

Exploring the dynamic effect of multi-quality attributes on overall satisfaction: the case of incentive events

Abstract

The extant incentive event studies are geared toward clarifying the general aspects of the incentive travel industry using qualitative and descriptive methods, while in-depth empirical research is overlooked, especially in the area of quality and satisfaction. This study investigates the dynamics (asymmetry) of multi-quality attributes towards satisfaction from the perspective of mainland China incentive travelers by (1) identifying quality attributes as frustrators, dissatisfiers, hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters, (2) prioritizing attributes for the purpose of effective satisfaction management, and (3) presenting theoretical and managerial contributions to the incentive travel literature.

Keywords: Asymmetry; Incentive event; Quality attributes; Satisfaction

1. Introduction

An incentive travel/event, one of the MICE segments, is defined as “a modern management tool used to accomplish uncommon business goals by awarding participants an extraordinary travel experience upon attainment of their share of uncommon goals” (Sheldon, 1994, p. 23). The incentive travel market is rapidly growing in the MICE industry. According to the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE, 2013), the US incentive event market is estimated at more than USD 10 billion per year. The demand for an incentive event is also noticeable in mainland China. According to Global Business Travel Association (GBTA, 2016), mainland China is ranked first in the world business travel market including incentive travel, leaving the U.S. behind; China’s total business travel spend is forecasted to rise to USD\$320.7 billion in 2016, higher than the business travel spend of the U.S. (US\$295.7 billion). As a growing number of Chinese firms are recognizing employees’ performance using incentive

events, they are becoming very important target clients to incentive travel destinations around the world (Angelini, 2012; Xing and Formica, 2007).

Given that the economic impact of the MICE industry is highly recognized around the world, the MICE literature flourishes in both quality and quantity. However, incentive event industry has been surprisingly under-researched in the MICE literature (Fenich et al., 2015). The current incentive event literature, mostly published in the 1990s, covers a limited research domain, namely the case studies of incentive travel destinations (Mehta, Loh, & Mehta, 1991; Witt, Gammon, & White, 1992), reward value of incentive event (Hastings, Kiely, & Watkins, 1988; Ricci & Holland, 1992), the demand for incentive travel (Sheldon, 1995), and a holistic view of the incentive travel industry (Fenich et al., 2015; Xiang & Formica, 2007). The abovementioned studies are geared toward clarifying the general aspects of the incentive travel industry using qualitative and descriptive methods, while in-depth empirical studies are overlooked, especially in the area of quality and satisfaction. Quality and customer satisfaction are central to understanding the nature of customers' evaluative perceptions and behavior in the hospitality and tourism literature. Nevertheless, an empirical examination of multi-quality attributes and satisfaction in the incentive travel research has not been conducted, although it would form a compelling research agenda that enriches the incentive travel literature.

In response to this research gap, this study validates the multi-quality attributes of incentive travels and investigates their dynamics (asymmetry) towards satisfaction from the perspective of mainland China incentive travelers. Researchers have reached a general consensus about the linear, symmetric relationship between quality attributes and satisfaction while exploring customer perceptions and judgments. However, blindly pursuing this consensus can be a barrier to further clarifying the quality–satisfaction link, given that the consumer behavior

literature provides conceptual and empirical evidence of asymmetric associations between quality attributes and satisfaction (e.g., Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Mittal, Ross, and Baldasare, 1998; Oliver, 1997; Streukens and Ruyter, 2004).

Overall satisfaction is a consequence of the performance of multi-quality attributes (Anderson and Mittal, 2000). The asymmetric relationship explains the phenomenon that a service firm substantially invests in the performance improvement of a particular quality attribute, but fails to observe the corresponding effect on customer satisfaction, whereas the equivalent investment in the quality improvement of another attribute leads to a more significant effect on satisfaction. This implies that the performance of quality attributes differentially influences satisfaction with an asymmetric effect (Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Mittal et al., 1998; Oliver, 1997). Overlooking such a dynamic link between quality and satisfaction may lead to model misspecification and lower predictive power (Streukens and Ruyter, 2004). Nevertheless, an empirical analysis of an asymmetric effect is largely neglected in the hospitality and tourism literature. In fact, the concept of asymmetry in the quality–satisfaction link is not novel; the asymmetric effect is qualitatively and descriptively defined with the notion of satisfiers and dissatisfiers, drawing on the analysis of complaints and compliments from hotels and restaurants (Cadotte and Turgeon, 1988) and the analysis of critical incidents from banks (Johnston, 1995). However, the qualitative assessment of anecdotes poses methodological limitations to an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of multi-quality attributes towards satisfaction (which is further discussed in the section of theoretical implications.). While complementing the limitation of the previous research, this study aims to present expanded theoretical and practical scope of satisfiers and dissatisfiers that the prior studies do not explore. To achieve such an aim, this study seeks to validate the multi-quality attributes of incentive travels; identify them as frustrators,

dissatisfiers, hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters, prioritize attributes for the effective satisfaction management; and make theoretical and managerial contributions to the further development of the incentive event literature.

2. Literature review

2.1. The asymmetric effect of attributes on satisfaction

Although much of the research has generally adopted symmetric linear relationships between attributes and satisfaction, an asymmetric function has also been advocated for examining the dynamic effect of attributes on satisfaction (Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Back, 2012; Deng, 2007; Füller and Matzler, 2008; Mikulić and Prebežac, 2008; Mittal et al., 1998; Oliver, 1997). This asymmetric function is expressed in the form of negative or positive asymmetry (Anderson and Mittal, 2000). Negative asymmetry occurs when one degree of negative performance of an attribute has a more powerful effect on satisfaction than a corresponding degree of its positive performance (Mittal et al., 1998), implying that attribute dissatisfaction is more salient and draws a more serious cognitive and affective response than attribute satisfaction (Peeters and Czapinski, 1990). Similarly, positive asymmetry is observed when the increase in performance of a particular attribute has a greater effect on satisfaction than an equivalent decrease in performance of the same attribute; an attribute gives rise to positive asymmetry if its quality is unanticipated or unusually high relative to customer expectation (Anderson and Mittal, 2000).

Prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) offers a theoretical rationale for the asymmetric effect, stating that customer judgment exhibits loss aversion with diminishing sensitivity at high and low levels of performance. Loss aversion indicates that individuals perceive loss as more serious than gain; a loss is given more weight than a corresponding

measure of gain (Einhorn and Hogarth, 1981). The loss aversion perspective holds that negative asymmetry occurs when the negative performance of an attribute affects satisfaction more than the equivalent extent of a favorable performance. Moreover, customers display diminishing sensitivity against satisfaction when they evaluate an attribute at a high level of its positive or negative performance. In other words, when the performance of an attribute is either high or low, customer satisfaction is less influenced than at the middle range of its performance, suggesting asymmetry (Mittal et al., 1998).

The aforementioned dynamic effect of attributes on overall satisfaction has been examined using three-factor theory of satisfaction (Anderson, Fornell, and Mazvancheryl, 2004; Back, 2012; Deng, 2007; Füller and Matzler, 2008; Mikulić and Prebežac, 2008; Oliver, 1997). Postulating that attributes influence satisfaction in different manners, three-factor theory arises out of Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) two-factor theory. Two-factor theory advocates that the factors (e.g., job security) that cause job dissatisfaction differ from the factors (e.g., challenging work) that cause job satisfaction. Inspired by two-factor theory, Kano (1984) develops attractive quality theory, which is based on five quality domains that affect satisfaction differently. Depending on the nature of the relationship between quality attributes and satisfaction, the five quality dimensions are categorized into "attractive qualities" (positively asymmetric), "one-dimensional qualities" (positive linear), "must-be qualities" (negatively asymmetric), "indifferent qualities" (non-existent), and "reverse qualities" (negative linear). Kano (1984) states that attractive qualities relate to attributes individuals do not usually expect, including surprise and delight attributes. When attractive qualities are given to customers, they are happy and satisfied, but they do not cause dissatisfaction even when they are not available. Thus, attractive qualities display a positive asymmetric relationship with satisfaction.

