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Article

Assessing User Satisfaction with Art Tourism Services

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of assessing user satisfaction with art tourism services. It synthesizes major international approaches to measuring customer satisfaction and service quality and identifies the specific features of a multi-attribute assessment approach based on the gap between expectations and perceived performance in art tourism. Changes in the structure of demand for art tourism services are identified using indicators of museum activities in Uzbekistan for 2021-2025. A seven-stage assessment mechanism integrating gap analysis, the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), and Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) is proposed.

Keywords: Art Tourism, Museum, Service Quality, Visitor Satisfaction, SERVQUAL, HISTOQUAL, Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA), Satisfaction Index

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the integration of culture and tourism has become one of the most persistent trends in the global tourism market. Museums, art galleries, exhibitions, biennials, theatres, and festivals are increasingly not only places for preserving and promoting cultural heritage and contemporary art but also key resources determining the attractiveness of tourism destinations. Art tourism, which primarily involves engaging with artworks, artistic environments, and creative processes, is a product of this integration. Since the product offered to consumers in art tourism is not a tangible good but an experience comprising aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive impressions, assessing its quality is more complex than evaluating conventional services.[1][2]

The ongoing paradigm shift in museum operations further underscores the relevance of this issue. Whereas museums traditionally concentrated on collection preservation and curatorial activities, attention is now shifting toward visitors' memories, emotions, and experiences (Su & Teng). In this context, the competitiveness of cultural institutions is determined not merely by visitor numbers but by the quality of experiences, satisfaction, and the resulting intentions to revisit and recommend the institution. Research on art museums has shown that satisfaction is a major determinant of visitors' behavioral intentions (Han & Hyun).[3][4]

This issue is particularly significant for Uzbekistan, which possesses rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including internationally renowned collections such as those held by the I. Savitsky State Museum of Art in Nukus. Contemporary art biennials held in Bukhara and Tashkent in recent years indicate the emergence of new forms of art tourism. However, official statistics primarily describe museum activity through quantitative indicators, including numbers of visits, exhibitions, and guided tours.

Although these indicators reveal considerable changes in visitor composition and needs, no systematic assessment mechanism provides evidence of how satisfied visitors are with the services received.[5][6]

Consequently, there is a pressing need to establish the theoretical foundations of the main approaches to assessing satisfaction with art tourism services, identify their distinctive characteristics, and develop a mechanism for implementing them in Uzbekistan.[7]

Scientific approaches to assessing customer satisfaction initially focused on the correspondence between expectations and service outcomes. They subsequently evolved into comprehensive models encompassing functional service quality, cultural authenticity, emotional impressions, and behavioral intentions.[8]

One of the earliest theoretical foundations of satisfaction is the expectancy–disconfirmation model developed by Oliver. According to this model, satisfaction results from comparing pre-service expectations with actual outcomes. Schiebler et al. supported this theory in a meta-analysis of 150 studies, finding a positive association between expectations and satisfaction ($r = 0.29$), which was stronger for services. Applying the approach to tourism, Pizam and Milman found that the discrepancy between tourists' expectations and actual travel experiences explains overall destination satisfaction.[9]

Building on this idea, Parasuraman et al. introduced SERVQUAL, which measures service quality as the difference between expectations and perceptions across tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Cronin and Taylor proposed the alternative SERVPERF model based solely on perceived performance, whereas Parasuraman et al. argued that expectations should be retained as a comparison standard.[10]

Because criteria designed for general services did not fully capture the distinctive characteristics of cultural heritage sites, Frochot and Hughes adapted SERVQUAL and developed HISTOQUAL, encompassing responsiveness, tangibles, communication, consumables, and empathy. Frochot further demonstrated that perceptions of service quality differ according to visitors' motivations and benefits sought.[11]

Satisfaction with visits to cultural attractions depends not only on functional service quality but also on emotional impressions. Combining cognitive and affective approaches, de Rojas and Camarero found that perceived quality and emotions directly influence satisfaction, while visitors' mood moderates this relationship. Drawing on a study of 447 respondents at four heritage sites in Taiwan, Chen and Chen used structural equation modeling (SEM) to confirm the sequence "experience quality → perceived value → satisfaction → behavioral intentions." This provides a basis for examining satisfaction as a determinant of intentions to revisit and recommend.[12]

