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(http://www.joghat.org/archive/2020-vol-3-issue-1)

2019 VOL 2, ISSUE 2
(http://www.joghat.org/archive/2019-vol-2-issue-2)

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(http://www.joghat.org/archive/2019-vol-2-issue-1)

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Research Article

SERVICE QUALITY, DESTINATION IMAGE AND REVISIT INTENTION RELATIONSHIPS AT THERMAL TOURISM BUSINESSES**

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ABSTRACT

Interest for health tourism and its subcategories is rapidly groving througout the world. Thermal tourism take its share from this interest too. Individuals who seek to gain their health back or to preserve their current health condition attend to thermal tourism activities with an increasing demand. This growing demand encourages the businesses to improve themselves in terms of competitiveness. However, when it is the matter of health, thermal tourists' needs and demands from the destinations and businesses they have been are much more different then mass tourists' demands and needs. Thus, it is crucial to have knowledge about thermal tourists' expectations and service quality perceptions for the owners or the managers of the businesses who consider to enter to the market or who desire to increase their market share. In this context, this study aims to determine the thermal tourist's service quality, destination image perceptions and their relationship with revisit intention. In addition, this study aims to determine destination image's mediating role in service quality and revisit intention. In order to achieve the these aims, related literature is reviewed and data is gathered from the thermal hotels in Balcova and Gonen regions. A total of 343 tourists participated to study. Data is analysed through ANOVA, T test, correlation and regression analysis. Findings show that there are significant relationships between service quality, destination image perceptions and revisit intentions of thermal tourists. Also results revealed that destination image has a mediating effect on service quality and revisit intention relationship.

Keywords: Thermal Tourism, Service Quality, Destination Image, Revisit Intention.

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**** This study was conducted with the data gathered from the masters' thesis named "Examination of Relationships Between Service Quality, Perceieved Destination Image and Revisit Intention In Context of Thermal Tourism".**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Health tourism and its Subcategories medical, thermal, spa and wellness tourism have become a profit-generating sector throughout the world, especially for developing economies (Han and Hyun, 2015; Han, 2013; Heung, Kucukusta and Song, 2011). Despite all the benefits and comfort that technology provides, people of today live under great pressure in their daily lives, and in time they became more susceptible to diseases than people in the past. Thus, desire to adapt a healthy lifestyle has become a rapidly growing demand in today's society due to worsening life conditions. As a result of this demand, facilities which operate with thermal and mineral waters and SPA and wellness centers have come into prominence. As the interest grew for these facilities and centers, their numbers also increased particularly in big cities (Kasli et al., 2012). This situation caused an increase in the number of businesses which aim to meet this demand and created a competitive environment. Thus, businesses in this market, focused on attracting new customers, increasing service quality for current customers and convincing their customers to revisit again and recommend to others (Han, 2013) since it is a known fact that convincing current customers to repurchase is more profitable than gaining new customers (Chiu et al., 2012; Kim and Gupta, 2009, Çatı and Kocoğlu, 2008). Therefore, in health tourism market where there is an intense competitive environment, studies which focused on understanding visitors' repurchase and recommending behaviours are monitored and encouraged by the countries and businesses which offer health tourism services (Han and Hyung, 2015). For example, in Turkey, 26 development agencies sponsor for small and medium enterprises (SME). In 2015, 700.000 US dollar were provided only for SMEs operating in Istanbul. In 2013, 2014 and 2015, over 5 million US dollar was provided to support health tourism investments in Istanbul (Istanbul Development Agency, 2015).

