Assessing **patrons' satisfaction** with the **cultural heritage** attribute (accommodation) in the historical city "Isfahan, Iran"(Abbasi Hotel)

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Abstract | Nowadays, the valorization of heritage is valuable for many societies. Experiencing heritage is a means of enabling people to approve their membership of a nation. In addition, scholars state that heritage is necessary for progress in marketing methods and management in the tourism field. This study investigated and revealed the potential of architectural heritage as well as the examination of tourist satisfaction through adaptive reuse of heritage sites. The question 'How can heritage resource be converted to a tourist product?' is derived from the research problem. The purpose of this study is to discover the role of architecture of the heritage hotel that affect on patrons' satisfaction and to identify the relationship between heritage accommodation as a cultural heritage attribute and patrons' satisfaction, also to analyze how the tourism characteristics, architectural attractions, physical infrastructure and service quality impacts on customer satisfaction and behavioral intention. Research data was collected from tourists who stayed in the Safavi heritage hotel in Isfahan with semi-structured questionnaires. The findings showed that the patrons were highly satisfied with the architecture of heritage hotel and that architecture was the factor with the highest satisfaction rating among the 4 dimensions in the heritage hotel. Although the majority of the patrons were not highly satisfied with the service quality, they recommended this hotel. This research focuses particularly on the impact of architectural attractions, physical environment and quality of service on tourist satisfaction of a heritage accommodation in Isfahan. The research was carried out in order to support the heritage site in conservation and also help tourism marketers to explore and fulfill customers' needs.

Keywords | Cultural heritage attribute, heritage accommodation, tourist satisfaction, physical environment, tourist characteristics.

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1. Introduction

At the present, the tourism industry has developed across the globe, and specialization has increased among tourists, and, as a result of this, cultural heritage tourism has grown considerably as a section of the tourism industry (Hollinshead, 1993). Heritage as an important asset of cities has a substantial effect on economic progress. Moreover, it raises the attraction of the region, improves city services, infrastructure, and the cultural corporation (Ismagilova et al., 2014). These days, nostalgic people who care about cultural heritage tend to experience the old ways of life (Dueholm & Smed, 2014). An increasing interest in cultural destinations has been noticed among American travelers who seek history, culture, and archeology (Huh, 2002). Heritage buildings as valuable assets of cultural heritage represent the history of a nation through architecture and aesthetics. In the most countries, the problems such as economic progress and innovation leading to a conservation crisis for historical buildings, for example during urbanization activity, many of these buildings were rebuilt with a new design. As an example, Chang (2016) claimed that there are hundreds buildings in Taiwan that underwent replacing with new design and function while they loss their history. Lack of proper management and preservation of historical buildings has been the cause of destruction on many occasions. Historical assets should be converted into a product in order to actualize the potential of heritage assets up to date (Chhabra, 2014). In this regards, heritage hotels are to be considered as products that need to be converted. Restoration of historical buildings and conversion into hotels has facilitated local development. The basis of this paper was to set up research investigating the relationship between tourist satisfaction and cultural heritage destinations (heritage accommodation) considering heritage hotels in Iran. In the history of Iran, Iranian heritage architecture has a substantial position, although aesthetic and cultural value are often denied and many voices call for the demolition of heritage sites. While investigation of customer satisfaction in accommodation is not new, research on customer satisfaction in heritage accommodation is limited. This research in particular tries to support the conservation of heritage sites. Moreover, this research may help tourism marketers to find out customers' needs in order to satisfy tourists, and it helps tourism planners to set strategies and approaches which will attract attention and retain tourists via heritage attributes.

This study contributes to the field in two aspects: a) understanding why tourists prefer to stay at historical accommodations. It would also help tourism marketers to find out the reasons for tourists' attention to historical hotels; b) to determine the factors of tourist satisfaction and loyalty that help to plan a method for conserving this, and achieving sustainability of cultural heritage destinations. This study attempts to identify the influence of heritage attributes in the destination on patrons' satisfaction in Iran. The researchers selected the heritage accommodation located in Isfahan. The antiquity of this heritage accommodation dates back more than 300 years. Isfahan is a city with large numbers of visitors and there is considerable competition among hoteliers. In the past decade, customer satisfaction was a critical issue but recently, retaining customer is more significant within the hotel industry, and so knowing the factors, which directly affect patrons' satisfaction, is a substantial challenge in this industry.

