

# INFLUENCE OF SERVICE QUALITY AND TRUST IN SPREADING POSITIVE WOM AND INCREASING LOYALTY OF A TOURIST LOCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Service quality enhancement is crucial for any business entity. Understanding the service quality gaps helps in improving the customer service. Good customer service quality is essential for enhanced customer satisfaction. An enhanced customer satisfaction helps in generating good word-of-mouth and thereby creating more loyal customers. Trust enhances commitment between the parties and lead to satisfaction. Tourism depends a lot on the flow of traffic to a location. The flow of traffic will depend on good customer experience, good word-of-mouth and recommendations from loyal customers. The researcher in this paper tries to check the influence of service quality, trust, satisfaction and commitment on word-of mouth and loyalty.*

**Keywords:** Servqual, Service Quality, Trust, Customer Satisfaction, Commitment, WOM, Loyalty.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism contributes 10.3% towards the Indian GDP and also contributes to 8% of employment generation (WTTC, 2020). India offers tourism products and services ranging from cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, rural and religious tourism and is considered as a destination for spiritual tourism for domestic and international tourists (IBEF, 2020). Tourism has a huge contribution to the economy and is considered as an important strategic sector (Abreu et al., 2018; Island & Higgins, 2018; Kelly & Fairley, 2018; Teixeira & Ferreira, 2018). There has been several research contributions in the field of tourism to understand the dynamics of tourism (Cibinskiene, 2012; Jurdana & Frleta, 2016; Montenegro, 2017; McKercher, 2016; Panfiluk, 2015; Santos et al., 2016; Tanford & Jung, 2017; Tiew et al., 2015; Yu`ru`k et al., 2017).

Tourists do a lot of research and comparisons while choosing a destination thereby giving rise to competitions for drawing in more customers (Teixeira et al., 2019). The capability of a location to service the customers and providing a memorable experience goes a long way to provide an attraction towards the location. The ability of a destination to showcase its attractions and experiences helps in creating differentiation (Cibinskiene, 2012). A tourist location's attractiveness depends on the thrill and excitement it is able to generate and the quality of services made available (Gogoi, 2020a). Service quality gaps need to be identified and corrected to bring in more traffic volume (Kumar et al., 2008) and sustain competition (Anderson & Zeithamal, 1984; Babakus & Boller, 1992; Garvin, 1983). Commitment, trust, behavioral intention and affective intention helps to increase the popularity of a location (Gogoi, 2020b)

There are several studies done on the antecedents of tourist loyalty (Bigne et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Ekinici et al., 2013; Huang & Hsu, 2009).

Loyalty of a tourist location will be dependent on various factors such as the available infrastructure, the quality of services, the customer experience and the popularity of the location.

In this paper the researcher measures the response of the customers on the factors which lead to positive WOM and loyalty of a location. The dimensions of service quality, trust, commitment, customer satisfaction are used to check the influence on word-of-mouth and loyalty.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist locations are seen too have lot of gaps in the service delivery. Service delivery is location specific depending on the cultural background of the local population. Due to diverse background of the tourists' visiting the location, standardization of services delivered helps in meeting the gaps. Micro management in specific cases is required to satisfy some visitors. Customer experiences the service in the interactive moments with the service provider (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The customer experience is totally personal and indicates the rational and emotional involvement of the customer (Gentile et al., 2007).

