

# Experiencing cultural tourism products and its impact on perceived service quality: research on the Barba Yorgo customers

Yrd.Doç.Dr. H.Rıdvan YURTSEVEN\*

## ABSTRACT

Gokceada is an island in the Aegean Sea of great natural beauty and scenery. The island, previously known as Imbros 'windy island' in Greek; offers a blend of experiences of Turkish and Greek culture. Barba Yorgo, built using authentic village building methods and materials in Tepekoy ('Agridia' in Greek) on Gokceada, is the only traditional island tavern in Turkey. The tavern uses the traditional methods of Tepekoy-Gokceada in its meal management. This paper examines the role of impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products in determining levels of perceived service quality amongst the Barba Yorgo customers. The major findings were that the Enthusiasts had high impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products, and better levels of perceived service quality than did the Moderates, who had low impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products. The implication of this finding is that destination products play a significant role in perceived service quality.

**Keywords:** Destination products, cultural tourism products, service quality, perceived service quality, Gokceada, Barba Yorgo Tavern.

## INTRODUCTION

International tourism is increasingly driven by a destination's natural and cultural resources (Ayala 1996). Culture is an important factor in shaping many visitor experiences. Authentic local culture, history, institutions and

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\* Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Gökçeada MYO, Turizm İşletmeciliği Programı  
e-mail: ryurtseven@comu.edu.tr

customs can provide a rich experiential tapestry for the visiting tourist (Cohen 1988; Prentice 1993). Cultural products will augment the visitors' experiences by providing an interpretation of the location and by offering them the opportunity to participate in the destination's everyday life.

The aim of the research was to conduct a preliminary investigation to determine if there was a significant relationship between impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products and the perceived service quality of the Barba Yorgo customers. Rather than take an all-inclusive definition of cultural tourism products and service quality, the research focused on cultural tourism products of a destination (Moscardo and Pearce 1999) and the SERVQUAL Model (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1990). The need for such research has arisen because of the rapid growth of cultural tourism. Based on the findings of this research, it appears that impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products by the Barba Yorgo customers had an important effect on their perceived service quality.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Service quality has been receiving much prominence because of its obvious relationship to costs (Kellogg et al. 1997), financial performance (Hallowell 1996; Rust and Oliver 1994; Rust and Zahorik 1993; Rust et al. 1994, 1995), customer satisfaction (Bolton and Drew 1991a,b; Cronin and Taylor 1992, 1994; Boulding et al. 1993; Gronholdt et al. 2000; Kellogg et al. 1997; Roest and Pieters 1997; Shemwell et al. 1998; Soderlund 1998; Stauss and Neuhaus 1997) and customer retention (Boshoff 1997; Hocutt 1998; Keaveney 1995) in tourism management. Numerous organizations have started focussing on ascertaining customer perceptions of service quality.

The research literature on service quality and satisfaction has indeed swelled enormously over the past two decades (Augustyn and Ho 1998; Babakus and Boller 1992; Brown et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 1992, 1994; Finn and Lamb 1991; Parasuraman et al. 1985, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1994a,b; Teas 1994; Zeithaml et al. 1985, 1990, 1993, 1996). However, the SERVQUAL Model (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1990) forms the cornerstone on which all other studies have been built. Table 1 summarizes the dimensions of the SERVQUAL Model.

**Table 1.**  
**The Dimensions of The SERVQUAL Model**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
TANGIBLES	physical evidence
RELIABILITY	getting it right first time honouring promises
RESPONSIVENESS	willingness readiness to provide service
COMMUNICATION	keeping customers informed in a language they can understand
CREDITABILITY	honesty trustworthiness
SECURITY	physical financial confidentiality
COMPETENCE	possession of required skills and knowledge of all employees
COURTESY	politeness respect friendliness
UNDERSTANDING	knowing customers' their needs their requirements
ACCESS	ease of approach and contact

Source: Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990).

However, a careful examination of the scale items of the SERVQUAL Model reveals that most of the items focus on the component of human interaction in the service delivery and the rest on the tangibles dimension of the service (Sureshchandar et al. 2002). The point to be underscored here is that the SERVQUAL Model does not address certain other important constituents of service quality. Buttle (1996) summarized the major criticisms of SERVQUAL in two broad categories: theoretical and operational.

Theoretical criticisms include:

- Paradigmatic objections
- Gaps model
- Process orientation
- Dimensionality

Operational issues comprise:

- Expectations
- Item compositions
- Moments of truth
- Polarity
- Scale points
- Two administrations
- Variance extracted

The concerns raised in the above-mentioned works clearly indicate that there is still scope for further research on the subject of service quality, which is, by nature, an abstract concept that is difficult to appraise. Considering this background, the current research aspires to develop an empirical model of service quality that could form the basis of a better understanding of the determinants of customer perceived service quality.

