



Quality Issues In Glamping Tourism From Providers Perspective In The UK

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Abstract

Glamping is a relatively recent phenomenon in tourism and outdoor hospitality which has considerably developed in the past few years in UK and is projected to continue growing in the future. Respondents are of the opinion that the growth of glamping offerings and demand has led to a need to evaluate service quality. However, so far, not much research has been done to explore provider's perceptions on quality in Glamping. Based on the study conducted, key attributes in glamping experience were identified along with the development of a few glamping standard schemes in the UK.

Keywords: Glamping, Quality, Providers, Perceptions



Introduction

An analysis of the existing research allows suggesting a few areas for future research which potentially could offer contribution to a body of knowledge. First of all, despite of growing popularity and significant economic contribution of camping and glamping particularly, there is a lack of studies on camping industry development in the UK. Secondly, the literature review reveals lack of agreement in defining glamping in both academic and glamping industry sources, therefore further analysis is required to establish definitional differences (Hrgović *et al.*, 2018).

Studies of Brochado and Pereira (2017) and Brochado and Brochado (2019) investigated service quality dimensions in glamping and main attributes of glamping experience from customers' point of view, whereas very limited study has been conducted to determine glamping accommodation attributes from providers' perspective (Hrgović *et al.*, 2018).

Research objectives

- to explore provider's perceptions of quality in Glamping industry in the UK

Literature Review

Quality in Glamping

According to Liberato *et al.* (2018), the growth of glamping offerings and demand arise a need of developing certain methods to measure service quality. Based on the study conducted by Pereira (2013) in Portugal, key attributes in glamping experience were identified as contact with nature, food, equipment (tangibility) and service which allowed to develop the GlampingExp tool (Glamping Experience tool). The GlampingExp tool consists of two set of questionnaires to evaluate customers' expectations before the stay and measure customers' service satisfaction after the stay at glamping sites (*ibid*, 2013).

Another study conducted by Brochado and Pereira (2017) was aiming to identify the attributes of glamping concept and service quality perceptions from a consumer's point of view. However, to the date no similar studies were conducted to explore glamping providers' perceptions on service quality in glamping. At the same time a glamping industry has seen a development of a few glamping standard schemes in the UK which will be briefly overviewed in the following section.

According to glamping industry expert Golding (Rust, 2018), there is no industry-wide standardisation in place, yet in order to maintain quality in service and manage customers' expectations, the glamping industry requires to develop one. The main point of industry quality standards identified as to set and



promote best practices among glamping site operators and ensure a 'transparency on the standard checklist of what's offered in a specific category' for customers (*ibid*, 2018). At the same time, an overview of glamping industry sources reveals an existence of glamping quality schemes in the UK developed by tourist boards and professional associations such as VisitEngland, Visit Wales, AA etc.

One of the first glamping standards was developed by UK Glamping Association in 2007. The UK Glamping Association was founded as a not-for-profit organisation which represents glamping site operators in the UK (Glamping Association, no date). The organisation aims to ensure quality and safety standards in glamping and support the industry development by providing information and guidance for its members (*ibid*, no date). The Glamping Code of Conduct developed by the UK Glamping Association requires adhering to all safety standards and legal requirements for glamping accommodation rentals in the UK (Glamping Association, 2017; Farrow, 2018).

In March 2016 VisitEngland tourist board has launched a Glamping Accreditation scheme which has replaced VisitEngland's Alternative Accommodation scheme (VisitEngland Assessment Services, 2017). The VisitEngland Glamping Scheme is a quality-based assessment which offers two levels of recognition: Accreditation and a Gold Award (*ibid*, 2017). In order to achieve VisitEngland Accreditation, glamping vendor needs to provide all the information, services and facilities and to meet Quality in Tourism's minimum entry requirements such as Safe, Clean and Legal qualities, and Gold Award is granted for providing exceptional quality and facilities (Van Heerden, 2016). Another quality scheme such as Visit Wales Glamping scheme follows the VisitEngland Glamping scheme grading system (Business Wales, 2017).

As a result of a fast expansion of glamping sub-sector in the UK, in 2015 was held a first ever Glamping Show (Holiday Parks Management, 2015). This a three-day glamping exhibition event was launched with an aim to bring together glamping manufacturers, providers and business owners and to give an opportunity for networking and consulting with the glamping industry experts (Glamping Show, 2018).

An overview of the glamping quality schemes and research indicates a lack of studies on service quality in glamping, thus further research is required. It also thought that a thorough comparative analysis of glamping quality schemes might be one of the areas for future research.

Research Methodology

The aim of this research lies within a constructivist paradigm which allows gaining a better understanding of a social phenomenon through an exploration of the participants' views, especially when there is a lack of theoretical background (Creswell, 2003; Durbarry, 2018). This study employed a qualitative approach which offers certain flexibility and allows gathering more detailed data (Veal, 2006). The data collection was completed through synchronous online interviews with eight professionals from different sub-sectors of the UK glamping industry such as glamping accommodation manufacturers and glamping site owners as well as event glamping and glamping agency representatives. The aim was to explore provier's perceptions of service quality in glamping in the UK. The research aim formulation lies within a constructivist paradigm which is described as



'understanding the phenomenon under study' which 'developed and constructed in the individual's mind according to what he/she perceived or believed to be' (Durberry, 2018, p. 17-18).