### Service Quality

Consumer expectation is built up on the perceived value. Every customer expects a good service delivery for the price paid. Due to varied characteristic viz. intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, perishability of services there is inconsistency in the service delivery (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This is why it is quite difficult to replicate service quality (Yuen & Thai, 2015). If we observe minutely we can see several service attributes constituting to the service quality (Zeithaml et al., 1990) the SERVQUAL model proposed by (Parasuraman et al., 1985) attributes five dimensions to service quality. These five dimensions (reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy and assurance) are measures by 22 items for determining the service quality gaps. These dimensions are used in different scenarios for understanding the service quality (Yuen & Thai, 2015). Service quality dimensions of tangibility, reliability, assurance and empathy is found to have a positive influence on customer satisfaction (Gogoi, 2020a). The five service quality dimensions are a measure of service quality. Service quality also increases the trust the consumers on the firm. Service quality and customer satisfaction are distinct features (Oliver, 1997; Taylor & Baker, 1994; Tian-Cole et al., 2002), which influences each other (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Gotlieb et al., 1994; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). Several researches done in the Tourism sector reveals a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Murray & Howat, 2002; de Rojas & Camarero, 2008; Ruiz et al., 2009) and also between perceived value and customer satisfaction (Moliner et al., 2007; Murray & Howat, 2002). Perceived value and service quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction (Dmitrovic et al., 2009). The following hypothesis is developed based on the discussion.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Service quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction*

Service quality improvement helps in enhancing customer satisfaction and purchase intention thereby increasing customer loyalty (Oliver, 1980; Gremler et al., 2001). The following hypothesis is developed based on the discussion.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Service quality has a positive influence on customer loyalty*

Service quality indirectly influences loyalty (Cole & Illum, 2006). Service quality has a direct and indirect influence on loyalty (Breiby, & Slåtten, 2018; Baker & Crompton, 2000;

Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Thrane, 2002). It is also seen that service quality has a direct influence on loyalty (Petrick, 2004; Moutinho et al., 2012; Žabkar et al., 2010). A customer appreciates good services and spreads the message of recommendations about the location. But it is also seen that a bad service brings in negative publicity. For spreading goodwill the service providers should improvise the service delivery and quality. Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Service quality has a positive influence on positive WOM about a tourist location*

## **Trust**

For every foundation of relationship building trust is the foremost factor (Moorman et al., 1992). Trust helps in increasing profitability of the firm (Suárez Álvarez et al., 2009). The role of trust has been studied to a large extent in general management (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Granovetter, 1985; Gulati & Nickerson, 2008; Gulati, 1995; Hoffmann et al., 2010) and tourism studies (de Araujo & Bramwell, 2002; Bramwell & Lane, 1999; Czernek, 2013; Grangsjö, 2006; Jamal & Getz, 1999; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Selin, 1999; Wang & Krakover, 2008; Zemła, 2014) as an important component of mutual understanding between two partners. Trust is seen as a component enhancing expectations and commitment from partners (Goodfriend & King, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is developed.

*H<sub>4</sub>: Trust has a positive influence on commitment*

Trust overcomes vulnerabilities and helps in developing positive association between the service provider and the customer (Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust also helps in building understanding of integrity and reliability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and enhances customer satisfaction. Thus the following hypothesis is developed based on the discussion.

*H<sub>5</sub>: Trust has a positive influence on customer satisfaction*

Trust is an important factor in developing positive relation in tourism and spreading good word-of-mouth (Bejou & Palmer, 1998; Crotts et al., 1998). Trust helps in spreading goodwill about the firm and the location. Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is developed.

*H<sub>6</sub>: Trust has a positive influence on positive WOM*

Trust is a combination of cognition and behavior in terms of intentions, motivations, honesty and benevolence which helps in lasting relationship development (Suárez Álvarez et al., 2009). Thus, trust enhances customer satisfaction and increases customer loyalty (Dekimpe et al., 1997; Kau & Loh, 2006). Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is developed.

*H<sub>7</sub>: Trust has a positive influence on loyalty*

## **Commitment**

Several studies were done in the field of commitment in the development of relationship (Gruen et al., 2000; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and its influence on consumer behavior (Bansal et al., 2004; Sharma & Patterson, 2000; Verhoef et al., 2002).