Product and service quality, customer satisfactions are considered as key factors which affect customers' repurchase intentions. Since businesses realized the importance of these factors, most of the businesses in the sector focused on improving themselves in terms of quality and satisfaction (Han and Hyung, 2015). Studies (Bowen and Chen, 2001; Han, 2013; Han and Ryu, 2006) indicate that quality and satisfaction factors affect customers' opinons and intentions positively. Eventhough revisit intention mostly mostly relies on customers' perceptions created by the services provided by businesses, it is known that other factors also affect revisit intention (Kasli et al., 2012) which occurs due to a destination's resources and attractions (Stabler, 1995:133). These attractions are defined in tourism literature as landscapes that attract tourists, various activities and experiences which will be remembered (Lew, 1987; Beerli and Martin, 2004). In other words, these attractions are the motivational tool that steer the people to visit that destination (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996). Destination image consists of an individual's concepts and opinions which are personally gathered about a destination. In other words, it consists of both cognitive and evaluator aspects (Embacher and Buttle, 1989). And these aspects are effective on tourists' revisit intentions.

Literature review shows that a number of concepts are assessed in order to explain revisit and recommend intentions in several studies. These studies mainly focused on what businesses should do and associated revisit intention and intention to recommend concepts with service quality and satisfaction (Banwet and Datta, 2000; Duman and Ozturk, 2005; Cole and Illum, 2006; Lee et al., 2011; Organ and Soydas, 2012; Awad and El-Rafae, 2012; Raza et al., 2012). Some studies (Bigne et al., 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Sullivan et al. 2008; Ilban et al., 2008; Pratminingsih et al., 2012) focused on relationships between a destination's features and concepts like image, service quality and satisfaction. Only two studies examined destination image, service quality and revisit intention (Canoglu, 2008; Cabuk et al., 2013) and they focused on two, three, four and five star hotels. There is not a single study which focused on thermal hotels.

Also none of the studies in literature focused on destination image's mediating role on service quality and revisit intention relationship. Findings of this study provide an important insight to understand if service quality's effect on revisit intention occured through destination image. For this purpose, a more extensive model is presented to explain revisit intention and evaluate the results of very few studies (Canoglu, 2008; Cabuk et al., 2013) in tourism literature.

The aim of this study is to answer the question "Does destination image have a mediating effect between service quality and revisit intention?". For this purpose, this study aims to conduct a research towards Turkey's best known thermal destinations. In other words, the aim of the study is to explain the factors that effect revisit intention in thermal tourism destinations in according to the findings of the study.

Eigen value of this study is that it is designed to examine the destination image, service quality and revisit intention with a holistic approach by taking the Turkey's most wellknown thermal tourism destinations

as base. At the same time, this study is geniune since these concepts are taken in a holistic approach in very few studies in tourism literature. Thus, it is possible that this study is an application based study.

This study aimed to determine the influences and level of influence of destination image and service quality on revisit intention. It is believed that findings present practical solutions not only for service businesses but also for destination policy developers. Thereby, revealing destination image's influence on service quality and revisit intention relationship would steer the businesses and destination managers to cooperate more effectively. This cooperation would contribute to the destinations' holistic success. Study consists of four parts. In the first part, the literature about destination image, service quality and revisit intention is reviewed. Then study method is presented and data analysis methods are discussed. In the third part findings are discussed and summarized. Finally, the study is finished by discussing the administrative applications and with suggestions to subsequent studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Health tourism creates a vast amount of monetary value on its own. Therefore, health industry and tourism relationship has great importance (Han and Hyun, 2015). Throughout the world, most countries are building facilities which are capable of competing with luxurious hotels in order to improve their market share in the highly competitive health tourism industry (Bernstein, 2012; Hume and DeMicco, 2007; Sheehan-Smith, 2006). These facilities are not only offering health services but also offer services beyond the international travelers' expectations for solving their health issues. Eventhough problems like language barriers, ineffective communication, low level services and rude staff may occure during the delivery of these services (Gan and Frederick, 2011; Han and Hwang, 2013; Snyder et al., 2011) facilities which dedicate themselves for delivering the perfect service are trying everything in their power to minimize these problems (Han, 2013). Measures like employment of qualified staff, having broader product and service range, after-service care, using modern hardwares, in service training for employees, increasing the number of foreign language speaking employees who have detailed knowledge about products and services (Han, 2013; Han and Hwang, 2013; Lee et al., 2012) play a vital role by helping visitors to have a more satisfactory experience during their stay. Thus, they may revisit these facilities and recommend them to their families and friends and more visitors would come (Han and Hyung, 2015; Han, 2013; Han and Hwang, 2013; Lee et, all. 2012).

