VALIDATING QUALITY TOURISM EXPERIENCE MODEL: INVESTIGATING SUSTAINABILITY AS AN ANTECEDENT

Endaew Tegegne Behaile, Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, India.

Dr. Apar Singh, Assistant Professor, School of Management Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, India.

Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to validate the Experience Economy concept of Pine and Gilmore in star classified hotels/resorts and to examine the effect of sustainability practices of star rated hotels on quality tourism experience in Ethiopian hotels/resort from managers' perspective. A quantitative and cross-sectional approach was applied. Data were collected from all (170) star classified hotel & resorts (manager) using a survey questionnaire. CFA and SEM were applied to validate and test the structural model respectively. The major findings are with higher sustainability practices of the star classified hotels are more likely to improve quality tourism experience of star classified hotel/resorts, and the measurement model for quality tourism experience in hotel context has validated with minor modification. A valuable insight on dimensions of quality tourism experience in star classified hotels/resorts has offered. Therefore, hotels and resorts in Ethiopia could give due attention for a better sustainability practices so that quality customer experience improved and enhance hotels/resorts' competitiveness.*

Keywords: sustainability, quality tourism experience, star classified hotels

I. Introduction

Accommodation sector has become one of the most dominant sectors within the tourism industry. Their aim is primarily to achieve superior customer perceived quality of physical environment, value, and image in the hotel. Many industries have been investing heavily in the design of consumer experiences to achieve satisfaction, loyalty and ultimately to enhance its competitiveness (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). It is well realized that tourism is an experience commodity. Most importantly tourists/guests are highly involved in the purchasing and consumption of the products and services (Mowen, 1987). In the meanwhile, multisensory, imagery, and emotive aspects of consumer behaviours in the hospitality sector could easily be affected. Thus, the relevance of creating experience setting in the tourism industry is vital (Titz, 2007).

Consequently, tourism businesses have been searching ways to design physical environment that would support guests' interactions and enhance their experience. In relation to this, recently, sustainability practices in the hotel are widely used so as to achieve quality tourism experiences. A number of studies have found that companies could create effective experiential designs that linked with their clients through manipulating the physical environments, which immediately influence positive, satisfied, and loyal consumers. However, tourism experiences are not solely formed by the physical environment. Hence, the interactions of both internal and external factors are required so as to enhance customer experience (Gilmore and Pine, 2002).

There is no general consensus on the notion and elements of quality tourism experience among scholars and practitioners. Because, the nature of tourism experience is not static, rather it is dynamic and individualistic. These intrinsic/individual emotional and personal factors are influenced by factors that are out of the control of management (Pullman & Gross, 2004). These include cultural backgrounds, personality traits, emotive, fantasy, multisensory experiences, and many others. Due to these, businesses are working intentionally to create distinct offerings and staging experiences so as to enhance tourism experiences (Titz, 2008).

Eventually, in hospitality industry, previous researches have focus on the concept of physical environment as the prominent factor to form customer /tourist experiences. However, recently it is believed the social environment would shape the customer experiences. Hence, it is argued that the atmospheric stimuli composed of physical environment and human interaction could influence the customer experience. Therefore, consumer/guest experience is the total perceived experiences of customer towards goods, services, and the environment that is purchased and/or experienced (Lewis & Chambers, 2000). In relation to this, tourism businesses' sustainability practices could influence elements of quality of tourism experiences (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). Empirical evidences on measuring the structural dimensions of quality customer experience of star classified hotels/resorts from managers perspective is limited (Kim, & Cha, 2006). The issue is also a less studied area specifically, in Ethiopian hospitality industry context.

II. Review of Related Literature

2.1. The concept of Experience

In the age of post modernity experiences of consumers play an increasingly important role in economic and social life. Tourism is surely one of the pioneer examples of experience economy. Contributors in the field have discussed the notion from different perspective i.e. sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives. Nowadays researchers come to some agreement on what constitutes the experience of leisure and tourism. Tourism is a business comprising many service sectors. Thus, to translate the consumer experience into managerial action, research into the experience of tourism from a services marketing perspective is warranted. From the 1970s onwards the tourist experience has become one of the most popular academic topics (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Wang, 2002).

