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Application of importance-satisfaction model to identify critical success factors of hot-spring industry in Taiwan

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There are many variety methods used in determining the critical success factors (CSFs) of the hot-spring industry in Taiwan, such as action research, case study, literature review and structured interviewing. In contrast, there are relatively few studies on the many models used to identify CSFs. To address this relative deficiency in the literature, the present study integrates importance satisfaction model (I-S Model) and CSFs to provide more comprehensive evaluation actions for the hot spring industry. This study attempts to determine the CSFs of hot spring industry in Taiwan through the importance level and satisfaction level of I-S Model. This study identifies six CSFs for hot spring industry. The research method has an advantage in that it not only identifies the CSFs, but also measures the service quality items of the hot spring industry. Businesses that apply CSFs can achieve a competitive advantage due to the fact that the managers would be in a better position to provide the greatest satisfaction by improving service quality and marketing strategies for customers.

Key words: Critical success factors (CSFs), hot spring industry, importance-satisfaction model (I-S Model), service quality.

INTRODUCTION

Delivering superior customer value and satisfaction are crucial to the competitive advantages of businesses operation management (Weitz and Jap, 1995). Undoubtedly, service quality and customer satisfaction are principal drivers of operational performance (Deng et al., 2008). Customer satisfaction increases customer loyalty, reduces price sensitivity, increases cross-buying and enhances positive word of mouth (Matzler et al., 2004). Service quality is thus generally considered to be a critical measure of contemporary organisational performance (Lassar et al., 2000; Yavas and Yasin, 2001). Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) indicate that customer satisfaction influences customer retention and the market share of the firm. Studies have shown that improving relationships with customers in this way enhances customer satisfaction, positive word of mouth, referrals, customer retention, long-term customer loyalty and overall company profitability (Reichheld, 1993; Kim and Cha, 2002; Ko et al., 2008). Therefore, it is critical for business managers to improve customer satisfaction in competitive global marketplace (Deng et al., 2008). With

this goal in mind, numerous business managers are continually attempting to identify critical service attributes that generate customer satisfaction and loyalty in order to stay abreast of competitors.

The critical success factors (CSFs) for any business consists of a limited number of areas in which results, if satisfactory, will ensure the organization's successful competitive performance. Being aware of CSFs are of great importance, since it helps managers to focus on the most relevant factors (Zwikael and Globerson, 2006). The CSFs researchers have used a variety method, such as action research, case study, literature review and structured interviewing (Remus and Wiener, 2009), but the research methods have their strengths and weaknesses, respectively. Therefore, the application of different research methods can increase the robustness of the research results. This is particularly important for a comprehensive CSFs research agenda driven by different research questions and taking into account the identification, analysis and management of CSFs (Esteves and Pastor, 2004). Most studies of CSFs used the aforementioned variety methods. In contrast, relatively few studies applied many models to identify CSFs. To address this relative deficiency in the literature, the present study integrates importance-satisfaction model

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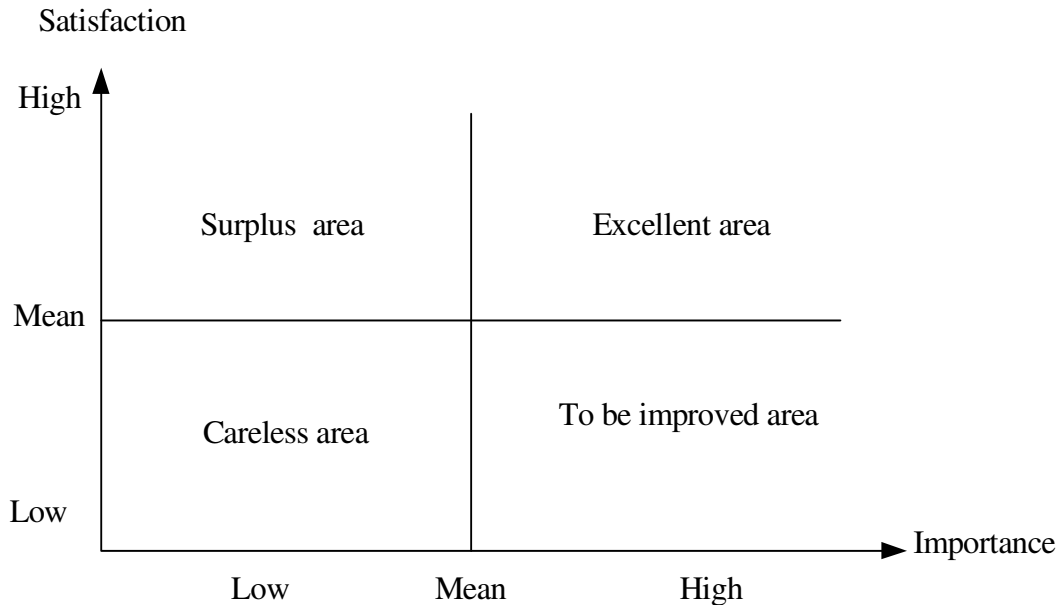