This study proposes a model that has been inspired by two other models: the consumer behavior model, and confirmatory factors analysis model (CFA). Expectancy-disconfirmation theory, developed by Oliver, is used to examine customer satisfaction. According to Oliver's theory, satisfaction is affected by expectation and disconfirmation. The framework of this study is built on Oliver's theory.

Source: own construction

Figure 1 | The proposed model of this study is adapted from two models

2. Literature review

On the basis of the theoretical framework, this study concentrates on tourist characteristics, architectural and infrastructural factors and service quality regarding customer satisfaction with heritage accommodation. Furthermore, it considers analysis of the correlation between cultural heritage attributes in the destination and tourist satisfaction. Today, the valorization of heritage is valuable for many societies (Greffe, 2004). According to Park (2010), experiencing heritage is a means to enable people to imagine and approve their membership of a nation. In addition, scholars state that different approaches in tourism marketing and management are needed to develop heritage tourism (Lee & Chahabra, 2015). In accordance with the studies of Gonzales (2008) and Rogerson (2010), cultural heritage can bring about a unique tangible and intangible experience for the tourist. Apoatolakis (2003) and Jolliffe & Smitt (2001) asserted that it is necessary to understand what experience of cultural heritage attributes can satisfy the needs for cultural consumption, in order to find out uniqueness in heritage commodity chain (Lee & Chahbra, 2015). Furthermore, cultural heritage is a medium of collecting essential resources for retaining and conserving monuments for their owners. Also, it is a means of gaining benefits for private companies and it is a cause of creating a positive perspective of that area and promoting the place and life there, so it can help the district authorities. Finally, according to Lee & Chhabra (2015) tourist's heritage experience is an medium that increase the people images which enable them to prove their belongings to nation. The impact of restored accommodation on the economy is unconcealed across the globe. In this case, the example can be given of eight palaces in the Jeleniogorska valley (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2011). In this research, they attempted to find important attributes that were the main determinants in choice of the heritage hotels by patrons. These heritage hotels bring together the needs of the patrons. Since the sustainability in business will be executed through high satisfaction, it is crucial for hotel managers to make the best decisions. Despite historical accommodations being the most important attribute of authenticity in tourism, the literature of heritage accommodation is limited (Khosravi et al., 2014).

Review of prior studies in order to obtain key terms for the title:

2.1. Architectural/cultural attraction

Prior inquiries on cultural heritage in many countries revealed that among several attributes of cultural heritage that were chosen to be investigated, the historical building, castle and museum were known as attributes as interesting places to visit by tourists during their trip. Increasing demand for visiting historical places in order to take pleasure in their architecture, can initiate a great opportunity for tourism industry (Lee et al, 2014).According to Glasson(1994) research that was done on characteristics of tourist who visited Oxford, it displayed 80% of tourist were satisfied when they visited cultural heritage attribute. They were interested in architecture and traditional college that originated physical environment attraction. They uttered, they would like to revisit. Glasson research shows 80% willingness to revisit and also architecture was one of the factors of satisfaction (Huh,2002). The elements of cultural heritage tourism referred by Sofield and Li (1998) in China, are include historic sites, architecture, scenic heritage, and traditional festival (Yuan, 2013). Furthermore, Boo (2011) proclaimed that ambiance is one of the hotel satisfaction dimensions that consists of five items: decor, facade of the hotel, layout, facilities and entertainment. According to Hill (2009); Poon & Low (2005) to keep traditional way and interesting façade in heritage hotel is necessary and it results in patron's satisfaction. Patron's pleasure feelings are influenced by aesthetic (Wong et al 2014). According to Indian government's criteria of heritage hotel "traditional architectural styles shall be kept through alterations or improvements that are required in the existing structures and also architectural features should possess distinctive qualities and ambiance its traditional way of life of that particular area"(Chahabra, 2014).