Since 1960's, authors have written about tourist experiences and tourism and the related recreation experiences for instance, Boorstin (1964) commented on authenticity with regard to tourist experiences. Experience has been defined from different perspectives. In academic literature, tremendous interpretations of the term 'experience' have been given. It is defined as an emotional state, consisting of "a steady flow of fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). From the organizational/business perspective experience is "a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Therefore, the term experience is not quite new to tourism, hospitality and leisure

sectors. It is a human interaction with people, place, spaces, products, services, organization, government and cultures (Gayale Jennings, 2009).

Moreover, tourism as an experiential product, it is largely viewed as an experience commodity. Hence, every encounter, any behavioural or perceptual, emotional or cognitive, and implied or expressed, can be considered an experience (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Pine and Gilmore (1999) has defined experience from a business perspective: Experiences are events that invite individuals to engage in a personal way. From customer perspective it can be defined as enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for individuals consuming these events. As a recent literatures find out (Kim, 2014) experience is constitutes of both an outcome of negative and positive encounters. Positive Experience is considered as a favourable encounter. In this regard researchers have found that tourism offer opportunities for enjoyment, cultural exploration, social interaction and personal development. A negative experience is also called unfavourable encounters. To mean that, though visitors went to satisfy their feelings through participating in tourism, one can unexpectedly experience dissatisfaction (Chen, Bao, & Huang, 2013).

2.2. Quality Tourism Experience

It is not an easy notion to describe, as tourism by nature is a complex and unpredictable. As a result, quality tourism experience need to be interpreted with in specific contexts and by specific 'actors' to reflect the temporality of the settings in which they constructed and significant attention should paid to create experiences for consumers. Quality tourism experience is repeatedly used by destination and organization involved in tourism planning, policy, management, marketing and delivery. The tourist experiences can be grouped along tourist visitation phases: pre trip experience, en-route trip experience, and destination on-site experiences. The notion of quality tourism experience as a concept is also part of travel behaviour. It is defined as the tourist's perception of the degree of quality of their tourism experience related to products and service received during different phases of the entire visitation process (Jennings & Nickerson, 2006).

2.2.1. Elements of Quality Tourism Experience

Pine and Gilmore (1999) has identified four dimensions of experience and he differentiates the elements based on the level and form of customer involvement in business offerings. Along the customer participation axis; two elements of experiences i.e. entertainment and aesthetic dimensions are characterized as passive participation, whereas educational and escapist dimensions have characterized as active participation.

Guests/tourists under passively participates in destination/business activities do not have a direct influence on the performance of the business, whereas an active participant could have influence on the performance of the business and their experience too. Along the absorption-immersion axis, tourists/guests are classified based on how they are physically become part of the event/experience as 'Immersion' and how an event attract guests' attention referred to 'Absorption'. Thus, entertaining and educational offerings of a business/destination are under absorption and offering aesthetic or escapist environment under "immerses" (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Each experience dimension is unique and contributes to the consummation of a business/destination experience, while the combination of all four dimensions results in an optimal tourist experience.

Educational experiences: According to Pine and Gilmore, a tourist absorbs educational experiences at businesses unfolding before go to a business/ destination, while actively involve through interactive engagement in mind and virtually. Guests/tourists could improve their skills and knowledge through educational experiences at business/destinations while staying in. For instance, visitors/guest staying at a hotel could learn the historical background of the city and its natural beauty from reading brochures and/or interacting with staffs/receptionists and he/she may increase their skills by trying to cook, during campfire or if the hotel/resort offer special cooking time. Therefore, educational experience can be measured using items such as 'I feel that I have learnt something of importance" and "I have gained insight into..." (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Esthetic experiences: in esthetic experiences, guests/tourists enjoy being in the business/destination environment without disturbing the natural beauty presented to them. They appreciate through appeals to their senses. Esthetic experience is highly influenced by the environmental characteristics of the business' physical setting and service. Therefore, the esthetic experience is significant determinant of business/destination overall experience.

Entertainment experience: it is one of the oldest forms of experience, but the most important elements of experience in today's business environment too (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Thus, it needs business/destination to offers catch customer's attention and business/destinations readiness. These include listing to music and reading for pleasure at a hotel/resort or watching events/festivals while staying at a destination/hotel.

Escape experience: an escape experience needs at least three components to be considered. First, many people depart from their daily life just to distant themselves from the daily routines, no matter what the daily routines are, where they head, and what they do. They just want to get away. This type of escape centres on fleeing from or avoiding routines of daily life temporarily, taking a break, and returning refreshed and recreated. The second type of escape is destination driven. People want to escape to a particular destination (the pull), regardless of their reasons to escape the daily life. The third component of escape is tourists 'active involvement in specific activities at the destination/resort in which they become instrumental in orchestrating an escapist experience. The escapist experience characterized by its

greater immersion and participation other than the elements of experiences such as entertainment and educational experiences.