Some tourism management researchers (Cai and Woods 1993; Chadee and Mattsson 1996; Fick and Ritchie 1991; Karatepe and Avcı 2002; LeBlanc 1992; Litvin and Ling 2001; O'Neill and McKenna 1994) have primarily thought that perceived service quality originates purely from service dimensions. However, this may not be so. Gotlieb, Grewal and Brown (1994), Gyimothy (2000), Handszuh (1995), and Keane (1996) found that both service dimensions and destination products played significant roles in perceived service quality.

## **KEY ISSUE OF THE RESEARCH**

Many studies highlighted the critical value of cultural tourism products in attracting customers to a specific destination (Murphy et al. 2000). Cultural tourism products are referred to as experiential tourism because customers often wish to immerse themselves in the local cultural environment and experience. It is involving first hand experiences with the practices of another culture (McKercher and So-Ming 2001; Stebbins 1996). The management of cultural tourism requires an understanding of what is important to customers and how the reality of their cultural experiences. These experiences include information on the history of the people, information on traditional lifestyles, information on how people live now, contact with indigenous people, arts and crafts, dance performances, authentic food, and

opportunities to participate in traditional activities (Moscardo and Pearce 1999). They bring back into life old traditions, together with local culture and history.

Gokceada ('Imbros' in Greek) in the Aegean Sea, the largest island of Turkey, has attractive Greek and Turkish cultural tourism products. The island, as a popular tourist destination, offers many experiences of traditional Aegean island lifestyle from the past. Tepekoy ('Agridia' in Greek), one of the centuries old Greek villages on Gokceada, has stone buildings reflecting typical mountain village architecture. It is a living museum, where life has changed very little for the Greek-speaking inhabitants for hundreds of years. Villagers, using traditional methods in their everyday life, rely very little on the outside world.

Barba Yorgo, constructed using authentic village building methods and materials, is the only traditional island tavern in Turkey. Barba Yorgo is located in the centre of the village. Its exterior and interior decoration, with emphasis given to detail, reflect the cultural values of the village. The tavern uses traditional methods in its meal management. Every year, cultural tourists (especially from Australia, Greece, New Zealand and Turkey) come to Tepekoy and taste the Barba Yorgo's cuisine.

The key issue of the research, using the Barba Yorgo customers as a sample, is to test the hypothesis: *there is a positive relationship between impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products and levels of perceived service quality.*

## METHODOLOGY

The population studied in the research was the Barba Yorgo customers. A convenience sample of 384 Barba Yorgo customers, all of whom were asked to respond to the questionnaire designed for the study, was drawn from this population by using the general formula of sample size ( $n = t^2 pq/d^2$ ;  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $t = 1.96$ ,  $p = 0.5$ ,  $q = 0.5$ ,  $d = 0.05$ ).

The research tool was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was initially written in Turkish and then translated into English and Greek, because a large number of the Barba Yorgo customers originated from Australia, Greece, New Zealand, and Turkey. Before the questionnaire was applied, it was tested on an accidental sample of 40 Barba Yorgo customers in May

2002. In this way, we determined which were over-complex or unintelligible questions in the questionnaire, and redesigned it.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part included closed-ended personal questions (gender, marital status, age, education level, annual income, group of Barba Yorgo, and visitation of Barba Yorgo) that explored the demographic profile of the Barba Yorgo customers. The five point Likert-type scale questions in the second part measured impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products by the Barba Yorgo customers. The questions were developed based on eight cultural tourism products in the literature (Moscardo and Pearce 1999). On the scale employed, 1 represented very low impressive level while 5 indicated very high impressive level (1=very unimpressive, 2=unimpressive, 3=neutral, 4=impressive, 5=very impressive). In the third part of the questionnaire, respondents utilized the five point Likert-type scale to indicate levels of service quality (1= very bad, 2=mediocre, 3=good, 4=very good, 5=excellent) with the ten dimensions of the SERVQUAL Model (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1990).

Using an on-site intercept methodology procedure, customers were approached while entering the Barba Yorgo Tavern. They were asked to complete the self-administered questionnaire. If customers agreed to participate, they were given the opportunity to benefit from interviewer assistance (only in case of need). This method of survey administration was cost effective and reduced the time involved in collecting the data. The survey was conducted in August 2002 during the Tepekoy-Agridia Festival. To obtain a significant convenience sample, the questionnaires were distributed for the entire duration of the festival, at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner. By the end of the festival, a total of 384 usable questionnaires had been collected.

## **FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

The findings of the research are presented in three sections: (1) impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products by the Barba Yorgo customers, (2) demographic profile of the Barba Yorgo customers, and (3) perceived service quality of the Barba Yorgo customers.