Commitment understands between parties desiring continuous relationship (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987). Commitment is also a desire for maintaining a valued relationship (Moorman et al., 1992). Relationship develops with commitment from the firm to serve the customer well. The relationship in the future is dependent on each party's commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment is also a sign for establishment of a long-term relationship (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Each partner develops confidence over the relationship and stay committed to the relationship (Kumar et al., 1995) which increases the satisfaction level. Commitment strengthens the relationship (Liljander & Roos 2002; Selnes, 1998) and enhances customer satisfaction. Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H<sub>8</sub>: Commitment has a positive influence on customer satisfaction*

Commitment increases the confidence on the service provider and helps in building trust in customers (Bansal et al., 2004; Crotts & Turner, 1999; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Kwon & Suh, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sharma & Patterson, 2000). A firm's commitment reflects on the level of services it provides to the customers (Suárez Álvarez et al., 2009). The customer will trust the service provider if the firm is more committed towards the service delivery (Bansal et al. 2004; Sharma & Patterson, 2000) and will spread positive word-of-mouth about the firm and its services. Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H<sub>9</sub>: Commitment has a positive influence on positive WOM*

Commitment is willingness to make sacrifices for long-term relationships (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Though commitment is different from loyalty (Fullerton, 2005), yet commitment leads to loyalty (Singh et al., 2011; Oliver, 1999). Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H<sub>10</sub>: Commitment has a positive influence on loyalty*

## **Customer Satisfaction**

Image of a destination has an impact on customer satisfaction (Ball et al., 2004) also customer satisfaction is seen to enhance the image of a tourist location (Johnson et al., 2001). Image and customer satisfaction has a two way relationship. Image is believed to influence customer behaviour (Tasci et al., 2007). Customer satisfaction builds trust (Selnes, 1998) and creates positive vibes about the location. Customer satisfaction has an influence on loyalty (Anderson & Fornell, 1994; Chi & Qu, 2008; Fornell et al., 1996; Oliver, 1997; Ryan et al., 1999; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and brand image (Ryan et al., 1999). Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H<sub>11</sub>: Customer satisfaction has a positive influence on loyalty*

Customer satisfaction and loyalty influence behavior and attitude (Oliver, 1997). Customer satisfaction leads to loyalty and positive word of mouth about the destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Bigné et al., 2005; Murray & Howat, 2002; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Customer satisfaction influences the tourist attitudes of word of mouth about the destination (Dmitrovic et al., 2009). Based on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

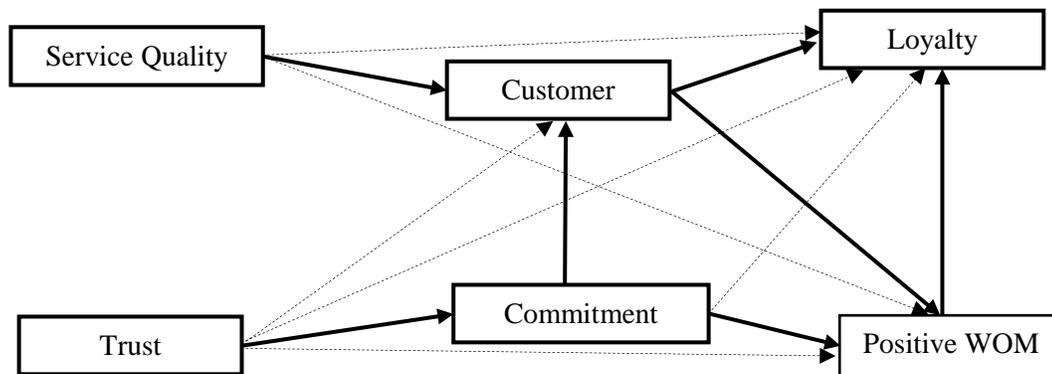
*H<sub>12</sub>: Customer satisfaction influences positive WOM about the location*

### Positive WOM about the Location

A positive word-of-mouth goes a long way in creating a positive feeling about the location. Positive WOM has an influence in the buying process (Money, 2000). Positive attitude is favorable for repurchase (Dick & Basu's, 1994; East et al., 2005). Customer suggestions and recommendation or positive w-o-m leads to repurchase and loyalty (Reinartz et al., 2005; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Base on the discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

*H<sub>13</sub>: Positive WOM has a positive influence on loyalty*

Based on the premises developed a conceptual framework is developed as depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1**  
**THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