Thus, these approaches complement one another and establish the theoretical and methodological foundation for satisfaction assessment. However, existing studies have primarily focused on heritage attractions and history museums. Comprehensive assessment of the distinctive features of art tourism services, particularly the combined effects of functional, cultural-aesthetic, and emotional factors on visitor satisfaction in Uzbekistan, remains insufficiently explored.[13]

2. Materials and Method

The study draws on research published in international academic journals, Uzbekistan's regulatory framework for tourism and culture, and official museum statistics for 2021–2025. Systematic and comparative analysis, abstract-logical generalization, trend and structural analysis, and modeling were employed. Relative indicators were calculated from absolute figures to identify changes in service intensity and the composition of demand.[14]

3. Results

To substantiate an approach to satisfaction assessment, it is first necessary to examine the dynamics of demand for art tourism services, the composition of visitors, and the intensity of service use. The principal indicators of museum activities in Uzbekistan are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key indicators of museum activity in Uzbekistan (2021-2025)

Indicators	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Museum visits, thousand persons	5100.0	5673.8	5711.2	4782.6	5474.9
Number of guided tours	136,993	105,039	97,394	89,940	56,142
Guided tours per 1,000 visits	26.86	18.51	17.05	18.81	10.25
Exhibitions held in museums	1,081	1,301	783	840	1,707
Visits per exhibition, persons	4,718	4,361	7,294	5,694	3,207
Share of school and university student visits, %	48.3	59.5	35.1	21.9	20.5

According to Table 1, museum visits increased by 7.4% during 2021–2025, while the number of guided tours fell by 59.0%. Consequently, guided tours per 1,000 visits declined from 26.86 to 10.25, a 2.6-fold decrease. Meanwhile, the supply of museum exhibitions expanded more rapidly than attendance: the number of exhibitions rose by 57.9%, while visits per exhibition fell from 4,718 to 3,207. The composition of demand also changed substantially: visits by school and university students decreased by 54.4%, and their share declined from 48.3% to 20.5%, whereas visits by other categories (adult local residents and domestic and international tourists) increased by 65.0%.[15]

These changes raise an important managerial question. The decline in guided tours may indicate either a preference for independent exploration of exhibitions or unmet demand resulting from shortages of qualified guides, tours in foreign languages, or affordable prices. Official statistics cannot distinguish between these explanations. Moreover, unlike students who usually visit in organized groups and frequently require guided tours, independent adult visitors and tourists are motivated by aesthetic enjoyment, new experiences, recreation, and personal development, and therefore have diverse expectations. Thus, Uzbekistan's art tourism market is transitioning from an "organized educational" model to an "individual experiential" model, requiring an attribute-level approach that reveals how effectively museums and galleries meet the expectations of different visitor segments.[16]

Most studies of art tourism services assess satisfaction according to a common principle: visitors' expectations and their perceptions of actual performance are compared across individual service attributes. However, the size of the expectation–performance gap alone is insufficient for managerial decision-making: a large gap in an unimportant attribute may matter less than a small gap in a highly important attribute. Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA), proposed by Martilla and James, addresses this limitation by positioning each attribute's importance and actual performance in a single matrix and revealing where resources should be prioritized.[17]

Under this approach, each respondent i rates their pre-visit expectations (E_{ij}) and post-visit perceptions (P_{ij}) for service attribute j (for example, exhibition lighting, clarity of information about artworks, or staff courtesy). The attribute-level gap is calculated as follows:

$$G_j = (1/n) \cdot \Sigma_i (P_{ij} - E_{ij}), \quad (1)$$

where n is the number of respondents. A value of $G_j > 0$ indicates that performance exceeded expectations (positive disconfirmation), $G_j = 0$ indicates confirmation, and $G_j < 0$ indicates that expectations were not met. The gap for dimension k is the mean of its constituent attribute gaps, while the overall service quality index incorporates dimension-specific importance weights (w_k):