Nevertheless, Pine and Gilmore's and other researchers' discussions on the experience economy have been at conceptual stage and validate a scale for empirical measurement of the tourist experience in some settings was tested, but it was limited to some form of tourism settings. Therefore, research of tourist experiences at star classified hotels/resorts is essential to be checked that can be useful for all stakeholders of tourism industry.

2.3. From Service Quality to Experience Quality

For many years, service quality was merely considered as an antecedent to customer satisfaction. In line with this consensus, service quality improvements were a factor to profit expansion and to get market share (Rahman, 2012). However, the contemporary tourism and hospitality studies suggests the conventional service quality dimensions will not be in a position to address the affective and holistic factors required for high quality overall service experiences. Chen (2007) asserts that customers should be delighted through experience quality rather than through the mere provision of service quality, which implies that experience quality "goes beyond the notion of service quality" (Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2011). This argument might be founded in the emphasis been placed on the creation of a consumer "experience" since the late 1990s. Although service quality still plays an important role in customer satisfaction, the general principles underpinning its conceptualisation seems to be of less importance to contemporary customers. Service quality is primarily founded on functional and technical aspects of service delivery, while increasingly, customer expectations tend to focus on the affective and holistic factors that lead to quality of the overall service experience (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Researchers have declared that the economy has been transformed into an experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998. They argue that, as the economy offers more and more commoditized products and services, companies should find ways to differentiate themselves from their respective competitors. Several authors advocate that it is no longer acceptable for companies to offer just commodities, products, or services; rather, offerings must be accompanied by memorable experiences in order to differentiate the companies in the increasingly commoditized and competitive world (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Scholars have argued that experiences are not appropriate for every product or service nor are every company capable of staging experiences (Day, 2000). An experience or experience dimension(s) is a blend of many individual dimensions that come together within the individual that may involve the consumer emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually (Mossberg, 2007) and are memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Accordingly, no two individuals will have the same experience because experience dimensions are interpreted individually. However, an organization cannot grant an experience to the consumer; rather organizations can only create the environment and the circumstances in which consumers could have an experience. It is the consumer or hotel guest that adds the final link to the

production chain by putting together the resources which produce the consumer experience (Andersson, 2007).

2.4. Factors of Quality Customer Experience

In hospitality industry, many previous researches has focused the concept of physical environment has been the prominent factor to form customer experiences. However, recently the researcher has studied the interaction of humans has also a factor that would shape the customer experiences. Hence, it is argued that the atmospheric stimuli composed of physical environment and human interaction could influence the customer experience (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). It can be generalized that consumer/gust experience is the total perceived experiences of customer towards goods, services, and the environment that is purchased and/or experienced (Lewis & Chambers, 2000).

The experience concept has particular relevance to the hospitality industry (Titz, 2007) due to the fact that consumers are highly involved in the purchase and consumption of the products (i.e., the props) and services (i.e. the stage) (Mowen, 1987). The hospitality sector affects many factors of consumer behavior such as multisensory, imagery, and emotive aspects (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). This concept has been reinforced by a number of studies, which found that companies that create effective experiential designs may make emotional connections with their clients by manipulating the physical and social environments, thereby creating positive, satisfied, and loyal consumers (Bitner, 1992; Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Pullman & Gross, 2004).

Schmitt (1999) has argued service providers need to offer environment setting for the desired customer experiences to emerge (Schmitt, 1999). The settings should result positive impact on the five senses of consumers. The staged situation or environment involves physical dimensions that would impact the five senses of consumers. In line with this, Bitner's (1992) has described creating a servicescape could result in commitment, loyalty, the spending of money, and prolonged stays.

2.5. Tourist Experience in Star Classified hotels/resorts

Recently tourism and hospitality researchers have employed emergent experiential or hedonic consumption theories to understand the complexity of the tourist's experience (Williams, 2006). The expanding body of literature related to consumer experience, while still evolving, affords a logical connection to other components of tourism such as accommodations and lodgings. Tourists staying at star classified hotels and resorts seek an experience that "is a complex interaction of natural setting, food, cultural, and historical inputs, environmentally friendly products and above all the people who service them.