2.2 Cultural Heritage attribute (heritage accommodation)

Accommodation as a cultural heritage attribute has the main role in patron's perspective to site (Khosravi et al., 2014). The prior researchers have evaluated heritage building as a main key in the cultural heritage field. Yazdani (2014) disclosed a significant relation between heritage building and tourist experience. High value heritage is essential to be preserved by restoration or reuse (Embay, 2014). Some approaches can be executed in reuse project for historical building as the hotel. Restoration of historical buildings subject to architectural style can be converted to hotels, museums, and restaurants functionally. Moreover, modification is another approach that won't be a cause of reducing architectural value. Modifying internal space or relocating some elements and installing the new technological system of lightening and elevators are more effective to conserve (Akibaba, 2006). Furthermore, it is found that higher satisfaction to product with higher motivation leads to buying again or recommend to friends (Huh, 2002). The historical assets should be converted into a product to actualize the potential of a heritage asset (Khosravi et al., 2014). In this regards, the heritage hotel is considered as converted assets to the product. Heritage hotels and resorts as substantial cultural and historical venues showed distinct ethnic heritage environment across the globe.

Restoration of historical buildings and convert them to the hotel have facilitated local development by the involvement of local community and also produce ancillary goods and services. The Cultural hospitality is defined as a form of service that has offered in a traditional manner, so it should be performed in heritage hotel to gain customer satisfaction (Cahabra, 2014).

2.3. Physical infrastructure)

Perceived performance of location and physical attractiveness can be called physical attribute performance (Ann et al., 2011). In another research, even facilities and travel services are included in heritage tourism attributes that affect customer satisfaction (Voon & Lee, 2009). This research was supported by that of Huh research (2006). The role of infrastructural facilities and services as supporting attributes has contributed to satisfaction (Yuan, 2013). Boo (2011), in his research, pointed out a significant role of the physical environment in satisfaction and loyalty. Ryu and Han (2010) stated there is a positive relationship between layout and customer quality perception, which results in customer satisfaction.

2.4 Service quality and Customer satisfaction

According to many scholars, evaluation by customers after buying and using a product can be treated as customer satisfaction (Olsen, Wilcox, & Olsson, 2005; Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998; Gundersen, Heide, & Olsson, 1996 derived by Wong, 2014). Barksy and Labagh (1992) showed the contribution of facilities, hotel staff behavior, location, and service to satisfaction (Wong 2014). As shown in many types of research, customer satisfaction has a substantial role in tourist decisions and loyalty, and it is also important in choosing the destination, purchasing and using the product that results from the marketing of the destination (Kozak, 2000). Among many types of research that provide several theories, the expectancy-disconfirmation theory has wide acceptance. Barsky and Labagh (1992) found that customer satisfaction is related to customer willingness to revisit. They introduce Oliver's expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Huh, 2002). Also, Huh (2002) in his study pointed out Neumann and Reichel's statement, in which they claimed each cultural attributes should be indivi-

dually investigated to measure customer satisfaction in order to identify customer dissatisfaction with each one. This research attempts to study customer satisfaction on one attribute of cultural heritage (accommodation). According to various researches (Han & Ryu, 2009; Kim et al., 2009; Kivela et al., 1999; Namkung and Jang, 2007; Oliver, 1999; Ryu et al., 2010), there is a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral and return intention. Han and Ryu (2011) revealed a strong influence between physical environments (such as ambiance, décor, artifacts, layout) and customer satisfaction, which has a direct or indirect effect on customer loyalty (intention to revisit and word of mouth). These findings revealed a substantial link between them.

On the other hand, Chang (2016), in his study in Taiwan, found a hundred historical buildings, which were constructed, in the Japanese period. When these buildings were converted and replaced with new functions, the visitors were not able to understand their history. He proposed placing an information center where the history of those buildings could be explained. Another research emphasized that tourist activity's reflex, can shift to harm, and so typically to prevent this negative activity, planning and knowledge about the touristic incident should be employed. It has been found that sustainability will be accomplished by the planning of touristic activity (Minasi et al., 2014).

In accordance with the aforementioned literature, the following hypothesis is posited: **H1** - tourists' demographic characteristics have an impact on customer satisfaction and heritage destination attributes. **H2** - architectural attractions have an impact on customer satisfaction and heritage destination attributes. **H3** - physical infrastructure has an effect on tourist satisfaction.