Conversely, must-be qualities exhibit a negative asymmetric relationship with satisfaction. When must-be qualities are not offered, customers are dissatisfied. However, even when these qualities are fulfilled, customers are not necessarily satisfied, as must-be qualities are very basic attributes. One-dimensional qualities have a positive linear relationship with satisfaction, suggesting that people are satisfied with the presence of one-dimensional qualities and dissatisfied with their absence. Indifferent qualities do not trigger satisfaction or dissatisfaction, regardless of whether they are provided to customers. Reverse qualities literally suggest that they create dissatisfaction when fulfilled and satisfaction when not fulfilled.

Kano's (1984) attractive quality theory is fine-tuned later by other scholars (Anderson et al., 2004; Back, 2012; Deng, 2007; Füller, Matzler, and Faullant, 2006; Mikulić and Prebežac, 2008; Oliver, 1997) into the three-factor structure of attributes that cause satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction. For instance, Oliver (1997) similarly posits that satisfaction is differently affected by three types of attributes: bivalent satisfiers, monovalent dissatisfiers, and monovalent satisfiers. Like one-dimensional qualities, bivalent satisfiers cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction, depending on whether those attributes are present. Monovalent dissatisfiers induce dissatisfaction only and do not cause satisfaction even when they are supplied, as the attributes are taken for granted. In contrast, monovalent satisfiers that are perceived as unexpected and valuable attributes trigger satisfaction and do not cause dissatisfaction even when not provided. In line with the aforementioned literature, the current study adopts three-factor theory to examine the asymmetric nature of attributes through the following zones.

- Negative asymmetry includes dissatisfiers and frustrators. Dissatisfiers are deemed as basic and must-be attributes that give rise to dissatisfaction if not provided, but do not induce satisfaction even when provided. As individuals take dissatisfiers for granted, one unit of negative performance of a dissatisfier attribute has a more consequential effect on satisfaction than a corresponding unit of its positive performance. Frustrators refer to extreme dissatisfiers that cause a high level of dissatisfaction to the extent that people are

frustrated if they are not available, but do not trigger satisfaction even when fulfilled. Frustrators are therefore seen as conspicuous basic attributes.

- Hybrids or performance attributes exhibit a positive symmetric linear relationship with satisfaction. If the attributes are fulfilled, people are satisfied, but dissatisfaction occurs when the attributes are not fulfilled.
- Positive asymmetry involves satisfiers and delighters. Satisfiers are viewed as unexpected (value-added) attributes that trigger satisfaction if provided for individuals but do not induce dissatisfaction when not available, as people do not usually anticipate them. The attributes are thus perceived as excitement and pleasant surprise attributes to people. In contrast to dissatisfiers, the positive performance of a satisfier attribute affects satisfaction greater than an equivalent amount of negative performance of the same attribute. Delighters signify a high level of satisfiers that arouse satisfaction to the extent that people are delighted if the attributes are present. Delighters are therefore treated as supreme excitement attributes.

2.2. Incentive event

An incentive event is designed to motivate sales personnel to achieve sales goals and reward them for their excellent performance. Sales forces perceive incentive travel as a more attractive incentive than cash or merchandise (Shinew and Backman, 1995) because it offers trophy value to travel winners, who are recognized as an elite group for outstanding performance (Hastings et al., 1988). In other words, an incentive event is treated as an award that triggers intrinsic benefits for accomplishment and recognition while acting as an effective motivational medium for employees (Ambron, 1985).

Baker and Crompton (2000) state that quality is suggestive of various attributes under the primary control of tour organizers, implying that the performance of attributes determines the overall tour quality. In the same vein, event quality is reflected in the quality of event attributes under the command of event organizers and determined by the way event participants perceive and experience event attributes (Crompton, 2003). As incentive travel is designed to motivate and recognize employees for their excellent performance with the offer of a trip, the attributes of incentive travel are significantly associated with a travel destination as well as event-specific

attributes. This study therefore reviews the quality attributes of incentive travel under destination- and event-specific domains.

Given that a destination should be safe, accessible, and charming enough to satisfy the expectations of incentive travelers (Mehta et al., 1991), the incentive travel literature covers destination attributes, such as accessibility (Fisher, 2005; Hankinson, 2005), attractions (Fenich et al., 2015; O'Brian, 1997), site environment (Fenich et al., 2015; Xiang and Formica, 2007), and image (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Hankinson, 2005). The participants in incentive events are concerned about the accessibility of a destination; poor accessibility lowers the attractiveness of a destination, consequently demotivating prospective incentive travelers to win reward trips (Formica and Goldblatt, 2005; Davidson and Cope, 2003). For a destination selection, incentive event organizers thus consider the extent to which a destination is accessible with the kinds of comfort, speed, and reliability that enhance the value of an incentive trip from the perspective of event attendees (Fisher, 2005; Hankinson, 2005; O'Brian, 1997).

Local attractions (e.g., a variety of tourist and cultural attractions, shopping) that affect the experience quality of incentive travelers determine the competitiveness of destinations to attract incentive events (Witt et al., 1992; O'Brian, 1997). For instance, top executives are reported to prioritize destination attractions when considering destinations for incentive travel (Fenich et al., 2015). A destination that offers the various assortments of cultural and natural attractions is generally popular to incentive event attendees and motivates them to participate in the event (Davison and Cope, 2003).

A destination's site environment, as represented by the destination's climate, safety, political environment, and infrastructure, is a basic consideration when individuals decide whether to join an event (Lee and Min, 2013; Whitfield et al., 2014). An incentive travel

destination loses its competitiveness when incentive travelers observe a hostile site environment, such as one characterized by political unrest, unbearable climate conditions, and poor security (Xiang and Formica, 2007). In addition, a secured, advanced infrastructure adds value to the experience quality of travelers, who are exposed to the infrastructure during their stay. The destination literature also supports the importance of site environment attributes (security, safety, infrastructure, and climate) that act as significant attributes in the formation of a destination image (Beerli and Martin, 2004).

Similar to site environment, a destination's image has been found to critically affect a choice for a vacation (Ramkissoon, Uysal, and Brown, 2011) and incentive travel destination (Hankinson, 2005). Given that event attendees tend to associate a destination's image with an event image (Xiang and Chalip, 2006), a destination with a unique, attractive image appeals to event participants (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2007). Destination image is critical to incentive travel in particular; as many incentive travelers already experience different destinations through incentive events (Mehta et al., 1991), an exotic destination is conducive to motivating sales personnel (Davidson and Cope, 2003).

By offering a memorable experience, an incentive event is staged to recognize event attendees and reward them for their excellent performance. As an incentive event organizer has to work together with local service providers, the quality of service contractors is key to satisfying the expectation of event attendees (Hankinson, 2005). Mehta et al. (1991) state that the competitiveness of local service suppliers, such as ground operators, travel agencies, audiovisual providers, hotels, and entertainment service providers, is fundamental to the reputation of the local incentive travel industry. Among the key local service contractors, the hotel industry is considered as a major service provider for incentive travel, wherein the substantial budget for

incentive travel is allocated to rooms and food and beverage (Mehta et al., 1991). Hotels equipped with a high quality of recreational and information technology (IT) facilities are preferred for incentive travel in which social and recreational programs are frequently adopted to create social networking opportunities (Davidson and Rodgers, 2006; Fisher, 2005), and many attendees must handle their clients even at incentive travel destinations by relying on hotel IT amenities (Xiang and Formica, 2007).

Incentive events are intended to create a “wow” effect for attendees with a unique, novel program (Fisher, 2005). For example, event organizers make arrangements for incentive travelers to meet celebrities or access exotic places not available to the general public (Davidson and Cope, 2003). A tailor-made social function with a surprising entertainment program is also offered to allow attendees to experience memorable moments (Fenich et al., 2015; Ting, 2012). A well-designed program contributes to the success of incentive travel in that the more unique and creative the program is, the more likely incentive travelers are to feel recognized and rewarded (Fisher, 2005; Formica and Goldblatt, 2005).

Incentive travel offers a “trophy value” to attendees, suggesting that the travel is interpreted as a reward for their achievement (Rucci and Holland, 1992; SITE, 2013). Individuals heighten the sense of achievement or recognition as their social identity is improved and respected. Incentive events are designed to enhance the social identity of attendees through social networking opportunities and specially arranged programs; event participants are given chances to network with senior management or celebrities (Fenich et al., 2015; Fisher, 2005) and to access exclusive places not available to the public. Such a special privilege further enhances social identity that, in turn, triggers a sense of achievement, thus motivating sales personnel to cherish the value of incentive events (Fisher, 2005).

