

Service Quality, Skier Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intentions in Leisure Skiing: The Case of Beijing

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Abstract : Triggered off by the forthcoming 2022 Winter Olympics, ski centers are blossoming in China, the number being 742 in 2018. Although the number of skier visits of ski resorts soared to 19.7 million in 2018, one-time skiers account for a considerable portion therein. In light of the extremely low return rates and skiing penetration level (0.5%) of leisure skiing in China, this study proposes and tests a leisure ski service performance framework which assesses the ski resorts' service quality, skier satisfaction, as well as their impact on skiers' behavioral intentions, with an aim to assess the success of ski resorts and provide suggestions for improvement. Three self-administered surveys and 16 interviews were conducted upon a convenience sample of leisure skiers in two major ski destinations within two hours' drive from Beijing - Nanshan and Jundushan ski resorts. Of the 680 questionnaires distributed, 416 usable copies were returned, the response rate being 61.2%. The questionnaire used for the study was developed based on the existing literature of 'push' factors of skiers (intrinsic desire) and 'pull' factors (attractiveness of a destination), as well as leisure sport satisfaction. The scale comprises four parts: skiers' demographic profiles, their perceived service quality (including ski resorts' infrastructure, expense, safety and comfort, convenience, daily needs support, skill development support, and accessibility), their overall levels of satisfaction (satisfaction with the service and the experience), and their behavioral intentions (including loyalty, future visitation and greater tolerance of price increases). Skiers' demographic profiles show that among the 220 males and 196 females in the survey, a vast majority of the skiers are age 17-39 (87.2%). 64.7% are not married, and nearly half (48.3%) of the skiers have a monthly family income exceeding 10,000 yuan (USD 1,424), and 80% are beginners or intermediate skiers. The regression examining the influence of service quality on skier satisfaction reveals that service quality accounts for 44.4% of the variance in skier satisfaction, the variables of safety and comfort, expense, skill development support, and accessibility contributing significantly in descending order. Another regression analyzing the influence of service quality as well as skier satisfaction on their behavioral intentions shows that service quality and skier satisfaction account for 39.1% of the variance in skiers' behavioral intentions, and the significant predictors are skier satisfaction, safety and comfort, expense, and accessibility, in descending order, though a comparison between groups also indicates that for expert skiers, the significant variables are skier satisfaction, skill development support, safety, and comfort. Suggestions are thus made for ski resorts and other stakeholders to improve skier satisfaction and increase visitation: developing diversified ski courses to meet the demands of skiers of different skiing skills and to reduce crowding, adopting enough chairlifts and magic carpets, reinforcing safety measures and medical force; further exploring their various resources and lower the skiing expense on ski pass, equipment renting, accommodation and dining; adding more bus lines and/or develop platforms for skiers' car-pooling, and offering diversified skiing activities with local flavors for better entertainment.

Keywords : behavioral intentions, leisure skiing, service quality, skier satisfaction

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