Consumer Behavior Method From The Conception Of The Political Economy

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ABSTRACT:

The conceptualization of political economy as a science and its approach to consumer behavior in the commercial management of the Sucre-San Vicente tourist destination. Through the explanatory method, a search is made of studies carried out from the science of political economy and its contribution to consumer behavior. The hermeneutic method is used as a scientific foundation for the dimensions of Cognitive, Methodological, Ideological and Practical functions. The satisfaction matrix through the applicability of the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model to determine the perceptions and expectations by calculating the index and the level of satisfaction of the consumers.

INTRODUCTION

The changes that took place in the second half of the 20th century are materially supported by the accelerated development of the productive forces which was caused by the technological revolution. The dialectic between productive forces and relations of production has created a series of new phenomena like the purely structural dimension of the rapid growth of the tertiary sector (service sector) that has been gaining greater weight in national economies and today constitute a sector of marked dynamism in almost all countries, especially tourism, and the Republic of Ecuador is no exception to this reality.

Scientists such as (Karl Marx, 1896) , (Friedrich Engels, 1885) among other manuscripts published from 1959 onwards, argue in their works that economic theory assumes that the objective pursued by consumption units, families or consumers, is to increase their welfare as much as possible through the consumption of goods and services: the higher their consumption, the higher the degree of satisfaction and welfare of citizens in any society. It is important to emphasize that there is a limit to consumption that is conceived by the money available to buy in the market, by the income of consumers among other determining factors of the environment where the consumer is established. Taking into account this restriction, the rational consumer will use his budget in such a way that, given the prices of the different goods and services, and

given his preferences or tastes, he will obtain the greatest number of goods and, therefore, the greatest degree of utility or satisfaction.

A study conducted by (Leonardo Alejandro Chiesa, 2015). mention the need to build an alternative intermediation, in which both producers and consumers can benefit, while valuing the need for workers to carry out the logistical task. This author starts from conceptualizations and solidarity policies existing in a prevailing regime, without having a precedent of the factors that affect the environment and its cultural and ancestral behavior.

The study of (Marta Peris Ortiz, Sofía Estelles-Miguel & Carlos Rueda-Armengot, 2016) , argue that the phenomenon called "collaborative economy" appears linked, to a significant extent, to the individual behaviors of consumers and to the exchange relationships of goods or services that occur between them through ICTs. Thus, exchanges often take place through a company that facilitates contacts via the Internet (Airbnb, Zipcar, Flickr, Freecycle, Wallapop or Couchsurfing, among others). These companies may be non-profit (Freecycle, or Couchsurfing before 2011), or companies seeking profit in this new field of activity (Airbnb, Zipcar) even though part of their services may be offered free of charge (Flickr, Wallapop).

 (BARDHI, F. and ECKHARDT, G.M, 2012) in their study conducted concerning market and collaborative economy show that access to goods and their use instead of their ownership is an important modification in consumer behavior, in a wide set of goods. But in this

new form of consumption, in many cases, collaboration is not required. Therefore, they emphasize that if the marketing of a company's marketing emphasizes the social aspects of collaboration in the services it offers, the services will attract fewer customers than if it emphasizes the functional aspects. Consumer perceptions and intuition know how to look for value.

According to the National Plan for Good Living" (PNBV), 2017-2021, in its axis No. 2: Economy at the service of society is a necessity to "boost productivity and competitiveness for sustainable economic growth in a redistributive and supportive way". In this context, according to the strategic positioning of the country, it will contribute to enhance Ecuador's tourism potential. During the last decade, the tourism sector has been a fundamental pillar in Ecuador's economic evolution. The considerable investment in projects of different kinds, from roads to the training of specialized human talent, has made it possible to activate the internal and external tourism movement.

According to reflected statistics, the country shows a positive improvement in international tourism revenue levels. According to (Ministry of Tourism, 2015) , tourism in Ecuador ranked in the first half of 2015 as the third source of non-oil income, within the national economy, with a growth of 2.9% in the number of visitors, and an increase of 5.9% in the level of spending by tourists, this represents $772.8 million, i.e., a growth of 8.7% compared to 2014, generating 397,190 sources of employment, with an increase of 11.6% compared to 2014, and representing 5.6% of total employees in the country's economy.

And by information from the World Economic Forum (2017), in 2016, tourism contributed 2.1% to Ecuador's GDP; corresponding to 8.7% of exports of goods and represented 4.4% of investments, amounting to USD 1,212 million (PNBV: 86).

According to figures from the Central Bank of Ecuador in the same year, tourism revenues with respect to total services exports were 67.73%, a value 10.2 p.p. higher than in 2012 (57.5%). For this new period of government, the main challenge is to strengthen coordination between the public and private sectors to diversify, for improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism services.

