

# TAKING A CRUISE TRAIN AND SEARCHING FOR HAPPINESS: MODEL CONSTRUCTION OF TRAIN PASSENGER SATISFACTION AND ITS EFFECTS EVALUATION

*Wei-Shang Fan, Department of Business Administration, Nanhua University, ws.fan@msa.hinet.net*  
*Chun-Shu Lai, Department of Business Administration, Nanhua University, p851714@yahoo.com.tw*  
*Ruei-Shiuan Chang, Department of Business Administration, Nanhua University, rschang@cht.com.tw*  
*Chao-yang Tsai, Department of Business Administration, Nanhua University, P287897@yahoo.com.tw*

## ABSTRACT

Passengers who had ridden on the Taiwan Railway Administration's "cruise train" were used as research subjects in this study. Researchers distributed 334 questionnaires on trains and in train stations. All 300 questionnaires were recovered, yielding a 89.8% recovery rate. This study used SPSS12.0 statistical software and the AMOS17.0 model for analysis. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, analysis of overall goodness-of-fit, and compilation of structural model path coefficients were used to assess the research results and verify hypotheses about variable relationships. All six hypotheses were established.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background and motivation

The Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) is acutely aware that, in order to overcome challenges posed by changes in the future environment, it must make itself more competitive to achieve sustainable operations. In this vein, the TRA recently unveiled a specially-commissioned train aimed at tourism for which they have coined the term "cruise train". As its name suggests, the cruise train stops at designated "harbors" (stations) for a period of time, allowing passengers to alight and go sightseeing at various scenic spots before re-boarding the train and continuing on to the next stop. Cruise trains are currently the focus of active promotion by the TRA. The TRA utilizes scenic spots and tourist locales nearby the stations of existing railway lines, and combines these attractions with local historical and cultural narratives and culinary specialties to develop a "railway tourism" model that integrates both transportation and recreation. Cruise trains made 250 runs in 2010, transported 55,000 passengers in total, and received strong support and positive reviews.

From an experiential viewpoint of the study, traveling on the train is the most entertaining part of the experience for passengers because it provides passengers with elements of participation, surprise, and learning (Petrick, 2004). The power of attraction is the driving force behind tourist systems. An outlook attractive enough to motivate passengers to action is the catalyst behind motivating passengers to participate in tourism packages. The effects of attraction can cause feelings of happiness and satisfaction in passengers participating in tourism or recreational activities (Swarbrooke, 2002). Related studies have also indicated that the experience of participating in recreational travel influences participants' sense of well-being by positively affecting perceived health and producing feelings of happiness (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Hunter-Jones, 2003; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004).

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

### 2.1 Experiential Marketing (EM)

Pine and Gilmore (1999) define an experience as a memorable feeling produced in a person's consciousness when he/she reaches a particular emotional, physical, or mental state. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) feel that empiricists are interested in the enjoyable and joyful experiences that are produced by consumer behavior, and wish to understand the behavior of consumers in different unique environments. Schmitt(1999) points out that consumer behavior does not only consist of rational decision-making processes, but also includes pursuing pleasant and memorable experiences. The ultimate goal of marketing is to provide customers with a valuable experience. Experiential marketing is a method by which businesses create experiences for consumers. Already vital to the operation and management of theme parks, experiential marketing is paving the way for the trend of future global marketing (Rifkin, 2001).

Dorfman (1979) indicates that recreational satisfaction is the subjective assessment of the individual with regard to the activity and experience, and is influenced by various objective and subjective factors in the process of recreational activities. Mannell (1989) states that an individual's degree of satisfaction with recreational experience is not only the manifestation of his/her true feelings about participating in the activity, but also an effective predictor of his/her willingness to repeat the activity. Businesses seeking to increase the number of repeat customers should first seek to enhance their customers' recreational experience. Oliver (1997) feels that satisfaction includes psychological feelings, and defines satisfaction as the reaction of a consumer after pleasurable fulfillment as well as a type of cognition of the pleasure brought about by a product or its attributes. Therefore, when consumers have experiences that result in a higher degree of pleasure, greater feelings of satisfaction are generated. Based on the above literature, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

**H1: The experience of passengers riding on a cruise train has a significant influence on their degree of satisfaction.**

### 2.2 Landscape attraction (LA)

Victor (1989) notes that landscape attraction is the primary motivation for tourists or travelers to visit tourist spots.