2.1. Service Quality and Satisfaction

The main aspect of perception of products and services is the process of comparing to competitors' performance for the same products and services (Han and Ryu, 2006; Taylor and Baker, 1994). This quality perception occures at two different levels which are called core product and service product performances (Bitner et al., 1990). Core product performance occurs with its value (Clemmer, 1990), however service quality performance occurs due to the interaction between customer and employees (Price, Arnaould and Deibler, 1995). Thus, customer and employee interaction plays a vital part in terms of service quality. Kind behaviour of employees will affect customers' opinions and increase the satisfaction (Hanif, Hafeez and Riaz, 2010: 46). Since the personal satisfaction level has a positive influence on general consuming experience (Jonhson et al., 1995; Oliver, 1997) it is possible to say that if customers evaluate their experiences positively, their intentions will be more likely to repurchase (Chiu, et al., 2012; Jani and Han, 2013).

Several studies indicate that quality and satisfaction have influence on revisit and recommend intention (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Han and Ryu, 2006; Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2000; Banwet and Datta, 2000; Ryu ve Han, 2010; Ting, 2004; Duman ve Öztürk, 2005; Organ and Soydas, 2012; Awad and El-Refae, 2012; Raza et al., 2012). The common idea of these studies is that the visitors who receive quality service are more satisfied and their revisit intentions and recommend intentions are high. Therefore, quality and satisfaction play a critical role on visitors' decision making processes.

2.2. Destination Image

Destination image is defined as an individual's knowledge, beliefs and feelings about a specific destination (Crompton, 1979; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Destination image is considered as an effective aspect of touristic decision making processes. (Beerli and Martin, 2004, Bigne et all. 2001; Castro et al., 2007; Chen and Tsai, 2007). In this context, it is fair to say if visitors have positive perceptions and impressions

about a destination; it is more likely that they will prefer to go to that specific destination (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). Destination image has two important affects on behaviours. These affects are to influence the decision making process and to form the attending (experience), evaluating (satisfaction) processes and future intentions (revisit and recommend) (Ashworth and Goodall, 1988; Bigne et al., 2001; Cooper et al., 1993; Lee, Lee and Lee 2005; Mansfeld, 1992).

Related literature review shows that destination image is a direct antecedent of perceived quality, satisfaction and repurchase intention (Bigne et all. 2001), it has both direct and indirect affects on behavioral intentions (Chen and Tsai, 2007), tourists' image perceptions about a destination improve as they visit the same destination more and more (Ilban, Koroğlu and Bozok, 2008) and destination image directly affects the revisit intention (Pratminingsih, et al., 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Proposed Model and Hypothesis

This study basically aimed to examine the service quality, destination image and revisit intention relationships among the thermal tourism businesses' and thermal tourists' view and to determine if the relationship of these variables are valid for thermal tourism. Various studies that utilized the same variables are reviewed in terms of methods and measures that they used (Petrick, 2004; Duman and Ozturk, 2005; Cole and Illum, 2006; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Canoglu, 2008; Pekyaman, 2008; Prayag, 2009; Lee, et al., 2011; Organ and Soydas, 2012; Raza, et al., 2012; Cabuk, et al., 2013). Methodology of the study is designed with the same logic. However, apart from these studies in literature, this study aimed to determine the destination image's mediating role in service quality and revisit intention relationship. Four hypotheses are developed in order to evaluate the proposed model.

H_1: Service quality influences revisit intention in thermal tourism.

H_2: Destination image influences revisit intention in thermal tourism.

H_3: There is a significant relationship between service quality and destination image in thermal tourism.

H_4: Destination image has a mediating effect on service quality and revisit intention relationship in thermal tourism.

