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# PAST EXPERIENCE AND FUTURE TOURISM DECISIONS



David Mazursky  
Hebrew University, Israel

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**Abstract:** In many previous studies of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction, specific performance expectations were considered the prime baseline of disconfirmation and post-exposure outcomes. The present study broadens the scope of the factors involved in the arousal of satisfaction and its outcomes. It is asserted that the traditional view constitutes but one of two mechanisms that impinge on the formation of future behavioral intentions. Norms and measures of past experience form another baseline standard that does not necessarily coincide with (or be mediated by) the expectational baseline. An exploratory test of the extended paradigm in the context of consumers' reactions to a tourist attraction is presented.

**Keywords:** expectations, satisfaction, tourism decisions.

**Résumé:** L'expérience préalable et les décisions touristiques. Dans beaucoup d'études de la satisfaction ou de l'insatisfaction du consommateur, on a considéré les attentes précises qu'on avait eu du produit comme la référence principale pour mesurer les évaluations postérieures. Dans le présent article, on soutient que l'approche traditionnelle ne prend en considération qu'un seul mécanisme, tandis qu'il y en aurait deux qui influencent la formation des intentions de comportement éventuel. Les normes et les mesures de l'expérience préalable constituent la deuxième référence, qui ne coïncide pas nécessairement avec la référence des attentes et qui n'est pas nécessairement déterminée par celle-ci. On présente un test préliminaire du paradigme élaboré dans les contextes des réactions des consommateurs à une attraction touristique. **Mots-clés:** attentes, satisfaction, décisions touristiques.

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, a growing number of published papers have focused on the consequences of vacation activities. Such research has useful implications in the context of tourism. First, to improve the understanding of satisfaction judgments, it is important to identify the causes and correlates of consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (CS/D) (Francken and Van Raaij 1979, 1981). Second, to improve predictions and managerial decisions, it is critical to consider various post-choice behaviors, such as complaint behavior (Francken 1982) and repeat vacation (Gitelson and Crompton 1984). The importance of this research is noted in the inclusion of (dis)satisfaction as a major stage in the "vacation sequence" that

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David Mazursky is Lecturer in Marketing at the Hebrew University (School of Business Administration, Jerusalem 91905, Israel). His research interests focus on consumer behavior, human information processing, and decision making processes.

underlies vacationers' decision processes (Van Raaij and Francken 1984; Van Raaij 1986).

The theoretical background that accounts for (dis)satisfaction has gained much from the considerable amount of research developed in the context of marketing and consumer behavior. The literature in that area has traditionally suggested that consumer satisfaction and its outcomes result from a comparison process. Before purchasing and using a brand, consumers form expectations regarding its performance. After using the brand, these expectations are mentally contrasted with the performance as perceived by consumers. Satisfaction is theorized to vary with the discrepancy between expectation and performance evaluation.

Early research in that paradigm contrasted levels of expectations with various performance levels in an attempt to evaluate the relative impact of these factors on consumer satisfaction. Expectations were often experimentally manipulated by providing specific information to each of the experimental groups (e.g., Anderson 1973; Cardozo 1965; Oliver 1977; Olshavsky and Miller 1972). This information was believed to induce desired levels of brand expectations.

More recently, researchers began to question the validity of using brand expectations, which are primarily based on focal brand information, as the sole pre-usage antecedent of the disconfirmation process and as the basis for predicting its outcomes. This criticism focused on whether there should be alternative or additional experiential and normative variables that account for post usage measures. This can be inferred from Francken and Van Raaij (1979) and Van Raaij and Francken (1984) works. They suggested that one's own earlier experience or the experience of others serves as the baseline for a social comparison that determines levels of satisfaction. More directly, Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins (1983) and Cadotte, Woodruff and Jenkins (1987) introduced an "experience-based model" which stressed the importance of focusing on consumers' experience with an evoked set of brands and related products in addition to the focal brand, as determinants of satisfaction and its consequences. This approach suggested that experiences beyond those with the focal brands may lead to different normative standards employed by consumers in evaluating performance. Possible norms, according to this view, include perceived best brand, the most recently used brand, a brand used by a reference person, products competing for the same needs, and the like. In the context of tourism, the reliance on past experiences and normative standards may be even more pronounced than information that was communicated from external sources. Mill and Morrison (1984:11) noted that "Our experiences, and the resultant generalization from them, are weighed more heavily than any information received. This is due, in part, to the fact that, as our decision criteria are strengthened, our need for information is weakened."

