

Enhancing Customer Delight in Luxury Hotel/Resort Spa through Positive Emotions and Service Quality

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Abstract

The main objective of this research was, therefore, to explore the impact of positive consumption emotions and service quality in creating a delightful spa experience in luxury hotels. For this purpose, a survey questionnaire was developed and used to gather data from resort and hotel spa located in 3 major tourist cities in Egypt: Cairo, Sharm El Shiekh, and Hurghada. This context is valuable as it tackles an under-researched region, which may further our understanding of spa delight in non-Western contexts. A total of 327 valid questionnaires were used to test the hypothesized relationships using a linear regression analysis. The results revealed that the positive consumption emotions of joy and relaxation were key predictors of spa-goers' delight. Moreover, four (out of five) spa service quality dimensions significantly impacted the feeling of delight among the study participants. The study also provided valuable managerial implications, limitations and avenues for future research.

Keywords: Delight; positive consumption emotions; service quality; luxury hotel/resort spa; Egypt.

Introduction

Traditionally, customer satisfaction has been conceptualized as the key metric for customer retention and loyalty (e.g. Oliver et al., 1997; Brady and Cronin, 2001). However, the value of satisfaction as an antecedent of customer loyalty has been questioned and the concept of customer delight, as an alternative key route, has been gaining more attention from the marketing community (Finn, 2005; Engel et al., 2006; Torres and Kline, 2006; Meyer et al., 2017). Separate and distinct from satisfaction, in which the customer receives what he/she expects, delight occurs when companies deliver a customer service above the customer expectation (Oliver et al., 1997).

So, what drives a customer's delightful experience? Despite the crucial role of delight for business profitability and sustainability, research about delight, as compared to satisfaction, is limited, particularly in hedonic settings such as tourism and hospitality (Kim et al., 2015; Dey et al., 2017). An examination of extant literature reveals that it is not as clear as to what determines customer delight. However, delight was primarily conceptualized (Plutchik, 1980; Oliver et al., 1997) and has been empirically examined as a function of positive consumption emotions (e.g. Oliver et al., 1997; Finn, 2005; Barnes et al., 2010). Besides, another research stream ensures that customer delight is an outcome of service quality; based on the reasoning that service quality is a key to building strong relationships with customers and ensuring their loyalty (Elias-Almeida et al., 2016; Ahrholdt et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the association between service quality and delight has received little attention in tourism and hospitality research.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore potential antecedents of customer delight among spa-goers in hotels/resorts in Egypt, where this research area has been apparently neglected. Subsequently, the specific objectives of this study were:

- 1- To identify whether positive consumption emotions can influence customer delight.
- 2- To explore the role that service quality can play a role in enhancing customer delight.

Literature Review

Spa: definition and experience

The word “spa” is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase “*sanitas per aquas*”, means health from water; a place that has traditionally devoted to offer healing and rehabilitation services through thermal springs (Frost, 2004). The Global Wellness Institute (GWIa) defines spa businesses as “establishments that promote wellness through the provision of therapeutic and other professional services aimed at renewing the body, mind, and spirit” (GWIa, 2017, p:9). Spa has been already existing for ages, but these establishments are now being recreated, merged and branded to generate the contemporary worldwide industry that brings many industries together (Cohen, 2008). The current rise in health consciousness has led to the emergence of a more proactive style to that traditional thermal springs (Dimitrovski and Todorovic, 2015). Nowadays, spa facilities, the core of the spa economy, generate revenues from the sales of health/wellness/spa related products (e.g. skin care products; exercise tools and herbal supplements) and services (e.g. body and water-based treatments) (Tsai et al., 2012; GWIa, 2017).

Driven by the growing market interest in health and fitness, today’s spas have taken many forms. The international Spa Association-ISPA has proposed six broad categories of spa establishments, based on the facilities and treatments provided. These are: club spa, day spa, resort and hotel spa, destination spa, cruise ship spa, medical spa and mineral springs spa (the international Spa Association, 2017). The resort/hotel spa, the fastest growing and most profitable category in the global spa market, falls under the umbrella of the hospitality industry as spa products and services are usually a part of the customer’s resort/hotel stay (GWIa, 2017 p.68). The current research targets spa facilities that are located within the luxury resorts and hotels and that provide spa services on an à la carte basis for leisure guests who tend to spend more time at wellness activities.