3. Methodology

3.1. Measurement development and data collection

In line with the item development procedure used by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis (1991), the measures used in this study were identified and developed through a literature review, in-depth interviews, and a focus group. This process is essential to the current study as the quality attributes of incentive travels are not empirically developed and validated in the extant incentive travel literature, although quality attributes in the literature are somewhat described in a qualitative and descriptive mode. In other words, no measurements that are empirically developed and validated for the quality attributes of incentive events are available for this study. For measurement development, the incentive event literature, although a bit outdated, was extensively analyzed to find incentive travel quality attributes. Thirty items were initially extracted from the literature review. Specifically, destination-related attributes were identified from the literature on accessibility (Davidson and Cope, 2003; O'Brian, 1997; Xiang and Formica, 2007; Witt et al., 1992), site environment (Formica and Goldblatt, 2005; Witt et al., 1992), image (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Mehta et al., 1991; Witt et al., 1992), and attractions (Davidson and Cope, 2003; O'Brian, 1997). Event-specific attributes were derived from the literature on services of local service contractors (Mehta et al., 1991), hotel facilities (Fisher, 2005; Xiang and Formica, 2007), programs (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Fisher, 2005; Rucci and Holland, 1992), and sense of achievement (Fisher, 2005; Hastings et al., 1988; Rucci and Holland, 1992). Incentive traveler satisfaction was measured using scales from Oliver's (1981) study, such as (1) "overall, I am satisfied with this incentive event", (2) "as a whole, I am happy with this incentive event", and (3) "I believe I did the right thing to attend this incentive event".

Following the literature review, in-depth interviews with three incentive travel experts were carried out. Serving as section chief of the international affairs division under a government's tourism sector in Taiwan, interviewee 1 assisted local travel agencies in promoting Taiwan as an incentive travel destination. Interviewee 2 was an assistant general manager of a major travel agency in Taiwan who had substantial experience with the incentive travel market. Interviewee 3 was an academic who specialized in the Taiwan travel industry. All of the interviewees were asked to review the measures from the literature review and suggest new items, if any. As a result, the interviewees recommended nine new attributes: warm attitude, friendly, considerate, local delicacies, seems familiar but not quite so, a place one looks forward to visiting, in-depth itinerary, choices of different itineraries, and group tours mixed with individual traveling. To finalize the items derived from the literature review and in-depth interviews, a focus group comprising three event researchers was asked to thoroughly review the clarity and relevance of the measures and to indicate their concerns and suggestions, after which 44 quality attributes of incentive travel were generated for a survey. In sum, thirty measures were developed from the literature review, nine measures from in-depth interviews, and five measures from a focus group.

With the support of travel agencies in Taiwan, a survey was administered to mainland Chinese incentive travelers in Taiwan in February 2015. The survey was carried out on the last day of the participants' stay to ensure they had completely experienced an incentive event in Taiwan. Tour guides who were briefed on the study background and nature of the questionnaire handed out the survey instrument to incentive travelers. In terms of business confidentiality, information about incentive travel groups (e.g., company name, the number of travelers) was not

disclosed. This study adopted a seven-point Likert-type scale with anchors of 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Overall, 409 respondents participated in the survey, but 12 respondents were excluded due to too many missing values. Another nine pieces of data were deleted because they showed illogically consistent perceptions (Dillehay and Jernigan, 1970), indicating that the nine respondents did not attend to the questionnaires. Consequently, the analyzed sample comprised 388 pieces of data. According to the demographic profiles of the sample, respondents fell into the age ranges of 21–30 (43.5%); 31–40 (37.8%); and 41–50 (18.7%). The gender ratio of the respondents was 40% male and 60% female. Furthermore, most of the respondents (about 95%) held a bachelor's degree or higher, while the remaining 5% had received a high school diploma. Their monthly salary ranges were categorized as follows: CNY10,000–12,000 (4.7%), CNY12,001–14,000 (12.2%), CNY14,001–16,000 (14.2%), CNY16,001–18,000 (64.1%), and CNY18,001 or above (4.9%).

3.2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal axis factoring and oblique rotation to identify the underlying dimensions of the incentive travel quality attributes. When the measures were below the factor loading value of 0.4 and communality of 0.5, they were removed. Only factors whose eigenvalues were greater than 1 were included, and a scree plot was reviewed for a visible elbow to determine the number of factors to derive. According to the aforementioned criteria, the following 12 measures were deleted: climate, organic agriculture, reputable, novel, exotic, healthy lifestyle, amount of cultural/heritage attractions, full of pleasant surprises, variety, in-depth itinerary, meeting influential members of senior management, and networking opportunities. Consequently, the number of attributes was reduced to 32 with an 8-

factor structure (see Table 1). Explaining 81.10% of the variance in the data, the eight factors were categorized as follows: (1) image and attractions, (2) local people, (3) sense of achievement/reward, (4) programs, (5) accessibility, (6) hotel facilities, (7) site environment, and (8) specially arranged programs.

Insert Table 1 about here

3.3. Reliability, construct validity, and method biases

The AVE values in Table 2 are 0.5 or greater, supporting convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, discriminant validity is evidenced by the AVE values greater than the squared correlation coefficients of the corresponding inter-constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The reliability of each construct is acceptable, as it exceeds the cut-off point of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Insert Table 2 about here

Non-response bias was tested by identifying the perception difference between respondents for the first 10% and last 10% of completed questionnaires, based on the survey completion dates. As the mean difference of each attribute between the two groups was not statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$, non-response bias did not threaten the validity of the current findings (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). Additionally, common method bias was checked using a single-factor analysis, as suggested by Schriesheim (1979) and Podsakoff et al. (1984), to examine the data via principal component analysis and varimax rotation. If a single-factor structure was identified or the one factor accounted for more than 50% of the variance, it would provide evidence of common method bias (Lings and Greenley, 2005). The single-factor analysis identified eight dimensions with the first dimension explaining 15.03% of the variance, suggesting that common method bias was a negligible problem in this study.

3.4. *Impact range performance analysis (IRPA) and impact asymmetry analysis (IAA)*

Mikulić and Prebežac (2008) identify the asymmetric range of an attribute's effect on satisfaction using impact range performance analysis (IRPA) and impact asymmetry analysis (IAA). Brandt (1987) states that to estimate IRPA and IAA, penalty-reward contrast analysis (PRCA) must be carried out using multiple regression analysis and dummy variables.

Specifically, two sets of dummy variables must be generated for each attribute as follows:

1. To estimate the effect of an attribute's low performance on satisfaction, the first set of dummy variables (i.e., penalty index) is created by coding the lowest attribute performance score (APS) as 1; when the performance of an attribute is 1, enter it as 1. Then, each remaining higher performance of the attributes is input as 0; when the performance of an attribute is rated as 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7, input it as 0.
2. To assess the effect of an attribute's high performance on satisfaction, the second set of dummy variables (i.e., reward index) is produced by entering the highest APS as 1; when the performance of an attribute is 7, input it as 1. Then, the remaining lower performance of each attribute is coded as 0; when the performance of an attribute is rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6, input it as 0.
3. Then, the two sets of dummy variables are regressed on satisfaction to generate two beta coefficients for the penalty and reward indices, respectively. The penalty index (PI) represents attributes negatively related to satisfaction. In contrast, the reward index (RI) denotes attributes positively related to satisfaction. The values of PI and RI are exhibited in Table 3.

Once PI and RI are estimated, they are used to estimate the value of an attribute's range of impact on satisfaction (RIS). For example, the absolute values of PI and RI of each attribute are added up to generate RIS (Table 3), which indicates the degree of the effect of an attribute on satisfaction. Then, PI, RI, and RIS are entered into the following equations, developed by Mikulić and Prebežac (2008), to create the satisfaction-generating potential (SGP) and dissatisfaction-generating potential (DGP) of an attribute. The SGP and DGP that indicate the proportion of reward and penalty indices of the attributes to the RIS are used to estimate the impact asymmetry (IA) as follows:

- (a) $SGP_i = r_i / RIJS_i$
 (b) $DGP_i = |p_i| / RIJS_i$
 (c) $IA_i \text{ index} = SGP_i - DGP_i$
 where r_i = reward index for attribute i ; p_i = penalty index for attribute i ;
 $RIJS_i = |p_i| + r_i$ = range of impact on AS; and $SGP_i + DGP_i = 1$.