Figure 1. Importance-satisfaction model (I-S Model). Source: Yang (2003a).

(I-S Model) and CSFs to provide more comprehensive evaluation actions for the hot spring industry. To be successful in business, one must understand how customers perceive the product/service quality attributes, and then compare the satisfaction level with other competitors (Chu and Choi, 2000). These quality attributes are integrated into a matrix that helps managers to identify primary drivers of customer satisfaction and to set improvement priorities (Matzler et al., 2004). Yang (2003a) adopted the 'importance' and 'satisfaction' indices, established by the importance-satisfaction model (I-S Model) to improve service quality. Numerous studies have applied I-S Model to identify the service quality improvement in customer satisfaction (Yang, 2003b, 2005; Chen, 2009) and employee satisfaction surveys (Chen et al., 2006). Yang (2005) and Chen (2009) pointed out that I-S Model is a simple and effective technique that can assist managers in identifying improvement priorities for service attributes and marketing strategies. The study applies I-S Model to analyze two dimensions of service attributes: importance level and satisfaction level for customers. Hence, following a customer satisfaction survey and I-S Model, business managers can make rational decisions about how to best deploy scarce resources to attain the highest degree of customer satisfaction. In the hot spring industry, managers must investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the product/service, and further, to understand the importance level and satisfaction level of quality attributes for customers. This study attempts to determine the CSFs of hot spring industry in Taiwan through the importance level and satisfaction level of I-S Model. Thus, the managers can develop the best marketing strategy for business and

provide the greatest satisfaction for customers to achieve competitive advantages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance-satisfaction model (I-S Model)

There are several authors who have contended that customers evaluate quality by using quality attributes that they recognize as important elements (Deming, 1986; Headley and Choi, 1992; Yang, 2003a). In taking action to improve service quality, service providers should therefore prioritize quality attributes that have higher importance levels and lower satisfaction levels. In accordance with this rationale, Yang (2003a) developed a model known as the I-S Model. This model is illustrated in Figure 1.

In this model, the results ('importance' and 'satisfaction') for each quality attribute are noted in the various quadrants of the model, and improvement strategies are then considered on the basis of the area in which each item is located. The following areas can be identified in Figure 1:

Area I: Excellent area

The attributes located in this area are those quality attributes that customers considered as important to them, and the performance is also satisfaction to customers. So, the business shall keep on the service level of these items. Those excellent service quality attributes ensure successful competitive advantages for

the operation performance of business; therefore, the attributes located in this area are exactly the CSFs for business.

Area II: To-be-improved area

The attributes located in this area are quality attributes that customers assessed as being important to them, but of unsatisfactory performance. Businesses need to undertake improvement strategies to improve the performance of these items.

Area III: Surplus area

The attributes located in this area are quality attributes that customers assessed as being unimportant to them, but of satisfactory performance. Businesses do not need to take any particular action with respect to these attributes unless cost pressures require action.

Area IV: Careless area

The attributes located in this area are those quality attributes that customers consider as unimportant to them, and the unsatisfactory performance is also satisfaction to customers. The attributes do not need to pay much attention on these attributes, since customers are paying less concern to these items.

