

COMPENSATORY SATISFACTION: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF AVOIDING DISAPPOINTMENT AND PRODUCING SATISFACTION IN BIRDING

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ABSTRACT

Using an ethnographic approach, the authors use birding to provide an exploratory account of compensatory satisfaction, that is avoiding disappointment when expectations are disconfirmed by seeking alternatives to what one hoped or expected. The findings of this study will provide ideas that could be used to analyze compensatory satisfaction in other settings. Implications for both theory and marketing practice are given.

INTRODUCTION: AN INSTANCE OF COMPENSATORY SATISFACTION

Seeking satisfaction and enjoyment is a fundamental motivation in many leisure/recreational activities. Choices, such as a vacation designation, are made in anticipation of what the choice will bring. Markula (1997) reports on a holiday, at the end of which she recalled: "What a disappointing trip! Why did I ever come to Tahiti?" In discussing the selection of Tahiti, she said: "I had my eyes set on Tahiti - someplace different - an exotic, peripheral, pleasure paradise. And that was what I expected to see". By different, she anticipated a culture different from the industrialized Western world. She found a commercialized culture and was profoundly dissatisfied.

Markula's experience is interpretable in terms of the familiar disconfirmation paradigm. The outcomes of her choice were below expectations, dissatisfaction followed. Her account of visiting Tahiti also touches on another process different from disconfirmation. The second process, seeking compensatory satisfaction, involves avoiding disappointment when expectations are disconfirmed by actively seeking alternatives to

what one hoped or expected. Markula sought and experienced some compensatory satisfaction. After disappointing initial experiences, on the third day of the trip, she and her husband opted for an organized inland tour of the island which was she wrote was successful as it gave "a spectacular view of Tahiti and adjacent islands" and a look at village life.

The disconfirmation paradigm has received much attention, however the possibility of compensatory satisfaction has not been explicitly treated in the literature. Our purpose is to present the concept of compensatory satisfaction and how consumers who find that their primary objectives are not being obtained still obtain satisfaction. The theme of our article is that in leisure pursuits, when primary objectives are blocked, satisfaction is sought and experienced by engaging in substitute activities. In the context of birding, we analyze experiencing compensatory satisfaction.

LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND

Compensatory satisfaction involves a shift in consumer attention from service attributes that are of most value prior to the experience to other attributes as the experience unfolds. Accordingly, we present some literature that suggests the possibility of shifts in expectations and evaluative criteria over the purchase and consumption process into alternative activities to achieve satisfaction.

The familiar disconfirmation literature and research on consumer satisfaction has consistently held that satisfaction results when post-purchase perceptions of service performance meet or exceed expectations, pre-purchase estimates of service performance. Post purchase performance short of expectations leads to dissatisfaction (Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky 1996). The

disconfirmation model is the dominant theoretical framework in the consumer satisfaction literature that has been supported by numerous studies (Oliver 1980, 1996).

Much of the disconfirmation literature assumes that the importance of service attributes to the consumer remains constant from pre to post purchase and that consumers use the same set of attributes in both forming prepurchase expectations and comparing expectations to post purchase performance. In some studies the stability of attribute importance and expectations has been questioned. Cote, Foxman and Cutler (1989) have noted three reasons that the expectations of consumers may change (from pre- to post-measurements). Consumer needs change over time. Purchase situation factors such as tradeoffs may result in evaluative criteria changing. Finally, individual differences (i.e. variety seeking) may cause changes in criteria (for selected consumers). Gardial et al (1994) documented many similarities and some differences in pre- and post-purchase product evaluation experiences for automobiles and shoes. In these general situations (where consumers' recall was measured), the pre- and post-purchase expectations shifted. Clow, Kurtz and Ozment (1998) reported on the measurement of consumer expectations for a service. Their data supported the hypotheses that consumers' expectations for restaurant service were stable over time (17 of 19 items rated did not change). However, two items' ratings did change.

Taylor and Burns (1999) have presented a vocabulary to describe changes in pre- and post-purchase evaluative criterion. Their work defined three types of evaluative criteria: (1) enduring criteria-features of the product experience that appeared in both pre- and post-purchase product judgments; (2) receding criteria-features of the product experience that appeared in the pre-purchase product judgments, but not in the post-purchase product judgments; and (3) emerging criteria-features of the product experience that appear in the post-purchase judgments but not in the pre-purchase product judgments. The authors documented that the majority of the subjects had a shift in the criteria in pre- and post-purchase

measurements (i.e. new criteria emerged) and that the importance ratings changed. Using a technological purchase as the focus of a study, Fournier and Mick (1999) documented the emergence of new criteria for evaluation during the consumer experience (suggesting the instability of expectations). Fournier and Mick (1999) suggested the need for a holistic context-dependent and dynamic process of satisfaction. We feel that the concept of compensatory satisfaction fulfills at least part of that quest.