This justifies that policy No. 9.4 of the PNBV proposes, as a framework for action, "To position and strengthen Ecuador as a megadiverse, intercultural and multiethnic country, developing and strengthening the national tourism offer and cultural industries, promoting inbound tourism as a source of foreign exchange and employment, within a framework of protection of the natural and cultural heritage. (PNBV: 95).

It should be understood that it is aimed at a high-consumption tourist, opening a niche for Ecuador under a sustainable tourism model.

However, not in all tourist destinations in the country does commercial management contribute to perfecting the commercial decision-making process and improving positioning and competitiveness, especially because there is no model for evaluating consumer behavior in such management; such is the case of the tourist destination Sucre-Jama-San Vicente. A diagnosis carried out in this destination revealed a series of shortcomings, among which the following stand out:

- Lack of knowledge of small entrepreneurs on issues related to customer service, environmental care, motivation and issues related to tourism and its development.
- There is little support from institutional and governmental organizations for the development of tourism activities in the area.
- Lack of knowledge about instruments that measure the perception of the inhabitants or communities in the canton in order to apply effective and operational strategies.
- Lack of management by the Canton's Decentralized Autonomous Government in developing a strategic model for tourism destinations.

Commercial activity in the cantons of Sucre and San Vicente has had a decrease due to the eventuality of the earthquake that occurred on April 16, 2016, which left severe damage and partial damage in different activities of the business sector, services and accommodation that affected not only in these sectors but also in the economy of the communities.

Materials and methods

Marxist-Leninist Political Economy has contributed to the theoretical conception to deepen in the study of the consumer and his behavior in the consumption activity, so this work aims to demonstrate the application of this science, as a theoretical and methodological basis for the development of the doctoral thesis from the explanatory method.

The demonstration of the application of Marxist-Leninist Political Economy as a theoretical and methodological basis for the development of the study required considering, as a starting point, the object of study of this science and the functions it fulfills.

Marxist-Leninist Political Economy studies a concrete historical material, that is, the set of social relations that are established in a process of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, that is, pre-capitalist production relations, capitalist or production relations in the transition to Socialism, and fulfills the following functions: cognitive, methodological, ideological and practical.

Development

From 2015 to 2019, the area of linkage with society in conjunction with the research department of the University Extension (ULEAM) denoted deterioration in the services and image of the most representative

commercial activities in the communities of the canton Sucre according to statistics from the Directory of Business and Establishment (DIEE) of Ecuador shown in Table 1, it was proposed to conduct a diagnosis to verify from the key elements of success to each of these most representative economic activities to know their level of market participation, where they are reflected below.

Table 1: Business Economic Activity

Economic Activity	N° Companies	Total
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles.	319,114	37.8%
Agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing.	89,751	10.6%
Transportation and storage.	88,048	10.4%
Manufacturing industries.	72,796	8.6%
Accommodation and food service activities.	63,673	7.5%
TOTAL	844,999	100%

Source: DIEE,2020

As can be noted, the most representative is wholesale and retail trade, where the main role is played by small commercial businesses that exist to support their families, followed by agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing, which play an important role in the economic and social activity of the communities due to their importance in the gastronomy and culinary culture of the country. Lodging and food service activities are the least representative among these activities, but are of vital importance to boost tourism activities in the area. All these activities form a value chain to position tourism not only at the local, regional or national level, but also at the international level.

The project developed by the linkage area directed to the redesign of the commercial image in the businesses of the communities located in the Sucre canton in its first statistical information survey in 2015 yielded a result of 60 commercial premises, in 2016 due to the seismic activity 31% were unaffected and continued their activity, but in 2017 there was a distinctive growth of this activity of a total of 2014 premises, as reflected at a detailed level in Table 2.

In 2019 new needs arise in the environment of commercial activity and new problems in the formation or creation of enterprises located in the area under study, so the project is created: **"Los Passaos, entrepreneurship with history"** that would contribute to strengthen the activity of innovation and entrepreneurship in the communities of the canton Sucre mainly and aligning to three research projects such as:

Application of Experiential Marketing in the creation, promotion, dissemination and post-earthquake positioning of the new image of the tourist destinations of Sucre-San Vicente, Jama and Pedernales.

2. Tourism observatory for the control of the management of the Sucre-San Vicente, Jama and Pedernales tourist destinations.

3. Design of a historical archaeological tourist route for the North Coast destination.

Each of these projects from their goals and activities developed objectives that contributed to develop scientific tasks in the area of linkage to strengthen economic activity in the communities of the canton, where from observation technique historically has seen a rapid growth of commercial activity in the area under study as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of representativeness of economic activity.

