sequential, mixed-methods approach. The scale consists of six quality dimensions: 'activities', 'staff', 'operation and environment', 'retail', 'access' and 'ease of use'. Perceived value was conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct adapting items used by Bello and Etzel (1985), Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Weber (2001). Satisfaction was measured using a multi-item scale adapted from Oliver's (1997) universal scale and behavioural intention was measured using items used by Zabka *et al* (2010). Creswell (2009) warns that when pre-validated items are modified or combined, the original validity and reliability may not hold for the new instrument; considering this, validity and reliability of the modified items were re-established.

Pearson scores were calculated for the index of attraction attributes, overall satisfaction, behavioural intention (via Positive word of mouth, intention to recommend and intention to revisit) and overall value. The correlation of overall satisfaction, overall perceived value, the three behavioural intention measures and the index of attraction attributes indicates a considerably high, statistically significant relationship between all the measures. The correlation of the index of attraction attributes and overall satisfaction yielded a score of 0.62  $p < 0.01$  as well as 0.63  $p < 0.01$  with overall value which indicates that the scale has convergent validity because there was high degree of positive correlation between the variables (Ryan, 1995).

The scale's discriminant validity was established because the correlation of the index of attraction factors with overall satisfaction (0.62) is greater than the three measures



of behavioural intention - Positive word of mouth (0.62); Intention to recommend (0.57) and Intention to revisit (0.61). Further perusal of the correlation scores revealed that nomological validity was also confirmed. Visitor satisfaction and attraction attributes correlate with behavioural intentions in a theoretically predicted manner. In the literature, (see for example Cole et al., 2002) a high level of visitor satisfaction, and/or perception of high service quality are likely to enhance visitors' intention to revisit a site and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication with family and friends. Additional evidence to buttress the achievement of nomological validity is predicated on the theoretical premise that visitors are more likely to recommend than revisit since recommending is easier than revisiting. From the results, overall satisfaction correlates in a theoretically predicted way with intention to recommend (0.74) having higher correlation than intention to revisit (0.58). To this end, the scale displayed theoretically predictable characteristics as it correlates with other measures to which it was theoretically related.

### ***Data analysis***

Data were analysed using ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between the constructs. Indirect effects were assessed by following Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure. To assess the mediating effect of variables the procedure stipulates the following: (1) the independent variable significantly affects the mediator, (2) the independent variable significantly affects the dependent variable, and (3) the mediator variable affects the dependent variable when both the independent and the mediator variable are in the model. If these conditions manifest in the hypothesized direction, then the influence of the

independent variable on the dependent variable should be less in the third regression equation than in the second (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Further to this, perfect mediation exists if the independent variable has no influence on the dependent variable when the mediator is controlled. The effect of the variable, perceived value of the attractions mediating the effect of attraction attribute performance (independent variable) on visitor satisfaction (dependent variable) was assessed employing the above procedures.

### ***Respondents' profile and demographic characteristics***

The combined samples from the two attractions numbered 507 but only 445 supplied information regarding their gender, of which 45% were male and 55% female. The majority (49%) of the respondents were within the age range of 18 to 24 years (see Table 1). The gender composition is similar to most family-oriented attraction visitor profiles in the literature (e.g. Spinks et al., 2005). The summary of the whole demographic profile of the respondents that completed the survey for the two sites can be found in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

### **Results**

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of the attraction on 23 attributes presented on five-point Likert scales. Employing Principal Components Analysis (PCA) with Promax oblique rotation and Kaiser normalization, 23 attraction attributes were

factor analysed to yield six factors representing 70% of the explained variance. The six factors identified are as follows: Factor 1 - activities, Factor 2 - staff attributes, Factor 3 - operations and environment, Factor 4 - retail, Factor 5 - access and Factor 6 - ease of use. To investigate the impact of the attraction Factors on overall attraction quality, the Overall Quality score was regressed against the six extracted attraction factors. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis which indicated that attraction Factors had a positive impact on Overall Quality. A  $R^2$  of 0.40 indicates that 40% of the overall quality was explained by the six attraction factors. The findings were consistent with the literature that visitor perception of attribute performance influences perception of service quality (Cole et al., 2002; Zabkar et al., 2010). Thus, Hypothesis 1 ( $H1$ ) was supported. Further examination of the  $\beta$  coefficients show that Factor 1 – activities ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ) exerts more influence on quality than other factors followed by Factor 4 – Retail ( $\beta = .16, p < .05$ ). Only Factors 1 - activities and 4 - Retail were statistically significant.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Examination of the value factors – social and personal value, monetary value and emotional value against the attraction factors also confirmed that the activities dimension exerts the highest influence on value. When all the three value factors when individually regressed on the six attraction factors the analysis show that Factor 1 – activities was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level in all the cases.