2.6. Sustainability Practices

According to Spencereley, A. (2001) sustainability practices require the ability of tourism service providers to optimal uses of environmental resources; keep the authenticity of the local community, and ensuring sound economic stands. The majority of hotel businesses in particular have already adopted sustainable practices, which enabled them to reduce the unnecessary inputs (Smerecnik and Andersen, 2011). Sustainable tourism has been defined as "tourism that takes full account of its future and current economic, environmental and social impacts, addressing the needs of the enterprises, visitors, local people and the environment (WTO and UNEDP, 2005).

Based on the above definition, organizational level sustainability is a systematic management effort by corporations to balance environmental and social with economic goals in order to minimize harm to and increase benefits for natural environments and societies, which is delineated as Triple bottom Line (TBL) (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) was introduced to achieve the required level of performances not only in "bottom---line" performance (profitability), but also in social and environmental performance to reach total sustainability. The three aspects of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) aspects should be seen as equally important. The WTO & UNEDP (2005) has discussed the three dimensions of sustainability as follows:

Environmental Sustainability: tourism sectors/business has to take actions to minimize their impacts such as pollution of air, land and water, and to maintain and conserve natural heritages and biological diversities. Particularly, tourism companies (e.g. resorts/hotels) are required to conserve non-renewable.

Social Sustainability: tourism companies should respect human rights and facilitate equal opportunities for all in the community, irrespective of their races, religion, gender, age and their physical abilities. A benefit received from tourism activities needed to be equitably distributed with a focus on alleviating societal problems like poverty. Companies' interactions with the society should be strengthen and recognizing and respecting cultural diversity and avoiding any form of exploitation and safety health, global climate change, environmental regulations, etc. need to be considered during operations. They have to also provide labour training, creating jobs to locals (Mowforth and Munt, 1998)

Economic Sustainability: tourism companies' economic gains from their activities must be sufficient to cover the cost of expended to cater the tourists and to mitigate the effects (e.g. the inconvenience caused to the local community visited). They have to also provide Jobs to local community and pay sufficient wages/salary (Mowforth and Munt, 1998).

2.7. Sustainability and Quality Tourism Experience

According to the WTO & UNEDP (2005), environmental sustainability is increasingly contributing the quality of customer experiences and overall tourist satisfaction in a tourist destination/ business. Quality tourism experiences offerings to customers may mutually supports sustainable tourism business practices (Arnould & Price, 1993). Experience of the hotels, resorts and lodges in tourist destination affects

satisfaction and plays a crucial role in achieving a competitive advantage within the industry. In the experience economy, consumers seek unique experiences beyond merely consuming products and services, because the high level of product and service quality can no longer be used to differentiate the businesses, especially in hotels and resorts of a tourist destination (Oh, H., Fiore, A. M., & Jeong, M.,2007).

Ryan, (1997) asserts sustaining quality in tourism destinations can be described as seeking to maintain a business/destination's reputation. The task of building reputation will necessitate some investment which implies that, in equilibrium, high quality tourism experiences will sell for a premium about its cost of production (Keane, 1996). Tourism businesses often seek to make renovations and improve their facilities, which can improve their guests' experience. But, doing such activities alone will not produce customer delight. It is the customer experience that will generate the feeling of delight. Thus, experiences take place not only on a physical location, but in the minds of guests. Consequently, firms in tourism industry need to pay close attention to customers' emotions and motivational needs (Gayle Jennings, 2006). The environmental sustainability is increasingly important to improve the quality of customer experiences and overall tourist satisfaction WTO & UNEDP (2005), On the other hand, perceived high quality tourism experiences may not always is sustainable. For instance, a five-star resort hotel experience in a developing nation may act unsustainable when it is competing with the local community and create pressure on the allocation of local level water.

Schmitt (1999) asserts that experiences happen in response to some staged situation and it involve the entire being. According to Bitner's (1992), companies need to think in terms of environmental dimensions, participants' internal responses, and employee and consumer behaviors that could create loyal and higher spending customers. The physical environment is a critical factor, which supports the social interaction. In other words, consumers who engaged in positive physical and relational aspects may find themselves in positive emotional, satisfying, and loyal environments (Bitner, 1992). Thus, customers could define experiential value based on the experiences encountered with the service provider (Yuan and Wu, 2008).