To address the identified gaps, the study objectives were set to explore opinions on glamping quality and standards from the UK providers' perspective. Thus, the constructivist paradigm seems to be the most appropriate choice for this study as the researcher aims to explore the new phenomenon and establish how it is perceived by the individuals who are professionally involved in glamping tourism (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This study has employed purposive sampling as non-probability sampling techniques being a useful technique in cases of the limited resources, lack of time or available workforce as was in this study (Etikan *et al.*, 2016).

A selective process of participants was conducted through a purposive sampling, also known as a judgemental sampling, which meant that the researcher had to rely on own judgment when choosing participants (Durberry, 2018). However, in all cases, the researcher needed to make sure that selected cases, or in these study informants, enable to answer the research question and meet the research objectives (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, for the purpose of this study the informants were chosen on the following criteria: being professionally involved in supply of glamping services and accommodation or manufacturing glamping structures and products (1) for at least a year or longer (2) and based in the UK (3) Only those who met the criteria were offered to participate in the interviews which were established either through a brief informal call prior to the interview or by email. A recruitment campaign in social media was conducted on relevant Facebook groups such as the Glamping Site Owners Club which unites over 1400 members ([Glamping Site Owners Club](#), 2019) and the Glamping Business Group and Unique Hospitality which consists of over 3000 members (Glamping Business Group and Unique Hospitality, 2019). Both groups are run by glamping consultants based in the UK. Additionally, two UK-based glamping consultants have offered to post recruitment adverts on their personal and corporate social media accounts which proved to be an effective way to access wider networks and increased the chances of recruiting suitable participants.

On the second phase, a pool of potential participants was identified and project information sheet and consent form were electronically sent out. The respondents who agreed to proceed further were requested to return signed copies of the consent form and confirm a suitable date and time for an interview. The third phase of the data collection included interviews which were conducted on the different dates between 8th of April 2019 and 1st of May 2019.

The semi-structured interview questions were built around themes of quality in glamping from the industry professionals' point of view. Finally, the participants were suggesting the interview location themselves which meant that they can choose the most appropriate time and place for the interview. The interview questions were pilot tested with the UK-based independent glamping consultant through a Skype interview conducted on 5th of April 2019. This process allowed testing the questions' wording, measuring the approximate length of interviews to be taken with participants.

The research interviews were conducted with the use of Voice over the Internet Protocol technologies (VoIP) such as Skype, FaceTime and WhatsApp, which allows users to send voice and video via synchronous (real-time) connection via the internet or mobile networks (Lo lacono *et al.*, 2016). With



the informants' permission, each interview was digitally recorded on external digital recorder Olympus WS-320M and the audio files were saved on the researcher's personal computer as well as a reserved copy on One Drive account of the researcher. Each interview lasted between 28 minutes to 75 minutes. The audio records were transcribed by the researcher with the use of automated transcription software Sonix which allows transcribing, editing and organising files through web-based tools and saving the transcribed files in text formats (Sonix, 2019).

A thematic analysis method was applied for the data gathered from the interviews. The method was chosen due to its known flexibility and effectiveness in analysing large amounts of qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 6) (*ibid*, 2006).

Analysis and Interpretation

Quality and standards in glamping

The study objective was set to investigate what are the participants' (providers) opinions on glamping quality and standards in the UK. Some participants agreed that there is a need to set up quality standards in glamping, whereas the others strongly disagreed. Some statements are presented below:

Quality is a massive thing. There are so many companies out there now that get away with very poor quality. So, you know there's nothing at the moment to really standardise what we should and shouldn't be doing... But I think it will come.[Glamping manufacturer from Carmarthenshire]

I think it would definitely help the end user because at the moment there are no ratings. You know there's no one-star, two-star, three-star, anything like that. And again, does it come back to the quality of the product in terms of structure, or quality of services, or quality of facilities? It is bigger than just the structure itself.[Glamping manufacturer from Devon]

Some participants argued that there is no requirement for setting up unified quality standards in glamping as in the following statement:

I don't think there's any requirement for quality standards than in any other form of hospitality business now. Because the quality standards that are being set by the customers who are providing feedback [...] through themselves, TripAdvisor, Airbnb, Facebook, Google and any other [platforms]. I think the one thing glamping is not about is standardisation, that's almost the opposite of what glamping is about.[Glamping site owner from Conwy County Borough]

Whereas other participants think that there is a need for setting up glamping quality standards for the benefit of the end-users as illustrated in the following statement:

I do think there is a need for it and this need is essential to reassure customers that the glamping experience that they are about to go on is going to meet their expectations. So, the industry benchmarks, or some form of grading or being part of an association and therefore meet their standards, those things are beginning to happen.(Glamping agency founder from Pembrokeshire]