We first describe the fieldwork that provides data for this article. Second, since expectations play a key role in satisfaction, we treat how expectations are generated in birding. Third, an account is provided of satisfaction seeking in a birding experience where primary goals are achieved. Next, we cover two ways that compensatory satisfaction is achieved. Finally, this article ends with discussions of contributions to theory, practice and conclusions.

METHOD

Our general interest was in learning how birders experience satisfaction/dissatisfaction, not to test hypothesis drawn from a well-established literature stream. Very little is known about consumption experience and processes involving satisfaction in birding. Thus an inductive, ethnographic method, primarily participant observation was used (Hudson and Ozanne 1988, Hunt 1991, Prus, 1996). Similar methods have been employed in recent studies of consumption experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; Price, Arnould and Tierney 1995; Sherry 1990; Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993), satisfaction (Swan and Trawick 1999) and satisfaction with birding (Swan and Trawick 1997). After observing birding activities, it became clear that the process we identify as compensatory satisfaction occurs in birding and our attention shifted to that topic.

More specifically, one of the authors has been actively birding ("birdwatching" is a term used by the general public) for over 30 years and systematic field work was initiated and continued over several years as he began to take field notes and keep newsletters/ announcements and other

documentary material from birding organizations. The field notes were transcribed and entered in a word processing system. Most of the field notes were taken while on field trips. During field trips birders go individually or with others to an area in order to observe and identify birds. His field trips with others include a key informant, trips with the Metro Birding Association, the State Birding Society and a trip to Venezuela by a commercial tour operator.

On birding field trips it is common for a number of participants to make a list of the birds identified and on many occasions note taking attracted little attention. If anyone asked or seemed to notice that my note taking was more extensive than usual, I explained or reminded people who knew me, that I am a college professor, people in my field study recreational activities and that I hoped to write articles on birding. No one objected or seemed uncomfortable. In fact some expressed interest or were otherwise supportive of my efforts. I did not observe differences in the other participants' behavior between occasions when I did or did not take notes. The only exceptions are that some times when I took notes during and/or at the end of the trip people would ask questions such as: how many birds have we seen? What birds did we see? While looking at a bird, sometimes I was asked: have we seen that bird before? Also on a trip to Venezuela, acting on the requests of the other participants I wrote a description of the trip. After a little over two years of fieldwork, compensatory satisfaction emerged as a topic. Our analysis of field notes focused on that topic. Most names are pseudonyms.

FINDINGS: EXPERIENCING COMPENSATORY SATISFACTION IN BIRDING

Compensatory satisfaction, finding alternative sources of satisfaction when expectations are disconfirmed, hinges on the nature of expectations in birding and our discussion of the findings starts with that topic. We classify satisfaction efforts in terms of the extent to which the actions taken represent means of achieving the primary or

secondary goals/expectations of a field trip. Primary actions involve efforts to find and view birds and constitute satisfaction seeking. Compensatory satisfaction includes all activities directed towards secondary goals. We discuss compensatory satisfaction in terms of two different sets of activities. One category of activities consists of striving for compensatory satisfaction by shifting attention from birds to other elements in the natural environment. Compensatory satisfaction seeking by sociability is the second set of secondary actions.

Expectations for Birding Field Trips

The literature on consumer satisfaction has consistently held that satisfaction results when perceptions of service performance meet or exceed expectations (Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky 1996). In turn, expectations have two basic components, the likelihood of occurrence of outcomes and the post consumption evaluation of the outcomes that occur. Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996) suggest that to achieve a clear understanding of expectations, separate terms should be used for each expectations component. We follow their basic recommendation and use **predictive expectations** to refer to the likelihood or probability that certain outcomes/benefits will be realized. **Desires** are evaluations of the degree to which outcomes result in the attainment of a person's values and can occur at levels ranging from the abstract, such as the desire to be protected; intermediate, a safe product; or concrete, antilock brakes in a car (example from Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996). We treat desires in birding at the concrete level of seeing or hearing birds while on a field trip. Predictive expectations are birders subjective estimate of the probability of seeing specific bird(s) on a field trip and/or that the trip will result in "good birding".