2.8. Conceptual Framework

Firms can significantly improve their current processes and product/service quality by making them sustainable and greener. All these activities offer a more attractive, likable, favourable, and acceptable company offering to customers (Garay and Font, 2012). In this research, the concept of tourist experience is interpreted based on Pine & Gilmore, (1998) and Prahalad & Ramaswamy, (2004), where experience is a deliberate offer by service providers and/or it is a co-creation. Hotels and resorts could employ their knowledge, resources and passion sustainably to create sustainable experience. The researcher has proposed a model to explore the relationships among the three pillars of sustainability performance in the tourism business, particularly in hotel businesses and its influence on improving quality tourism experience in star classified hotels/resorts (see Figure 1.2). This research model assumes environmental, social-cultural and economic sustainability performance of hotels/resorts is more likely correlated, which

referred to as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) (Smerecnik & Andersen, 2011). It is assumed that hotel-specific sustainability (social-cultural, economic and environmental) performance of hotels/resorts may improve quality tourism experience in star classified hotels/resorts. This research has considered the firm Resource Based View RBV of Barney, J. B. (1991), where managing companies' resources result in organizational capabilities.

Based on the above literatures, this study has proposed the following framework.

Fig.2.8. Conceptual Framework
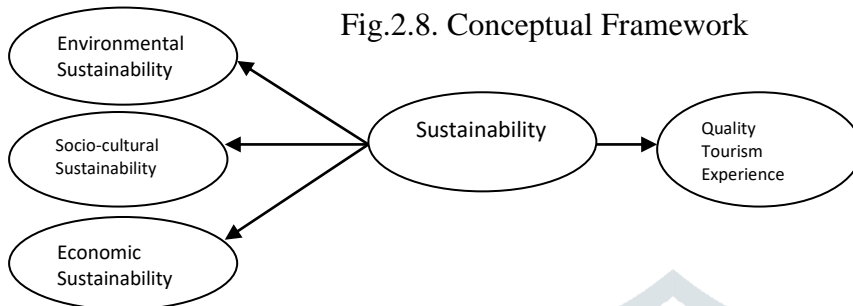
Source: (researcher, 2018)

2.9. Hypotheses

Tourism businesses particularly, hotels/resorts have played vital role in supporting green strategies that will make the operations conducive for the customers and to sustain the organizations success (Shah, 2011). Thus, firms can significantly improve their current processes and product/service quality by making them sustainable and greener. All these activities offer a more attractive, likable, favourable, and acceptable company offerings to customers than will enhance quality customer experience (Garay and Font, 2012). Based on this theoretical framework, this study has tested the following hypotheses:

H1. Sustainability practices positively influence quality of tourism experience in Star classified hotels in Ethiopia.

2.10. Statement of Problem

Pine and Gilmore (1998) world economy has been transformed into an experience economy. They argue that, as the economy offers more and more commoditized products and services, companies should find ways to differentiate themselves from their respective competitors. Hence, it is no longer acceptable for companies to offer just commodities, products, or services; rather, offerings must be accompanied by memorable experiences in order to differentiate the company in the increasingly commoditized and competitive world (Schwartz, 1990). Due to this, companies need to adopt a sustainability strategy that would improve a quality of tourism businesses. However, some have argued experiences are not appropriate for every product or service nor are every company capable of staging experiences (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998; Day, 2000). It is because, an organization cannot grant an experience to the consumer; rather organizations can only create the environment and the circumstances in which consumers could have an experience (Mossberg, 2007). It is the consumer or hotel guest that adds the final link to the production chain by putting together the resources which produce the consumer experience (Andersson, 2007).

Moreover, WTO (2004) asserts perceived high quality tourism experiences may not always be sustainable. For instance, a five-star resort hotel experience in a developing nation may act unsustainable when it is competing with the local community and create pressure on the allocation of local level water. On the other hand, tourism businesses' financial/economic position can play a vital role in supporting green strategies that will make the operations conducive for the stakeholders and sustain the organizations success (Shah, 2011). Hence, they can significantly improve their current processes and product/service quality through making them sustainable and greener. All these activities would create and acceptable offerings to customers that will improve quality customer experience (Garay and Font, 2012). The company's focus is not only on the product or service, but also on the entire consumer experience (Yuan & Wu, 2008).