H4 - service quality has an effect on revisit and recommendation. **H5** - there is a relationship between cultural heritage destination attributes and customer satisfaction.

3. Metodology

This study examines the impact of demographics of tourists (age, gender, occupation, education, income, tourist interest), physical environment (architectural and infrastructure) and service quality, patrons' satisfaction, heritage hotel evaluation, and behavioral intentions (revisit). Also aims to discover the relationship between cultural heritage attributes and customer satisfaction. This research follows a quantitative method, a deductive approach that starts from a test of theory and collects data. Construct validity is used to identify the validity of the research, carrying out interviews via a questionnaire. The sample of this study consisted of tourists who stayed at heritage hotels in Isfahan in August 2015. Convenience sampling was adopted in this research. The questionnaire was distributed at random during the day among international tourists. The purpose of the survey was explained to tourists before answering the questionnaire and they were asked if they would like to participate. The questionnaire included 6 parts. These parts examined the effect of destination attributes on tourist satisfaction through architecture and physical infrastructure of the hotel on a Likert-type scale and also collected the demographic characteristics and service qua-

lity. The source of data was a secondary source that provided the collected data and cited data in prior scholars' research and was analyzed. To extract primary data, a survey questionnaire was employed. The survey was carried out with heritage hotel patrons to identify why tourist prefers to stay at historical accommodation. In order to collect data and to do analysis, a survey questionnaire was distributed among patrons of heritage hotels. The mentioned questionnaires are derived from Yuan, 2013, Ryu et al., 2012, Huh, 2002 and Akbaba, 2006.

4. Findings and conclusion

60 questionnaires were distributed. The majority of participants were aged between 35-55 years and 75% were male. About 50% have a high level of education. Most participants traveled with family. The profile of participants (65.7%) is dominated by European nationalities and (19.1%) are from south east Asia and America (7.4%) and other nationalities (7.8%). Due to the small sample size, exploratory analysis was not done. The reliability of 6 dimensions is shown in Table 1. This study also assessed tourist expectations of heritage hotels. The results showed satisfaction.

Table 1 | Reliability test of the dimensions

Dimension	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Architectural attraction	5	80%
Physical infrastructure	2	79%
Service quality	4	78%
Heritage destination attribute	7	79%
Customer satisfaction	13	81%
Behavioral intentions	5	81%
Total		80%

Source: own construction

Several analyses were done to test the hypotheses. Independent T-test and one-way ANOVA were done to test hypothesis 1. The T-test found that satisfaction based on gender is significant with the dimension of heritage destination attribute ($p = 0.00$) and customer satisfaction ($p = 0.003$). The male participants had higher satisfaction with the architecture attraction dimension ($M = 15.79$).

Differences are shown between all age group sa-
tisfactions. There is a different level of satisfac-
tion among hotel patrons regardless of their ages.
In terms of patrons' occupations, satisfaction has
differences in architecture attraction by one-way
ANOVA (p = 0.014). Also, there are signifi-
cant differences in architecture and infrastructure
among the tourists based on education. Among
tourists based on nationality, it was found that
there are significant differences in the dimension
of architecture (p = 0.002) and infrastructure (p
= 0.005). The difference according to age, oc-
cupation, nationality and education are shown to
have various tastes over heritage hotel architecture
and infrastructure. The findings correspond with
Hill (2009) and Poon & Low (2005) that heritage
hotels should be related to their theme. The con-
fidence level (0.05) is for all significant results; so
demographic characteristics have an effect on cus-
tomer satisfaction.