Economic Activity	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Store	25	10	35	45	70
Restaurant and lodging activity	9	4	45	48	51
Fast food	4	2	18	19	20
Beauty Salon	2	4	12	20	39
Cyber and computer services	55	3	7	9	16
Bakery-sweets	7	6	8	9	12
Others	17	2	79	90	110
Totals	69	31	204	240	318

Source: Own elaboration, 2021

The table shows how the different economic activities were affected by the telluric event of April 16, 2016 where the damages were identified as total and partial. In this case, Table 2 only shows those whose activity continued in that year; for 2017, it shows a growth of 173 commercial activities more than in the subsequent year that made reactivate not only the economy of the communities but also contributed to improve tourism activity in the area.

Among the causes of this situation is the lack of evaluation of consumer behavior for the commercial management of the destination. The above-mentioned inadequacies show a theoretical-methodological gap and justify the evaluation of consumer behavior in the commercial management of tourist destinations as an important element of sustainable growth of tourism and commercial activities which in turn support the economy of the area under study.

The relations of production are the set of relations that are established between men, independently of their consciousness and their will, in the process of production, distribution, exchange and consumption. These last four moments are the phases of the relations of production.

Marx, in his essay named "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", analyzes in an appendix-Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy- the relation of production to distribution, exchange and consumption. "In **production**, the members of society appropriate (produce, create) the products of nature for human needs; **distribution** determines the proportion in which the individual shares in these products; **exchange** brings him the particular products into which he wishes to convert the share that has accrued to him by distribution; finally, in **consumption**, the products

become objects of enjoyment, of individual appropriation." **Production** facilitates the objects that respond to needs...; in **consumption**, the product disappears from the social movement, becoming directly the object and servant of individual need and satisfies it with enjoyment. **Production** thus appears as the starting point, while consumption is considered the end point[1].

Marx goes on to explain this relationship, specifically on production-consumption, by stressing that: "Without production there is no consumption, but without consumption there is no production either. Consumption gives rise to production in two ways. First: insofar as the product does not really become a product except in consumption...Secondly, consumption produces production insofar as it creates the need for new production, that is, the ideal, internal and active motive of production.

On the part of production, it can be said that production gives rise to consumption by: providing it with the object, determining its mode of consumption and exciting in the consumer the need for the products that production has established as an object"[2].

Any economic investigation related to one or another phase of the relations of production must understand that they are elements of a single whole, differences within a unity. In this respect ,Marx explains: "Production dominates over itself, in its antithetical determination with respect to other factors, as well as over the latter. From it, the process always begins again and again without ceasing. From its weight it follows that change and consumption cannot be decisive elements.

The above also refers to distribution as distribution of products. But as the distribution of agents of production, it is a factor of production. A given production thus determines a given consumption, a given distribution and

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[1] C. Marx: "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" p. 138.

[2] C. Marx: "Work mentioned, pages 139-1490.

a given exchange, as well as the given reciprocal relations of these different factors. Of course, production, in its unilateral form, is itself determined by the other factors. Thus, when the market, i.e., the sphere of exchange, expands, the volume of production increases and a deeper division takes place in it. When distribution is transformed, production is also transformed, for example, when there is a concentration of capital, the distribution of population in town and country, etc., is altered. Finally, production is determined by consumption demands. There is an interaction between the different factors. This is characteristic of every organic entity"[3] .

Production, change and consumption: phases of production relations from the conceptualization of the consumer.

Considering that the topic of research, exposed above, is directly related to the **production** of a service in a tourist destination, its commercialization, as a moment of **change** and consumer behavior, **consumption,** it is necessary to consider Marx's ideas in this regard to understand the interrelationship between these phases.

In the specific case of service production, tourism is an economic, social and cultural phenomenon that consists of the voluntary and temporary displacement, individually or in groups, from the place of habitual residence, for reasons of recreation, rest, culture and health, to another place where there may or may not be activities, spaces, goods and services planned, built and operated for its enjoyment. And when referring to tourist destinations it means a zone or geographic area located in a distant place and visited by tourists, with limits of a physical nature, political context and market perception.

From a business point of view, both strategic and organizational, the perimeter of the destination is constituted by the relationships that are built between the set of productive units that participate in the tourist activity. The interaction between these units guarantees, among other things, to reach the consumer.

Consumer behavior is defined as the study of the behavior that consumers exhibit when seeking, buying, using, evaluating and discarding products and services that they believe will satisfy their needs. Consumer behavior, as a marketing discipline, focuses on how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money and effort) on consumer-related items depending on the environment in which marketing is primarily performed.