In line with these recent contributions, the present study offers an extended approach which views the traditional paradigm (i.e., expectation-disconfirmation-satisfaction paradigm) as nested within a broader structure. This extended structure includes the antecedents of the traditional CS/D process (e.g., consumer norms, extent and nature of

past experience with products competing for the same needs or wants as the focal event), as well as its post-consumption outcomes (e.g., willingness to engage in an activity which is similar to the one experienced). It is posited that an analysis of the structural relationships among the CS/D measures, and particularly if purchase intentions are assessed, will reveal that experience-based measures are important contributors to the predictions. The discussion focuses on two areas in which focal event (or activity) and experience-based information are posited to exert a different impact. The first area focuses on the baselines of disconfirmation, and the second on the resulting outcomes (namely, future intentions).

#### *Axiom of Expectations, and Performance Comparability*

In most CS/D studies, satisfaction has been postulated to emerge as an evolutionary process. First, expectations are formed and then, performance is assessed and contrasted with it. This conceptualization precludes the possibility which may be operative: that the performance itself triggers a comparison process even if the consumer does not explicitly form a set of predictions prior to brand performance. A suggestion that is in line with this contention has recently been offered by Botterill (1987:140) who noted that “. . . the unpredictability of tourism events seems to lie at the heart of vacational experience.” Thus, for example, before examining a new brand of home computers, a consumer's predictions regarding its performance may be somewhat superficial and vague. The assessment of performance, on the other hand, may be more profound and could cause a retrieval of memories from past experiences and norms which may function as comparison baselines.

This latter example illustrates the need to shift attention toward prior experiences. It relates to the assumption inherent in most satisfaction models that the difference between performance perception and expectations is quantitative rather than qualitative. According to this assumption, the mismatch (or disconfirmation) between product evaluation and brand expectations constitutes the algebraic difference (either objectively computed by the researcher or subjectively by the subject) between the pre- and post-usage assessments of certain pre-designated attributes.

However, recent definitions, such as Oliver's (1981:27) definition of satisfaction as the “evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience,” raises a more fundamental question pertaining to the comparability of expectations and performance. In particular, it is argued that the consumption experience itself may influence the manner in which the assessed attributes are reinterpreted by the consumer. Consider the example of purchasing a new home computer by a consumer. Prior to product trial, expectations on an attribute such as the computer's ability to plot high quality graphs are measured. After the trial and usage of the computer for a given period, the performance of the computer with respect to that attribute is recorded. It is plausible that judgments indicated by the respondent following her experience will also reflect a new interpretation of this

characteristic. The consumption experience elicits scenarios from memory which may not have been considered or contemplated by the consumer when being asked to form predictions regarding the brand's performance. This may occur if the usage experience reveals that the computer is capable of producing types of graphs not envisioned or experienced before. In such a case, the meaning of an attribute, "quality of graph plotting," has been revised and is no longer comparable with pre-usage expectations.

Therefore, if the consumer is asked "was the quality of graph plotting better or worse than you expected," the appropriate answer could be "this feature is unique and different from what I had expected" (i.e., difference in content), rather than "it is better (or worse) than I had expected" (i.e., difference in value along a common scale). Needless to say, these two constructs may be, at least conceptually, weakly related to each other. The relevant baseline for the pre- vs. post-usage comparison in the present example is *intensity and nature of past experience* with computers and related phenomena *rather than expectations from brand performance*.

