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Research article

Approach to the level of satisfaction of visitors to the Department of Amazonas, Colombia*

Aproximación hacia el nivel de satisfacción de los visitantes al Departamento del Amazonas, Colombia

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Abstract

The study of demand as part of tourism management is essential to ensure international tourist destinations' sustainable development. Specifically, satisfaction studies are extremely important when it comes to making strategic decisions that allow increasing the flow of visitors to the territories and, with them, impact the economic results of the same and its local population. The present investigation is developed to make an approximation towards the level of satisfaction of the visitors to the Department of Amazonas after they visit the territory and the elements that affect it. Different methods and tools are applied to obtain information, among which the survey of visitors in various areas of the territory under study stands out. The main results allow us to identify some deficiencies associated with the activity in the territory and the positive elements that positively affect acceptable levels of satisfaction, establishing the starting point for future actions of the key actors in the Department of Amazonas.

Keywords: Study, Demand, Management, Sustainable Development, Satisfaction.

* Original article. Research and innovation article. Research article. Research project linked to the Universidad de la Amazonia.

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Resumen

El estudio de la demanda como parte de la gestión turística es fundamental para garantizar el desarrollo sostenible de los destinos turísticos a nivel internacional. Específicamente los estudios de satisfacción cobran suma importancia a la hora de toma de decisiones estratégicas que permitan aumentar el flujo de visitantes a los territorios y con ellos impactar en los resultados económicos del mismo y su población local. La presente investigación se desarrolla con el objetivo de realizar una aproximación hacia el nivel de satisfacción de los visitantes al Departamento del Amazonas tras su visita al territorio y los elementos que inciden en ello. Para la obtención de los resultados se aplican diferentes métodos y herramientas de obtención de la información entre las que destaca la encuesta a visitantes en varias zonas del territorio objeto de estudio. Los principales resultados permiten identificar algunas deficiencias asociadas a la actividad en el territorio, así como los elementos positivos que inciden de manera positiva en niveles aceptables de satisfacción, estableciendo el punto de partida para acciones futuras de los actores claves el Departamento del Amazonas.

Palabras Clave: Estudio, Demanda, Gestión, Desarrollo Sostenible, Satisfacción.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION. - RESOLUTION SCHEME. - I. Research problem. - II. Methodology. - III. Research results. - CONCLUSIONS. - REFERENCES.

Introduction

Tourism as an economic activity has been gaining prominence in the development of nations, contributing greatly to the increase in gross domestic product (GDP). It has maintained growth rates above other sectors. It is agreed with Mogrovejo (2022) and Hernández, Rodríguez, Sánchez & Saldiña (2021) that the COVID-19 pandemic caused the paralysis of most of the activities associated with international travel and significantly affected organisations; however, since the middle of the year 2021, the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has begun to present indicators that allow us to affirm the gradual recovery of international travel.

Due to the above and the impact and relationship of tourism with the rest of the economic sectors, it has been the subject of several research studies, which aim to improve management results and focus on increasing the levels of visitor satisfaction. In this sense, we agree with Moreno, Korstanje & Picaso (2020; p. 82) that "the consensus in the academic community on the importance of tourism research (...) has enabled the dissemination of knowledge on a phenomenon that shows different approaches and definitions".

Among the most frequent research, those that aim to study and analyse the demand in the territories stand out (Gidebo, 2021; Li, Gong, Gao & Yuan, 2021; Xiaoying, Gang & Jason, 2020; Carvache, Carvache, Molina, Arteagal & Villagómez, 2018), as the role of this in its direct interaction with the supply is recognised above all, also recognising the importance of defining the needs that must be satisfied and being able to establish, in the territories, the infrastructure and attractions necessary to do so. It is agreed with Lemoine, Montesdeoca, Villacís & Hernández (2020, p.21) that:

(...) dynamic and rapidly evolving markets require as much as possible to be known about consumers. This market diversity drives marketers to establish market segments to meet the specific needs of their consumers.