Spas basically sell an “experience” as the service provider “intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props, to engage customers” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 11). The core service of a spa is to afford a relaxation and a well-being experience that stimulates the customer’s five senses (Cohen, 2008). Every single aspect of the spa service (e.g. service and treatment quality) can reflect consumption experiences (Bjurstam and Cohen, 2010). Although it can provide a wide range of services, the most distinctive characteristic of a spa is a “*place for emotional sensitization*” (Lempa, 2002, p.58). To gain a differential advantage, spa companies have largely dedicated their efforts to design, build, and enhance their environment in such a way that creates a more attractive atmosphere. Spa owners invest heavily on designing environmental sensory stimuli such as background music, aroma, mood lights, soft fabrics, fragrant flowers, and physical architecture in to order to induce positive emotions in customers. Previous researchers have stressed the power of emotions in hedonic services such as leisure and entertainment (e.g. Mattila and Enz, 2002; Jani and Han, 2015; Ali et al., 2016).

This research represents delight as such attitudes that are likely to be developed in a hospitality setting, especially those relating to experiences at hotel/resort spa. The research setting is noteworthy as the spa industry has become one of the fastest developing categories within the tourism industry worldwide and an integral part of the overall experience for a tourist destination (Loureiro et al., 2013; Lo et al., 2015). As today’s customers have become more willing to take preventive measures by keeping healthy bodies and brains, the demand for products and services provided by the spa sector will grow. A recent report by The Global Wellness Institute (GWIa)

indicated that in 2015, there were 121,595 spas operating in 210 countries, generating \$77.6 billion in revenues and hiring more than 2.1 million employees. Since 2013, the industry has added 16,000 spas, more than 230,000 workers, and \$3.5 billion in revenues (GWI, 2017a). Research evidence suggests also that a spa isn't merely a hotel amenity, but it is an expected basic feature of a luxury hotel and a major generator for a hotel's bottom line (Cohen, 2008; Madanoglu and Brezina, 2008). Thus, a luxury hotel that has no wellness facilities will be at a severe disadvantage and miss the opportunity to earn substantial amounts of revenues (Heyeset al., 2015). The spa industry is obviously developing in Egypt. According to a recent report by GWI, there are almost 362 sophisticated spas that are currently operating in the country, generating US \$67.5 million and employing 3,061 workers (GWIb, 2017). Few years ago, the spa market was limited to a few numbers of hotels that used to provide poor quality standard of treatment rooms, tying themselves to the concept of the gym/health club. This market has, however, benefitted from the recent huge investments in the hotel sector in the country where spa services and facilities are among the criteria of the applied hotel rating system (Raison d'Étre Spas, 2012). For example, reputable international hotel companies such as Four Seasons, Kempinski, Fairmont, Ritz Carlton and Raison d'Étre hotels have devoted all the necessary resources to differentiate themselves in the market, thereby fostering the concept of the hotel/resort spa in the country.

Despite the enormous growth of this dynamic sub-sector of the hospitality industry, few research attempts have been devoted to understand the behavior of the spa-goers' market. Notably, the majority of spa research has obviously focused on Non-Arab contexts (e.g., Cheron and Nornart, 2010; Tsai et al., 2012; Loureiro et al., 2013; Lo et al., 2015). This study aims, therefore, at filling this research gap by understanding the customer experience at hotel/resort spas in Egypt, and providing recommendations to spa operators not only in Egypt but also possibly in other neighboring countries such as Jordan and Tunisia. Towards this aim, this study investigated the role of positive emotions (i.e. joy and relaxation) and service quality attributes in enhancing customer delight at resort/hotel spas.

This research suggests that it is imperative for spa operators to provide quality services so that customers can develop positive emotions, which in turn could trigger delightful experience. In their study, Lo et al., (2015) examined the impact of service quality dimensions on positive consumption emotions in resort and hotel spa experience. Their study demonstrated the importance of specific service quality in explaining positive emotions in spa experience in the Chinese context. Building on their study, the current research moves further by examining the role that these two related variables (service quality and positive emotions) can play a significant role in triggering a delightful experience in the Egyptian spa market. Unlike the study of Lo et al., (2015) that did not consider the possible distinctions among positive emotions, the current research, agrees that positive emotions are complex psychological reactions that cannot be treated as a single construct (Shiota et al., 2006), proposing that there are only certain affective responses that can influence delight experience in the spa context.