The issue of incomparability of expectations and performance measures is further compounded by the manner in which the relevant constructs were operationalized and empirically tested in some early applications. Olson and Dover (1979) criticized early studies for creating an expectation manipulation by merely exposing consumers to product information. In these studies prior experience and norms were not considered. Furthermore, the creation of expectation was generally accomplished by communicating verbal information to subjects. However, it has been noted that verbal and experiential sensory cues entail a different mode of representation (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Returning to the previous (home computers) example, one may suppose that the manipulation of expectations is operationalized by communicating two scripts describing high vs. low graph plotting quality to two different groups. The measurement of disconfirmation may then be confounded by respondents' difficulty to re-encode information conveyed verbally to a mode compatible with the experiential (i.e., performance) mode. Thus, the internal validity of the traditional disconfirmation measure may be weakened. In such a case, knowledge which had been encoded and processed in a manner similar to the product usage experience (i.e., past experience and normative measures) may be more accessible for comparison.

This analysis implies that the traditional expectations-disconfirmation-satisfaction process cannot be studied as a closed, independent system. The interaction and effects of prior experiences and norms on these factors have to be taken into account to improve the understanding and predictions of choice decisions. As indicated below, these differences are likely to mediate the impact of satisfaction on future behavioral intentions.

#### *Impact of Satisfaction on Intention to Purchase*

Future behavioral tendencies are among the most important issues which satisfaction models attempt to predict. To date, however, the

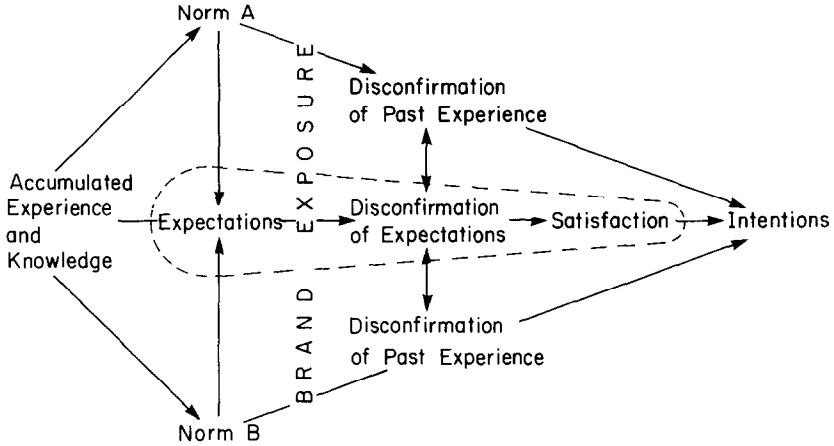
conclusions derived from studies attempting to predict repurchase intentions from pre-exposure and post-exposure measures appear to be equivocal. While there is no disagreement over the positive relationships between satisfaction and intention, the direct impact of preexposure variables was found to be significantly related to intention to purchase in some studies (LaBarbera and Mazursky 1983; Oliver 1980), but failed to reach significance in others (Bearden and Teel 1983).

According to the present view, the distinction between *satisfaction* and *future behavioral intentions* is reflected in the scope of phenomena to which each of the measures pertains and the kinds of information that are activated when outcome judgments are formed. The measurement of satisfaction places the focal event as the focal reference with a relatively high likelihood that information related to it will be accessed. When intentions to purchase are assessed, the consumer's focal reference shifts toward the anticipated occasion. The information that could be evoked, in this case, includes a much broader set of thoughts and associations to past experiences. For example, according to the conditional response view (Bugelski 1982), the anticipated usage context may generate associations to past behaviors that are similar at least in one comparable dimension (e.g., mood states: Gardner 1985). As an alternative, the anticipated event or activity may stimulate other affective responses from past experiences, thus limiting the impact of the focal event's satisfaction on intentions (Zajonc and Markus 1982). In addition, attempts to improve predictions of intentions showed that assessing contextually specific measures by directing the consumers' attention toward the evoked set of events and location may produce an intention index that is superior to a global measure (Warshaw 1980).

### *Hypotheses*

In short, the operationalization of many previous studies rests on the assumption that focal expectations generally capture the pre-exposure information which impinges on the CS/D process. The present study offers several theoretical underpinnings, suggesting that in many situations norms and past experience measures are not completely mediated by specific expectations, particularly if the phenomenon involves the exposure to a new event or activity. The traditional logical sequence which involved measurement of focal expectations, disconfirmation of expectations, and satisfaction is, therefore, viewed here as a closed system since it is primarily based on information which is specific to the studied event. The extended view also includes the other mechanism which stems from experience-based measures and disconfirmation of past experience.