In this sense, the study of consumer behaviour as a marketing tool or discipline focuses on the activities that people carry out when they make the purchase and consumption process of a specific tourism product, where they expect their needs to be satisfied (Novianti, Susanto & Rafdinal, 2022; Brandtner, Darbanian, Falatouri & Udokwu, 2021; Diksha, Swati, Farmaan & Kanika, 2019). As part of the process, emphasis is placed on satisfaction studies, as this is the basis on which a customer's loyalty to the territory, company or product consumed depends (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Pizam, Shapoval & Ellis, 2016).

The results presented by Otero & Giraldo (2022); Ledesma & Malave (2022); Biswas, Deb, Hasan & Khandakar (2021); Othman, Harun, De Almeida & Sadq (2021); Jeong & Kim (2020); Jeong & Shin (2020); Huang & Crotts (2019); Rahman, Islam, Al Amin, Sultana & Talukder (2019) are noteworthy in this regard; Halpenny, Kono & Moghimehfar (2018), Sung, Chi-Ming & Choong-Ki (2017), the relationship of actors, service providers, destination promoters and the role of the local community in the degree of visitor satisfaction and their possible loyalty as customers in the territories is evident. The above reaffirms the importance of studying consumer behaviour about the different elements that make up their destination experience.

In the case of Colombia, the need to clarify various elements of social, environmental and economic dynamics has been recognised, articulated by the search for reconstruction of the social fabric, which is an important challenge for the institutional resilience of the country's living forces and the functioning of the tourism sector. The objective of the actions to be carried out is the articulation of the different strata with the firm purpose of playing a leading role in the consolidation of new dynamics, generating a force capable of strengthening and enhancing the business activity around tourism in the region, which will contribute positively to enriching the quality of life of the people who reside in its interior (Brida, Rodríguez & Mejía-Alzate, 2021; Ortíz, Cancino & Cancino, 2019).

One of the regions in the country that has been dedicated to developing tourism is the Amazon area, which stands out for its natural resources. In this place, the Amazon River and its tributaries stand out; in the same way, you can glimpse lush timber trees and medicinal fruit trees where a great variety of birds, exotic fish and mammals of different sizes live. The region's geographical location (Peru-Colombia-Brazil triple border) plays a decisive role in tourism development, generating, in turn, a dynamic competition between tour operators.

The influx of tourists in the indigenous communities located in the Colombian Amazon region has experienced a significant increase in recent years, responding to the particular needs of adventurous travellers eager for new and unforgettable experiences in the jungle. It is why the increased demand, contrasted with the high level of competition in the sector, has generated organisational challenges that forge integral marketing strategies in the service.

Within these zones, the indigenous communities of Nazareth and Macedonia are allowed to have part of these experiences offered to the visitors, activities that lead to the sustainable development of these native peoples, revitalising their culture and showing to the world their cultural essence and the high quality of their handicrafts. For this reason, Macedonia has been considered a pioneer in this modality, showing all visitors its ancestral uses and customs.

Diversification, sustainability, and a commitment to the care of the environment play a fundamental role in the distinctive and indigenous elements presented in typical costumes for the delight of visitors. Likewise, for the more daring adventurers, an overnight stay in the virgin jungle is another of the most desired options, where contact with nature goes from fantasy to fearful and exciting reality.

Although the value of the study on visitor satisfaction levels has been highlighted internationally, and these results could constitute in the medium term the development of competitive advantages for the territories, in the Amazon region there are no indicators about it, inhibiting the possibility of articulating the living forces of the locality around "(...) leading a comprehensive strategy for the planning, promotion and implementation of policies that improve tourism competitiveness (...)" (Rodríguez & Granados, 2017, p. 204), a high-dimensional need to improve the competitiveness of tourism (...)" (Rodríguez & Granados, 2017, p. 204), a high-dimensional need. 204), a need for a high dimension, considering the sector's relevance for the region.

For this reason, the present article aims to make an approximation towards the level of satisfaction of visitors to the Department of Amazonas after they visit the territory and the elements that affect it. It made it possible to understand the lines of action in which tourism work should be directed to contribute to its development based on criteria of integration and sustainability.

Resolution scheme

1. Research problem

What are the elements that influence the level of satisfaction of visitors to the Department of Amazonas?