$$SQ = \Sigma_k \, w_k \cdot G_k, \quad \Sigma_k \, w_k = 1. \qquad (2)$$

The practical value of this approach lies in identifying precisely where problems arise, which cannot be established from performance scores alone. For example, guided tours at two museums may both receive 4.0 out of 5. If visitors to the first museum expected 4.8, the service fell short of expectations; if visitors to the second expected 3.5, performance exceeded expectations. The observed performance is identical, yet the managerial implications differ. Jain and Gupta empirically demonstrated this distinction by comparing the two scales. However, the approach must be adapted to the specific characteristics of art tourism.[18]

First, the art tourism product combines a core cultural offering—artworks, exhibitions, and curatorial concepts—with supporting services such as ticketing, wayfinding, cloakrooms, and catering. Analyzing negative online museum reviews, Su and Teng found that cultural interpretation and the immediate visiting experience are important alongside conventional SERVQUAL dimensions. Assessment attributes should therefore be adapted to individual venues. The usefulness of such adaptation has been demonstrated at Rogalin Palace in Poland (Nowacki) and the Silesian Museum (Kowalska & Ostręga).[19]

Second, the effects of attributes on satisfaction may be nonlinear. Applying the Kano model to online reviews of an immersive art museum, Shin et al. showed that some attributes enhance satisfaction while others primarily prevent dissatisfaction. Third, visitors are heterogeneous. Studying 1,091 visitors to the Picasso Museum and the Miró Foundation in Barcelona, Forgas-Coll et al., and examining art museums, Han and Hyun, demonstrated that involvement in art moderates relationships among service quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. This calls for separate assessments of students, independent local visitors, and international tourists in Uzbekistan.[20]

Fourth, attribute importance must be taken into account. Applying IPA at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Lin found that high-quality exhibitions were the main priority, while workshops, multimedia, retail, and catering services were relatively less important for certain visitors. Kline et al. incorporated expectations into IPA, proposing expectation–importance–performance analysis (EIPA). Nevertheless, methodological limitations remain, including the statistical reliability of gap scores, the timing of expectation measurement, and the selection of priority thresholds in the IPA matrix (Oh; Lai & Hitchcock). Caldwell, studying 11 major London museums, found that visitor evaluations are also influenced by factors absent from conventional surveys. Quantitative results should therefore be supplemented by qualitative evidence.[21]

The main characteristics, advantages, and limitations of tools based on expectation–perception gaps are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative characteristics of assessment tools based on the expectation–perception gap approach

Instrument	Measured indicator	Advantages	Limitations
SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988)	P − E gap, five dimensions	High diagnostic capability; extensively tested	Lengthy questionnaire; gap-score reliability concerns

SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1994)	Perceptions only (P)	Concise and psychometrically stable	Excludes expectations; limited diagnostic power
HISTOQUAL (Frochot & Hughes, 2000)	P and E; heritage-specific dimensions	Adapted to museums and heritage sites	Does not fully address contemporary art or digital services
IPA / EIPA (Martilla & James, 1977; Kline et al., 2016)	Importance (I), performance (P), expectations (E)	Translates findings into managerial priorities	Subjective selection of matrix crosshairs
Kano modeli (Shin et al., 2026)	Asymmetric effects of attributes	Identifies nonlinear relationships	Requires additional survey items or text analysis

Table 2 shows that each tool captures a particular aspect of satisfaction and that comprehensive assessment of art tourism services requires their integration. Accordingly, a seven-stage assessment mechanism is proposed that combines gap analysis, attribute importance ratings, and the calculation of an aggregate satisfaction index.[22]

In the first stage, the assessment objective (monitoring current service quality, evaluating a new exhibition, or identifying the effects of digital services on satisfaction) and object are defined, and a pool of service attributes is developed. Attributes are selected based on SERVQUAL and HISTOQUAL dimensions, expert interviews with curators, guides, and tour operators, and content analysis of visitors' online reviews. The proposed dimensions and indicators are organized in Table 3.