Gunn (1993) stated that if experiential marketing is the “push” for travel, then landscape attraction is the “pull”. Swarbrooke (2002) opined that landscape attraction is the attraction tourists feel for certain types of messages intentionally or unintentionally disseminated, which generate a desire to take measures to achieve satisfaction. Landscape attraction is the original driving force behind tourism systems. Areas attractive enough to motivate tourists to action include Las Vegas, U.S.; Kyoto, Japan, and the Forbidden City in Beijing. Many scholars have indicated that landscape attraction is a catalyst for engagement in recreational activities, and is also an antecedent to becoming motivated enough to participate in tourism or travel (Page, 2003; Gunn, 2004).

Lew (1987) believes that attraction to scenic spots is inclusive of its surrounding landscape, opportunity for participation, memories, and services and facilities that satisfy tourists. Hu and Ritch (1993) indicate that tourism attraction lies in the requirements of tourists with regard to special holidays and their recognition of the potential satisfaction that each destination might provide. Based on the above literature, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

**H2: The degree of attraction offered by taking a ride on a cruise train has a significant influence on the degree of satisfaction.**

### **2.3 Traveler satisfaction (TS)**

Regan (1963) points out that the public transport industry is intertwined with the service industry to some extent. The most important objective in the service industry is to provide an experience that fulfils the expectations of the customer, and enhance customers’ perception of the value of the experience. Therefore, the four general characteristics of the service industry also apply to the public transportation industry: intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability. Churchill and Surprenant (1982) indicate that customer satisfaction is the result of both purchase and use; it is generated from favorable comparison between the return on expected results and the cost invested. According to Mannell (1986), understanding the role that leisure satisfaction plays in personal life contributes to achieving a sense of happiness, which can then lead to satisfaction with life.

Degree of satisfaction is the assessment made by the consumer after experiencing a certain service. This assessment can be positive, neutral, or negative (Anderson 1973). Howard and Sheth (1969) first applied the concept of satisfaction to consumer theory and opine that satisfaction is a feeling that indicates whether there is a reasonable balance between output and actual gain. Baker and Crompton (2000) stated that degree of satisfaction refers to the psychological and emotional state of an individual after an experience. If their pre-use anticipation exceeds the actual results, then satisfaction results; if not, dissatisfaction is the result.

According to Wei & Milman (2002), participation in tourism activities (i.e., an itinerary) is positively correlated with a psychological sense of happiness, and overall satisfaction with the travel experience is positively correlated with sense of happiness. Related studies indicate that the experience of participating in recreational travel influences participants’ sense of happiness by positively affecting perceived health and producing feelings of happiness (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Hunter-Jones, 2003; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004).

Metzelaars (1995) researched the degree of satisfaction, leisure satisfaction, and life satisfaction of adult university students. Results showed that these three variables were all significantly correlated. Based on the above literature, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

**H3: Satisfaction with the cruise train has a significant influence on sense of happiness**

### **2.4 Passenger sense of happiness (SH)**

Campbell (1976) believes that subjective well-being is the self-realization of having (material conditions), relating (interpersonal relationships), and being (self-achievement); these dimensions include overall emotions and life experience. Rim (1993) wrote that an individual’s sense of well-being originates from past life experience, value perspective, or the results of favorably comparing one’s current state of life with that of others or with personal ideal life goals. Berger and Mcluman (1993) pointed out that a sense of happiness can alleviate symptoms of anxiety, depression, and anger. A sense of well-being produces more positive emotions, and satisfaction with life in general becomes a worthy objective (Diener, 1999; Christopher, 1999).

Loesch & Wheeler (1982) explain that the potential benefits of leisure are recreational sense of happiness, expression of creativity, and self-growth. Wei & Milman (2002) also indicate that organizing and participating in tourism activities is significantly and positively correlated with a psychological sense of happiness, while overall satisfaction with a travel experience is significantly and positively correlated with a sense of happiness. Related studies have indicated that the experience of participating in recreational travel influences participants’ sense of well-being by positively affecting perceived health and producing feelings of happiness (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Hunter-Jones, 2003; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004). Based on the above literature, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

**H4: The experience of taking the cruise train has a significant influence on sense of happiness.**

McIntyre and Pigram (1992) applied the specialized recreational viewpoint described by Little (1976) and Bryan (1977), which is formed from cognitive, affective, and behavioral systems. After repeated verification, they found that the two dimensions of importance and pleasure often aggregate into a single factor. McIntyre and Pigram thus combined these two dimensions into a single construct, named attraction. This construct was integrated with the constructs of self-expression and centrality to form the concept of leisure involvement, which was used as a tool of measurement.