For (Ana María, 2011) , consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups or organizations and the processes they follow to select, obtain, use and dispose of products, services, experiences or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer.

Likewise, (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2004) Kotler & Armstrong in their book Fundamentals of Marketing define consumer behavior as: "the purchasing behavior of individual and household final consumers who purchase goods and services for their personal consumption".

Consumer behavior is defined as the set of individuals, groups, and organizations that use their available resources to satisfy their needs.

It is always important to highlight the variables that can influence consumer decision making. These variables can be structured in 2 main groups:

1.- Personal influences (motivations, beliefs, personality)

2.- Social influences (culture, socio-demographic profile, social class, and reference groups).

In the aforementioned, on the types of consumers, it can be defined that individuals are those who buy their goods and services for personal use in order to satisfy their needs, but this is already done through their personal influencers and their social influencers.

To solve the problem, the SERVQUAL Model of Service Quality, which was developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry and whose purpose is to improve the quality of service offered by an organization, has been reviewed so far. It uses a standard questionnaire that evaluates service quality along five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, security, empathy and tangibles. It consists of a multiple-response scale designed to understand customers' expectations of a service. It allows evaluation, but is also a tool for improvement and comparison with other organizations (Consultants, 2016) .

The SERVQUAL Service Quality model measures what the customer expects from the organization providing the service in the five dimensions mentioned above, contrasting that measure with the estimate of what the customer perceives of that service in those dimensions.

Determining the GAP or gap between the two measurements (the discrepancy between what the customer expects from the service and what he/she perceives from it) is intended to facilitate the implementation of appropriate corrective actions to improve quality.

According to the above mentioned SERVQUAL model is the one used to measure the quality of an organization's service, which provides us with a questionnaire of questions and is based on 5 dimensions which are reliability, responsiveness, security, empathy

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[3] C. Marx: "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 145.

and tangible elements, i.e., each of these dimensions are measured by the perception and expectation of the customer.

SERVQUAL MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALE

For (Morales, 2005) , the multidimensional SERVQUAL scale is a tool for measuring service quality developed by Valerie et al. (1988) under the auspices of the Marketing Science Institute, has undergone improvements and revisions and has been validated in Latin America by Michelsen Consulting, with the support of the new Latin American Institute for Service Quality. The Validation Study was completed in June 1992.

The authors suggest that the comparison between the general expectations of users (clients, users, patients, students, beneficiaries, etc.) and their perceptions of the service provided by an organization can be a measure of service quality, and the gap between the two and an indicator for improvement.

In order to define the needs, expectations and perceptions of customers, it is necessary to assess behavior and inquire whether the user or customer has certain needs and desires, of which sometimes he/she is not even aware. These needs and desires must be collected by the organization in order to design and provide (deliver) services that achieve their satisfaction. Some systems are able to identify the customer's real needs, while others only perceive the needs of which the customer is aware. Both perspectives are useful to improve the quality of service and tend to a greater satisfaction of the service recipient.

The multidimensional SERVQUAL scale measures and relates customer perception and expectations with respect to service quality, whereby customer or user perception refers to how the customer or user estimates that the organization is fulfilling the service delivery, according to how he values what he receives, while customer expectations define what he expects the service delivered by the organization to be. This expectation is basically formed by his past experiences, his conscious needs, word-of-mouth communication and external information. From here, feedback to the system can arise when the customer makes a judgment. SERVQUAL is a method for evaluating the key factors for measuring the Quality of the Services provided. The SERVQUAL questionnaire is based on the classic customer evaluation model, which considers that every customer who acquires a service generates expectations of the service he/she will receive through different channels and once received there are a series of factors, dimensions, that allow him/her to have a perception of the service received. The difference between both attitudes is the Customer Satisfaction Index and it is the indicator obtained through the appropriate treatment of the information obtained by applying this service

quality evaluation tool, which is **SERVQUAL**. (Dircom, 2013)

A rating of service quality: Service Quality Index (ISC) (DIRCOM, 2013)

➢ What consumers want.
➢ What consumers find
➢ Gaps of dissatisfaction
➢ Sort quality defects

Service quality level indicator (Nizama, n.d.)

Q= P - E
Q= Quality of service
P= Perception of service delivered
E= Customer expectation

A negative indicator will indicate that customer expectations are not being met by the customer's perception of the service being provided.

A positive indicator will indicate that customer expectations are being met by the customer's perception of the service being provided.

For (Uriostegui, 2013) , CSI (Customer Satisfaction Index) is a system that allows to capture the customer's opinion about the services received during their stay in a hotel helping to provide important information to the areas involved to correct those points pointed out by the guest.