Table 3. Dimensions and indicators for assessing art tourism service quality

Dimension	Indicators (examples)	Theoretical foundation
1. Exhibitions and artistic content	Appeal of collections and artworks; coherence of curatorial concept; renewal of exhibitions; confidence in authenticity	Lin (2009); Shin et al. (2026)
2. Interpretation and communication	Clarity of labels and explanations; multilingual content; audio guides and digital information; quality of guided tours	Frochot & Hughes (2000); Su & Teng (2018)
3. Physical environment and atmosphere	Lighting, indoor climate, cleanliness; wayfinding and signs; peaceful environment for contemplation	Parasuraman et al. (1988); de Rojas & Camarero (2008)
4. Staff (responsiveness and empathy)	Courtesy; prompt responses; professional knowledge; consideration for visitors with different needs	Parasuraman et al. (1988); Frochot & Hughes (2000)
5. Convenience and accessibility	Online ticketing and opening hours; affordability; accessibility for people with disabilities; transport convenience	Kowalska & Ostręga (2020)

6. Supplementary services and digital experience	Museum shop and café; interactive and AR/VR solutions; social media engagement	Trunfio et al. (2022)

In the second stage, a questionnaire covering expectations (E), perceived performance (P), and importance (I) for each attribute is developed using a five- or seven-point Likert scale. Questions on overall satisfaction, revisit and recommendation intentions, visit motivation, involvement in art, and sociodemographic characteristics are also included. Measuring expectations before the visit (at entry) and perceptions afterwards (at exit) is the most reliable option, although retrospective measurement is possible when resources are limited.[23]

In the third stage, the sample is stratified into school and university students, independent local visitors, domestic tourists, and international tourists, with quotas determined by the visitor composition. For factor analysis, at least five to ten respondents should be recruited per questionnaire item, and surveys should be conducted during different periods of the year to account for seasonality.

In the fourth stage, internal consistency is examined using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), while factor structure is evaluated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Given that SERVQUAL factor structures differ across service sectors (Ladhari), the suitability of the dimensions for art tourism venues must be empirically established.

In the fifth stage, gaps for individual attributes and dimensions are calculated using Equations (1) and (2), and their statistical significance is examined using paired t-tests. Overall visitor satisfaction is estimated through the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), which takes account of attribute importance:

$$CSI = [\ \Sigma_j\ (I_j \cdot P_j)\ /\ (Y \cdot \Sigma_j\ I_j)\ ] \cdot 100\%, \quad (3)$$

where I_j and P_j are the mean importance and performance ratings for attribute j, respectively, and Y is the maximum scale value. In practical interpretation, CSI values of 81–100% are considered "very satisfactory," 66–80.99% "satisfactory," 51–65.99% "moderate," 35–50.99% "unsatisfactory," and below 35% "very unsatisfactory." Attributes are then plotted in a four-quadrant IPA matrix based on their mean importance and performance ratings (Figure 1).

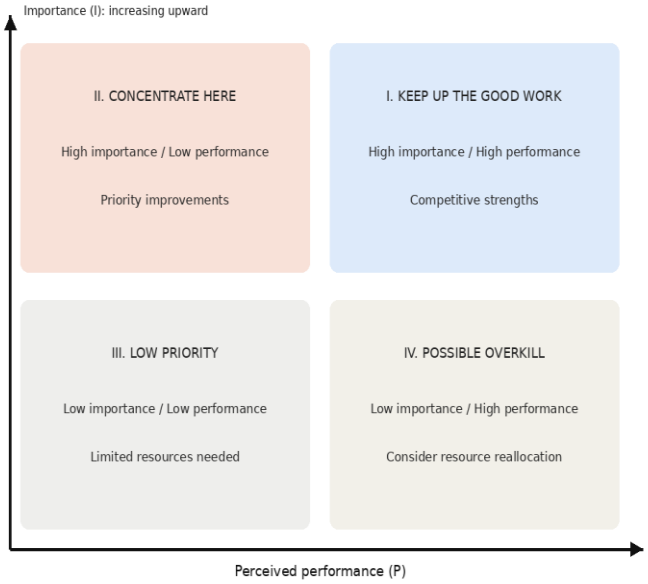


Figure 1. Classification of art tourism service attributes in the importance–performance (IPA) matrix