Table 2 | Satisfaction items mean scores

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Architecture (overall)	4.216	2.324
Façade	4.20	0.609
Décor	4.25	0.609
Art	4.20	0.609
Physical infrastructure (overall)	4.02	2.189
Convenient transportation	4.10	0.877
Close to downtown	3.93	0.904
Behavioral intentions (overall)	6.31	1.428
Revisit	6.12	0.980
Recommendation	6.50	0.980
Service Quality (overall)	3.309	3.171
Responsive service	3.29	0.830
Competent service	3.20	0.906
Communication technology	3.08	1.030
Multilingual staff	3.93	0.902

Source: own construction

Table 2 shows the satisfaction of heritage ho-
tel customers with architecture (M = 4.216), fol-
lowed by infrastructure (M = 4.02) and behavioral
intention (M = 6.31) and service quality (M =
3.309). In the behavioral intention dimension, re-
commendation has the highest rate of satisfaction
(6.5). Multilingual staff (3.93) and responsive ser-
vice (3.29) in the dimension of service quality have
the highest rates of satisfaction. Transportation
gained the highest satisfaction in the infrastruc-
ture dimension (M = 4.10). Within the cultural
heritage attribute, most participants were satisfied
with architecture (M = 4.216). This was surveyed
by attribute evaluation and it was also found that
architecture of heritage hotels is significant compa-
red to the general theme of the heritage hotel. Star
rating of the hotel is visible in architecture. Infras-
tructure (4.02) and architecture attraction (4.216)
among the independent variables, show an effect
on satisfaction and support hypothesis 2 and 3. It
is revealed that evaluating satisfaction through a
10-point Likert scale leads to revisit (6.12), recom-
mendation (6.50). and behavioral intention (6.31)
being the items that are related to high satisfac-
tion. Table 3 shows a result which in R- square
of value 0.786 and a P value of 0.000 pointed to
the model having correlation and explained about
79% of satisfaction of heritage hotel patrons. The
independent variables of architecture (p = 0.000),
infrastructure (p = 0.000) and behavioral intenti-
ons (p = 0.018) indicate a positive correlation with
satisfaction. Architecture is the most significant
satisfaction dimension (b = 0.570) followed by in-
frastructure (b = 0.343) and behavioral intentions

(b = 0.221). As Huh (2002) stated, architecture was one of the important factors for satisfaction and Wong et al (2014) also declared that patrons' feelings of pleasure are influenced by aesthetics. Service quality (3.780) indicates there is no effect on revisit and recommendation, so hypothesis 4 is not supported. Multiple regression analysis was used as a statistical tool to analyse the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. It was found that there is a positive relation between them that supports hypothesis 5. The positive correlation between cultural attributes and satisfaction disclosed positive customer behavior, so it could be stated that heritage hotel is treated as a themed service with its own identification. Finally, a positive correlation was found in this study between satisfaction and revisit and recommendation, which reflects the findings from Barsky and Labagh (1992).

Table 3 | Satisfaction dimension regression with revisit and recommendation

Dimension	Standard Coefficient Beta	sig
Architectural attraction	0.570	0.000
Physical infrastructure	0.343	0.000
Behavioral intentions	0.221	0.018

Adjusted R square
0.775
F value
117.160
P value
0.000

Source: own construction

The result of this study can help the planners and marketers of the tourism industry in making strategies to enhance patrons' satisfaction and to achieve sustainability and competitiveness. This study suggests that managers of heritage hotels could focus on these dimensions to attract more tourists and concentrate on their hotel brand, making it indexed as heritage hotel to be ensured of high patron satisfaction. The findings showed patrons are highly satisfied with the architecture of heritage hotels. Male respondents seem to have higher satisfaction than female, and as a result males can be the target consumer population. According to Poria et al (2003) understanding tourists' profile is essential to achieving better management, so identification these differences is a main point for managers making change to the process of marketing (Poria et al., 2001a, 2001b). Present study suggest that managers should pay more attention to the age, nationalities, education and occupation level of patrons who will have various perceptions towards architecture and service. The findings showed that there was low satisfaction with service among patrons but high satisfaction with the architecture of the hotel. It is interesting to note that although the most of the patrons were not highly satisfied with the quality of service, they said that they would recommend this hotel. Small sample size and low response rate were the limitations of this research. The research was done during a 1-week period. A longer period is recommended data collection, and moreover, questionnaires were distributed at one heritage hotel in Isfahan so this finding should not be generalized to all heritage hotels. This research provides practical help to marketers to focus on factors that influenced patrons' satisfaction. Researchers should study another sampling area of

other heritage cities in Iran.

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