Given that IA is measured based on the arithmetic difference between SGP and DGP, IA acts as a cutoff point in classifying attributes as dissatisfiers, hybrids, or satisfiers (Mikulić and Prebežac, 2008). Specifically, if the SGP of an attribute is higher than the corresponding DGP, the attribute is considered to cause more satisfaction than dissatisfaction. In this case, the attribute is categorized as a satisfier. In contrast, when the DGP is greater than the corresponding SGP, the attribute is categorized as a dissatisfier. In addition, when the arithmetic difference between the SGP and DGP is marginal for an attribute, the attribute is categorized as a hybrid due to its comparable effect on both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. As suggested by Mikulić and Prebežac (2008), this study used the following criteria to classify attributes as frustrators (known as extreme dissatisfiers, $IA < -0.4$), dissatisfiers ($-0.4 \leq IA < -0.1$), hybrids ($-0.1 \leq IA \leq 0.1$), satisfiers ($0.1 < IA \leq 0.4$), and delighters (known as extreme satisfiers, $IA > 0.4$).

Based on the IRPA and IAA, this study identified the asymmetric effect of attributes on incentive travel satisfaction by categorizing them as frustrators, dissatisfiers, hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters (Table 3). Most of the attributes of image and attractions had negative asymmetric relationships (frustrators or dissatisfiers) with satisfaction, except for variety of attractions (delighters). All of the attributes under “local people” also exhibited negative asymmetric relationships with satisfaction. In the “sense of achievement/reward” dimension, attributes had either positive symmetric (hybrids) or positive asymmetric (satisfiers or delighters) relationships with satisfaction. Apart from “free time to visit other places” (frustrator), the program attributes, accessibility, and hotel facilities were classified as satisfiers or delighters. Under the “site

environment” dimension, safety, security, and reliable infrastructure were seen as dissatisfiers, while common language was categorized as a hybrid. The two attributes of specially arranged programs were categorized as a delighter and a frustrator, respectively, displaying the extremely different nature of the asymmetric effect on satisfaction.

Insert Table 3 about here

Based on the findings in Table 3, the attributes along the Y-axis (IA) and X-axis (RIS) were further examined. Figure 1 presents the relative position of the attributes in each dimension while also considering the asymmetric nature of the attributes on satisfaction (i.e., IA) and the effect of attributes on satisfaction (i.e., RIS). To measure the RIS of each attribute, it is split into low, moderate, and high RIS values based on the mean value of RIS. Given that both IA and RIS are taken into account when assessing the attributes, the detailed interpretation of the asymmetric effect of attributes on satisfaction can be derived. For instance, although attributes 2 and 7 have similar RIS values on the image and attractions dimension, they exhibit extremely opposite asymmetric effects, i.e., those of delighters and frustrators. Conversely, attributes 1 and 3 on the accessibility dimension are classified as satisfiers, but attribute 3 affects satisfaction more than attribute 1. The simultaneous analysis of IA and RIS for each attribute allows industry practitioners to identify which attributes must be prioritized when managing satisfaction. Further discussion is presented in the practical implications section.

Insert Figure 1 about here

4. Discussions and conclusion

4.1. Theoretical implications

This study analyzes the asymmetric effect of incentive quality attributes on satisfaction and verifies the asymmetric nature of the attributes by categorizing them as frustrators,

dissatisfiers, hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters. Specifically, dissatisfiers and frustrators are highly featured in the dimensions of image and attractions (except for “variety of attractions” [delighters]), local people, and site environment (except for “common language” [hybrids]); thus, the attributes in those dimensions are deemed must-be attributes, which incentive travelers take for granted. Satisfiers and delighters are noticeable in the programs dimension (except for “free time to visit other places” [frustrators]), accessibility, and hotel facilities, whose attributes are considered value-added attributes because they offer more value and pleasant surprises. The attributes of sense of achievement/reward are a mixture of hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters. Those attributes are critical to managing incentive travelers’ satisfaction, as the hybrid attributes cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction while satisfiers and delighters further enhance satisfaction by adding more value. The attributes of specially arranged programs exhibit extremely opposite effects on satisfaction. That is, incentive travelers perceive more value and are more impressed when they have the privilege to “access exclusive places and people” (delighters). “Full of special events,” however, turns out to be a frustrator; incentive travelers are presumed to expect special events well in advance, given that special events/performances are common ingredients in an incentive program.

Unlike conventional empirical research adopting symmetric linear relationships between quality attributes and satisfaction, this study explores how the attributes are asymmetrically associated with satisfaction in the context of incentive travel. There are two main advantages to examining asymmetrical relationships over symmetric linear relationships. First, the symmetric linear function looks into whether an attribute has a statistically significant relationship with satisfaction. If the attribute is not found to be significantly related to satisfaction, it is interpreted as not having any effect on satisfaction. In other words, symmetric examination concludes

whether an attribute has an effect (positive or negative) on satisfaction. However, asymmetric relationships indicate that each attribute can be differently associated with satisfaction. The asymmetric approach examines whether an attribute asymmetrically affects satisfaction or dissatisfaction or symmetrically influences both, thereby identifying the distinct nature of each attribute's effects on satisfaction. Identification of the detailed nature of attributes enables researchers to prioritize attributes when managing satisfaction, a point discussed further in the practical implications section.

Second, many event studies operationalize an antecedent (i.e., a construct) of satisfaction as several attributes when exploring the relationships between satisfaction and its antecedents. The drawback of using constructs does not reflect the distinctive effect of each attribute on satisfaction. When a particular construct does not have a statistically significant relationship with satisfaction, the attributes that make up the construct are all collectively believed not to affect satisfaction without considering the asymmetric nature of the attributes. That is, the differential effect of each attribute on satisfaction is masked by construct-based empirical research. For example, the distinct effects of quality attributes on satisfaction in this study were observed in the respective dimensions of image and attractions, sense of achievement/rewards, programs, site environment, and specially arranged programs. If incentive travel quality were operationalized as constructs using a conventional symmetric linear function, the differential nature of quality attributes would not be recognized.

Previous studies examine the asymmetric effect of quality attributes on satisfaction, based on the critical incident technique (Johnston, 1995; Johnston and Silvestro, 1990) and the analysis of compliments and complaints (Cadotte and Turgeon, 1988; Oliver, 1997). Those studies identify quality attributes from customers' comments and categorize them as satisfiers and

dissatisfiers by looking into the relative frequency of those attributes in a positive or negative context. For instance, based on the frequency of complaints and compliments, hotel and restaurant attributes are classified into neutrals (not receiving many complaints and compliments), criticals (causing both complaints and compliments), satisfiers (frequent compliments), and dissatisfiers (frequent complaints) (Cadotte and Turgeon, 1988). Although the prior studies contribute to the conceptual clarification of the dynamics of multi-quality attributes towards satisfaction, its methodological limitations cannot be denied in several ways. First, given that all of the attributes are identified within customers' comments or incidents, researchers cannot test the asymmetric effect of attributes that are not observed from the anecdotes (Mikulić and Prebežac, 2011). This is a significant obstacle for researchers to explore the asymmetric effect of comprehensive multi-attributes of a particular study setting. Second, there is a possibility that some attributes predominate in favorable incidents (compliments), whereas other attributes always frequently occur in unfavorable incidents (complaints). This implies that a particular research setting likely determines complaints and compliments-inducing attributes (Matzler et al., 2002); in a certain service firm, some attributes always perform well, while others always perform poorly. This limitation cannot be easily avoided when research relies on case studies or critical incidents. Third, the critical incident technique (CIT) asks respondents to recollect their perceptions of incidents that occurred some time before the incident collection, thus their perceptions could have been reinterpreted by the following event other than the incidents (Johnston, 1995). Fourth, as CIT is likely to gather only extreme perceptions or views, it may have difficulty collecting incidents that fall into the zone of tolerance (a range of attribute performance that individuals deem satisfactory) (Stauss, 1933). The current study adopts IRPA and IAA and surveys multiple incentive travel groups to avoid the aforementioned limitations.