Predictive expectations for organized field trips are rooted in a combination of the birder's past experience and birds mentioned in the trip announcement. The birder's past experience, both birding in general and experience, if any, with the location of the trip and season of the year, is a

source of predictive expectations. A second source is the common practice of mentioning birds that may be seen in the announcement of an upcoming field trip. Both past experience and announcement are contained in Oliver Good's birding class as he talks of a possible class field trip: "Late Feb, (if we go to) Lake Farms, see Osprey Spring Migration - (with) luck, catch early one (on the) 3rd Saturday (of February).

Oliver's experience is the source of his predictive expectations that he conveys to the class: "see Osprey Spring Migration...". He has birded many areas a number of times, recalls bird sightings and often tells the class about them:

"(My) favorite spring memory (is) Babies Restaurant, (just after a) light rain at 7:00 am, 53 species in (the) parking lot. It was simply remarkable! The Botanical Gardens after light rain, just incredible".

Oliver has a great deal of additional knowledge bearing on his expectations including such factors as the seasonal movement of migratory birds, what birds might be seen where, and so on.

The announcement per se is a source of expectations for members of the class. The expert is telling us that we may see Ospreys in spring migration.

An important factor in expectations for a birding field trip is unpredictability and variability in birding. Oliver's phrase "with luck..." helps communicate that property. The field trip experience did not match an announcement in which Oliver Good says: "We (are) in April, Migration is happening like rain down South. (We will go to the) Okamulgee National Forrest... (It has) Red Cockaded Woodpeckers, the largest population ...in Alabama ... and the third largest on that species (it is an endangered species)." Oliver went on to name other birds...lots of Prairie Warblers, ... will be Prothonotary Warblers, Common Yellow Throat, ...last year had five Mississippi Kites." Of the birds mentioned only Prairie Warblers and Common Yellow Throat are seen. Not many birds are seen and the trip is rained out about 3:00 PM.

SATISFACTION SEEKING: ACHIEVING PRIMARY GOALS

What birders most often **desire** during a field trip is to see a variety of birds and/or one or more unusual birds. Primary satisfaction seeking actions include a number of activities all undertaken to place the birder at the right place at the right time. A number of primary satisfaction seeing actions occur during an outing at Vincent Wildlife Refuge, less than 100 miles from our home city. A key action is selecting Vincent, a popular birding area with a variety of different habitats including wetlands, bottom land hardwoods, pine uplands, grass lands, agricultural fields, seasonal mud flats, ponds and a major river. The diversity of habitats attracts, on some occasions, a variety of birds. Winter is best for ducks, geese and other winter migrants. On a December day trip one of us goes to Vincent in the morning, parks at a likely spot and walks along with binoculars and telescope looking and listening for birds and happens to meet two birders from that area. We all enjoy quite a variety of 30 species including a goose that is uncommon. The two Vincent birders are quite pleased.

The trip to Vincent involves little, if any, compensatory satisfaction seeking actions as most of the time primary objectives are being achieved. However, when primary objectives are elusive, "good birds" are not being seen, instances of compensatory satisfaction actions emerge. In the following accounts we first treat secondary actions to gain compensatory satisfaction and second cover tertiary activities.

COMPENSATORY SATISFACTION BY SECONDARY ACTIVITIES-SWITCHING FOCUS: SHIFTING ATTENTION FROM BIRDS TO OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Many birders have interests in nature beyond just birds. A number of Metro Birding Association members are quite interested in wildflowers, are members of the Wildflower Society and are able to readily identify many of the wildflowers

encountered on a birding trip. Butterflies are another item of interest to some birders. While out birding if the primary objective of seeing or hearing birds is not being achieved, compensatory satisfaction seeking may occur as attention switches from birds to another element of the natural environment that is present.

It's late summer, three birders and I are out on a scouting mission to evaluate some specific areas for possible inclusion in an early fall trip. We are walking along a road during a period when no birds are being seen or heard. Ellen: "Look at that bright orange butterfly on the dark green bush directly in front of me on the other side of the ditch". She is looking through her binoculars. Others look. Ellen: "I wonder what it is". She unfolds and looks at a plastic covered identification guide to common butterflies. "Orange wings with black along the edge." Someone else says: "Gulf Flittarie.." Ellen looks at the butterfly again; "yes that's it".

Talk turns to the bright colors of the butterfly and enjoyment in seeing it. Compensatory satisfaction by shifting attention from birds to other elements in the natural environment has occurred.