### METHODOLOGY

A primary survey was carried out to collect data from customers who liked to travel. The research was carried out using a structured questionnaire. Out of a total of 500 questionnaires distributed there were only 406 completely filled questionnaires. Hence the sample size of the survey was taken as 406. The respondents were customers who loved to travel. 77.1% of the respondents were male and 22.9% of the respondents were female. 23.4% of the respondents are in the age group 18 years to less than 25 years, 29.6% of the respondents are in the age group 25 years to less than 35 years, 32.3% of the respondents are in the age group 35 years to less than 45 years, 11.3% of the respondents are in the age group 45 years to less than 55 years, and 3.4% of the respondents are in the age group 55yrs and above. The data was analyzed using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

### Measurement Scale

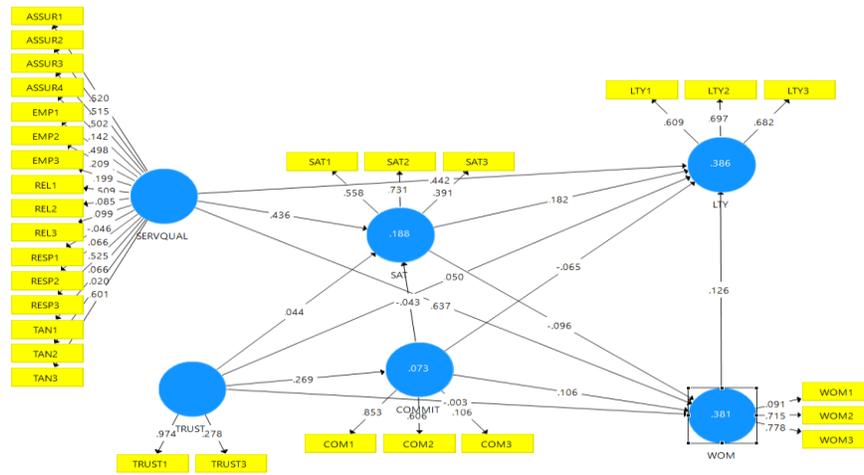
Scale for Service quality is adapted from (Parasuraman, et al., 1988). Scale for Trust is adapted from (Doney & Cannon,1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Price & Arnould, 1999; Sharma & Patterson, 2000); Scale for Commitment is adapted from (Álvarez et al., 2009); Scale for

Satisfaction is adapted from (Oliver, 1997; Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Williams & Soutar, 2009; Žabkar et al., 2010); Scale for WOM is adapted from (Bitner, 1992; Lin & Liang, 2011; Hooper et al., 2013); Scale for Loyalty is adapted from (Bigne, et al., 2001).

The measurement scale consisted of 32 statements. One statement TRUST2 was removed to increase the model fitness.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### SEM Path Analysis



**Figure 2**  
**SEM PATH ANALYSIS**

	<b>Saturated Model</b>	<b>Estimated Model</b>
<b>SRMR</b>	0.0963	0.0965
<b>d_ ULS</b>	4.3116	4.3273
<b>d_ G</b>	1.2496	1.2502
<b>Chi-Square</b>	2384.1403	2383.7231
<b>NFI</b>	0.0289	0.0291

SRMR: A value less than 0.10 or of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) is considered a good fit (Henseler et al., 2015). Here the SRMR value is 0.0963 in Table 1 and Figure 2.

NFI: The NFI results in values between 0 and 1. The closer the NFI to 1, the better the fit (Lohmöller, 1989). The NFI value is 0.0289 which is low.

Rms Theta: The measure should be close to zero to indicate good model fit (Henseler et al., 2015; Lohmöller, 1989). The rms Theta value is 0.1458 which is ok in Table 2.

	<b>R Square</b>	<b>R Square Adjusted</b>
<b>COMMIT</b>	0.0726	0.0702
<b>LTY</b>	0.3858	0.3780

<b>SAT</b>	0.1884	0.1823
<b>WOM</b>	0.3811	0.3749

The r square value of satisfaction is 0.1884 which shows 18.84% of the variance being explained by the independent variables and Loyalty is 0.3858 which shows 38.58% of the variance is explained by the independent variables in Table 3.