Consumption emotions as a key route towards of customer delight

There is no universal definition of consumption emotions in marketing and psychology research. However, it is commonly argued that consumption emotions are *the psychological reactions that may be created during the consumption of products, services, or experiences* (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Richins, 1997; Dubé and Menon,

2000). Marketing researchers have also suggested that affective responses are keys to customer delight (e.g. Oliver et al., 1997; Finn, 2005), stressing the significance of incorporating consumption emotions to customer delight models. Spa-goers want to feel better and relaxed and to enjoy being pampered (Monteson and Singer, 2004). They are, thus, engaged in an emotional process that builds up their feelings, attitudes and perceptions of their spa experience (Sundbo and Darmer, 2008). Although “*there is no one way to create delight*” (McNeilly and Barr, 2006; p:157), delight has been usually conceptualized as a blend of joy and surprise (Plutchik,1980). However, in a spa context, where customers receive a variety of treatments and practice activities aiming to lessen or eradicate the arousal state that they usually experience during their daily lives, surprise is believed to be inappropriate (Loureiro et al., 2013). Accordingly, the model of this study incorporated the positive emotion of relaxation instead of surprise, arguing that, like joy, relaxation is a key of spa-goers’ delight.

Relaxation

Relaxation in psychology refers to an emotional state that occurs in the absence of such sources of arousal as anger, anxiety, or fear (Pagnini et al., 2013). In The Oxford Dictionary, relaxation is an emotional feeling that *occurs when the body and mind are free from tension and anxiety*. Spas provide various relaxation facilities and services that help visitors cope with stress. The spa experience may thus stimulate such positive emotions as pleasure and relaxation, which in turn, are expected to influence delight. Research evidence has proven that relaxation is a key to customer satisfaction, which in turn, influences customer loyalty in the spa context (Loureiro et al., 2013). The present research postulates also that relaxation is crucial for creating a memorable experience in the spa context, hypothesizing the following:

H1: The emotion of relaxation will positively influence spa-goers’ delight.

Joy

Spa operators may alternatively follow the joy route to achieve customer delight. Scholars distinguished, however, between two types of joy: “magic “ joy and “real” joy. Magic joy comes usually through good luck in a short lived experience in which people feel that the unexpected fulfillment of their wishes or needs may change their status. Real joy is, however, an outcome of one’s or others’ effort and occurs as a result of any ongoing activity which connects the person with his/her surrounding environment and triggers a feeling of relatedness between the person and the stimulus (Kumar et al., 2001). In the spa setting, it is the “real” joy that is likely to trigger a feeling of relatedness between the customer and spa services and products.

The joy/delight relationship has also received an extensive support in the existing literature. For example, Ball and Barnes (2017) found joy as a key route for a delightful restaurant experience. Similarly, Ma et al., (2013) revealed that joy was powerful in triggering customers’ feeling of delight in a theme-park setting. Barnes et al., (2016) indicated also that the path from joy to delight was even stronger and powerful than the path from surprise to delight in the grocery industry. Hence, this research postulates that:

H2: The emotion of joy will positively influence spa-goers’ delight

Service quality as a key rout for customer delight

Today's hospitality customers demand high quality services; with multiple choices available, customers will look for the best. Marketing scholars and practitioners agree that service quality is essential for business success and sustainability, as the service

that a company provides is directly related to customer satisfaction and, in turn, to customer loyalty (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Service quality is, however, particularly important for the hospitality businesses which place more emphasis on understanding customers' wants and needs and invest heavily in quality management and service recovery programs to fulfill the expectations of their customers. According to Zeithaml et al., (1990), service quality is an assessment of how well a delivered service meets customer expectations. Based on Oliver's (1980) expectancy-disconfirmation theory, Parasuraman et al., (1988) proposed the SERVQUAL model to examine the customer's perceptions of the products or the services they receive. The model breaks down service quality into five main factors: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibility focuses on the modern-looking of equipment and the physical appearance of facilities and personnel, and communication materials; reliability represents the employees' ability to deliver the promised service dependably and accurately in the right time; responsiveness refers to the employees' willingness to help customers sincerely, and to provide a prompt service and an adequate time when requested; assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees, and to their ability to inspire trust and confidence; finally, empathy relates to the caring and the individualized attention that a firm provides to its customers.