**COMPENSATORY SATISFACTION BY
TERTIARY ACTIVITIES:
COMPANIONSHIP-FINDING
SATISFACTION IN AN OTHERWISE
DISAPPOINTING EXPERIENCE**

Friday is a rainy night in Alabama and I wonder about our field trip for tomorrow. I am the Field Trip Chairperson for the Metro Birding Association. Our newsletter announcement of the outing reads: "**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 27 - HAWK WATCH - ROCK MOUNTAIN - Watching Migrating Hawks wheeling and gliding past on rising currents of air is one of the great birding experiences. Join us as we try our luck at Hawk Watching. 7:00 AM - Meet at Mc's For Pancakes**". We have permission to drive up a three-mile long private road to the top of a ridge for our watch. Late in the morning, after the sun has heated the earth, migrating hawks use

unseen rivers of warm air flowing up a ridge as their highway. While at Mc's a light rain, which will stop migration, starts to fall. Just as we leave Mc's for Rock Mountain, the morning clears, a beautiful bit of blue sky to the North east - just what we need.

Arriving at Rock Mountain about 8:45 a.m. we start looking for birds near the beginning of the road to the top. Sam Abbott: "We should be at the top about 11:30" (to allow time for the air to heat up and the hawks to come). A bit of light rain falls, then stops. About 10:30 a small flock of Broadwing Hawks soars right over us - excitement! A birder exclaims: "That's like Columbus discovering America," smiles and laughter.

I hear: "The Hawks are moving, let's get to the top". Eager birders hop in their cars, drive to the ridge top, park and begin walking to the overlook. Just then a light rain begins to fall, people seek shelter in their cars. Two birders are with me. We use the back trunk lid of my Ford Explorer as a rain shield and have drinks, cheese and crackers.

The rain varies from moderate to hard and time passes. I take an umbrella and walk down the slope a bit past a big highway trailer, with a "Recycling Pays" banner. It is for construction work on a TV tower. In the almost empty trailer are a half dozen birders sitting in lawn chairs intended for the now rained out hawk watch, eating, talking, joking and laughing. Not wanting to walk back and bring a lawn chair, I find a heavy cardboard box and sit on it. In a short while the box begins to slowly mash down. That brings laughter.

About noon the rain is still falling. The trailer crowd begins to leave. However, people speak of having a good time and ask that I schedule another trip to Rock Mountain.

The rained out Hawk Watch involved tertiary activities to gain compensatory satisfaction, birders finding alternative sources of satisfaction as expectations are disconfirmed. Birders activities of socializing by eating, sharing stories of birding experiences and other topics of conservation in the trailer are alternative means of enjoying the field trip. Such actions were ways to enjoy passing time that were removed from the

primary desires of the field trip.

EVIDENCE THAT SEEING BIRDS IS THE PRIMARY GOAL

The concepts of satisfaction seeking, activities to achieve primary goals, and compensatory satisfaction, actions to realize secondary goals are premised on the assumption that to birders seeing/hearing birds is the primary goal while other sources of enjoyment are secondary. Evidence is presented in this section of the primary goals of seeing/hearing birds.

During some three years of serving as the field trip committee chairperson of the Metro Birding Association the set of field trips for the upcoming birding season (September to April) were planned in consultation with other birders. The major consideration for each trip was the possibility of seeing birds. The major statewide birding group, The Southern State Ornithological Association has all of its three-day meetings at top birding locations across the state. While out with the Metro Birding Association it is common to be with a group of 15-20 people walking slowly along looking and listening for birds. While no birds are in view, some people are talking quietly to each other. Talk is a form of compensatory satisfaction. An announcement is heard: "Parula, water oak directly in front, right hand side, on the first large branch with moss..". All prior conversation stops, people raise their binoculars trying to see the Parula warbler. In his account of birders as a community of participants, Cocker (2001) presents an extended analysis that provides strong evidence that to birders finding and identifying birds is the essential activity of birding.

DISCUSSION

Contributions to Understanding of Satisfaction Processes

Examining satisfaction from the perspective of those participating in birding yields findings that confirm, extend and broaden existing theory.

During a birding field trip when expectations for seeing a number of "good" birds are confirmed or positively disconfirmed, the familiar disconfirmation paradigm is supported. Satisfaction with birding at Vincent Wildlife refuge is a case in point.

Current views of satisfaction/dissatisfaction beyond the disconfirmation paradigm also finds support, especially the phenomenological inquiry of Fournier and Mick (1999) and their multi-model account of ownership experiences with technological products. Those investigators find evidence of satisfaction as an active, dynamic process. Our study extends their model to birding. Fournier and Mick (1999) find that satisfaction is a dynamic, contingent process. Consumers find unexpected uses and benefits in using technologic products as the unpredictable matter of daily living unfolds. Birding is also unpredictable and contingent as birders adjust their action in seeking satisfaction as a field trip occurs. A very common contingent means of seeking satisfaction is to go to a new location during a field trip if the current location lacks "good birds" or birders become satiated with the birds at hand.