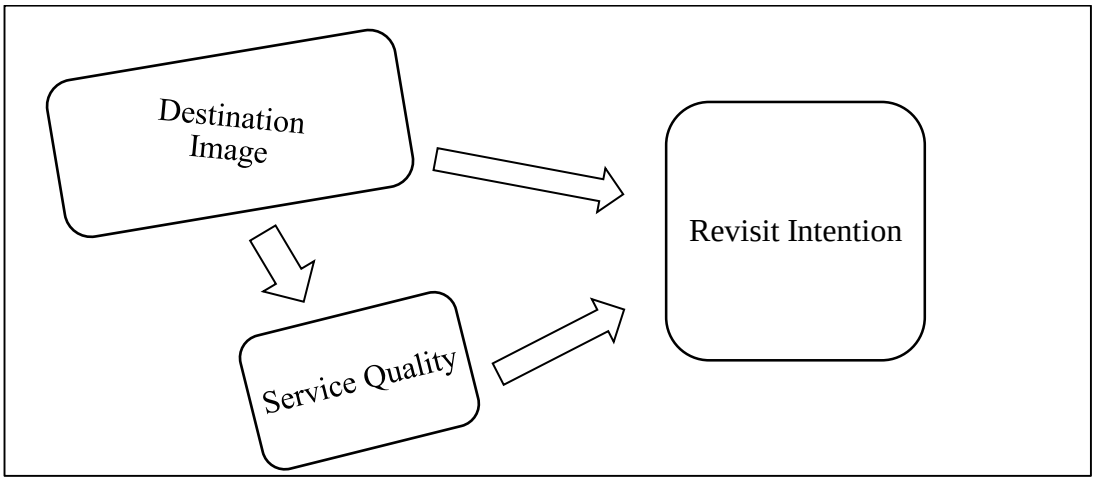


Figure 1. Proposed Model of the Study

3.2. Measurements and Scale Development

A questionnaire form which consists of 3 parts is used during the study. A total of 46 items were presented to participants to collect information about demographics, service quality-destination image perceptions and revisit intentions. Items were picked from the studies in the related literature. 5 point Likert-type scale from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5) were utilized to measure the variables. Service

quality scale was adapted from Parasuraman et all.'s (1988) "SERVQUAL" and destination image scale was adapted from Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) study.

3.3. Data Colletion and Participant Profiles

Balcova and Gonen regions are the two most thermal tourist attracting regions. Data is gathered from the hotels which are located in these two regions. Convenience sampling method is used to collect data. Tourists who agreed to participate to study are given a questionnaire form. Questionnaire forms were translated for Turkish tourists. Questionnaire forms in English are used for foreign tourists. Questionnaire forms were translated by some English lecturers from Eskisehir Osmangazi University. Then, they are shown to academicians who are expert in the field of study variable and they are improved by their suggestions. At the end of data collection process, a total of 343 questionnaire forms were received.

Most of the 343 participants were domestic tourists (79,3%) and male (54,8%). Ages of participants changed between 18 and 65 and most of them were retired (21,9%) and graduated from high school (36,4%). Finally, a huge part of participants were visiting the same hotel (70,6%) and the same destination (82,8%) 2 or more times.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Validity and Measurement Model Results

Questionnaire form was tested for validity and results showed that all the measurements were at proper reliability and validity levels (SQ Cronbach Alpha: 0,92; DI Cronbach Alpha: 0,83; RI Cronbach Alpha: 0,83). After that, normal distribution analysis was conducted. Because accuracy of the results in statistical tests depend on normally distributed data (Genceli, 2006:88). Thus, skewness and kurtosis values were calculated in order to conduct multivariate analysis on data. Results indicated that parameters were not in the normal distribution values which are -1 and +1 (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, data was converted and results showed that data was suitable for parametric tests.