Attributes located in Quadrant II (high importance, low performance) that also have negative gaps constitute a "critical zone" and should be prioritized for improvement. Given the sharp decline in guided-tour intensity (Table 1), interpretation and communication attributes in Uzbek museums—including multilingual explanations, audio guides, and guided tours—may fall into this zone. Trunfio et al., studying 739 visitors to the Ara Pacis Museum in Rome, found that VR and AR technologies positively affect visitor experience and satisfaction, suggesting opportunities to expand interpretive services through digital tools.

In the sixth stage, the effects of quality dimensions on overall satisfaction and loyalty (revisiting and recommending) are evaluated using multiple regression or structural equation modeling (SEM). The model incorporates the "quality → value → satisfaction → intentions" sequence proposed by Chen and Chen and the emotional factors identified by de Rojas and Camarero; differences between segments are tested using multi-group analysis (Forgas-Coll et al.).

In the seventh stage, an action plan is developed for each quadrant: resources are concentrated on Quadrant II attributes, while excess resources allocated to Quadrant IV are redistributed. The assessment is repeated at least annually, and findings are integrated into continuous improvement through the plan–do–check–act (PDCA) cycle. The stages and outputs of the mechanism are summarized in Table 4.[24]

Table 4. Mechanism for assessing satisfaction with art tourism services

Stage	Content	Tools and methods	Output
I. Attribute pool	Define objectives and venue; compile attributes	Literature review, expert interviews, online review analysis	Set of dimensions and indicators
II. Measurement instrument	Design questionnaire covering E, P and I	Five-/seven-point Likert scale; trilingual survey	Pilot-tested questionnaire
III. Data collection	Stratified survey across visitor segments	Entry/exit survey; online survey	Dataset
IV. Psychometric validation	Assess reliability and validity	Cronbach's α, EFA, CFA	Validated dimensional structure
V. Gap, CSI and IPA	Calculate gaps, satisfaction index and priorities	Equations (1)–(3), t-test, IPA matrix	Critical-zone attributes
VI. Modeling	Identify determinants of satisfaction and loyalty	Regression, SEM, multi-group analysis	Effect coefficients
VII. Management and monitoring	Action plan and repeated assessment	PDCA cycle; annual report	Continuous service quality improvement

The practical significance of the proposed mechanism is that it enables museum and gallery managers to make decisions based on qualitative performance measures alongside quantitative statistics, such as visits and guided tours. A standardized methodology would also make it possible to benchmark different museums and develop regional rankings of art tourism service quality.[25]

4. Conclusion

The research findings demonstrate the need for an integrated approach to assessing user satisfaction with art tourism services. Comparative analysis of the literature indicates that satisfaction emerges from the interaction of functional service quality, initial

expectations, perceived performance, and emotional experiences. The distinctive nature of art tourism requires consideration of cultural-aesthetic experiences and emotional factors alongside conventional service quality criteria.

The study proposes a multi-attribute approach based on the discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance as a methodological foundation for assessing satisfaction with art tourism services. A six-dimensional assessment framework was developed, covering exhibitions and artistic content; interpretation and communication; physical environment and atmosphere; staff performance; convenience and accessibility; and supplementary services and digital experiences. In addition, a seven-stage assessment mechanism was formulated to integrate attribute-level gap analysis, calculation of the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), and Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA).

Based on these findings, museums and art galleries in Uzbekistan are advised to assess visitor satisfaction regularly using a common methodology, analyze results by visitor segment, and translate findings into service-improvement decisions. Given the decline in guided-tour intensity, particular attention should be paid to multilingual exhibition descriptions, audio guides, QR-code information systems, and interactive digital solutions. Systematic monitoring of online reviews and visitor feedback, combined with conventional survey findings, can further improve the identification and correction of service quality deficiencies.

Implementing and empirically testing this approach would help establish priorities for service improvement in museums and galleries, increase the efficiency of resource use, and provide an evidence-based foundation for managerial decisions aimed at improving visitor satisfaction.

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