Gilmore and Pine (2002) has recommended that memorable guest experiences are obtained when a company applies sustainability. The Service organizations and marketers have focussed too much of their efforts on designing core service's that enhances the entire customer experience. This energy is needed for firms to be competitive in the marketplace, because it is believe the price will no longer be the only weapon of competitive advantage. Some argued sustainability practices such as environmental sustainability and customer experiences relationship is weak as compared to other drivers of customer experiences and satisfactions such as facilities and food and beverage quality However, currently increasing numbers of customers are starting to seek environmentally-friendly products and services and paying more such products and services (cited in Brun-Smith, et al., 2015).

Most of the existing studies have investigated the tourist experience on-site, whilst less attention has been given to experiences in supporting services (e.g. accommodation, food, transportation, wineries, etc.). Literatures in the field have suggested that the concept of customer experience portrait a complex and multidimensional nature, with physical environment and human interaction as two of the major factors of customer's five senses. But, the delineation of the specific factors for companies is depends on a specific characteristics of companies and it is difficult to generalize. Therefore, this study intends to examine the structure of consumer experience in the hospitality industry (Williams, 2006).

Scholars have been exploring elements experience economy. For example, Pine and Gilmore's (1999); have identified aesthetic, education, entertainment, and escapism as elements of experience economy and other scholars have started to validate the pine and Gilmore experience economy model for instance Oh, Fiore, & Jeong (2007) have developed a measurement instrument to measure experience in B&B. However, this model has not been validated in different tourism settings and countries. Though, ability to know components of customer experience is critical, scholars believed, hotel managers and owners could have lack of awareness on some components of tourist experience (Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2009).

Consequently, this study serves two purposes: to empirically test the predictive validity of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy concepts to the star rated hotels experience (2) to investigate the antecedent (sustainability) effect in improving quality tourism experience/stage.

2.11. Objectives

- To validate the Pine and Gilmore's (1999) 'Experience Economy model' in the context of star classified hotels/resorts' quality tourism experience in Ethiopia

- To investigate the effect of sustainability practices on quality customer experiences of star classified hotels/resorts in Ethiopia.

III. Methodology

3.1. Study Area

This study has been conducted in Ethiopia, one of ancient nation in the heart of the East Africa found between 9.4969° N latitude, and 36.8961° E longitude. The country has enormous natural and cultural resources and one of the best tourist destinations in Africa. As tourism business in the region is becoming more and more competitive, advances in technology and most critically, continually changing customer or employees needs has altered the ways to compete. In order to hold Ethiopia's competitive position in East Africa, the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Culture & Tourism Minister (MoCT) has standardized tourism businesses such as, star classification of the hotels, resorts and lodges. Therefore, the target population of this research were all star classified hotels ranging from one star to five stars in the five found in the country. This research has aimed to understand the structure of star classified hotel/resort quality tourism experience and to assess the effect of sustainability practices on quality tourism experiences in the context of tourism businesses from managers' perspective. For these reasons, A Quantitative and cross-sectional design were employed to collect data at one point in time as time constraints prohibited a longitudinal study (Dillman et al., 2009).

3.2. Instrument development

Measures used for this research were based on previous studies, with appropriate modifications to suit the characteristics of the tourism industry in Ethiopia. Managers were assumed to give reliable reports about the retrospective data before practicing sustainability. The 15 items of the questionnaire for measuring 'Quality Tourism Experience' were adopted from Oh, H., Fiore, A. & Jeoung, M. (2007) and related literatures. In addition, 20 items of questionnaire for measuring 'Sustainability' were adopted from (Nidal Alzboun, et al., 2016). A careful comparison was done with items used to check the quality tourism experiences and sustainability separately. Related literature review and interview has been also conducted. A five point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= strongly agree) have been used with minor wording changes to all variables. The questionnaire was administered between April and August 2018. The process resulted in completed questionnaires from 170 hotels (i.e., 94% response rate). Thus it is sufficient to provide a 95% confidence level as suggested by (Mendenhall et al., 1993). Missing values, outliers, and normality issues were addressed prior to data analysis.