Also, the IRPA and IAA allow this study to further classify satisfiers into satisfiers and delighters and dissatisfiers into dissatisfiers and frustrators, shedding light on the detailed nature of the dynamics of quality attributes that the prior research does not examine. In addition, Mikulić and Prebežac (2008) state that frustrators/dissatisfiers positioned at a high RIS (range of impact on satisfaction) level are likely to substantially diminish satisfaction due to high RIS if they are not addressed properly. Thus, Figure 1 enables the related government bodies and event organizers to locate those attributes that require particular attention while operating incentive events. Although no frustrators/dissatisfiers are located at a high RIS level in this study, this is an unexplored implication in the prior research for scholars and industry practitioners to understand the dynamic nature of quality attributes.

Although numerous studies have explored the issues between quality and satisfaction in the hospitality and tourism industry, none of incentive travel research empirically validates quality attributes unique to incentive events and examines their dynamics toward satisfaction. As quality attributes act as key antecedents when individuals judge their satisfaction, value, and loyalty, an empirical evidence of the impact of quality attributes is a compelling research issue, especially in the incentive event literature that has been developed descriptively and qualitatively only. While validating multi-quality attributes of incentive travels, the current study offers a comprehensive view of the asymmetric effect of each quality attribute on satisfaction.

Asymmetry revealed through empirical research presents another angle and aspect not revealed in the prior literature. Given the empirical evidence of the dynamic link between quality and satisfaction and between satisfaction and loyalty in the literature (Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Streukens and Ruyter, 2004), it is constructive for researchers to consider the asymmetric nature of the relationships in their research models. This enables researchers to examine the unexplored

aspects of traveler/customer evaluative judgments and generate unique findings not discussed in the prior literature. Therefore, it is worthwhile for the current study to delve into how the dynamics of multi-quality attributes affect satisfaction, thereby contributing to the further development of the incentive event literature.

4.2. Practical implications

Identification of the asymmetric effects of incentive event attributes provides government bodies and event organizers with insight into how to strategically prioritize attributes in a way that ensures the satisfaction of incentive travelers. Figures 2 and 3 classify destination- and event-specific attributes as frustrators, dissatisfiers, hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters. Destination-specific attributes are treated as the attributes a destination has control over, while event-specific attributes are seen as attributes event organizers have control over.

Insert Figure 2 & 3 about here

For government bodies concerned with promoting a city/country as an incentive travel destination, Figure 2 presents a picture of how to prioritize attributes when managing incentive traveler satisfaction. Specifically, the attributes that fall into the frustrator and dissatisfier categories are perceived as must-be or basic attributes by incentive travelers. As they are considered taken for granted, they do not cause satisfaction. However, when the quality of basic attributes does not meet the expectation of incentive travelers, they induce a high level of dissatisfaction to the extent that the travelers' whole experience is ruined. Frustrators and dissatisfiers thus act as prerequisite attributes for incentive attendees to appreciate the quality of attributes that belong to hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters. In other words, even if incentive attendees are satisfied with hybrids, satisfiers, and delighters, when must-be attributes do not

meet the expectations of incentive travelers, their incentive travel experiences are likely to result in dissatisfaction. In this study, many attributes of image and attractions, local people, and site environment fall into the frustrator and dissatisfier categories; thus, the related government bodies should prioritize those attributes over others when managing and promoting a city/country as an incentive travel destination. Once basic attributes cater to the expectation of incentive attendees, the priority then moves to hybrids, followed by satisfiers and delighters. Hybrid attributes that cause either dissatisfaction or satisfaction, depending on their level of performance, are critical to the satisfaction of incentive travelers, as they can determine overall satisfaction on the condition that basic attributes satisfy incentive attendees. Common language is deemed as a hybrid attribute in this study. The related government bodies should carefully assess the issues associated with language barriers and implement measures to address the feedback/complaints arising out of language communication. Given that satisfier and delighter attributes add more value and benefit to the experience of incentive travelers, they are considered effective at further enhancing the satisfaction of incentive attendees. When basic and hybrid attributes are well managed in a destination, more investment can be put into value-added attributes. In this study, comfort and reliability of local transport, travel time, and variety of attractions are found to add more value and excitement to the experience of incentive travelers.

Similar to Figure 2, Figure 3 provides incentive event organizers with managerial implications for how to prioritize event-specific attributes when designing an incentive event. The classification of those attributes suggests to incentive travel organizers that incentive travelers perceive “free time to visit other places,” “full of special events,” and “service quality of local hotels and ground operators” as basic attributes. Therefore, event organizers should prioritize these attributes over others to ensure that their quality meets the expectations of

incentive travelers when organizing an incentive event. Priority should then be given to the hybrid attributes that represent three out of five “sense of achievement/reward” attributes in this study. This indicates that event organizers should stage an incentive event in a way that fully inspires incentive attendees with a sense of achievement/reward. Once basic and hybrid attributes are well managed, event organizers must think about how to enhance the value of an incentive event from the perspective of attendees. The findings imply that the attributes of hotel facilities and incentive programs are considered value-added attributes, while two other attributes (increase in social status, peer recognition) of “sense of achievement/reward” also enable incentive events to offer more benefits/value to incentive travelers. This suggests that event organizers should carefully select a hotel and design an incentive program to the extent that incentive travelers perceive their increased social status and peer recognition.

4.3. Limitations and future research

This study has limitations. As its findings are based on the perceptions of mainland Chinese incentive travelers, they may not be generalizable to other incentive travel groups, Western incentive travelers in particular. To complement the lack of generalizability, cross-cultural research would be useful to expand understanding of the dynamics of multi-quality attributes of incentive events. Moreover, this study relies on cross-sectional data with self-report measures. Carry-over effects cannot be considered when cross-sectional data are adopted. As a cross-sectional study can only explain phenomena at one particular point in time, the results of the cross-sectional research would have differed had different time slots been selected (Bland, 2001).

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Table 1.
Results of exploratory factor analysis

Factors	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Image and attractions (eigenvalue: 4.46; % of variance: 13.93)	
1. A place one looks forward to visiting	0.82
2. Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	0.75
3. Shopping opportunities	0.72
4. Variety of attractions	0.68
5. Festivals	0.66
6. Local delicacies	0.64
7. Seems familiar but not quite so	0.63
Factor 2: Local people (eigenvalue: 4.18; % of variance: 13.06)	
1. Friendly	-0.99
2. Warm attitude	-0.96
3. Considerate	-0.95
4. Service quality of local suppliers (hotel, ground operator, etc.)	-0.65
Factor 3: Sense of achievement/reward (eigenvalue: 4.02; % of variance: 12.56)	
1. Reward for effort	-0.85
2. Long-lasting, positive memories	-0.78
3. Increase in social status	-0.76
4. Peer recognition	-0.75
5. Sense of achievement	-0.75
Factor 4: Programs (eigenvalue: 3.52; % of variance: 11.00)	
1. Group tours mixed with individual traveling	0.91
2. Free time to visit other places	0.77
3. Choice of different itineraries	0.60
4. Professional program planning	0.58
Factor 5: Accessibility (eigenvalue: 2.99; % of variance: 9.34)	
1. Reliability of transport	-0.90
2. Comfort of transport	-0.90
3. Travel time	-0.63
Factor 6: Hotel facilities (eigenvalue: 2.88; % of variance: 9.00)	
1. Guestroom facilities	0.83
2. Event facilities	0.74
3. Information technology facilities (e.g., in-room wireless Internet)	0.74
4. Recreational facilities	0.60
Factor 7: Site environment (eigenvalue: 2.17; % of variance: 6.78)	
1. Safety and security	0.98
2. Reliable infrastructure (i.e., transportation, buildings, and telecommunication system)	0.91
3. Common language	0.85
Factor 8: Specially arranged programs (eigenvalue: 1.74; % of variance: 5.43)	
1. Access to exclusive places and people	0.75
2. Full of special events (e.g., novel sporting activities)	0.68

Note: Total variance explained = 81.10; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.81;
Bartlett's test of sphericity = $p < 0.001$.

Table 2.