Overall value explained 46% of the dependent variable; thus, Hypothesis 2 (H2) was supported.

To analyse the impact of perceived value on visitor satisfaction, overall visitor satisfaction was regressed on three value factors (Table 3). The results indicate that social and personal value, monetary value and emotional value together explain 37% of the variability in visitor satisfaction with emotional value exerting the most influence ( $\beta = .42$ ).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Investigating the influence of the perceived quality of the attractions on visitor satisfaction, overall satisfaction was regressed on overall quality. The result of the analysis supports the view that quality influences satisfaction with a  $R^2$  of 0.28 indicating that 28% of overall quality explains overall satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.53, p < .001$ ) (see Table 4). In addition, four further regression models were run assessing the impact of overall quality on 'I was delighted with the attraction' (SAT 1), 'I was pleased that I decided to visit the attraction' (SAT 2), 'The experience I had visiting the attraction exceeded my expectation' (SAT 3) and 'Visiting the attraction was exactly what I needed' (SAT 4). Overall quality explained the following variances in the four satisfaction measures: SAT 1 – 32%, SAT 2 – 25%, SAT 3 – 32% and SAT 4 – 25%. All the satisfaction variables were significant at 95% confidence level further supporting the

existence of a quality-satisfaction relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 (*H4*) was accepted.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure and Sobel (1982) statistic were carried out in testing hypothesis five (*H5*) – the influence of attraction attribute performance on visitor satisfaction is mediated by the perceived value of the attraction. The results of the procedures are shown in Figure 2 and Table 5. The regression analysis showed that the influence of attraction attribute performance on perceived value was significant ( $t = 10.57, p < .001$ ). The influence of attraction attribute performance on overall visitor satisfaction was also significant ( $t = 10.50, p < .001$ ). Additionally, perceived value significantly affected overall satisfaction ( $t = 6.61, p < .001$ ), and attraction attribute quality in the same equation also influenced overall satisfaction significantly ( $t = 4.57, p > .001$ ). This indicates a partial mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The indirect influence of attraction attribute performance on satisfaction through perceived value was also examined using the Sobel (1982) test to explicitly assess the significance of mediation effects. A test statistic with a normal distribution was derived using the unstandardized coefficients and the standard errors from the regressions above. The statistical significance of this test statistic was then evaluated.

As shown in Table 6, the mediation effect of perceived value on attraction attribute performance and overall visitor satisfaction was significant  $p < .001$ .

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

In summary, the Sobel (1982) statistic showed that perceived value mediated the effect of attraction attribute performance on overall visitor satisfaction. Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure indicated a partial mediation effect. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported. The partial mediating effect means that, attraction attribute performance had some direct effect on overall visitor satisfaction.

The same procedures as above were followed to test Hypothesis 6 (H6), the influence of perceived service quality on behavioural intentions through the mediating effect of perceived value; Hypothesis 9a (H9a) stated that the effect of service quality on behavioural intentions would be mediated by visitor satisfaction; and Hypothesis 9b (H9b). The statistical significance of the test statistic was then assessed and it indicated that perceived value undoubtedly, positively mediates the effect of perceived quality on behavioural intentions ( $p < .001$ ) albeit partially and thus Hypothesis 6 (H6) was supported. The mediation effects are summarised in Table 6 below. The regression analysis indicated that the effect of service quality on visitor satisfaction was significant ( $t = 8.60, p < .001$ ). Likewise, the effect of service quality on behavioural intention was significant ( $t = 12.40, p < .001$ ). Further to this satisfaction significantly influenced behavioural intentions ( $t = 19.22, p < .001$ ) as did service quality ( $t = 3.59, p < .001$ ) in this same equation. However, the impact of service quality was

less in the third equation than the second thereby signifying a partial mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The analysis showed that the effect of perceived value on visitor satisfaction was significant ( $t = 15.86, p < .001$ ). Equally, the influence of perceived value on behavioural intentions was significant ( $t = 18.15, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, both satisfaction ( $t = 16.70, p < .001$ ) and perceived value ( $t = 8.55, p < .001$ ) had significant influenced on behavioural intentions when both variables were present in the same equation. Nevertheless, the effect of perceived value was less in the third equation than in the second one thereby indicating a partial mediation of satisfaction in the model (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

In testing Hypothesis 7 (*H7*) - value positively influences behavioural intentions, relationships between the three Value Factors and Behavioural Intention 1 (BI1 - I would speak highly of the attraction to friends and relatives) were examined, the Factors were found to explain 41% of the variance in BI1. When Behavioural Intention 2 (BI2 - I would recommend the attraction to others) was considered, the Factors explained 40% of the variance in BI2. For the significant coefficients ( $\beta$ ) in the Value Factor- Behavioural Intention 1 model, for every unit increase in emotional value, the tendency for visitors to speak highly of the attraction to friends and relatives increased by .384 units; for a unit increase in monetary value, Behavioural Intention 1 increased by .205 units and; a unit increase in Social and Personal value resulted in a 0.175 unit increase in visitors speaking favourably of the attraction to others. For the

Value Factor- Behavioural Intention 2 equation, an increase in emotional value results in .473 units increase in visitors' willingness to recommend the attraction to others and a unit increase in monetary value produced a 0.182 unit increase in Behavioural Intention 2. Social and personal value was not statistically significant in this model. For the Value Factor- Behavioural Intention 3 model only emotional value ( $\beta = .394$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was found to have a significant effect on revisit intentions.