The SERVQUAL has been widely adopted to assess the customer's perception of service quality by calculating the difference between the expected and perceived performance of the quality dimensions mentioned above. When performance goes beyond what the customer has expected, positive disconfirmation occurs (Parasuraman, et al., 1988). The model was, however, criticized by many scholars (e.g. Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1993; Baker and Crompton, 2000) as it measures the expectation and performance constructs simultaneously, while the actual service performance concept could be more related to the service quality. Furthermore, the SERVQUAL does not help researchers determine which type of expectations has been assessed (Teas, 1993). Taking such critics into consideration, Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed and verified the SERVPERF model, which excluded the expectation section of the SERVQUAL and focused only on customer perception of the performance of service attributes.

Although the SERVQUAL has been known an attractive tool to measure customers' perception of service quality, it is argued that the model requires customization to the specific research needs of a particular service setting (Parasuraman et al., 1988). As in many other research areas, tourism and hospitality researchers have customized the SERVQUAL to match the purpose of their research. For example, Knutson et al., (1993) offered the LODGSERV model while Getty and Thompson (1994) proposed the LODGQUAL that is a SERVPERF-based model. Several studies have also employed the SERVQUAL model to understand customers' perceptions of service quality in the context of hot springs tourism (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2008), health spas (e.g. Gonzalez and Brea, 2005), and resort spas (e.g. Lo et al., 2015). Similarly, this research adapts the service quality dimensions in such a way that helps measuring spa-goers' perceptions of service quality in a resorts/hotel spa setting.

Previous research has also proposed service quality as a key route for customer delight; based on the reasoning that delight occurs when a customer receives a service quality that exceeds his or her expectations (Oliver et al., 1997; Ahrhodt et al., 2017). In today's dynamic business environment, customers have become demanding when it comes to quality of services and they want services that are higher than their expectations, i.e., they want to be delighted. Thus, in order to delight customers it is

necessary for businesses to measure the current service levels and to find new avenues to maintain customers' interest with their products and services. Every single construct of service quality reveals a combination of sub-constructs or service attributes that the customer takes into consideration when he/she assesses the quality of that service construct. Such an assessment reflects an attribute level-approach, for a better evaluation of the different dimensions (Albayrak and Caber, 2015; Ahrhodt et al., 2017). Thus, a customer may have a highly positive perception about the performance of an attribute, but may have a highly negative perception regarding the other attributes of the same service quality dimension. Likewise, customer perceptions of different service dimensions affect overall delight (Oliver et al., 1997; Ahrhodt et al., 2017). This relationship was also supported by Elias-Almeida et al., (2016), which found that service quality in five-star hotel spas in Portugal had a positive impact on customer delight. Consequently:

H3: The service quality dimensions will positively impact spa-goers' delight

Methodology

Sample design and data collection

A survey questionnaire was designed to collect data, through from a sample of spa goers at 8 spa units in Egypt. All the selected units were belonging to 5-star luxury hotels and resorts, located in the three major tourist cities of Cairo, Sharm El-Shiekh and Hurghada. In order to get a permission to contact customers, the goals and the value of the study was, first, explained to the recreation managers at the targeted resorts and hotels. A convenience sampling method was adopted; this is the most common sampling approach in the Arab world due to difficulties in obtaining random samples; the lack of familiarity with research, and the general negative attitude of business managers towards research (see: Mostafa, 2007; El Dief and Font, 2010). Customers were approached after they finished their spa sessions in order to minimize the potential impact of memory on precise recall of the spa experience. Customers who showed willingness to participate in the study were requested to complete the survey. A total of 400 questionnaires were handed to guests (50 for each hotel/resort property) and 327 were deemed sufficiently complete, (a response rate of 81.75%). Data collection lasted for 4 weeks between the 1st and 28th of November, 2017.

Measures

To consolidate the content validity of the scales used in this study's survey, a deductive approach was adopted, where all items were taken from previous relevant literature. The spa service quality scale used in this research adapted from the original ServQual (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which was also the backbone of other spa research (e.g. González et al. 2007; Lo et al., 2015). Following those studies, 22 items were used to measure spa service quality on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The constructs of joy (3 items) and delight (3 items) were also borrowed from the studies that examined the joy/delight relationship (e.g. Oliver et al., 1997; Finn, 2005; Barnes et al., 2016; Ahrhodt et al., 2017; Ball and Barnes, 2017), while the construct of relaxation (2 items) came from Loureiro et al., (2013). The items of the three constructs of "joy", "delight" and "relaxation" were also measured using 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = never to 5 = always). In total, the four main constructs of this study were measured on 30 items. To ensure the conceptual equivalence of the scale items, the English version of the questionnaire was translated into Arabic and then back into English. The clarity of the wording of the questionnaire statements were also checked by pre-testing the questionnaire in a

polite study with 19 persons: 3 were academics, 4 hospitality industry professionals and 12 spa-goers. The questionnaire was, then, fine-tuned to fit the current study context.