Lu & Argygl (1994) studied 114 members of the Oxford community in England, and found that focused investment in a recreational activity is related to leisure satisfaction and sense of happiness. Leisure satisfaction can be used to predict sense of happiness. The research conclusions of Havitz and Dimanche (1997) indicate that the beneficial results of leisure can significantly influence individual perception of happiness. Based on the above literature, this study proposed the

following hypothesis:

**H5: The attraction of riding on a cruise train significantly influences sense of happiness.**

According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is the overall experience that consumers have after comparing quality, quantity, and other objective and subjective factors. The research of Rao and Monroe (1989) and Monroe (1990) showed that perceived value is influenced by the information that consumers obtain, which in turn influences consumers' willingness to purchase and the price they can accept. Riddick (1986) indicates that the satisfaction an individual feels from leisure activities influences his/her mental health, and that satisfaction derived from leisure has a greater influence on psychological sense of happiness compared to satisfaction from work, family, health, or income. Patrick (2004) expresses that research on perceived value in the tourism industry helps business owners to understand consumers' degree of satisfaction and subsequent behavior. Chen and Chen (2010) indicate that tourists' identification of perceived value is a comprehensive measurement of their satisfaction with the tour, which influences their feelings of happiness. Based on the above literature, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

**H6: The perceived value of taking a ride on a cruise train significantly influences degree of satisfaction and sense of happiness.**

**3. Research Methods**

**3.1 Research Framework**

The main goals of this research are to understand, whether or not LA has a significant positive influence on EM, TS, and TH; whether or not EM has a significant positive influence on TS and TH; and whether or not TS has a significant positive influence on TH. The research framework is shown in Figure 1.

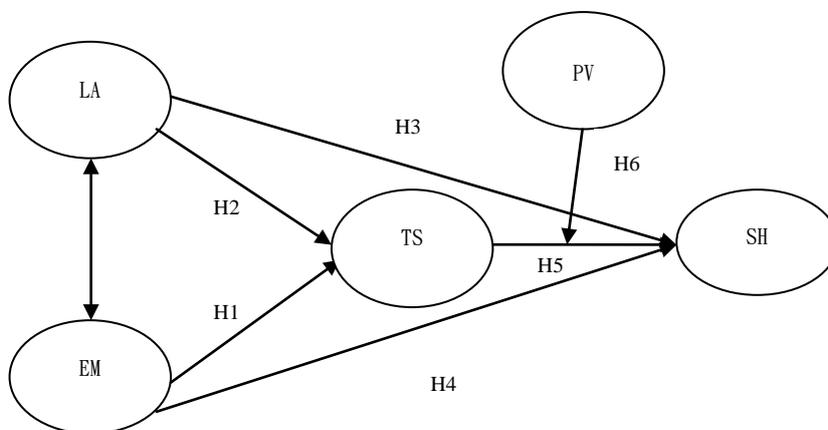


Figure 1: Research Framework

**3.3 Samples**

The questionnaires were filled out by participants and collected on the spot. A total of 210 questionnaires were placed in the carriages of the mountain line cruise train for passengers to fill out. After subtracting the number of questionnaires that were lost, invalid, or not recovered, the total number of valid questionnaires was 188. Respondents were also sampled from the ocean lines, feeder lines, and cruise trains stations, for which 90 questionnaires were distributed. After subtracting the number of questionnaires that were lost, invalid, or not recovered, the total number of valid questionnaires was 78. In total, 300 questionnaires were distributed and 266 were recovered, resulting in a recovery rate of 89%.

The majority of the respondents were female (59%); the largest age range consisted of 41 to 60 (37.3 %); the majority of income levels fell into the NT\$20,001 to NT\$40,000 range (48%); marital status being married accounted for the majority (63%); as did the level of education being university (college) (44.7%).