Overall, Hypothesis 7 (*H7*) was supported as all the regression model examined to assess the influence of the perceived value of the attraction on behavioural intentions reflect the general state of the literature (e.g. Chen & Chen, 2010; Cronin et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2007). However, these findings are at variance with Gallarza & Saura's (2006) study results that did not find direct effects of social, play, aesthetics, and time and effort value dimensions on loyalty.

The hypothetical relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions was also verified. The results of the impact of Overall Quality on BI1, BI2 and BI3 indicate the independent variable explained 27% variance in BI1, 22% variance in BI2 and 14% variability in BI3. In all cases the independent variable was significant at 95% confidence level. In addition, the regression coefficients indicated that Overall Quality had significant impact on Behavioural Intentions exerting highest influence on BI1 ( $\beta = .524$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by BI2 ( $\beta = .475$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and BI3 ( $\beta = .383$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Although the results are somewhat lower compared to for example perceived value results; however, the results support Hypothesis 8 (*H8*).



## **Discussion**

The focus of this research was to examine the relationship between quality, value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions in the UK visitor attraction industry using Alton Towers and Blists Hill Victorian Town as the context. Nine hypotheses, formulated based on the literature, were tested. Also, the effects of attraction attributes on quality and value, and value factors on satisfaction and behavioural intentions were examined. The study supports Cronin et al's (2000) argument that the relationship existing between the service constructs is far more complex than that generally reported in the literature. The findings of this study, like those of Cronin et al. (2000) and Petrick (2004), show that perceived quality directly affects perceived value, visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Also, it has indirect effects on behavioural intentions through both perceived value and visitor satisfaction. The complexity of the relationship is not limited to quality; the perceived value of attractions also exhibits similar convolution. It was found that perceived value has a direct influence on both satisfaction and behavioural intentions. These findings are consistent with previous research by Tam (2004) and Chen and Chen (2010), albeit in other sectors. Perceived value also has an indirect influence on behavioural intentions through visitor satisfaction. This result supports Tam's (2004) work, which also reported perceived value as having an indirect effect on behavioural intentions through customer satisfaction.

This finding however, is a complete departure from Gallarza and Saura's (2006) work that found no link between service quality and satisfaction or Bolton and Drew (1991) who modelled satisfaction as an antecedent to service quality. The vast majority of

studies in this area (e.g. Brady et al., 2002; Cole & Illum, 2006; Zabkar et al., 2010) support the quality-satisfaction relationship; moreover, Brady et al (2005) contend that this order is obtainable irrespective of setting/context.

The general state of the literature regarding the direct relationship of service quality and behavioural intentions is quite mixed. A number of studies (e.g. Cronin et al., 2000) found that different sectors displayed different results when it comes to a direct link between perceived quality and behavioural intentions. Gonzales et al (2007) found buying intentions and word of mouth communication are positively influenced by perceived quality although they found that satisfaction exerts more influence. Whilst it is acknowledged that the direct relationship of service quality and behavioural intentions may not exist in all service contexts, this relationship was found at Alton Towers and Blists Hill Victorian Town.

Examination of value against the attraction factors on one hand and quality against the attraction factors on the other yielded an interesting finding. Whilst the findings were consistent with the literature that visitor perception of attribute performance determine perception of service quality (Cole et al., 2002; Zabkar et al., 2010), 46% of value was explained by the attraction factors compared to 40% of quality being explained by the attraction factors. This indicates that attraction attributes (via the factors) exert relatively more influence on perceived value than on perceived quality; this theoretically has an implication on the role assigned to attributes in relation to quality. If attributes are the make-up of quality, it is then logical that they exert more influence on it than any other construct.

Further examination of the effect of attraction attributes (through the factors) on value suggests that visitors' perception of value is influenced by activities at both the Alton Towers and Blists Hill Victorian Town visitor attractions. This result is in line with Patterson and Spreng's (1997) study in business-to-business contexts that found one dimension of performance the most important in explaining value and satisfaction. This suggests that managers and developers of visitor attractions need to investigate and design 'activities' which will enhance visitors' perception of value. It must be noted that this is an area that is seldom researched in tourism; there is a need for further investigation in this area. Other factors, apart from 'activities' have substantial impacts, and therefore, considered also to be important; they should not be overlooked in product and marketing strategy development.