Fournier and Mick (1999) point to a social dimension of satisfaction in which the satisfaction of relevant others contribute to the individuals satisfaction and reframes satisfaction from a secluded mental calculation of expectations and outcomes to one of collective interaction among all persons affected by the product. The social dimension of compensatory satisfaction is illustrated by the rained out Hawk-watch at Rock Mountain trip with birders enjoying socializing with each other in the trailer. Collective interaction is making satisfaction possible.

To our knowledge avoiding dissatisfaction when expectation are not confirmed by the process of compensatory satisfaction is a new contribution to understanding satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The disconfirmation paradigm ties consumers to pre experience goals and expectations. Our findings suggest a model as follows. When expectations are negatively disconfirmed consumers actively seek other, second, sources of satisfaction that are possible given the contingencies of the immediate situation and consumer interests. Due to the wide

interests in nature that many birders have a common mode of short-term compensatory satisfaction when "good birds" are not currently available is switching focus from birds to other elements of the natural environment including butterflies or flowers if they are available.

Socialization as a form of compensatory satisfaction suggests dynamic, continuous, shifting of activities in satisfaction seeking. Given the immediate situation, socialization can be a "background" activity or the major activity of birders. As a background activity on field trips it is common for people to talk quietly to each other while no birds are in view. During lunch breaks, talk becomes a major activity as it was during the rained out hawk watch.

Managerial Implications

The results of our study have important implications for service failure and recovery. Service failure includes instances in which service performance fails to meet an important consumer expectation. In some instances the service provider enacts service recovery, an effort to repair the service failure. Service failure has received much attention in the literature with the general finding that service recovery reduces dissatisfaction and may even result in satisfaction (Maxham 2001, Sarel and Marmorstein 1999, Michel 2001, Spreng, Harrell and Mackoy 1995, Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar 1998, McCollough, Berry and Yadav 2000, Smith, Bolton and Wagner 1999, Mattila 2001).

The literature has concentrated primarily on the role of the service provider as the party taking action to repair the service failure. The consumer's role had been limited to voicing a concern to the service provider. A primary contribution of this article to the service failure/repair literature is in two parts. First, we offer qualitative evidence that in some situations customers act to repair service failures. *Service repair is customer, not provider driven*. Second, this article describes a process of compensatory satisfaction, which is a way that consumers construct service recovery following service failure. Compensatory satisfaction occurs when primary objectives are blocked, a service

failure. Satisfaction is sought and experienced by engaging in substitute activities.

If customer driven service repair is thought possible for a type of service, several important managerial implications are suggested. A first task is to study customer behavior and the service process to determine if customer service repair occurs or is possible. Some service failures will not be subject to customer accomplished repair. An example is no hotel room available for a customer with a reservation. Provider enacted repair is necessary.

If customer driven service repair occurs or is likely the next managerial task is to discover the service specific activities that customers can accomplish to enact repair. With respect to customer goals two categories of service repair are possible. Some service problems can be solved by customers to achieve their primary desires. However, customers may lack the knowledge to do so unless the service provider gives the customer necessary information. As an example, one of us rents a condo on the beach and was provided with a flyer with instructions for making some appliances work. The flyer gives step by step instructions for "fixing" the phone (check that the phone line is plugged into the wall jack). A managerial implication is that do it yourself service repair may be facilitated by discovery of customer knowledge and behavior.

Another set of service problems are not possible to solve in a way that the customer's primary goals are reached. Birding is but one of a number of services that are subject to contingencies beyond the control of customer or provider. A fishing trip can result in poor fishing, the home town team loses the big game, rain stops golfing during a golf resort weekend and so on. If the provider knows of or can determine the customer's secondary goals, then compensatory satisfaction may be possible. Actions may be open to the provider that will assist customers in customer driven service repair. As a case in point, I experience provider encouraged sociability among participants at the Wyoming Nature Camp. On the arrival evening, each participant is paired with someone new, learns about the new person and introduces the "partner" to the rest of the

group.

In conclusion, the concept of compensatory satisfaction has been introduced, defined and developed using an ethnography study of birding trips. Compensatory satisfaction appears when the expectations of the consumer change during the consumption process. In other words, the pre-purchase evaluative criteria are different from the post-purchase evaluative criteria. In the case of birding, the inability to obtain the sought pre-purchase criteria (of seeing a given bird) prompted a shift to secondary criteria (such as butterfly watching) or to new criteria for the post-purchase evaluation. Since new criteria may be used in post-purchase evaluation, the description, exploration and hopefully at some future time-prediction of those criteria are an important part of the understanding of the customer (dis)satisfaction experience.

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