Critical success factors (CSFs) or key success factors (KSFs)

After researching the main causes of business management, almost every business manager can list the main reasons or factors responsible for business operation success. These factors are usually called critical success factors (CSFs) or key success factors (KSFs). Daniel (1961) was the first to introduce the concept of CSFs. This concept became popular when it was later used to assist in defining the CEO's information needs that were most critical to the success of the business (Rockart, 1979). Brotherton and Shaw (1996) defined CSFs as the essential things that must be achieved by the company or which areas will produce the greatest competitive leverage. They emphasize that CSFs are not objectives, but are the actions and processes that can be controlled/affected by management to achieve the organisation's goals. Kanji and Tambi (1999) stated that CSFs are the few things that must go well to ensure success for the manager or organization. They represent those managerial areas that must be given special and continual attention to cause high performance. The CSFs approach represents an accepted top-down methodology for corporate strategic planning that can highlight key

information requirements of top management.

Over the last two decades, the application of CSFs have been extended beyond the information technique field into a more 'generic' approach to management domain, particularly within strategic and operational management (Leidecker and Bruno, 1984; Devlin, 1989; Van Veen-Dirks and Wijn, 2002; Mendoza et al., 2007; Chin et al., 2008). The CSFs method has also been applied with organisational management (Rangone, 1997; Shah et al., 2007), project management (Fortune and White, 2006; Zwikael and Globerson, 2006) and total quality management (Karuppusami and Gandhinathan, 2006; Fryer, Antony and Douglas, 2007). The CSFs are a concept which is used often in discussing the characteristics of industry and the relationship of business strategies. To get better performance, the theory of business strategies uses the unique competence of the business to cope with the most important requirements of the environment, which is called the critical success factor (Porter, 1980). The CSFs may be derived from the features of a particular company's internal environment, that is, its products, processes, people and possibly structures. Moreover, CSFs will reflect the company's specific core capabilities and critical competencies for its competitive advantages (Van der Meer and Calori, 1989; Berry et al., 1997). Pollalis and Frieze (1993) proposed three main functions of CSFs in business: (i) planning more efficiently, (ii) communicating more easily and (iii) controlling process more smoothly. In conclusion, there are five main functions in CSFs as follow:

- (1) The organization allocates the resources more efficiently.
- (2) Simplifying the management works of higher level management.
- (3) A detector as the business performance.
- (4) A communication tool for the system of planning management information.
- (5) An analysis tool for competitive advantages.

The importance of determining the CSFs for implementation is to increase the success rate, reduce costs and prevent disillusionment for business operation management.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Background of the case study

Taiwan is famous for its scenery as Formosa, and even the nature resources are limited. However, the hot spring is very famous in Taiwan among Asia. The amount of Taiwan's tourism accounted for 4.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) from the 2002 Annual Report of Tourism Bureau of Taiwan (2003). The number of tourism has exceeded the contribution of agriculture. Thus, tourism has been one of the major industries in Taiwan (Kim et al., 2006).

Hot spring tourism is an important recreational activity for all tourists in Taiwan. According to the 2008 Annual Report of Tourism Bureau, the annual number of inbound travelers is around 3.84

Table 1. Demographics of the sample.

Items		No.	%
Sex	Male	234	39.33
	Female	361	60.67
Age	Below 20	63	10.58
	20-29	108	18.15
	30-39	134	22.52
	40-49	187	31.42
	Above 50	103	17.31
Education degree	Below higher school	106	17.81
	Higher school	118	19.83
	College/university	307	51.59
	Above masters	64	10.76
Occupation	Office holder	179	30.08
	Industry	61	10.25
	Agriculture industry	37	6.22
	Service industry	106	17.82
	High-tech industry	133	22.35
	Other	79	13.28

million. The major recreational activities of inbound travelers include pleasure (46.17%), business (22%) and visit relatives (10.52%). Furthermore, hot spring tourism represents 12.3% of the leisure activity of domestic tourism (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2008). The Hot Spring Law was established in July 2003 to effectively develop hot spring tourism. Consequently, hot spring tourism is undoubtedly a key sector within the tourism industry in Taiwan (Deng, 2007).