Results

Factor analysis for the service quality dimensions

In order to explore the service quality dimensions in the hotel/resort spa context principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted based on orthogonal varimax rotation (Field, 2013). The analysis revealed five dimensions, accounting for 68.027% of the total variance explained, with eigenvalues > 1 (see Table: 1), from the 22 items that were proposed to measure spa service quality. KMO value was 0.839 with a significant χ^2 of 4356.151, while in the Bartlett's sphericity test p value was $< .001$. The delineated dimensions are, thus, labeled as follows: "Responsiveness"; "Tangibles"; "Reliability"; "Empathy"; and "Assurance", resembling the original SERVQUAL dimensions, as in the original survey. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was then used to check the reliability and validity of the extracted service quality dimensions, revealing a good indication of reliability (see Table: 1)

Table 1: Factor Analysis, reliability and mean scores for Spa Service Quality Construct

Factor	Item Loadings	Explained Variance	Eigenvalues	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Mean Scores of Summative Scales
Factor1: Responsiveness		27.613	6.351	0.930	3.255
The spa staff deliver prompt service to guests	.900				
The spa staff are always willing to help guests	.860				
The spa staff explain the types of service provided clearly	.842				
The spa staff are never too busy to respond to my requests	.851				
The employees are professional in providing the service	.680				
Factor2: Tangibles		16.588	3.815	0.874	4.022
The spa staff are well dressed and look neat	.771				
The appearance of the physical facilities of the spa is in keeping	.787				
The music and sound used in the spa are appropriate to the types of service provided.	.820				
The spa has a comfortable environment (such as	.813				

good temperature, ventilation and fragrance, lighting).					
Factor3:Reliability		9.330	2.146	0.792	3.22
When the spa staff promise to do something by a certain time, they do it.	.479				
The spa staff are dependable.	.680				
The spa staff can explain the charges for services clearly	.797				
The spa keeps their records accurately	.846				
When a guest has a problem, the spa staff show sincere interest in solving the problem	.734				
Factor4: Empathy		8.082	1.859	0.780	3.41
The spa staff know what my needs are.	.795				
The spa has my best interests at heart	.775				
The spa has convenient operating hours	.868				
The spa offers a good variety of treatments which cater to different types of guest.	.829				
Factor5: Assurance		6.414	1.475	0.854	2.88
The spa is clean and hygienic	.726				
The products used are of good quality (natural ingredients or trustworthy brands, etc.)	.766				
The environment of the spa is safe.	.762				
The spa provides proper changing facilities.	.688				

Factor analysis was also performed for the scales measuring “Relaxation”, “Joy” and “Delight”, in three separate procedures as they represented different constructs (see: Table 2). The factor analysis revealed a single factor for each of the three constructs; all items also loaded on one factor. Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity had shown that the procedures were acceptable. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha for the three scales were apparently

good: relaxation= 0.707; joy = 0.930 and delight = 0.918 respectively.

Table 2: Factor Analysis, reliability and mean scores for Relaxation, Joy and Delight Constructs

Factor	Explained Variance	Eigenvalues	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Mean Scores of Summative Scales
Relaxation	77.450	1.54	0.707	3.313
How often you experience? Happy				
How often you experience? Calm				
Joy	87.793	2.634	0.930	3.159
How often you experience? Joyful				
How often you experience? Pleased				
How often you experience? In a good mood				
Delight	85.844	2.575	0.918	3.147
Based on the spa experience, how often do you feel delighted				
Based on the spa experience, how often do you feel elated				
Based on the spa experience, how often do you feel gleeful				

Correlations among the independent variables in the study

Pearson's correlation coefficients test were used to examine the relationships among the proposed predictors of delight in this study (see Table 3). This procedure aimed to evaluate the multicollinearity among the proposed predictors of delight and thus to avoid interpretation problems before proceeding into the regression analysis. As shown in Table (3), multi-collinearity was particularly important among the proposed predictors, suggesting that it would be difficult to evaluate the explanatory power of each single predictor over the dependent variable (i.e. delight) . For ease of interpretation, the 7 predicting variables were, consequently, entered into two hierarchical regression models.