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>rho_A</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>	<b>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</b>
<b>COMMIT</b>	0.1925	0.2199	0.5639	0.3687
<b>LTY</b>	0.3606	0.3617	0.7016	0.4403
<b>SAT</b>	0.0414	-.0070	0.5852	0.3329
<b>SERVQUAL</b>	0.4181	0.5709	0.5935	0.1290
<b>TRUST</b>	0.1045	0.2425	0.6172	0.5134
<b>WOM</b>	0.1340	0.2223	0.5724	0.3751

Chronbach's alpha value of 0.5 and above is good. Rho A of 0.7 and above is good. Composite reliability of 0.7 and above is good. AVE of 0.5 and above is good. Loyalty has a Composite Reliability of 0.7016 and Trust has AVE of 0.5134 in Table 4.

	<b>COMMIT</b>	<b>LTY</b>	<b>SAT</b>	<b>SERVQUAL</b>	<b>TRUST</b>	<b>WOM</b>
<b>COMMIT</b>	0.6072					
<b>LTY</b>	-.0131	0.6635				
<b>SAT</b>	-.0091	0.3957	0.5770			
<b>SERVQUAL</b>	0.0505	0.5895	0.4309	0.3591		
<b>TRUST</b>	0.2694	0-.0012	0.0009	0-.0718	0.7165	
<b>WOM</b>	0.1380	0.4147	0.1780	0.6017	0-.0201	0.6125

The diagonals are the square root of the AVE. Off-diagonals are the correlations of the latent constructs. The diagonals indicate the highest of any column or row. Also in the cross loading in Factor analysis, the items under each construct fall under the same factors. This complies with the discriminant validity requirements.

	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistics ((O/STDEV))</b>	<b>P Values</b>	<b>Results</b>
SERVQUAL -> SAT	0.4363	0.4405	0.0649	6.72	0.00001	Accept H1
SERVQUAL -> LTY	0.5966	0.6048	0.0371	16.0654	0.00001	Accept H2
SERVQUAL -> WOM	0.5957	0.5999	0.0367	16.227	0.00001	Accept H3
TRUST -> COMMIT	0.2694	0.2735	0.0589	4.5751	0.00001	Accept H4
TRUST -> SAT	0.0323	0.0309	0.0526	0.6132	0.5399	Reject H5
TRUST -> WOM	0.0227	0.0213	0.0405	0.5591	0.5762	Reject H6
TRUST -> LTY	0.0416	0.0388	0.0501	0.8299	0.4068	Reject H7
COMMIT -> SAT	-0.0429	-0.039	0.0553	0.7763	0.4378	Reject H8

COMMIT -> WOM	0.1097	0.1105	0.0529	2.0725	0.0385	Accept H9
COMMIT -> LTY	-0.0587	-0.0553	0.0436	1.3464	0.1785	Reject H10
SAT -> LTY	0.17	0.1637	0.0797	2.1337	0.0331	Accept H11
SAT -> WOM	-0.0957	-0.0973	0.0442	2.1665	0.0305	Accept H12
WOM -> LTY	0.1263	0.1177	0.0578	2.1852	0.0291	Accept H13

From the path analysis of the model in Table 5, it is seen that service quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive WOM. Reducing service quality gaps and providing a seamless service to the tourist will help in enhancing customer satisfaction thereby increasing loyalty and spread of positive WOM about the location.

Trust has a positive influence on commitment. Trust between the service provider and the customer helps build good relationship. Good relationship establishes commitment from each party to sustain the relationship which is a good foundation for loyalty.

But it is seen that trust do not directly influence customer satisfaction, positive WOM and loyalty. This shows that though trust may be the stepping stone for building up loyalty still trust alone is not sufficient to create customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Commitment has an influence on positive WOM. Commitment builds trust (Gogoi, B.J., 2020b). Thus it helps in spreading positive WOM about the location.