## Impressive Levels of Experiencing Cultural Tourism Products

To identify the major groups of the Barba Yorgo customers, respondent general mean ratings of the impressive of eight cultural tourism products (Moscardo and Pearce 1999) in Tepekoy-Gokceada were used. Interpretation of the scale of impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products indicates:  $< 2.5$  unimpressive,  $2.5-3.5$  neutral, and  $> 3.5$  impressive. Using the scale, the Barba Yorgo customers were divided into two main groups. In the spirit of the paper of Sandro and Uysal (1998), we named them 'enthusiasts', with a general impressive mean of more than 3.5, and 'moderates', with a general impressive mean of less than 3.5. The Enthusiasts, 128 Barba Yorgo customers, are thirsty to experience cultural tourism products. The Moderates, 256 Barba Yorgo customers, are also interested in cultural tourism products, but to a lesser extent.

T-test was used to analyse the averaged scores of impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products for the Enthusiasts and the Moderates. One purpose of the t-test is to determine whether the two means differed significantly from each other. The two sample groups had the conditions of t-test for the analysis. In this analysis, there were statistically significant differences between the two groups' impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products in Tepekoy-Gokceada. The analysis of t-test is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
**Impressive Levels of Experiencing Cultural Tourism Products**

Cultural Tourism Products	Mean Rating of The Enthusiasts (a)	Mean Rating of The Moderates (a)	t-test Significance Level (p)
Information on the history of the people	4.5000	3.4688	0.000 (b)
Information on traditional lifestyles	4.2500	2.8750	0.000(b)
Information on how people live now	3.8750	2.5313	0.000(b)
Contact with indigenous people	4.1875	3.0625	0.000(b)
Arts and crafts	3.5625	2.1875	0.000(b)
Dance performances	3.3125	2.1875	0.000(b)
Authentic food	3.8750	3.1875	0.001(c)
Opportunities to participate in traditional activities	3.3750	2.4375	0.003(c)

(a) Interpretation of scale:  $< 2.5$  unimpressive,  $2.5-3.5$  neutral,  $> 3.5$  impressive.

(b)  $p < 0.001$

(c)  $p < 0.01$

## **Demographic Profile of the Barba Yorgo Customers**

The demographic profile of the sample is outlined in Table 3. There were more male respondents (53.4%) than female respondents (46.6%). Of the sample 65.4%, were married. The age of the respondents was widely distributed across all age categories. The level of education was skewed toward the high end of the continuum, with 74.8% reporting having graduated from a college or faculty, or higher. The level of income was less widely distributed. About half (45.8%) reported an annual income of less than \$20,000. The majority of the customers indicated, they were couples (34.1%) or a family (32.8%), with 62.8 % of the sample being first time visitors to the Barba Yorgo Tavern.

A two-sample Kolmogorow-Smirnow test was performed comparing the demographics of the Enthusiasts and the Moderates. It was found that there were no differences of gender ( $z=0.036$ ,  $p=1.000$ ), level of education ( $z=0.505$ ,  $p=0.961$ ), or the group of Barba Yorgo ( $z=1.191$ ,  $p=0.117$ ). With regard to marital status ( $z=2.742$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), age ( $z=2.273$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), annual income ( $z=1.371$ ,  $p=0.047$ ), and the visitation of Barba Yorgo ( $z=5.016$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), there were statistically significant differences. The Enthusiasts were generally married (85.25%) and between the ages of 31 and older (88.3%). By contrast, the Moderates were generally married (55.5%) or single (44.5%), and between the ages of 49 and younger (92.9%). Looking at annual income, the level of annual income of the Enthusiasts was widely distributed across all income categories. Of the Enthusiasts responding, 73.4% were repeat visitors, while 80.9% the Moderates were first time visitors.