2. Methodology

For the development of the research, a mixed approach was used with a design aimed at enriching the qualitative and quantitative information, where the quantitative elements helped to complement the qualitative description, thus achieving, through a critical social paradigm, the forge elements of utmost importance to achieve a significant transformation in the social sphere in question (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). The aim of this design is the analysis, integration and joint discussion of the results in order to achieve a better understanding of the object of study.

In addition, theoretical methods such as the historical-logical method were used to carry out a study, review and analysis of the existing literature in order to define the background and understand the theoretical framework linked to the object of study. At the empirical level, documentary analysis, observation and survey were used.

The fieldwork was conducted in three areas of the Department of Amazonas: the city of Leticia, the Macedonia Indigenous Community and the Nazareth Indigenous Community. According to the criteria of Hernández (2021), the study used non-probabilistic convenience sampling, as a total of 62 visitors were selected from the areas that were part of the study, given the conditions in which the study was carried out and the difficult access to a larger number of participants.

3. Research results

The main results of the tools used to obtain the information are shown below. As a whole, the above allows us to identify the elements that make up the degree of visitor satisfaction in the territory under study, complementing each factor that impacts it.

In the first instance, a socio-demographic description of the visitors to the territory was made. The surveys identified Mexico, the Netherlands and Canada as the main source markets; in addition, most visitors are nationals of the country. It is important to highlight that, for the research, it was impossible to obtain the total number of visitors in these areas due to the lack of updated information sources concerning these indicators. It is a negative element, not only for the research but also for decision-making and the design of marketing strategies for the territory.

Together with the data from the surveys and interviews, the visitor segment was defined as backpackers, i.e., people who travel constantly, only use a backpack as a tool, and are recognised as clients who regularly do not access conventional plans or tours.

In the second instance, the results of the strategic planning of the actors in terms of the development of their advertising media and tools are evident, leading to the attraction of the greatest number of visitors through this channel. Likewise, the second group learned about the destination through communication with family, friends or partners, and there is a close link between the level of satisfaction of this group with their visit.

The data obtained reveal that 100.00% of those surveyed expressed an interest in returning to the destination and referred to their recommendation, which leads to establishing the first criteria on their satisfaction levels.

Another important information is the number of destinations visited in the territory. In this sense, it is important to point out that the Department of Amazonas has various tourist sites that, from different tourist agencies, aim to captivate travellers who wish to discover the exotic landscapes of the tropical rainforest so that the tourist destinations visited by the respondents were linked to previously acquired plans, where some tours were offered through activities in the form of a day trip. Therefore, the differentiation in the number of visitors who frequented the places under study was notoriously unequal (table 1).

Table 1. Number of visiting tourists by tourist destination

Tourist destination	Isla de los micos	Puerto Nariño	CI Macedonia	CI Nazareth	CI Yaguas	Reserva Tanimboca	Reserva Marasha
Visit	40	22	25	61	5	11	4
No Visit	22	40	37	1	57	51	58
Total	62	62	62	62	62	62	62

Source: Own elaboration.

One of the most demanded services is accommodation. On this aspect, the results show that 68.00% of the total number of tourists said it was good, 16.00% said it was excellent, while another 16.00% said it was average. It should be noted that this analysis was satisfactory, as 52 of the 62 tourists stated this, which represented 86.00% of the total number of tourists.

However, the urban accommodation (in the municipality of Leticia) had different characteristics to the rural accommodation (indigenous communities) since the infrastructure and services were those of a three-star hotel. On the other hand, the lodgings in the indigenous communities with houses made of wood and zinc roofing tiles mostly lacked public utilities (water supply, drinking water, energy, and sewage, among others). Likewise, important data

was obtained to analyse the degree of satisfaction of the tourists regarding the provision of tourist services concerning the personnel in the region.

The Amazon region is marked by multiculturalism, which is framed around the various ethnic groups that inhabit the Amazon basin, such as the Cocamas, Yaguas and mainly the Ticunas. The inhabitants of the indigenous communities of Nazareth and Macedonia, approximately 95.00% of whom belong to the Ticuna ethnic group, speak the native language and Spanish, so contact with the national tourist did not represent a language barrier, and in the case of foreign visitors, the tourist agencies assigned a bilingual tourist guide who guaranteed translation for understanding between the interlocutors (indigenous-foreign). In this way, bilingualism (native language/Spanish) was not a limiting factor in providing tourist services; on the contrary, it became an additional attraction in the region. However, this situation could be distorted if communication in other languages is assessed. Therefore, the hosts had qualifications in customer service and permanent training as environmental interpreters (tourist guides).