Correlations (squared correlations), reliability, AVE, and mean

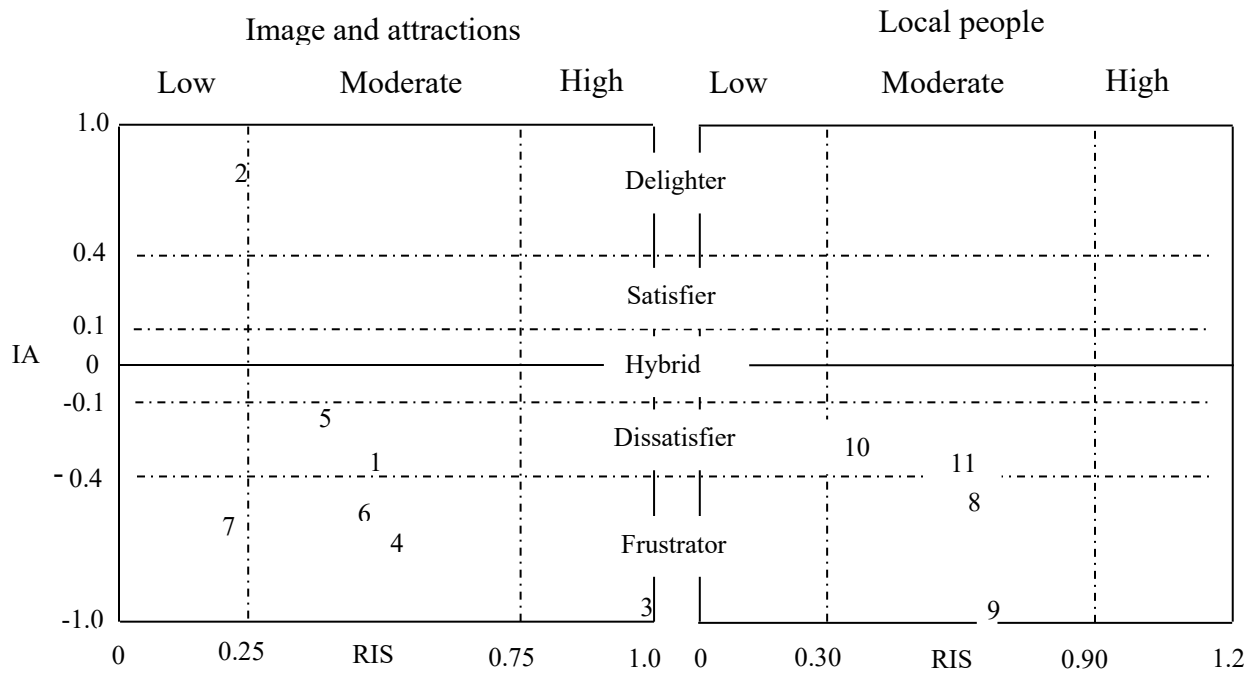
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	IS
IA	1.00								
LP	.14(.02)	1.00							
SAR	.36(.13)	.12(.01)	1.00						
P	.30(.09)	-.08(.00)	.14(.02)	1.00					
A	.19(.04)	.22(.05)	.07(.00)	.17(.03)	1.00				
HF	.14(.02)	.36(.13)	.21(.04)	.01(.00)	.17(.03)	1.00			
SE	.33(.11)	.35(.12)	.32(.10)	.01(.00)	.21(.04)	.28(.08)	1.00		
SP	.30(.09)	.18(.03)	.21(.04)	.17(.03)	.14(.02)	.11(.01)	.06(.00)	1.00	
IS	.33(.11)	.32(.10)	.48(.23)	.15(.02)	.17(.03)	.26(.07)	.29(.08)	.23(.05)	1.00
CR	.84	.95	.90	.75	.85	.78	.76	.72	.90
AVE	.50	.82	.62	.55	.67	.56	.82	.53	.77
Mean	6.53	6.59	6.50	5.88	6.19	6.35	6.65	4.96	6.34
SD	.43	.47	.53	.54	.57	.47	.46	.57	.58

Note: IA=image and attractions; LP=local people; SAR=sense of achievement/reward; P=programs; A=accessibility; HF=hotel facilities; SE=site environment; SP=specially arranged programs; IS=incentive traveler satisfaction; CR=construct reliability; AVE=average variance extracted; SD=standard deviation. Mean values are based on seven-point scales.