Table 3. the relationship between the independent variables (predictors).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Responsivness	1						
Tangibles	-.224***	1					
Reliability	.479***	-.127**	1				
Empathy	.465***	0.021	.350***	1			
Assurance	.182***	-.310***	.096*	.059	1		
Joy	.760***	-.149***	.454***	.463***	.164***	1	
Relaxation	.154***	-.147***	.047	-.53	.276***	.180***	1

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level (2-tailed)

Regression analysis

In order to assess the impact of the two variables of consumption emotions and the five perceived service quality dimensions on the dependent variable (delight) two linear regression models were employed and were found to be all significant (see: Table 4). In the first regression model, the consumption emotions of joy and relaxation were included and explained 53.1% of the total variance ($p < .001$), implying that consumption emotions had a great contribution to and significant power on delight among spa-goers. Finally, the factors measuring service quality dimensions were incorporated into the second model, where the predictive power (R^2) increased significantly ($p < .001$) and positively, but, noticeably, with a smaller effect size ($\Delta R^2 = .663$). Only four dimensions were found to be significant predictors of spa delight: responsiveness, reliability, empathy and assurance. The dimension of “tangibles” was, however, insignificant.

Table 4. Regression coefficients of model predicting Spa-goers delight in luxury hotels

	Explanatory	
	Model 1	Model 2
	Spa-Goers Delight	
	β Step1	β Step2
Joy	0.698 ***	0.328***
Relaxation	0.118***	0.132***
Responsiveness		0.222***
Tangibles		0.032
Reliability		0.290***
Empathy		0.134**
Assurance		0.075*
R^2 at each step	0.531	0.670
ΔR^2 at each step	0.528	0.663

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level (2-tailed)

Results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis 1 states: The emotion of relaxation will positively influence spa-goers' delight.

The influence of relaxation, as a consumption emotion predictor, on spa-goers' delight was tested in this research. The findings revealed that relaxation had a significantly positive effect on spa-goers' delight in both the first ($B = 0.118$, $p < .05$)

and second models ($B = 123, p < .001$). This suggested that in a hotel and/or resort spa setting, the relaxation feeling is more likely to be translated into delight. Thus, H 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 states: The emotion of joy will positively influence spa-goers' delight. The first model of the regression analysis tested also the consumption emotion of joy. As shown in Table (4), joy had a strong and positive relationship to spa-goers' delight in the first ($B = 0.698, p < .001$) and second ($B = 0.328, p < .001$) regressed models. In other words, joyful spa-goers were more likely to experience delight, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 states: The service quality dimensions positively influence spa-goers' delight

The second regressed model included all the five dimensions of the perceived service quality in a hotel/resort spa setting. The analysis revealed that only four dimensions were statically significant and positive predictors of spa-goers' delight. In support of H3, responsiveness ($B = 0.222; p < 0.001$), reliability ($B = 0.290; p < 0.001$), empathy ($B = 0.134; p < 0.05$) and assurance ($B = 0.134; p < 0.1$) were found to be related to delight. The results from the hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated, conversely, that the dimension of "tangibles" was not a predictor of spa delight ($p > 0.1$), despite the positive association between this independent variable and delight ($B = 0.032$). Thus, these findings partially supported H3.

Discussion and Conclusions

Effects of consumption emotions on spa-goers delight

In such expensive settings as luxury spas, customers usually expect a high-quality and astonishing experience. Thus, studies that are devoted to explore the key predictors of customer delight in these settings, is unquestionably, valuable. The present research is one of the few to highlight the key role of consumption emotions and perceived service quality in eliciting a delightful spa experience in luxury resorts and hotels in an Arabian context.

While previous research has studied the role of consumption emotions on spa experience as an aggregation of positive effects (e.g. Lo, et al., 2015), this research represented a forward step by depicting joy and relaxation as two distinct emotions that can be measured separately in an attempt to benefit from greater psychometric specifications and to provide both theoretical and practical recommendations for the marketing community. The findings of this study indicated that joy was a significant variable that proved to be a powerful predictor of spa-goers' delight in luxury hotels and resorts. This was consistent with previous research in other contexts which found also that joy was a key contributor to customers' delightful experiences (e.g; Barnes et al., 2016; Ball and Barnes, 2017). This finding also supported the argument of Barnes et al., (2016) that customer could experience delight even with very elevated expectations. Thus, the research concluded that in trying to delight customers, hotel/resort spas are encouraged to employ tactics that promote joy.