Figure 1 illustrates these relationships graphically. It shows that the measures included in the traditional paradigm are nested within the broader structure. Satisfaction originates primarily from judgements about the focal event. However, intentions are related to a broader set of measures which are not necessarily mediated by specific expectations. Two specific hypotheses emerge from this analysis. First, satisfaction is affected by specific expectations, perceived performance, and



--- Denotes the variables traditionally included in the analysis

Figure 1. An Extended View of Satisfaction Arousal and Intention Formation

disconfirmation of expectations. Specifically, a strong positive correlation is expected between satisfaction and the post-exposure variables (i.e., perceived performance and disconfirmation of expectations) and a weaker relationship between satisfaction and the pre-exposure variable (i.e., expectations). Second, future behavioral intentions do not necessarily derive directly from satisfaction. They are also distinctively affected by normative standards and experience-based measures.

An illustrative study conducted in the context of consumers' responses to a tourist attraction that measures this structure of relationships among the relevant variables is presented below. It should be noted that the empirical investigation represents an early exploratory test of the theoretical propositions. Given the limited availability of (and lack of consensus concerning) the operational definitions of experiential measures and normative standards, the small number of selected variables ought to be considered preliminary. Further developmental work is needed to construct and validate the appropriate measures for a comprehensive test of the proposed structure.

PROCEDURE

Two-hundred adult tourists visiting a stalactite cave were handed a two-page questionnaire upon their arrival at the cave site and immediately after hearing a short description of the cave. The purpose of this questionnaire was to record respondents' expectations about the tour as well as to obtain information about their past experience and norms which bear on visits to stalactite caves, other types of caves, and attitude toward nature reserves. The tourists visited the cave in groups of 5-15 people at a time.

Upon completing the tour, respondents received a second two-page questionnaire which focused on postexposure measures (e.g., performance assessment, disconfirmation of expectations, satisfaction, and future behavioral intentions). One hundred and ninety-one respondents completed and returned both questionnaires.

The first questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section aimed at obtaining information about respondents' prior experience with that and other stalactite caves. Second, their expectations about the visit to the cave were obtained on three attribute-specific and one global measure (Churchill and Surprenant 1982). These included "Variety of Shapes" (on a scale ranging from "Extremely Rich" to "Not Rich at all"), "Quality of Guidance" ("Excellent" to "Not Good at all"), "Value for your Money" ("Definitely Worthwhile" to "Not Worthwhile at all") and "Overall" ("A Very Nice Cave" to "Not a Particularly Nice Cave"). All measures were taken on seven-point scales.

The final section focused on respondents' ratings pertaining to various normative standards of stalactite and other caves (e.g., "Touring in Caves can Sometimes be Dangerous") and a statement relating to nature reserves in general ("If the Cost of Maintaining a Nature Reserve is too High it should be Abandoned"). These statements were rated on seven-point Likert Scales.

The second questionnaire consisted of ratings of performance, disconfirmation, and satisfaction, each factor consisting of three attribute specific and one global measure. For the purpose of the present study, the disconfirmation measures consisted of a summary judgment on a "better than expected-worse than expected" scale as applied in various recent studies (Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Linda and Oliver 1979; Oliver 1977, 1980; Westbrook 1980).

In addition to these measures, a new set of variables was introduced which was intended to measure disconfirmation of past experience rather than disconfirmation of pre-exposure expectations. According to this measure, which was termed "The Uniqueness (or Unusualness)" of the current experience, respondents were asked to rate the attribute specific and the global judgments (along similar dimensions as in the traditional disconfirmation measure) on a seven-point scale ranging from "It was something I never Experienced Before" to "There was Nothing Unusual about it."

## ANALYSIS

### *A Multidimensional Representation of Measures*

To test the structural scheme suggested earlier, a Weighted Smallest Space Analysis (WSSA1) was performed on the data (Guttman 1965). In this analysis, the correlations among the variables are used as a measure of similarity, recognizing that variables located close together in the space tend to be more highly correlated than those located in more distant points. The two-dimensional representation is depicted in Figure 2.