4.2. Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

In the context of research model, unpaired t test and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test were conducted to determine if there was any significant differentiation in terms of service quality, destination image and revisit intention. Results showed that domestic tourists' service quality and destination image perceptions were lower than foreign tourists perceptions [SQ: (Mdom= 3,83, SE= 0,119); DI: (Mdom= 3,95, SE= 0,503)].

Also, tourists with bachelor degree education have the lowest perception and intention level. Nevertheless, participants' perceptions and intentions did not change depending on gender. However, perceptions of the tourists who visited the same hotel and region 2 or more times are higher than the others [RI: (Mtwo= 4,31, SE=0,141)].

4.3. Service Quality, Destination Image and Revisit Intention Relationship Results

A series of correlation analysis were conducted to determine the service quality, destination image and revisit intention. Results show that there is significant and positive relationships between service quality, destination image and revisit intention [(SQ↔DI (r=,529**)]; [(SQ↔RI (r=,646**)]; [(DI↔RI (r=,701**)]. Besides, there is a significant and positive relationship between the service quality subdimensions and revisit intention [(EMP↔RI (r=,449**)]; [(WIL↔RI (r=,515**)]; [(REL↔RI (r=,557**)]; [(TGB↔RI (r=,434**)]; [(ASR↔RI(r=,552**)]. According to these findings, hypothesis 1, "service quality influences revisit intention in thermal tourism", is accepted.

Table 1. Correlation Analysis Results

	MEAN	SS	SQ	DI	RI	EMP	WIL	REL	TGB	ASR	ENV	ATM	CUL	RES	PEO
SQ	3,8723	,57933													
DI	3,9856	,48517	,529**												
RI	4,1655	,64504	,646**	,701**											
EMP	3,8175	,79320	,792**	,367**	,449**										
WIL	3,9102	,74668	,795**	,370**	,515**	,607**									
REL	3,8630	,68740	,770**	,473**	,557**	,420**	,485**								
TGB	3,8338	,77238	,706**	,355**	,434**	,329**	,393**	,582**							
ASR	3,9670	,72785	,762**	,505**	,552**	,524**	,534**	,522**	,461**						
ENV	4,1268	,58598	,571**	,864**	,629**	,403**	,381**	,530**	,405**	,503**					
ATM	3,4325	,76252	,365**	,763**	,684**	,214**	,299**	,361**	,225**	,342**	,608**				
CUL	4,3601	,75854	,214**	,560**	,234**	,109*	,110*	,221**	,208**	,202**	,336**	,274**			
RES	3,7347	,79629	,751**	,453**	,547**	,397**	,488**	,945**	,593**	,515**	,494**	,352**	,229**		
PEO	3,1630	,75256	,138*	,492**	,289**	0,101	0,077	0,098	0,076	,200**	,229**	,249**	,195**	,112*	

Findings show that destination image's sub-dimensions and revisit intention have the same significant and positive relationship as in service quality and revisit intention [(ENV↔RI (r=,629**)]; [(ATM↔RI (r=,684**)]; [(CUL↔ RI (r=,234**)]; [(RES↔ RI(r=,547**)]; [(PEO↔ RI (r=,289**)]. According to these findings, hypothesis 2, "destination image influences revisit intention in thermal tourism" is accepted.

Finally, table 1 shows that there are significant and positive relationships between service quality and destination image subdimensions. Therefore, hypothesis 3, "there is a significant relationship between service quality and destination image in thermal tourism" is accepted.

4.4. Destination Image's Mediating Role in Service Quality Revisit Intention Relationship

After determining the relationships between variables through correlation analysis, two stage regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the mediating effect. First regression model showed that service quality positively affects the revisit intention [F(9,88), p<0,05)]. R^2 value came up as 0,523 and service quality explains the revisit intention at 52,3% level.