Similarly, relaxation was an emotional response that had positively and significantly influenced spa delight in this research. This was expected as spas are basically relaxing settings with a low level of arousal and a high level of relaxation. While the dominant understanding of customer delight in the literature has depicted delight as a combination of joy and surprise (e.g. Westbrook and Oliver, 1991; Oliver et al., 1997; Finn, 2005), to date there has been limited discussion on other possible determinants of delight besides those two variables. As surprise has been considered irrelevant to the spa context, the introduction of the relaxation variable, as a predictor of spa

delight, into this study's model had the potential to extend the current understanding of what creates customer delight in the spa context. This contribution is expected to create unforeseen benefits to spas that see customer delight via the lens of relaxation. While there is some research evidence in the hospitality literature to suggest that relaxation was crucial to influence thermal spa satisfaction (e.g. (Loureiro et al., 2013), the results achieved in this study carried a further theoretical implication as it showed how relaxation was also positively and significantly associated to spa delight.

The impact of service quality on spa-goers' delight

In this research the SERVQUAL measurement scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988, González et al., 2007; Lo et al., 2015) was adapted to evaluate the perceptions of spa-goers regarding spa service quality in luxury hotels and resorts in Egypt. The findings revealed that four service quality dimensions influenced spa delight, where responsiveness and reliability were the most influential predictors, followed by empathy and assurance. The findings were congruent with Snoj and Mumel's (2002) and Lo et al., (2015) which found also that responsiveness and reliability were the most important two quality attributes for spa-goers. However, these four service quality predictors of delight were, noticeably, related to staff performance, which highlights the impact of the "people" aspect in the creation of customer delight in a spa settings, as in Elias-Almeida et al., (2016). This can be explained by the fact that spa is a very personal service where visitors' experience is typically influenced by the quality of interaction between the visitor and the staff. It can be also contemplated that the service quality attributes under these four dimensions were overwhelmingly intangible in their nature. According to the Herzberg's Two-Factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1967), these are the motivation attributes which do not cause dissatisfaction when absent, but when provided, they are likely to create a positive disposition and may result in customer satisfaction (Chowdhary and Prakash, 2005), and even customer delight.

The findings of this study suggested that delight was more likely to occur as the spa staff had adequate skills and abilities to service guests willingly and effectively. This finding is congruent with previous studies which argued that the spa staff should have the appropriate knowledge of customer wants and needs and make information easily accessible for them (McNeil and Ragins, 2005; Lo et al., 2015). The results revealed also that customers were more likely to experience delight when the spa staff were able to perform what they promised to do dependably and accurately and when they had the abilities and skills to solve customer's problems sincerely. This echoes the findings of Lo et al., (2015) who stated that therapist dependability and accuracy were crucial in positively influencing spa-goers' experience. In the same vein, the findings indicated also that the personalized attention that the spa staff provided to the customers was also important to trigger customer's feeling of delight. As many guests may seek a fitness regimen to take home, spa employees should be well-trained and detail-oriented to the customer concerns, and have the abilities to tailor the customer's personal needs.

In this research, assurance was also a significant predictor of delight in the spa setting. This can be attributed to the nature of the spa service encounter where customers are greatly concerned about their privacy and safety as much as the spa cleanliness and safety, given the majority of respondents (89%) were foreigners. Although it is admitted that the attributes under the assurance dimension are somehow basic expectations of customers of luxury resort and hotel spas (Lo et al., 2015), this might not be the case for spa-goers in Egypt. The literature suggests that while service

providers in developed countries focus typically on the “breakthrough” service, those in developing countries put more emphasis on “merely good” service (Malhotra et al., 2005). Being in a developing country that is very different culturally, international travellers may develop lower expectations about such attributes. Most probably, the respondents of this study felt, however, delighted when they found the level of cleanliness, safety, and privacy in spas; and the quality of the products they used were enough to inspire their trust and confidence.

Finally, in this research, the impact of tangibles in affecting spa-goers’ delight was insignificant, akin to hygiene factors in the Two-Factor theory: as they are considered essential, their absence causes dissatisfaction, while their presence does not necessarily cause satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1967) and thus nor delight. It appeared that the surrounding environment, equipment, facilities, and the atmosphere in the spa setting were certainly the basic attributes that the spa-goers expected to find in spas at luxury resorts and hotels; and therefore, this dimension did not contribute significantly to spa-goers’ delight. Despite this insignificant relationship, these attributes shouldn’t be neglected by spa operators when designing delight strategies as previous research suggested that the tangible attributes that customers experience during their spa visit, through their five senses, were central to create the sense of quiet escapism and seclusion (Pehlivanglu, 2012) and to impress the positive emotions while feeling relaxed and comfortable (Lo et al., 2015).