3.3. Validity and Reliability

Prior to data collection content validity conducted and improvements for measurement model were suggested. This includes changing 6 point lickert scale into 5 points. Then pilot study conducted using twenty five randomly selected hotel managers, the instrument has achieved the required level of reliability (Alpha > 0.7)

IV. Findings of the Study

4.1. Measurement Model of Quality Tourism Experience in Star Classified Hotels

One of the purposes of this study was to validate the Experience Economy concept of Gilmore and Pine for Quality Tourism Experience Model (QTCM) in star classified hotels. In order to achieve a valid and reliable QTCM in star classified hotels/resorts the researcher has applied EFA and CFA. As part of checking the unidimensionality of the constructs, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. The result indicated no cross loading found for Quality Tourism Experience, but five items cross loading such as implementing renewable energy programs, capturing rainwater runoff and reusing it, uses treated waste water for garden irrigation, implements no smoking policy in public areas, and reuses packages and/or plastic materials were found on sustainability (SUS). However, all the variables have a higher factor loading i.e. above .6. Four factors for QTEM were identified and named as Educational, Aesthetic, Entertainment and escape. Seven factors of SUS were also found and named as water management, energy management, educational program, waste management, profit, economic size, and socio-cultural. Totally, thirteen factors were extracted for both exogenous and endogenous constructs.

The result for confirming the model shows no factor correlation above .7 and there were no cross loadings among factor loadings. Reliability test also shows all factors have a Cronbach alpha of above .7 (Hair et al., 2013). The initial model for Quality Tourism Experience Model indicated poor fit as it can be seen Table (1.1). To improve the model fit the researcher has applied Modification Indices (MI). The MI has shown error covariance between (Item 2 and item 3) i.e. design the hotel that includes a learning experience for the customer and design the hotel that stimulates customers' curiosity to learn something new. Therefore, it was decided to draw error covariance among these items and run the model again. The revised model shows some improvement on the p-valu and the model fit indices found satisfactory. These are includes the S-Bχ^2 = 89, df = 73, GFI= .928, CFI = 0.983, RMSEA = 0.037, 95% Confidence Interval of (RMSEA), all of which indicated a good fit (Byrne, 2013).

Table No.1 model fit for the measurement model of Quality Tourism Experience

Absolute fit measures	X^2	Df	P	GFI	RMSEA	RMR	NFI	CFI
Initial	108.22	71	.003	.917	.057	.056	.899	.962
Revised	89	73	.093	.928	.0037	.053	.917	.983

Source: (Researcher own, 2019)

The initial model for sustainability indicated poor fit as it can be seen Table (1.2) need Modification Indices (MI) to improve its model fit. The MI has shown error covariance between (Env 2 and with other variables) i.e. installs water-efficient devices & equipment and install water tap aerators in hotels, Therefore it was decided to remove and run the model again. The revised model shows some improvement on the p-value. However, Env 13, Eco 7 and soc 8 has error covariance with other factors and decided to remove and the final model run once again and found the S-Bχ^2 = 391, df = 312, CFI = 0.971, RMSEA = .040, 95% Confidence Interval of (RMSEA), all of which indicated a good fit (Byrne, 2013).

Table No.2 model fit for the measurement model of Sustainability Practices

Absolute fit measures	X^2	Df	P	GFI	RMSEA	RMR	CFI
Initial	461.39	805	.000	.846	.043	.062	.960
Revised	334	277	.011	.874	.036	.055	.971

Source: (Researcher, 2019)

Table No. 3 Parameter Estimates for Measurement Model

Regression Weights	Standardized Loadings	Standard Error	t-value	P	AVE	CR
soc_4 <---SoC	.930	.082	11.365	***		
soc_1<--- SoC	1.000					
soc_8<--- SoC	.930	.081	11.448	***	.625	.893
soc_3<--- SoC	.821	.078	10.528	***		
soc_5<--- SoC	.879	.078	11.290	***		
Eco_2<---EcO	.970	.097	9.986	***		
Eco_4<--- EcO	.978	.099	9.929	***	.609	.86
Eco_1<--- EcO	1.000					
Eco_3<--- EcO	.993	.103	9.607	***		
Env_1<--- EnG	1.000			***		
Env_3<--- EnG	.887	.084	10.602	***	.615	.864
Env_4<--- EnG	.881	.084	10.524	***		
Env_2<--- EnG	.846	.084	10.055	***		
Env_7<--- WtR	.772	.092	8.386	***		
Env_5<--- WtR	.838	.089	9.423	***	.568	.839
Env_8<--- WtR	1.000					
Env_6<--- WtR	.917	.085	10.803	***		
Exp_1<--- EdX	1.000			***		.81
Exp_2<--- EdX	.935	.113	8.305	***	.59	
Exp_3<--- EdX	1.018	.107	9.474	***		
Exp_5<---AeS	1.000					
Exp_7<--- AeS	.884	.081	10.972	***		.83
Exp_8<--- AeS	.792	.087	9.096	***	.57	
Exp_6<--- AeS	.829	.091	9.124	***		
Env_15<---WsT	1.000					.83
Env_12<--- WsT	.786	.083	9.416	***	.56	
Env_13<--- WsT	.858	.089	9.674	***		
Env_14<--- WsT	.805	.086	9.331	***		
Eco_8<- --prt	.843	.102	8.258	***	.72	.83
Eco_6<-- -prt	1.000					
Exp_12<---Esp	.941	.101	9.270	***	.59	.81
Exp_14<-- Esp	1.000					
Exp_13<- -Esp	.842	.098	8.606	***		.80
Exp_10<---Etr	.915	.108	8.452	***	.57	
Exp_11<---Etr	.988	.112	8.786	***		
Exp_9<--- Etr	1.000					
Env_11<-- EVE	1.000			***		.85
Env_10<--EvE	.877	.077	11.324	***	.66	
Env_9<-- -EvE	.919	.083	11.105	***		