Commitment does not influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. Commitment alone is not sufficient to enhance satisfaction and loyalty. With commitment the services delivery outcome also has to be monitored for gaining customer satisfaction in Appendix Table 1A.

Customer satisfaction has a positive influence on loyalty and positive WOM. A satisfied customer becomes loyal and spreads positive WOM about the location. This helps in differentiation. Positive WOM has an influence on loyalty. A customer spreading goodwill will definitely stay loyal to a location.

## CONCLUSION

Service quality is crucial for enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty and spreading positive WOM and goodwill. Trust and commitment is essential for motivating the customer to spread positive WOM and goodwill. A satisfied customer becomes loyal and spreads positive WOM about the location. Positive WOM helps in building loyalty.

A location will benefit by reducing the service quality gaps and focusing on building trust and commitment for a long lasting relationship and profitability.

### Limitations

A bigger sample size would help in getting a better model fit. The responses were not any location specific. Going for location specific survey would help in getting more insights about any particular location.

### Business Implications

Loyal customers help in increasing profits. Service providers in tourist locations will benefit if they can benchmark their service delivery to enhance customer satisfaction and increase trust through commitment. The firms along with the backup of the local government may integrate the services available in the location to smoothen the process of service delivery.

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## APPENDIX

<b>Table 1A STATEMENTS</b>		
Variable	Codes	Statements
<b>Service Quality (SERVQUAL)</b>	<b>Tangibility (TAN)</b>	
	TAN1	I prefer to go to tourist location that has well developed facilities
	TAN2	Physical facilities of the service providers available should be good and appealing
	TAN3	I like to go to places with neat, cleaning and pleasing employees
	<b>Reliability (REL)</b>	
	REL1	The tourist location have reliable services
	REL2	The service providers are sympathetic and reassuring
	REL3	The service providers are accurate in its billing
	<b>Responsiveness (RESP)</b>	
	RESP1	Employees of the service providers deliver prompt services
	RESP2	Employees of service providers are always willing to help the tourists
	RESP3	There are adequate information on services availability
	<b>Assurance (ASSUR)</b>	
	ASSUR1	The service providers are knowledgeable
	ASSUR2	The service providers are polite
	ASSUR3	The service providers get adequate support from the management to do their jobs well
	ASSUR4	Tourists feel safe in their interactions with service providers
	<b>Empathy (EMP)</b>	
EMP1	The service providers give tourists personal attention	
EMP2	The service providers have convenient working hours to accommodate the tourist's requirements	
EMP3	The service providers understand tourist specific needs	
<b>Trust (TRUST)</b>	<b>Trust (TRUST)</b>	
	TRUST1	The location service providers are prepared to consider all my requests and suggestions
	TRUST2	The location service providers has detailed knowledge about the tourism products and services available in the market
	TRUST3	This location service providers guides me suitably when I ask for its opinion about the best tourism service
<b>Commitment (COMMIT)</b>	<b>Commitment (COMMIT)</b>	
	COMMIT1	This location service providers carries out the necessary changes in the performance of its duties to deal with me suitably
	COMMIT2	I observe that the location service providers considers consumers to be the basic target to be satisfied in the performance of its activities
	COMMIT3	I believe this tourist location service providers makes an effort for me to feel like an important consumer
<b>Customer Satisfaction (SAT)</b>	<b>Customer Satisfaction (SAT)</b>	
	SAT1	I was pleased from the experience of the location
	SAT2	I was happy to visit the location
	SAT3	The visit to the location was quite satisfying
<b>Positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM)</b>	<b>Positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM)</b>	
	WOM1	I would recommend this location to my family and friends
	WOM2	I would recommend this location to my family and friends for similar experience
	WOM3	I would give positive recommendations about this location
<b>Loyalty (LTY)</b>	<b>Loyalty of a Tourist Location (LTY)</b>	
	LTY1	I would recommend others to visit this location

	LTY2	I will visit this location in future
	LTY3	This location is my first choice among destinations