Ecotourism and bathing in the hot spring are the two major leisure activities of the hot spring industry in Taiwan. Shei-Pa National Park, located in Tai-An of Miao-Li County, ranks the top ten most popular tourism sites, and is famous for its hot spring in Taiwan. The visitors of Shei-Pa National Park are 1.2 million people (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2008). As such, this study conducted a satisfaction survey for the hot spring industry in Shei-Pa National Park.

Questionnaire design and structure

A questionnaire survey of customer satisfaction was used in conjunction with the previously described matrix. The questionnaire was based on: (i) A review of the literature (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Chu and Choi, 2000; Deng, 2007; Deng et al., 2008) and (ii) Discussions with experts (including service-quality consultants) and customers. The questionnaire for customer satisfaction survey has five service quality dimensions. These five dimensions, adopted from SERVQUAL Model, are tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The questionnaire contained 26 items reflecting the dimensionality of importance and satisfaction with service levels of hot spring tourism in Taiwan (Table 3). The final questionnaire was divided into three parts, as follows:

(i) Importance survey: Responses requested on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 representing 'extremely unimportant' and 5 representing 'extremely important').

(ii) Satisfaction survey: Responses requested on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 representing 'extremely dissatisfied' and 5 representing 'extremely satisfied').

(iii) Demographics survey: Sex, age, qualifications and occupation.

Demographics of the case study

The questionnaire was distributed randomly from May to August in 2008 to all customers of Tai-An hot spring industry in Taiwan. In all, 900 questionnaires were distributed and 627 were returned (a response rate of 69.67%). Among those returned, 32 questionnaires have incomplete-meanings, although 595 completed questionnaires were used in data analysis. The demographics of the final sample are shown in Table 1. The majority of respondents (60.67%) were female, and most (31.42%) were aged 40 to 49 years. More than half (51.59%) had completed college/university. The most common occupation of the respondents (30.08%) was office holder, while the one that followed was a high-tech industry worker (22.35%).

Reliability and validity of data

Reliability was assessed by Cronbach's alpha using SPSS software. Cronbach's alpha for customer importance was 0.926 and for customer satisfaction, the coefficient was 0.914, indicating that the questionnaires were extremely reliable. Table 2 shows the results for the dimensions. As can be seen in the table, all dimensions but one had a Cronbach's alpha of greater than 0.7, which indicated high reliability (Cuieford, 1965; Gay, 1992). These results demonstrated that the questionnaires were extremely reliable. In terms of validity, the questionnaire had been designed on the basis of related studies, consultation with service-quality professionals and consultants, and discussion with customers. This demonstrated that the scales of the formal questionnaire have considerable reliability.

Table 2. Reliability of the five dimensions of customer importance and satisfaction.

Dimensions	Importance survey	Satisfaction survey
	Cronbach's- α	Cronbach's- α
Tangibility	0.891	0.864
Reliability	0.925	0.875
Responsiveness	0.937	0.919
Empathy	0.947	0.936
Assurance	0.872	0.825
Total	0.926	0.914

RESULT OF I-S MODEL

The average score for 'importance' across all 26 items is 4.27 and that for 'satisfaction' is 4.01. Table 3 and Figure 2 show the results for all 26 items in terms of the I-S Model. As shown in Figure 2, only six attributes (items 6, 11, 12, 14, 22 and 24) fall into the 'excellent area' (high importance and high satisfaction), whereas three quality attributes (items 13, 20 and 21) fall into the 'to-be-improved area' (high importance and low satisfaction). The majority of the attributes (12 in all) fall into the 'careless area' (low importance and low satisfaction), which include items 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 23, 25 and 26. Finally, five attributes (items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 17) fall into the 'surplus area' (low importance and high satisfaction). According to Yang (2003a), the attributes that fall into the 'excellent area' demonstrate the quality attributes of the hot spring managers' performance of high satisfaction to customers. The present study therefore finds that attributes 1, 7, 8, 15, 23, 24 and 27 are defined as CSFs. These factors provide the customers with the highest satisfaction, far beyond the customer's expectation. Thus, it helps the company to gain the maximum profit and creates the competitive advantages.

DETERMINATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Being aware of CSFs is of great importance, since it helps managers to focus on the most relevant product/service attributes. Usually, organization resources are limited and resources are invested in important product/service items of customer perceptions (Chen, 2009). Thus, when a business concentrated all of its resources to make better product/service items, it is called core competence. To any business, the core competence of the company means that there are several key elements which perform better than its competitors and satisfy its customers. It is so called CSFs. Business managers may consider different distribution of efforts among the services and resources processes, leading to improved overall effectiveness of the operating processes in a business environment. From this case study analysis, there are six

CSFs in the I-S Model, and they are as follow:

1. The hotel provides reasonable prices.
2. Employees of this hotel have the knowledge to respond to problems.
3. The willingness of the hotel's employees to help customers.
4. The hotel provides accurate concept of bathing knowledge for hot spring.
5. Food and beverages served are hygienic, adequate and sufficient.
6. The hotel provides a safe and secure place.

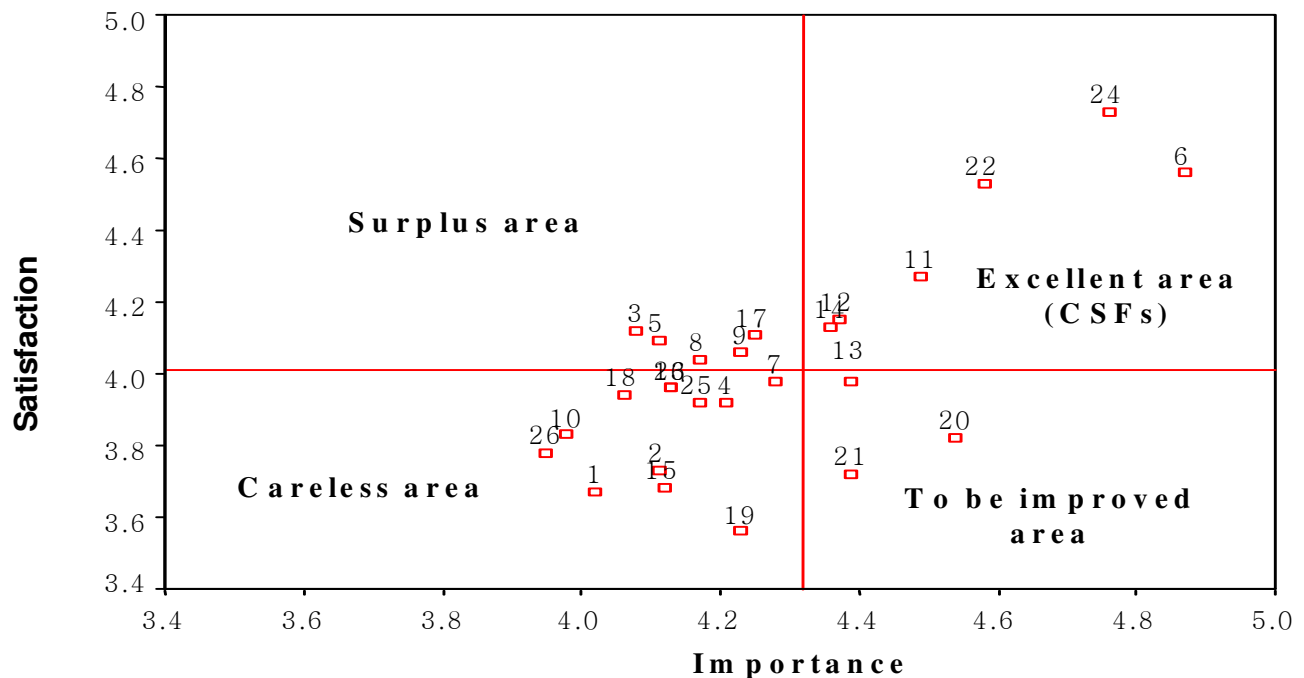
The aforementioned CSFs represent that the company tries to perform better than its competitors, and its excellent services touch the hearts of its customers far beyond their imagination. In this case, the owner of this company tries his best to impress the customers and tries to learn what the advanced leisure management models in advanced countries are. In this business, teaching the customers the proper bathing knowledge in hot spring, and providing the delicacies which combines the essential parts of aboriginal food and minority food is the important duty of delighting and touching the hearts of the customers.