Source: (Researcher, 2019)

Lastly, this research has validated Experience Economy model of Gilmore and Pine, 1999 for QTE in star classified/resorts hotels in Ethiopia. The result of the study has shown Educational Experience, Aesthetic Experience, Entertainment Experiences and Escape Experience represent the Quality Tourism Experience of star classified hotels/resorts. Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation techniques provided by the AMOS 20.0 was applied. Table No.3 provides summarized results of the CFA. All these measures surpassed the minimum suggested values. Moreover, the Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in respect of all the items included in the model exceeded the threshold 0.5 (Byrne, 2013; Hair et al., 2010).

4.2.The Effect of Sustainability on Quality Customer Experience

In addition to validate the QTEM of star classified hotels/resorts this research has also investigated the antecedents of QTEM. Building the structural model to test the hypotheses begun after a sufficient model fit of the revised second order measurement model was established. And univaiate and multivariate assumptions were checked. A robust maximum likelihood method was applied to estimate the structural model because the Mardia‟s standardized coefficient was 21.145 (Kline, 2011).

As part of this research investigating the effect of sustainability practices on quality tourism experience of star classified hotels in Ethiopia has conducted. Table No. 3 indicated that the goodness of fit for the structural model was acceptable. S-Bχ^2 = 420, df = 420, CFI = 0.983, RMSEA = .036, 95% Confidence Interval of (RMSEA), indicating the overall fit of the structural model was achieved.

H1 deals with the sustainability practices improve quality tourism experience of star classified hotels in Ethiopia. The result indicated the higher sustainability practice is the higher quality tourism experience. This research result come up with (β = 2.4, p = .039). The finding is in harmony with the research done on sustainability and quality customer experience (Heide & Grønhaug, 2006; A Walls, et al., 2011). The study has realized that sustainability practices have impacted the hotels/resorts setting to improve the quality customer experiences. This finding could support the current state of knowledge on sustainability and quality tourism experience.

V.DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study have clearly shown sustainability practices in the hotels improved quality tourism experiences of star classified hotels. The Gilmore and Pine 1999 experience economy model can also be applicable to hotel/resort settings. However, some modifications are required, due to the tourist experiences changing frequently and creating a stage by tourism businesses is depend upon its standards and the guests/tourists by themselves. The result has confirmed Educational Experience, Aesthetic Experience, Entertainment Experiences and Escape Experience represent the Quality Tourism Experience of star classified hotels/resorts. This result has confirmed the finding of (Oh, H., Fiore, A. & Jeoung, M., 2007). Thus, tourism service providers such as hotels and/resorts should adopt sustainability strategy so

as to create a convenient resort/hotel stage that would enhance quality tourism experience and competitiveness.

VI. IMPLICATION AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research result would provide an insight on how sustainability contributes for customer experiences in tourism industry. Prior researches have rarely link sustainability as a strategy with experience to improved customer experiences in tourism industry. This research has focused on how sustainability practices of hotels/resorts enabled them to improve hotel/resorts' settings/design that would ultimately enhance quality tourism experiences. Hence, it is imperative to researcher to study the perceived quality tourism experiences in star classified hotels/resorts from guest/tourist perspective. Nonetheless, tourism businesses (e.g. hotels/resorts) should be aware that they are not fully control and manage the tourist experience; rather they should be aware of they are co-creating experiences whereby guests/tourists make their own experiences, while continually conserving the environment and fulfilling societal responsibilities.

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