**4. Data Analysis Results**

In analyzing the model, this study has employed the AMOS17.0 statistical software for the analysis of the structural equation model. The internal structure's model fitness is used mainly to evaluate the level of significance of the estimated parameters within the model, the reliability of the indicators, and of latent variables, which represents the analysis of intrinsic quality of the model. Prior to evaluating the model fitness, one must first test the reliability and validity of the variables and constructs. In terms of convergent validity, Hair et al. (1998) propose that considering these three indicators are necessary: reliability of individual items, constituent reliability of the latent variables, and the average variance extracted of the latent variables. If these three indicators measure up correctly, it indicates the presence of convergent validity

**4.1 Model Internal Structure Validity analysis**

This research analyzed the validity of each construct by confirmatory factor analysis, which tests the model fit by measuring model to examine if the construct has adequate convergent validity. It also conducted discriminant validity test according to Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

- (1) Convergent validity analysis

Internal Structure Validity was based on two-stage confirmatory factor analysis. Fit indexes, including GFI, NFI and CFI, of each construct model all exceeded the ideal standard of 0.9. RMR was also in the acceptance interval below 0.05. Factor loading of each measuring item was over 0.5. The average extraction variance of each construct was over 0.5. P value also reached significance degree.

(2) Discriminate validity analysis

Based on Anderson and Gerbing (1988), this research conducted the discriminate validity test. The test first used confidence interval; if the upper and lower limits of the correlation factors of pair constructs after adding and subtracting two standard deviations were not within 1, it indicates that these two constructs had discriminate validity. The data showed that the correlation of factors of pair construct was between 0.34 and 0.59, which was not over the basic fit index of parameter correlation absolute value, which was close to 1. The upper and lower limits of the correlation factors of pair constructs after adding and subtracting two standard deviations was not within 1. Thus, there is discriminate validity among the constructs.

**4.2 Model fitness analysis**

The analytical result of overall model fit of this research is shown in Table 2. and the evaluation result of the internal structure fit and overall model fit indexes of the theoretical model were above the standard, which showed adequate fit of theoretical model in this research.

Table 2 Analytical result of overall model fit

Fit index	Judgment principle	Research framework model	Fit index	Judgment principle	Research framework model
Chi-square (CMIN)	The smaller the better	377.582	GFI	>0.9	0.868
DF		113	AGFI	>0.9	0.821
P	Not significant	0.000	NFI	>0.9	0.904
CMIN/DF	< 3	3.341	CFI	>0.9	0.930
RMR	<0.05	0.057	PNFI	As least 0.5	0.751
RMSEA	<0.08	0.088	PGFI	At least 0.5	0.773

**4.3 Verification of Hypotheses**

Maximum likelihood was used to test whether the study’s hypotheses reached levels of significance and whether or not the hypotheses were supported. The results of analyzing the theoretical model revealed the following: Experiential marketing can directly and positively influence design quality and passenger sense of happiness. Therefore, better customer perception of experiential marketing results in better assessment of satisfaction and sense of happiness. Experiential marketing can also indirectly influence sense of happiness through degree of satisfaction. Landscape attraction can directly and positively influence design quality. Greater landscape attraction implies greater passenger satisfaction. Through passenger satisfaction, landscape attraction can indirectly influence sense of happiness. Passenger degree of satisfaction can directly and positively affect sense of happiness. A higher degree of satisfaction can increase passengers’ feeling of happiness.

To summarize, if recreational business owners wish to increase the sense of happiness of customers, they should strive to increase customers’ degree of satisfaction, which directly increases sense of happiness, in addition to enhancing the quality of recreation offered.

**4.4 Perceived value interference test**

For interference testing, researchers used the multi-group approach to test the influence of perceived crowding on attraction, and its subsequent influence on degree of satisfaction, as well as the influence of perceived value on degree of satisfaction. Two groups were formed: high level of perceived crowding and low level of perceived crowding. The process for testing interference effects was as follows: The interference variables were divided into two groups. The two groups were then set to different models, and their chi-square values and degrees of freedom were obtained. In order to prove interference effects, the difference in degrees of freedom (DOF) between the two models must be 1, and the difference in chi-squared values must exceed 3.8 (Hsin Hsin Chang and Su Wen Chen, 2009). The table below shows that the DOF of each model was 169 and 168, respectively (difference of 1), and the chi-squared values were 385.6 and 375.6, respectively (difference: 10>3.8). These result proved the existence of interference effects. The path coefficient of low perceived value in relation to passenger satisfaction→ sense of happiness was 0.65; the path coefficient for high perceived value was 0.43. This indicates that the satisfaction of passengers with low perceived value has a greater influence on sense of happiness; the influence of high perceived value was comparatively lower. H6 was therefore established. Table 3 compares the results of testing the interference of perceived value (passenger satisfaction→ sense of happiness).