Conclusions

The concept and affirmation of CSFs are important due to the fact that it increases the success rate, reduces costs and prevents wastes. The identification of CSFs can help practitioners understand their relative importance and propose improvement plans where the sufficient resources are not focus enough. CSFs originally were applied at the information technology industry and were applied at organisational management and strategy management late, but they were seldom applied at leisure management. Based on the literature review and empirical study, following the I-S Model, this study identifies six CSFs for the hot spring industry. The research method has an advantage in that it not only identifies the CSFs, but also measures the service quality items of hot spring industry. In the environment of severe

Table 3. The importance and satisfaction relative value of the case study.

No.	Items	I	S	Zones
1	The hotel has visually appealing buildings and facilities	4.02	3.67	Careless
2	The hotel has comprehensive hot spring facilities (SPA, spring saunas, spring massage pools, etc.)	4.11	3.73	Careless
3	Employees of the hotel appear neat and tidy	4.08	4.12	Surplus
4	The hotel provides convenient parking spaces	4.21	3.92	Careless
5	Hygiene and cleanness of hot spring facilities	4.11	4.09	Surplus
6	The hotel provides reasonable prices	4.87	4.56	Excellent
7	The hotel provides consistent services	4.28	3.98	Careless
8	The hotel provides just in time services as promised	4.17	4.04	Surplus
9	Dependability in handling customers' service problem	4.23	4.06	Surplus
10	The service of this hotel is reliable	3.98	3.83	Careless
11	Employees of this hotel have the knowledge to respond to problems	4.49	4.27	Excellent
12	Employees of the hotel willingness to help customers	4.37	4.15	Excellent
13	Employees prompt reply to customers' complaints problem	4.39	3.98	Improvement
14	The hotel provides accurate concept of bathing knowledge for hot spring	4.36	4.13	Excellent
15	Easy to get employee's attention and help	4.12	3.68	Careless
16	The hotel provides flexibility services according to customers needs	4.13	3.96	Careless
17	Employees of the hotel appear courtesy and friendly	4.25	4.11	Surplus
18	Employees of the hotel give customers individualized attention	4.06	3.94	Careless
19	The hotel provides convenient opening hours	4.23	3.56	Careless
20	The hotel has adequate capacity (dining rooms, meeting rooms, swimming pools, etc.)	4.54	3.82	Improvement
21	The hotel provides convenient hotel location	4.39	3.72	Improvement
22	Food and beverages served are hygienic, adequate and sufficient	4.58	4.53	Excellent
23	The hotel performs the services right the first time	4.13	3.96	Careless
24	The hotel provides safe and secure place	4.76	4.73	Excellent
25	The hotel keeps accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	4.17	3.92	Careless
26	The equipment works properly without causing breakdowns	3.95	3.78	Careless

**Figure 2.** The I-S Model of the case study.

competition, the profit is getting less. Therefore, how to maximize the utility of resources is based on what consumers care for the most. Particularly, service quality is the most important issue in leisure management. Thus, the CSFs are the only key to help the business make profit.

To be competitive, successful business managers have to capture information and resources from numerous internal and external environments. Also, they must analyze, divide and compare the raw data, and then transform it into meaningful database, after which the meaningful business information would be converted into useful knowledge. Therefore, the business managers should recognize which knowledge is needed from the overall business strategy. Also, they must update the information and sustain the ability to identify and fill knowledge gaps by using the proper technology in their enterprise. They should also support the knowledge usage and strategic planning process when CSFs are used for strategy formulation. The CSFs can be trailed from the vision and mission of the organization and from a strategic evaluation of the market. Furthermore, CSFs will reflect the company's specific core capabilities and critical competencies for its competitive advantages. The CSFs can be regarded as 'core competence' and 'know how'. Once the business maintains this ability, CSFs can help the business to grow endlessly and to maintain its profitability.

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