Research Implications

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, the present study extended support for the conceptualization of customer delight by adopting an affect-based schema to propose delight in spa setting as an outcome of the positive emotions of joy and relaxation. It lends support to the disconfirmation of expectation approach by suggesting that delighted spa-goers were more likely to express positive feelings about their spa experience, driven by happiness, joyfulness, calmness and pleasure, which surpassed their expectations. The findings suggested that predictive models of customer delight in a spa setting should include such important elements of positive emotions as “joy”, and “relaxation”.

The present research provided also empirical support to the existing literature on the link between service quality attributes and customer delight (Oliver et al., 1997; Goodman, 2009). However, the findings revealed that while customers were delighted by their spa experience, that delight was more driven by joy and relaxation than by service quality. This implies that without the existence of emotional bonds between the customer and the services that the company provides, service quality will only do little in the way to customer delight. Customers appear to form emotional commitments to spa services as there are many service encounters between customers and staff during the consumption experience in a spa setting. Positive emotions can provide greater psychological benefits to customers; customers may feel delighted at a hotel/resort spa and not in another because of emotional experiences, such as joy and relaxation. While not tested in this research, positive emotions seem to mediate the relationship between service quality and delight.

Managerial implications

Customer delight is the responsibility of spa management, where managers teach spa-goers what to expect from a particular experience. The findings of this study imply that spa managers must create attractive encounters that reinforce joy and relaxation

in the route to spa-goers' delight. Customer delight does not mean delivering only what the customer needs, but it is more about providing something that goes beyond or above what the customer expects in such a way that creates a value to impress him/her. As emotional bonds are likely to occur between spa employees and customers, it is even easier for spa managers to understand the real needs of his/her customers and to maintain strong relations with them by fulfilling and even going beyond those needs.

Spa managers must aspire excellence in service quality to cater for delightful customers. Previous research has shown that customers who are delighted with the services tend to be loyal; and a key to maintain loyal customers is to deliver quality services (Kim et al., 2015; Elias-Almeida, 2016; Ahrholdt, et al., 2017). Spa managers and operators should design loyalty programs for their customers, which is likely to make loyal spa-goers feel delighted. The findings of the current research regarding customers' perceptions of service quality attributes in a spa setting can also allow spa operators in resorts and hotels to employ the available resources to enhance the key service quality attributes that positively influence customer delight. This research concludes that there are certain factors of the service quality dimensions that have a greater influence on customer delight in resort and hotel spas, hence managers should consider these factors as their strength and put much more emphasis on these attributes in their CRM strategy. With spa-goers placing more emphasize on the quality of service encounters, spa operators must strive to constantly exceed customer expectations by taking adequate measures to empower their employees. In order to maintain an inimitable competitive advantage over their competitors, the hotel/resort spa sector needs to concentrate and invest more in improving the service interaction between staff and customers than on the tangibles features. The spa sector is very much an experience-driven industry and thus, spa managers and operators should realize that they provide a highly personalized service where customers want to be rest assured and enjoy their spa treatments heartily (Lo and Wu, 2014; Lo et al., 2015). Accordingly, only trustworthy, reliable and professional therapists should be employed. Moreover, spas can also provide better amenities to have a delightful customer experience. Free healthy snacks and drinks or free spa products can be small important aspects of a delighted customer experience.

Limitation and Future Research

This study has provided a new insight on the drivers of spa-geos' delight in luxury hotel/resort spas in Egypt. However, these findings cannot be generalized to other countries. Future research is encouraged to apply the current study's model to other hotel/resort spa settings in other countries. Additionally, the current research used a small convenience sample to collect data from luxury resort/hotel spa. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to other hospitality segments or different industries. More work has to be conducted in other hospitality segments or different industries, using larger samples, to obtain a further understanding on the proposed relationships and to generate comparative studies. Finally, the data were limited to specific drivers of delight. For example only two positive consumption emotions were used. Admittedly, additional variables that can drive a delightful spa experience may also exist. In the spa setting, it sounds yet interesting to study such constructs as customer trust, commitment, and attachment. Nevertheless, it is believed that the findings have useful implications for hospitality researchers and spa operators alike.

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