Another important element to analyse, which influences the degree of visitor satisfaction, is the attention provided by the tour operators. Table 2 reveals that considering that there is an acceptable level of satisfaction concerning the level of training of the human talent of each organisation consulted, it is presumed that the permanent qualification policies of these organisations have allowed them to provide good customer service to external clients.

Table 2: Elements for the management of tourism organisations

Element	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
Availability of transport in the region.	0	0	3	0	0
Fluency in other languages, such as English and Portuguese, among others.	0	0	1	2	0
Air ticket costs.	0	1	1	1	0
State of the roads.	0	0	0	0	3
Competition from international operators (Brazil, Peru).	0	0	0	1	2
Level of training of the organisation's human talent.	0	2	0	1	0
Companies with monopolies in their activities	2	0	0	1	0
Environmental management	0	0	1	1	1
Frequency of flights	0	2	1	0	0
Connectivity and technological tools.	0	0	1	1	1
Articulation with local government	0	1	0	2	0
Logistical and economic requirements	1	0	2	0	0

Source: Own elaboration.

However, there are trends in the responses on some elements that hinder the management of each organisation, classified as regular dissatisfaction, among which the following stand out: the low availability of transport in the region, the high cost of Air Tickets, the poor state of the roads; the informality in the competition of international operators (Brazil, Peru); the precarious connectivity and technological tools for the improvement of the service; the non-existent articulation with the local government; lack of logistical and economic requirements on the part of the competent authorities, the regular command of other languages such as English, Portuguese, among others. Finally, about the companies with a monopoly in their activities, the respondents did not express any disagreement and considered the frequency of flights to be good.

Consequently, regarding the attractions visited and their contribution to the satisfaction of respondents' needs, the results are closely related to those proposed by Araújo-Dos-Santos, De-Carvalho & Dos-Anjos (2021) and Mori, Mori, García & Ishuiza (2022); in these works, reference is made to the importance of developing tourism activities in regions that possess natural treasures, always with the conviction that the legacy that future generations will receive lies in all the care and protection actions that can be carried out today.

Likewise, the authors focus on the lines of action in which tourism work should be oriented to contribute to sustainable development that will last throughout history. Finally, new strategies are assessed that could be implemented based on specific diagnoses in the localities to be visited, the intention being to offer tourism that is attractive to visitors but which, at the same time, commits all people to the history of the place, in such a way that the promotion and dissemination for the preservation and care of these sites becomes increasingly necessary.

All of the above elements are reaffirmed in the comments made by respondents, who state that they positively impact the image perceived during their stay in the destination and, therefore, on their satisfaction levels.

Conclusions

The collective perception of the different actors involved in tourism - tourists, tour operators and competent authorities - highlights the vast tourism potential of the Amazon region; this majestic region, known for its biodiversity and cultural richness, is of incalculable value in the global tourism arena.

The comprehensive analysis of visitor satisfaction in the Department of Amazonas provided further insight into the predominant source markets. It gives a clear indication of where the majority of visitors come from and how they learned about the destination. This information is crucial to understand how and where to promote the territory. In addition, details about the quality and perception of the services offered in the territory have been discerned, giving us a guide to the areas that require improvement.

Beyond providing an x-ray of the current state of tourism in the region, the data collected allows us to identify specific deficiencies in the management and promotion of tourism in the territory. One of the most relevant findings is the need to improve and amplify access to information about Amazon. Therefore, this information is a vital tool for any visitor and essential for formulating marketing plans adapted to current needs. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the importance of strengthening the language skills of local staff. In an increasingly globalised world, the territory's human resources must be prepared to attend to and understand tourists of different nationalities and languages. Therefore, the Department of Amazonas has undeniable tourism potential; addressing and overcoming certain challenges identified in this study is essential.

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