Essentially, most of the tested variables are aligned with two dimen-

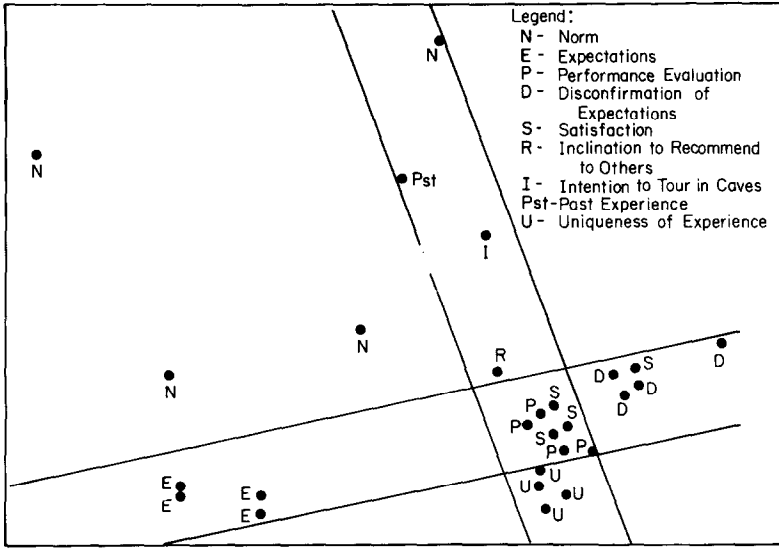


Figure 2. A Two-dimensional Representation of the CS/D Variables

ions which are almost orthogonal to each other. One dimension is positively correlated with the horizontal axis (hereafter, horizontal structure), while the other dimension is aligned with the vertical axis (hereafter, vertical structure). It should be noted that a rotation of the axes does not affect the relative location and relationships among the variables.

Structures are termed simplex when variables have a degree of similarity or dissimilarity such that they can be arranged in a line and “each [variable] will be more like its neighbor than those further down the line” (Runkel and McGrath 1972:357). In the present configuration, the two simplex structures intersect and give rise to a more complex representation, termed duplex (Elizur and Shye 1976).

Interestingly, the horizontal structure contains those variables (namely, expectations, performance, disconfirmation and satisfaction) which have been traditionally studied in the CS/D paradigm. Most of these variables are located along a line within a relatively narrow range. The norms are placed outside this range but appear to be more concentrated in the left-hand side of this dimension.

The vertical structure represents other sets of variables, some which are different from those appearing in the horizontal range and some which are shared by both dimensions. Yet, in the vertical dimension, the variables are also plotted within a relatively narrow range. The set which is exclusively differentiated from the horizontal structure includes the number of past visits to stalactite caves, the uniqueness of the present experience (which is the measure of disconfirmation of past experience), a norm describing the potential danger of touring in caves, and the consequences of (dis)satisfaction such as, intention to visit stalactite caves in the future and word of mouth recommendation.



An important finding which emerges from this analysis relates to the fact that perceived performance and satisfaction are located in the intersection between the two simplex structures. In fact, since the two dimensions represent the two mechanisms as described above, it appears that the experience-based approach enriches the perspective that would be obtained if only the traditional (i.e., the horizontal) dimension was considered.

Another important finding is noteworthy. The satisfaction outcome measures (namely, inclination to recommend the tour to others and intention to visit other stalactite caves) are placed somewhat outside the horizontal simplex structure which includes the variables traditionally incorporated in CS/D research. Not surprisingly, the direction of this deviation is toward the spatial location of variables describing past experience and norms. This finding suggests that future behavioral inclination is not fully mediated by satisfaction derived from a single experience. It is also related directly to past behavior and norms.

Though the multidimensional technique provides only a visual tool for assessing the convergent validity of the factors, it is encouraging that in most cases the measures relating to each factor (e.g., expectations) appeared on the space with relatively small distances among them. To support this conclusion, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were run for each of the factors. The value of these coefficients varied between Alpha = .84 and Alpha = .88, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency. The only exception were the norms measures which showed a low level (Alpha = .44). This, however, was not surprising as each of the measures bears on a different issue and/or phenomenon.