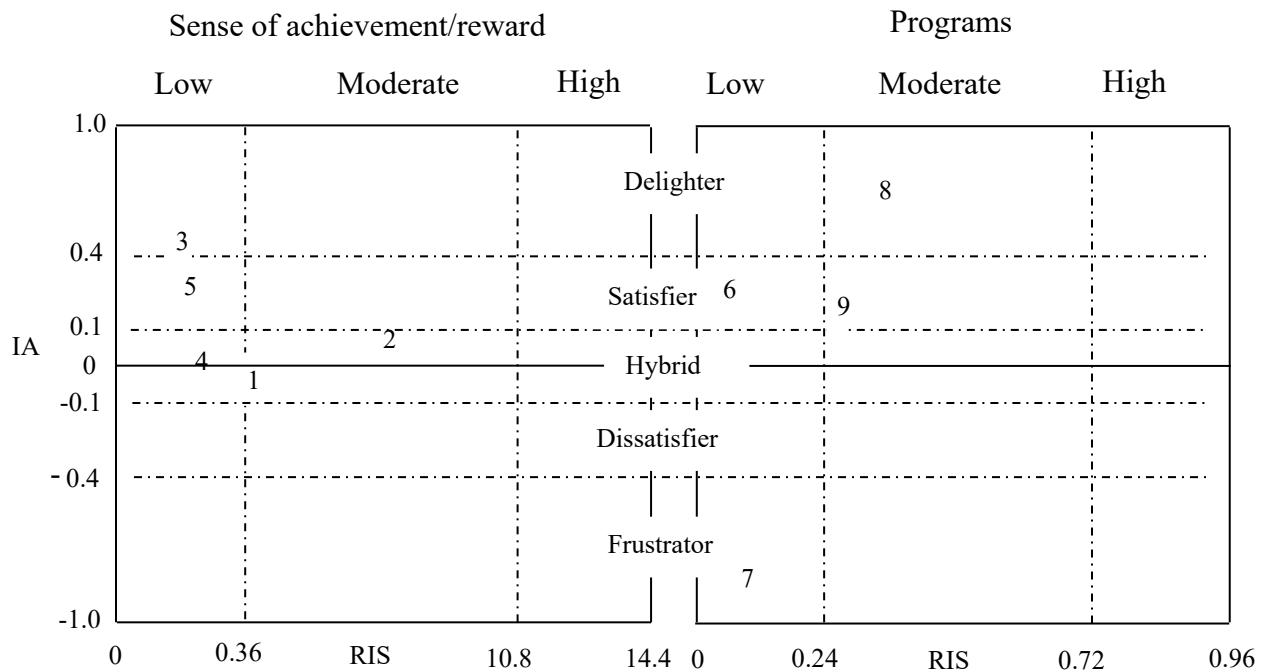
Table 3.
Results of IRPA and IAA

Incentive travel attributes	RI	PI	RIS	SGP	DGP	IA	AR
Image and attractions $R^2=0.38$							
1. A place one looks forward to visiting	.16*	-.36*	.52	.31	.69	-.38	Dissatisfier
2. Variety of attractions	.28*	-.04	.32	.88	.13	.75	Delighter
3. Local delicacies	.01	-.93*	.94	.01	.99	-.98	Frustrator
4. Shopping opportunities	.10	.49*	.59	.17	.83	-.66	Frustrator
5. Seems familiar but not quite so	.19*	-.27*	.46	.41	.59	-.17	Dissatisfier
6. Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	.10	.38*	.48	.21	.79	-.58	Frustrator
7. Festivals	.04	-.17*	.21	.19	.81	-.62	Frustrator
Local people $R^2=0.31$							
1. Warm attitude	.15*	-.52*	.67	.22	.78	-.55	Frustrator
2. Friendly	.01	.71*	.72	.01	.99	-.97	Frustrator
3. Considerate	.15*	.29*	.44	.34	.66	-.32	Dissatisfier
4. Service quality of local suppliers (hotel, ground operator, etc.)	.18*	-.42*	.60	.30	.70	-.40	Dissatisfier
Sense of achievement/reward $R^2=0.45$							
1. Reward for effort	.18*	.20*	.38	.47	.53	-.05	Hybrid
2. Sense of achievement	.38*	-.32*	.70	.54	.46	.09	Hybrid
3. Increase in social status	.15*	-.06	.21	.71	.29	.43	Delighter
4. Long-lasting, positive memories	.15*	-.14*	.29	.52	.48	.03	Hybrid
5. Peer recognition	.15*	-.08	.23	.65	.35	.30	Satisfier
Programs $R^2=0.21$							
1. Group tours mixed with individual traveling	.09*	-.05	.14	.64	.36	.29	Satisfier
2. Free time to visit other places	.02	-.16*	.18	.11	.89	-.78	Frustrator
3. Choice of different itineraries	.31*	.05	.36	.86	.14	.72	Delighter
4. Professional program planning	.16*	-.10	.26	.62	.38	.23	Satisfier
Accessibility $R^2=0.29$							
1. Comfort of transport	.13*	.07	.20	.65	.35	.30	Satisfier
2. Travel time	.10	.01	.11	.91	.09	.82	Delighter
3. Reliability of transport	.32*	-.19*	.51	.63	.37	.25	Satisfier
Hotel facilities $R^2=0.28$							
1. Guestroom facilities	.05	-.04	.09	.56	.44	.11	Satisfier
2. Information technology facilities (e.g., in-room wireless Internet)	.19*	-.15*	.34	.56	.44	.12	Satisfier
3. Event facilities	.12*	.06	.18	.67	.33	.33	Satisfier
4. Recreational facilities	.24*	-.06	.30	.80	.20	.60	Delighter
Site environment $R^2=0.21$							
1. Safety and security	.15*	.25*	.40	.38	.63	-.25	Dissatisfier
2. Reliable infrastructure	.05	.11	.16	.31	.69	-.38	Dissatisfier
3. Common language	.18*	-.19*	.37	.49	.51	-.03	Hybrid
Specially arranged programs $R^2=0.19$							
1. Access to exclusive places and people	.41*	-.01	.42	.98	.02	.95	Delighter
2. Full of special events (i.e., novel sporting activities)	.09	-.27*	.36	.25	.75	-.50	Frustrator

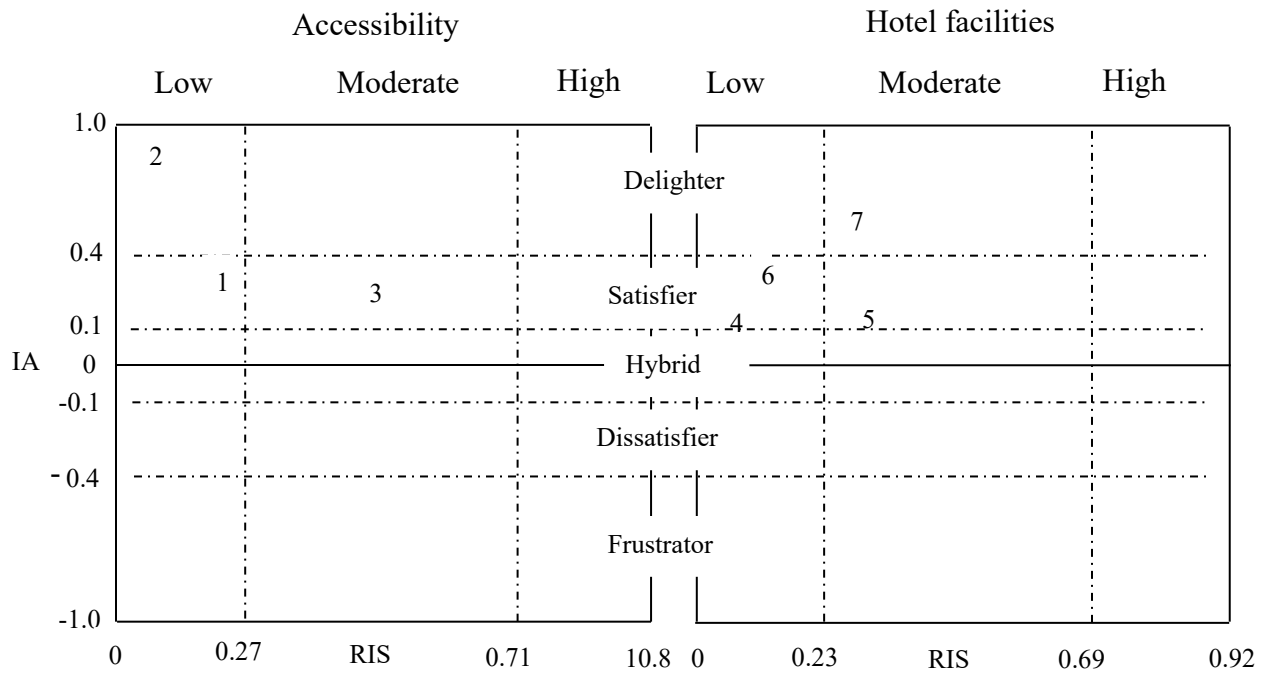
Note: RI=reward index, PI=penalty index, RIS=range of impact on satisfaction, SGP=satisfaction-generating potential, DGP=dissatisfaction-generating potential, IA=impact asymmetry, AR=asymmetry range. * $p < 0.05$



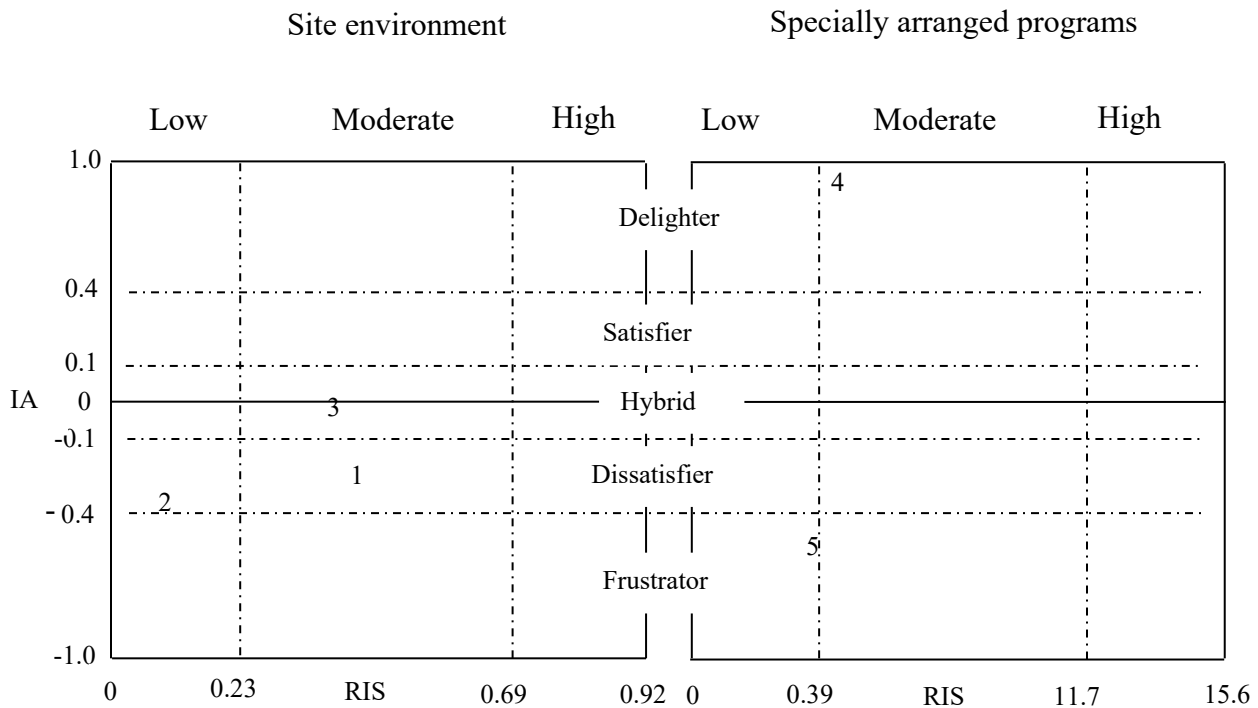
1. A place one looks forward to visiting. 2. Variety of attractions. 3. Local delicacies. 4. Shopping opportunities. 5. Seems familiar but not quite so 6. Nightlife and entertainment opportunities. 7. Festival. 8. Warm attitude. 9. Friendly. 10. Considerate. 11. Service quality of local suppliers.



1. Reward for effort. 2. Sense of achievement. 3. Increase in social status. 4. Long-lasting, positive memories. 5. Peer recognition. 6. Group tours mixed with individual traveling. 7. Free time to visit other places. 8. Choice of different itineraries. 9. Professional program planning.