Table 3: Results of testing the interference of perceived value

	Controlled model	Uncontrolled model	adjX <sup>2</sup>
Chi-square (d.f.)	385.6 (169)	375.6 (168)	10
GFI	0.868	0.871	

	Controlled model	Uncontrolled model	adjX <sup>2</sup>
AGFI	0.813	0.816	
CFI	0.899	0.903	
RMSEA	0.66	0.64	
		Perceived value	
		Low perceived value	High perceived value
passenger satisfaction sense of happiness		0.65	0.43

#### 4.5 Discussion of mediator effects

Total effect refers to the sum of direct effects and indirect effects (Lin, 2006). The empirical data collected by this study showed that the direct effect between experiential marketing and sense of happiness reached a level of significance. The direct effects of landscape attraction and experiential marketing on passenger satisfaction both reached a level of significance. The direct effect of passenger satisfaction on sense of happiness was extremely significant. The indirect effects of landscape attraction and experiential marketing on passenger sense of happiness were also significant. The results are shown in Table 4.

According to Baron and Kenney (1986), a complete mediator effect refers to conditions in which the mediator causes the direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables to lose significance. A partial mediator effect refers to conditions in which the mediator causes the indirect relationship between the independent and dependent variables to become weaker or less significant. Table 4.2 shows that passenger degree of satisfaction has a mediator effect on the relationship between landscape attraction and sense of happiness; its value is -0.12 (0.73x-0.17). The direct effect of landscape attraction on sense of happiness is 0.50, and this effect is reduced to 0.38 by the mediator effect. This result shows that passenger satisfaction has a partial mediator effect on the relationship between landscape attraction and sense of happiness.

Passenger satisfaction was also shown to have a mediator effect on the relationship between experiential marketing and sense of happiness; its value was -0.04 (0.26x-0.17). The total effect was 0.57, which exceeded the direct effect (0.40) of experiential marketing on sense of happiness. Therefore, passenger satisfaction has a partial mediator effect on the relationship between experiential marketing and sense of happiness. This data shows that landscape attraction and experiential marketing can increase sense of happiness through the mediator effect of passenger satisfaction, which demonstrates the importance of passenger satisfaction.

**Table 4: Direct, indirect, and total effects**

Variable relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
F1→F4	0.73***(8.29)		
F2→F4	0.26***(3.49)		
F1→F3	0.50*(2.44)		
F2→F3	0.61***(5.27)		
F4→F3	0		
F1→F4→F3	0.50	0.73x-0.17=-0.12	0.38
F2→F4→F3	0.61	0.26x-0.17=-0.04	0.57

## 5. Conclusions

This study demonstrated that after taking the TRA cruise trains, passengers were satisfied overall with the trains' operation, itinerary, and quality of service. All five hypotheses of this study were supported. This shows that passengers feel differently about taking the cruise trains, as compared to taking regular trains. The cruise trains, though still in the early stages of development, create a leisurely and recreational atmosphere.

From the SEM analysis results, this study found that landscape attraction positively affects passenger sense of happiness, and can also generate positive influence through the indirect effects of passenger satisfaction. The analysis results show that experiential marketing has a direct and positive influence on sense of happiness, and is also an important factor in building an overall feeling of satisfaction and psychological happiness (Wei & Milman, 2002).

Awareness marketing for the cruise trains is currently insufficient. Further innovation is required to enhance their appeal and experiential model, and greater thought and effort is needed to improve their hardware and software facilities. This study feels that the area surrounding the Taichung line of the TRA offers a unique geographical environment, favorable climate, and rich culture (such as the Da Jia Mazu Cultural Festival). In the future, TRA cruise trains have the potential to become not only a top choice for local tourists, but also a popular form of tourism for mainland Chinese tourists. We hope that the TRA will be able to appropriately plan the development of the cruise trains, which may offer the railway administration a chance to turn loss into gain.

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