#### *A Hierarchical Regression Analysis*

To assess the impact of the studied pre-exposure variables on post-exposure measures, a hierarchical regression analysis was employed. This analysis was considered superior over alternative methods because the independent measures can be conceptually ordered with regard to their temporally determined causal priority and because past studies in the CS/D realm had revealed that the independent variables had highly redundant associations with the dependent measures (Oliver 1980).

Accordingly, the relevant pre- and post-exposure variables were employed as independent measures in two analyses. First, these variables were utilized as predictors of satisfaction. Second, they were used, along with the satisfaction measure, as input to explain future intentions. The major hypothesis of this analysis was that satisfaction should be a function of expectations, performance, and disconfirmation (as predicted in the traditional CS/D studies). However, it was expected that future intentions will also be influenced by prior experience and norms indicators.

The results of this analysis are shown in Table 1. An examination of these results appears to support the basic hypothesis of this paper. With respect to the prediction of consumer satisfaction, none of the past-experience and norms measures significantly account for satisfaction arousal. This measure is solely determined by expectations, perfor-

**Table 1. The Impact of Pre- and Post-Exposure Measures on Satisfaction and Intentions Toward Future Behavior**

Norms and Prior Experience	Satisfaction	Intentions
Number of Prior Visits	.06	.26 <sup>b</sup>
Normative Standards about Caves	-.12	-.21 <sup>a</sup>
Norms about Nature Reserves	.09	-.03
Norms about Potential Danger	.01	-.02
Expectations	.17 <sup>a</sup>	.25 <sup>b</sup>
Performance	.48 <sup>b</sup>	.39 <sup>b</sup>
Disconfirmation	.16 <sup>a</sup>	.04
Satisfaction		.25 <sup>b</sup>
R <sup>2</sup>	.48	.51

<sup>a</sup>  $p < .05$

<sup>b</sup>  $p < .01$

mance, and disconfirmation. As anticipated, however, future behavioral intentions are indeed affected by these factors (except for disconfirmation, including satisfaction), but are also influenced by one measure of past experience (number of past visits) and one normative standard measure about caves. This analysis supports the hypotheses and is consistent with the multidimensional scaling analysis.

## CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The present study identified two mechanisms that account for the formation of future behavioral intentions. One mechanism stems from specific judgments about the event or activity. It consists of specific expectations, perceived performance, and disconfirmation of expectations. The other mechanism emanates from information that had not been acquired directly in the context of the focal event (e.g., extent and nature of past experience with other events that satisfy the same needs) but may potentially be retrieved when the willingness to engage in an activity, similar to the one experienced, is assessed.

The traditional mainstream research in the area of CS/D has emphasized the first mechanism: the one primarily determined by focal brand information. More recent research has conceptually discussed the importance of the other mechanism. In the present study, these mechanisms were contrasted theoretically and empirically. It was found that such distinction is necessary to assess the relationships between satisfaction and future intentions. Accordingly, it is recommended that future models will include measures of past experience and normative standards and specify paths linking these measures directly with postexposure evaluations in order to improve the understanding and predictions of future behavior.

Although most of the findings reported here are consistent with the proposed theoretical framework, three methodological issues deserve mention. First, the event examined in the study represents an important aspect of marketing and tourism decisions and serves as a useful

environment for testing the impact of norms and past experience on satisfaction outcomes. Yet, to verify the generalizability of the conclusions, it is recommended that future research in the CS/D paradigm should also examine the applicability of these conclusions in other consumer and tourism contexts.

Second, the sample frame used in the study may be a potential source of error. Although the response rate was high (over 95%), the population from which the sample was drawn was not necessarily representative of the population at large. Naturally, the sample consisted of a selected group of individuals who were initially predisposed to visit the cave. This issue also enhances the need to replicate this study in other contexts and on different samples.

Finally, further work is needed in construct development and validation. This is particularly important as little empirical work has been previously done in addressing measurement issues in the context of norms effects on satisfaction. A similar suggestion applies also to some new post-exposure variables, such as the uniqueness of the current experience, that are introduced in the present study. □□

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