Table 2. Service Quality-Revisit Intention Relationship Analysis Results

Variable	**β**	**t**	**Sr^2**	**R**	**R^2**	**AR^2**
Model 1				0,723	0,523	0,47
Service Quality	0,606	5,885	0,14			
Age	,042**	0,332	0,047			
Gender	,029**	0,28	0,158			

Education	-,262**	-2,211	0,071
Occupancy	-,004**	-0,037	0,031
Monthly Income	0,119	1,239	0,049

Second regression model, in which destination image was added to model later, destination image affects the service quality and revisit intention relationship [F(16,22), p<0,05)]. In this model R^2 model came up as 0,682 and service quality explains the revisit intention on 68% level. Therefore, it is obvious that destination image has a 16% explanatory effect on revisit intention.

Table 3. Destination Image's effect on Service Quality-Revisit Intention Relationship Analysis Results

Variable	**β**	**t**	**Sr^2**	**R**	**R^2**	**AR^2**
Model 2				0,826	0,682	0,64
Service Quality	0,39	4,115	0,129			
Destination Image	0,518	5,137	0,147			
Age	0,127	1,21	0,039			
Gender	,068**	0,794	0,131			
Education	-,044**	-0,413	0,064			
Occupancy	-,101**	-1,203	0,026			
Monthly Income	,033**	0,412	0,041			

According to the results, it is possible to say that destination image has partial mediating effect on service quality and revisit intention relationship. Model 1 shows a cause effect relationship between service quality and revisit intention. Model 2 however, shows that destination image has a mediating effect on service quality and revisit intention relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 4, "destination image has a mediating effect on service quality and revisit intention relationship in thermal tourism" is accepted.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Health tourism has become a rapidly growing sector and the number of academic studies on this subject is increasing on daily basis. Eventhough there are several studies on service quality, destination image and revisit intention at hotels, the number of studies on these subjects are lacking in thermal tourism businesses. As a sub-branch of health tourism, thermal tourism has a great potential in Turkey both for the benefit of tourists and investors. Thus, thermal tourists' service quality and destination image expectations and perceptions and revisit intentions should be well-known. In this context, this study aimed to examine the thermal tourists' service quality and the influences of destination image perceptions on their revisit intentions.

Findings show that domestic tourists' service quality and destination image perceptions are lower than foreign tourists since they visit these destinations every year and they have higher expectations (Kenzhebayeva, 2012). Also, more the tourists are educated they have lower perceptions and revisit intentions because their life standarts and expectations are high (Pekyaman, 2008; Kenzhebayeva, 2012). Students have the lowest perceptions. This is mostly caused by their expectation from a vacation.

Results indicate that there are significant and positive relationships between service quality, destination image and revisit intention in thermal tourism. Besides, destination image has a mediating effect on service quality and revisit intention relationship, and destination image strengthen their relationship when it is added to the model.

Another fact is that thermal tourists usually seek specific treatments for their diseases. These specific treatments are mostly found in specific regions with thermal resources. Thus, their destination image perceptions are higher than their service quality perceptions. That means that they have to go to the same hotels whether the hotel has high quality service or not. Because they can only find the treatment they need in that

specific destination and they may not have much accomodation alternatives. Apart from all these, planning recreational activities for thermal tourists to enjoy their spare times after treatments may help lesser-known destinations with good thermal resources but poor promotion to increase their share in thermal tourism.

Additionally, a lot of effort concerning to promote and develope thermal tourism is put in Turkey on government basis. 5 regions are declared as "Thermal Tourism Protection and Development Region" with the conribution of Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Ministry of Health to popularize the thermal tourism. Any investment within the boundries of these regions can benefit from the most extensive incentives. Some of these incentives are customs duty exemption, vat exemption, investment participation rate, tax reduction rate, investment place allowance and etc. Also, there are land allocation for tourism investment, employment of foreign personnel, preferential treatment for exporters, tourism credits and incentives in the context of 2634 numbered Tourism Promotion Law. The context of these incentives should be promoted and extended more.

Finally, thermal tourism plays an essential role for Turkey to increase its share in health tourism market. Therefore, future studies should focus on promoting the destination image of the regions with thermal resources and facilities and promoting thermal tourism incentives for investors.

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