1. Comfort of transport. 2. Travel time. 3. Reliability of transport. 4. Guestroom facilities.
5. Information technology facilities. 6. Event facilities. 7. Recreational facilities.



1. Safety and security. 2. Reliable infrastructure. 3. Common language. 4. Access to exclusive places and people.
5. Full of special events.

Fig 1. IRPA grid

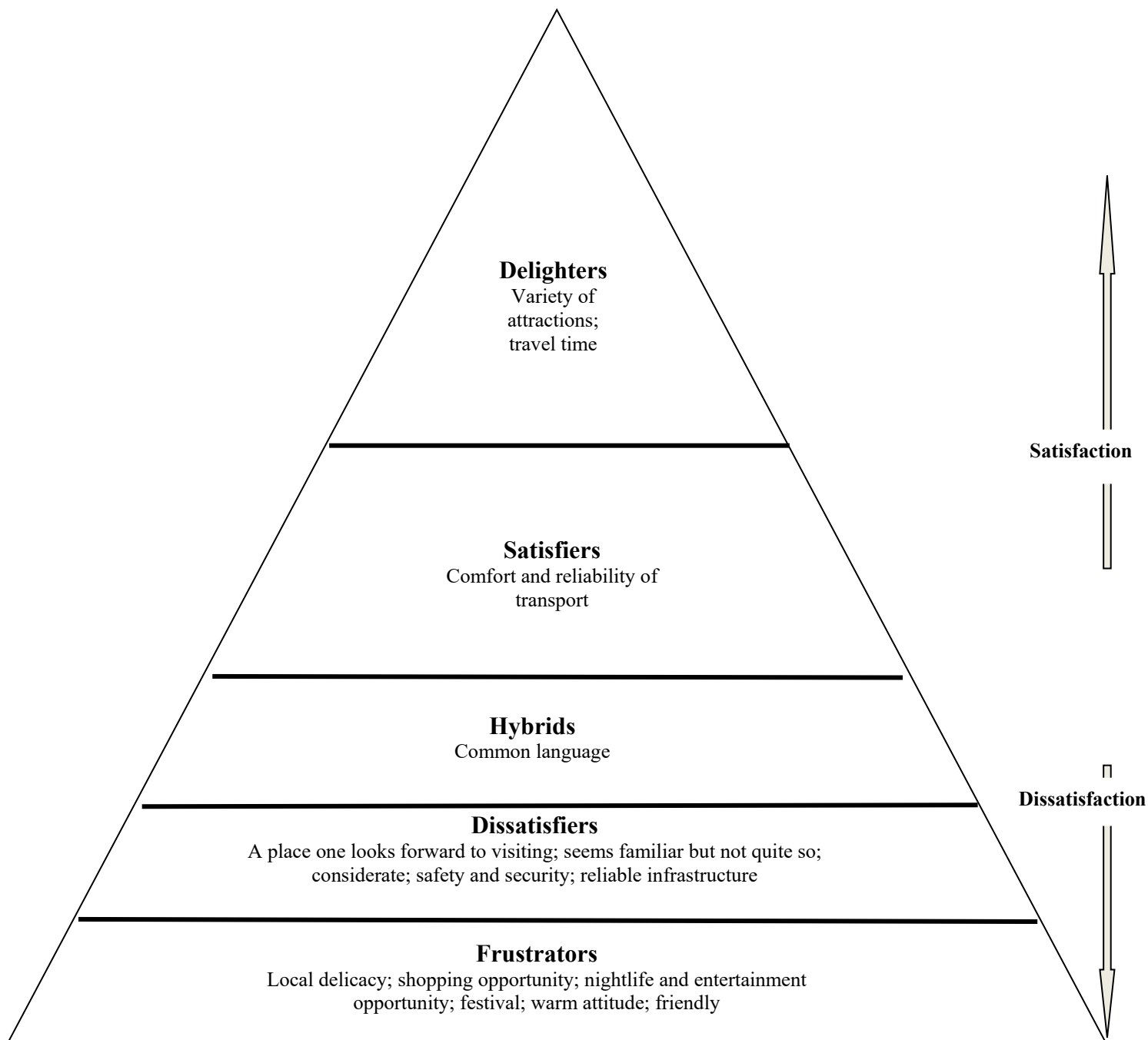


Fig 2. Prioritizing destination-specific quality attributes for incentive traveler satisfaction

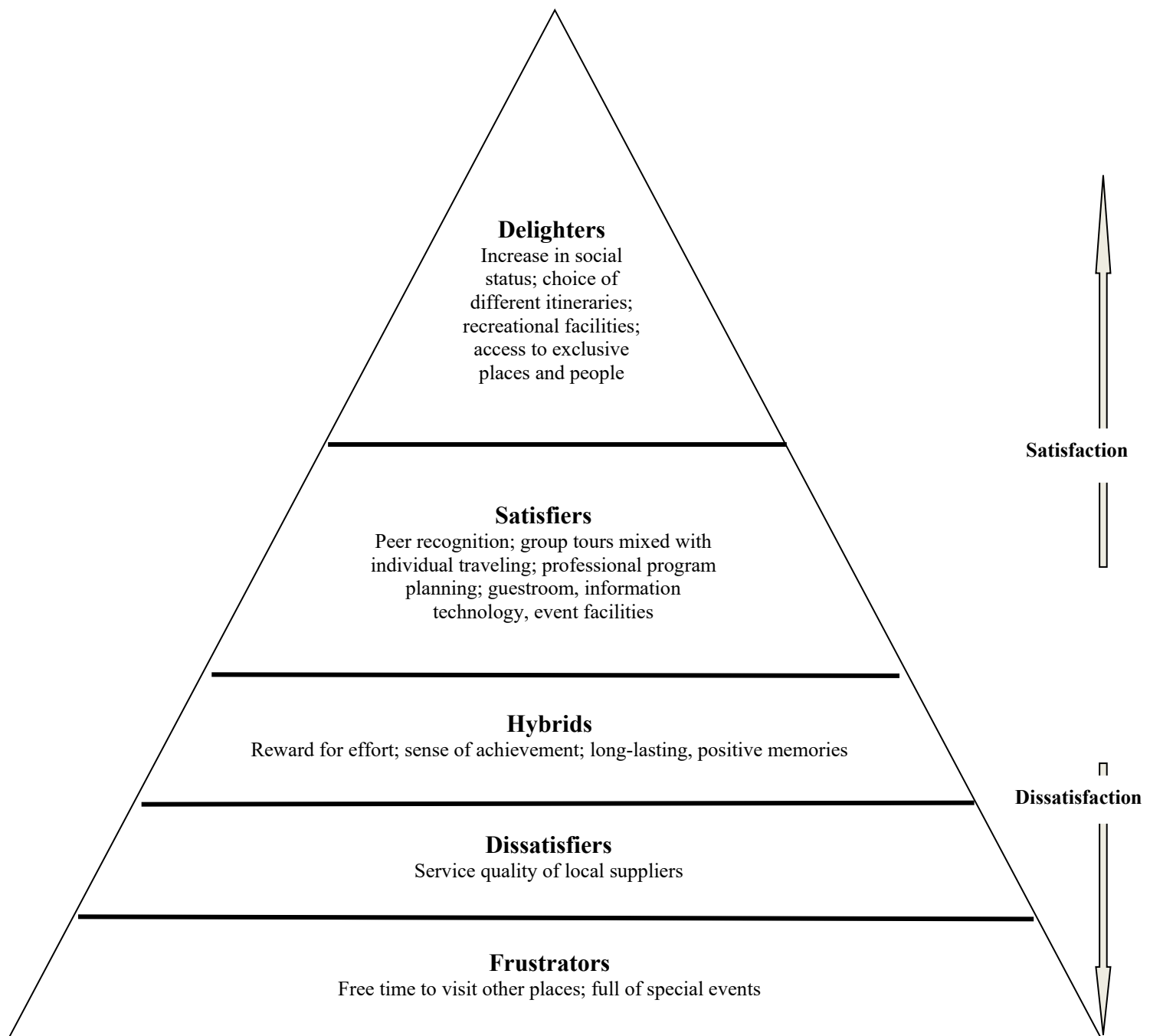


Fig 3. Prioritizing event-specific quality attributes for incentive traveler satisfaction