**Table 3.**  
**Demographic Profile of the Barba Yorgo Customers**

Factor	Enthusiasts		Moderates		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	68	53.1	137	53.5	205	53.4
Female	60	46.9	119	46.5	179	46.6
<b>Total</b>	128	100.0	256	100.0	384	100.0
<b>Marital status</b>						
Married	109	85.2	142	55.5	251	65.4
Single	19	14.8	114	44.5	133	34.6
<b>Total</b>	128	100.0	256	100.0	384	100.0
<b>Age</b>						
30 and younger	15	11.7	93	36.3	108	28.1
31-39	42	32.8	84	32.8	126	32.8
40-49	46	36.0	61	23.8	107	27.9
50 and older	25	19.5	18	7.1	43	11.2
<b>Total</b>	128	100	256	100.0	384	100.0
<b>Level of education</b>						
High school or less	37	28.9	60	23.4	97	25.2
College or faculty	68	53.1	162	63.3	230	59.9
Master or doctorate	23	18.0	34	13.3	57	14.9
<b>Total</b>	128	100.0	256	100.0	384	100.0
<b>Annual income</b>						
Less than \$ 20.000	50	39.1	126	49.2	176	45.8
\$ 20.000-29.999	34	26.6	61	23.8	95	24.8
\$ 30.000-39.999	17	13.3	53	20.7	70	18.2
\$ 40.000-49.999	19	14.8	16	6.3	35	9.1
More than \$ 50.000	8	6.2	-	-	8	2.1
<b>Total</b>	128	100.0	256	100.0	384	100.0
<b>Group of Barba Yorgo</b>						
Alone	14	10.9	35	13.7	49	12.8
Couples	38	29.7	93	36.3	131	34.1
Family	57	44.5	69	26.9	126	32.8
Friends	19	14.9	26	10.2	45	11.7
Organized group	-	-	33	12.9	33	8.6
<b>Total</b>	128	100.0	256	100.0	384	100.0
<b>Visitation of Barba Yorgo</b>						
First time visitors	34	26.6	207	80.9	241	62.8
Repeat visitors	94	73.4	49	19.1	143	37.2
<b>Total</b>	128	100.0	256	100.0	384	100.0

### Perceived Service Quality of the Barba Yorgo Customers

Mann-Whitney test was conducted to find out whether there were significant differences in the mean ranking for the Enthusiasts and the Moderates on levels of perceived service quality. The reason for using this

test was that the data of the two samples on perceived service quality did not have conditions for parametric tests. Conformingly, the reliability test done for this research showed an alpha value of 0.8665, which indicated a high reliability. Table 4 summarizes the results of Mann-Whitney test.

**Table 4.**  
**Perceived Service Quality of the Barba Yorgo Customers**

Dimensions	Enthusiasts		Moderates		Mann-Whitney Test Significance Level
	Mean	Mean Rank	Mean	Mean Rank	
Tangibles	3.8125	219.75	3.4063	178.88	0.000 (b)
Reliability	3.7500	224.50	3.4063	176.50	0.000 (b)
Responsiveness	4.0000	224.50	3.5938	176.50	0.000 (b)
Communication	4.3750	245.25	3.7813	166.13	0.000 (b)
Creditability	3.8125	232.75	3.4063	172.38	0.000 (b)
Security	3.8750	229.00	3.4375	174.25	0.000 (b)
Competence	3.5625	223.75	3.1875	176.88	0.000 (b)
Courtesy	4.1875	199.00	4.0938	189.25	0.383 (c)
Understanding	3.8750	178.50	4.0000	199.50	0.056 (c)
Access	4.3125	190.00	4.3125	193.75	0.732 (c)

(a) Interpretation of scale: < 2.5 bad, 2.5-3.5 mediocre, > 3.5 good.

(b)  $p < 0.05$

(c)  $p > 0.05$

With regard to the analysis of the test, dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, communication, creditability, security and competence tests were statistically significant. The Enthusiasts perceived a good level in all service dimensions, while the Moderates perceived a good level in responsiveness and communication dimensions, and a mediocre level in all the rest.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research was to discover if there was a significant relationship between impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products in Tepekoy-Gokceada and the perceived service quality of the Barba Yorgo customers. The analysis identified two different groups, the

Enthusiasts and the Moderates, among the customers of Barba Yorgo, based on their impressive level of experiencing cultural tourism products. The Enthusiasts group was very interested in all aspects of experiencing cultural tourism products, including learning about different aspects of the visited culture, participating in traditional activities, experiencing traditional food, seeing arts and crafts, and having direct contact with local people. On the other hand, the Moderates group was characterized by lower impressive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products than the Enthusiasts. With regard to cultural tourism products, all of the tests were statistically significant. The Enthusiasts found all cultural tourism products more impressive than the Moderates. Perceptions of service quality were determined by breaking down the mean ranks scores of both sets of respondents, the Enthusiasts and the Moderates, by each dimension of service quality. In this analysis, there were statistically significant differences in seven of the ten tests between the two groups' perceptions of service quality. In general, the Enthusiasts perceived a good level in all service dimensions, while the Moderates perceived a mediocre level.

The results reported in this paper show that positive levels of experiencing cultural tourism products affect positively perceived service quality. The research supports the former studies (Gotlieb, Grewal and Brown 1994; Gyimothy 2000; Handszuh 1995; Keane 1996) on destination products and perceived service quality.

The major limitation of this research is the small sample size. It was applied only to the customers of the Barba Yorgo Tavern in Tepekoy-Gokceada. It should be repeated by other tourism companies in cultural tourism destinations. For the benefit of further studies to be conducted on the same topic, it is beneficial here to note one further thing about the research. The results present important knowledge about the effects of experiencing cultural tourism products on perceived service quality. In cultural tourism management, tourism companies should focus on finding the best customers who have similar interests and needs, and tailoring products and services to them by evaluating their cultural experiences.

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