The result show that value, and all value factors, have meaningful influence on visitors' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. This finding reflects Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) assertion that consumers assess product not only from functional or performance, value for money and usefulness bases, but also in terms of pleasure derived from the product (emotional value) and social imports of the product as it is communicated to families, friends and other acquaintances (social value). This is also consistent with Chen and Hu's (2010) findings.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The findings of this study support several dominant theoretical propositions concerning the relationships that exist between perceived quality, value, customer

satisfaction and behavioural intentions when viewed from visitor attractions perspective. All the hypotheses tested in this regard were supported. Consistent with prior research in services management (Cronin et al., 2000) and tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010; Petrick, 2004), the cognitive responses (quality and value) precede emotional (satisfaction) and conative (behavioural intentions) responses.

One significant contribution of this study is that attraction attributes exert more influence on perceived value than on perceived quality; this has some theoretical implications on the conceptualisation of quality and the role assigned to attributes in relation to quality. If attributes constitute quality, it is only logical that they exert more influence on it than any other construct. Another significant contribution of this study is the further expansion of knowledge in the quality-value-satisfaction-behavioural sequence in attraction service experience as it examines the direct and indirect relationships in the service construct. The study suggests that visitors are disposed to engaging in cognitive assessment of attraction services, filtering their benefits in quite a varied way before developing emotional attachment and subsequently arriving at decisions of promoting and/or remaining loyal to the organisation that provided the services. The model provides us with an understanding of the interaction between the service constructs examined in this research, responding to Gallarza and Saura's (2006) call that this area be explored, particularly in visitor attraction context.

On the whole, the assessment of the tested model revealed that the service constructs are extensively integrated; hence managers in the industry need to study them carefully and avoid abandoning one for the other - for instance, customer

satisfaction and service quality are often the focus of attention within a tourism context, whereas, this study and many others indicate that other constructs, such as value, are crucial in visitors' repurchase and referral intentions. Another significant practical contribution of this study is that it highlights the importance of the value and quality constructs for segmenting visitors and positioning attractions. Visitor attraction operators can use the preferences of their customers to differentiate markets and develop products. For instance, operators may want to segment their customers based on dimensions of value such as emotional value, social value etc. They may also present their products on these bases – using choice of language that will communicate social value for example. Although this area would need further investigation by the operator because it is essential to identify the elements of the service visitors value most, as well as design the required aspects of service to stimulate visitor perception of value to position the product effectively in the mind of the target audience. Essentially, managers need to interpret the visitor experience holistically rather than focusing on one or two service construct(s). Although, the holistic approach presumably can create additional costs at the initial stage, however, the costs are highly likely to be recouped not only in financial term but also in terms of strong brand image and visitors' loyalty.

### ***Limitations and recommendations for further research***

This research has contributed to knowledge by developing and testing a model that examined the relationship between perceived quality, value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions in the visitor attraction context. Whilst care was taken in the

design and conduct of the study, as with any other research project, some limitations were identified.

Due to the nature of visitor attraction operations, which make access to the visitor difficult, a multiple method of data collection was adopted including a web-based survey. Web-based surveys are often criticised for not having high response rates to enable the results to be generalized beyond the scope of the sample (Sill & Song, 2002). This may result from technological problems with delivery, for instance the incompatibility of the survey system with web browser or computer system used by respondents and security issues. Problems with spam mails are also likely to cause problems with delivery in some instances. In a case like this, intended respondents may not be reached, contributing to low response rates and an impact on representativeness. Also, associated with the constraint of adopting multiple methods of data collection was the implementation of a non-random sampling method. Future research could employ a probability sampling approach and may also want to consider a broader spectrum of attraction visitors. There is also some difference between the average profiles of the respondents of the selected sites in terms of age; however, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to check whether there is any statistical significant difference. It was found that there were significant differences in five items, which is somewhat minimal and deemed to have a negligible influence on the result.

The model developed in this study was only tested in a heritage visitor attraction with enactment and a theme park and did not include all possible service constructs involved in visitors' experience. Therefore, generalisability of the results to other

attraction contexts should be considered with caution because quality is context specific and visitor attractions vary significantly in size, type and visitor appeal. In addition, data collected from the two attractions was aggregated because this provides a basis for exploring the commonality and differences between them. However, this limited the set of available attributes to those common to both attractions. Again, the focus of the study was on the relationship between service quality, perceived value, visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Some insights were gained on the influence of attraction attributes on value. Further research should therefore explore this domain, compare the effect in different types of attractions and examine the direct influence on other constructs such as loyalty.

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