The raison d'être of any business activity is to provide effective and efficient services that generate memorable guest experiences. To achieve this, it is necessary that the decisions made are correct and can be measured, through valid instruments that allow to know the customer's perspective on the service provided by the hotel and respond to the fulfillment of the guest's expectations and if a memorable experience has been generated during their stay.

In order to measure satisfaction rates, Heyes (1999) suggests focusing on the concept of quality, which Montgomery (1996) defines as: "the degree to which products or services satisfy the needs of the people who use them". This author also distinguishes two types of quality, that of design and that of adaptation.

To apply an instrument that defines the 5 dimensions of the direct method SERVQUAL which is one of the models that allows the different presentations that the consumer has with respect to the quality of services and their characteristics allowing to know the expectations and the perception that the customer has regarding the service, which in turn will yield information of great importance in any sector to evaluate and correct the weak and strong points. And therefore, this method will be carried out by means of the verbal scales supported by the Likert scale which will allow the client to choose the conditions in which he/she finds himself/herself when receiving the service.

The application of this procedure includes the development of group work with experts to define the elements to be taken into account and the corresponding evaluations. The Matrix of Satisfaction Levels

elaborated by PhD Norma Rafaela Hernández and PhD Graciela Castellanos Pallerols in their studies carried out in different Marketing research proposals. The procedure to be followed is described below:

The procedure for calculating the level of customer satisfaction based on the criteria of experts (people related to the activity covered by this type of business). The application of this procedure involves the development of group work with experts to define the elements to be taken into account and the corresponding evaluations. The procedure to be followed is described below:

1. Define parameters to be evaluated

2. Define the Weighting Vector (WV). - The distribution of values in the VP will be made from 0 to 1, which will depend on the importance that the group of experts assigns to each of the measurement parameters. The total sum should be equal to 1.

3. Evaluation of the parameters according to the experts for the Expectations (SEj). - The evaluation of the parameters will be made according to the value from 1 to 4, where the value 4 will be assigned to the highest expectation and 1 to the lowest expectation; the others will be proportional to them.

4. Evaluation of the parameters according to the experts for Perceptions (SPj). - The evaluation of the parameters will be made according to values from 1 to 4, where a value of 4 will be assigned to the highest perception and a value of 1 to the lowest perception, the remaining values are proportional to them.

5. Calculation or weighting of expectations for each parameter:

$Ej = SEj * VPj$

6. Calculation or weighting of perceptions for each parameter:

$Pj = SPj * VPj$

7. Level of satisfaction for each parameter. - This is calculated by taking the value of expectations and subtracting the value of perceptions:

$NS = Ej - Pj$

8. Satisfaction index for each parameter. - This is calculated by taking the weighted value of perceptions and dividing it by the weighted value of expectations, as follows:

$IS = Pj / Ej$

In this way, the customer satisfaction index is obtained in relation to the parameter or service being measured. The higher the value, the higher the degree of customer satisfaction.

9. Total satisfaction level

$NS = E - P$

That is, total expectations minus total perceptions.

10. Total satisfaction rate

$IS = P / E$

That is, total perceptions divided by total expectations. This matrix will be linked to the SERVQUAL method based on the dimensions of the method in order to measure from the consumers' perspectives and their expectations.

The aspects discussed above constitute, in a general way, elements of the theoretical framework of the thesis, which was elaborated based on the **cognitive** and methodological function of Political Economy. This meant, from the review of accumulated knowledge, analyzing, ordering and synthesizing the approaches that precede the subject under investigation. Always starting from an objective reality, considering the historical approach of the economic processes, the logic of its evolution that implies, among other things, going from the general to the particular and the unity of the quantitative and qualitative.

The research is inserted in the Good Living Program, and in the entire legal and institutional framework in favor of promoting the development of tourist destinations due to the strategic importance of this sector as a source of progress and support for the economic development of Ecuador. It is in this aspect where the ideological function must be considered**.**

CONCLUSIONS

Marxist-Leninist Political Economy has served as a theoretical and methodological basis for the development of the present research, since it allowed obtaining the following conclusions:

1. Contextualizing from the methods used allowed a study from the production relations a descriptive and explanatory analysis of the interrelationship of political economy in its contribution to consumer behavior.

2. The production of the service, tourism, is an economic, social and cultural phenomenon directly affects consumer behavior from the dimensions of the Cognitive, Methodological, Ideological and Practical functions.

3. The satisfaction level matrix allows, through the five dimensions of the SERQUAL model, to measure the perceptions and expectations of consumers, determining their level of satisfaction and their satisfaction index in order to make decisions and define functional and competitive strategies.

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