Obstacles for and disadvantages of standardisation

Some participants were pointing out that there are certain obstacles for standardisation of glamping industry in the UK, those opinions are listed below:

I think it's difficult in the glamping industry because the industry changes so much especially when it comes to structures and designs and buildings...So, I think will take a few years of all the industry leaders to sit together, come together and sort of really discuss that properly, like a glamping association.[Glamping manufacturer from Carmarthenshire]

It's not an easy thing to do, to round together various business owners into an association, it can be challenging, but it would help guests. [...] whenever you've got a form of grading, you have to have quantifiable things you could measure and benchmark against. But that's not always easy [...] to establish the criteria; it's more difficult in glamping because of the diversity of structure type.[Glamping agency founder from Pembrokeshire]

On the other hand, some of the participants, pointed out that standardisation also might come as a disadvantage for glamping providers as illustrated in the following statements:

I suppose you could do something whereby like a hotel would have one-two-three-four stars and you'd have to fit in to get [...] stars. But I think it would probably take the magic away from. I think it would take the magic away for me anyway because it would then become a bit more regimented, a bit more corporate. [Event glamping provider from London]

It's difficult. I believe that we need quality. I believe that regulations, to begin with, probably, restrict what you can and can't do in the industry.[Glamping manufacturer from Carmarthenshire]

In a way that all the regulation does, it creates a new business for somebody [...] and it actually creates costs for the owners [...] you've got to have people come to your site and do an assessment. So, on one hand, you're creating jobs. On the other hand, you're cutting the glamp sites money.(Glamping manufacturer from Devon]

'Mass Glamping' perceptions

Throughout the interviews, a majority of participants have raised a theme of a 'mass glamping' which in some cases is affecting quality in glamping. Some of the opinions are presented below:

So many people out there that manufacture glamping products on a commercial scale is just profit-driven, purely profit driven. There's no character behind what they're doing. There's no culture behind what they're doing. There're no ethics [...] [but] you need a quality, you need authenticity, and you need originality.[Glamping manufacturer from Carmarthenshire]

I think that is a huge concern for the mass market. You have to find some other word [not glamping] [...]. I think there's a lot of people who are operating much larger sites or corporately lead or much more commercially operated sites [...] think they're called a 'glamping site', they're not. They are still a campsite with glamping pods.[Glamping site owner from Conwy County Borough]

[...] we've seen a lot of places are have made it very commercial, very pedestrian, it's about getting as many people in as possible [...] you've just become a holiday park really, not a glamp site. I'm not sure how they determine the difference.[Glamping site owner from Sussex]

So, what I've seen, in my view, is a polarisation of standards by which I mean, increasingly, there are very high-end luxurious offers but also more at the bottom end of the market. By the bottom end of the market, I would be thinking about campsites or caravan sites that have land already. They are often getting into glamping and they put a lot of structures up in a small space.[Glamping agency founder from Pembrokeshire]

Glamping quality schemes

Within the sample, only one informant has confirmed that their glamping site has participated in glamping scheme, whereas other participants have suggested alternative ways to reassure quality of glamping experience. Some of the opinions are listed below:

Absolutely not, it [glamping quality scheme] would actually do nothing for our business. Our requirements are that we have passed over 400 five-star reviews on Airbnb, 78 reviews on our Facebook site, and 17 reviews on Google [...] But 'No' to the standards outside, other than guests that come up to us.[Glamping site owner from Conwy County Borough]

Your quality is judged by your customers. For us to have rosette or three rosettes or something, I don't see us benefiting from that. I think we've probably better been running on reviews basis rather than chasing after national accreditation schemes or being rated by local authority and things like that. I'm not sure people really look [at those things] [glamping site owner from Hampshire]

The above analysis explored glamping providers' perceptions on glamping features and providers notions on quality and standardisation in glamping in the UK.

Findings

The literature review has indicated a lack of research on quality in glamping and hence this study was set to provide some insight into glamping providers' opinions on glamping quality and standards in the UK.



As seen from the data, all participants have stated the existence of quality issues in glamping, thus management of customer expectations is very important for business success. Part of the participants has stressed out that developing glamping standards will help to improve service quality and reassure customers. Whereas another set of participants strongly disagrees with such opinion and argued that there is no need to standardise glamping industry as it will increase costs for providers and possibly over-regulate the industry which already has to comply with the existing regulations such as fire regulations, health and safety, licensing etc.

The majority of providers stated that the main obstacle for regulations and standardisation comes from the nature of glamping business which provides accommodation in a variety of structures and offers different levels of services from basic to high-end; therefore it seems difficult to create a unified industry standard. Furthermore, some participants have suggested alternative ways to manage quality in glamping such as benchmarking against quality standards of professional associations and glamping agencies or complying with standards of the existing glamping brands as a franchisee. Interestingly, only one provider has confirmed that their glamping site has participated in the glamping quality scheme. Whereas, other providers have stressed out the importance of customers' reviews provided on various online platforms and websites; however, the reviews can be biased and similarly to other grading systems unable to guarantee 100 per cent accuracy as was explained by glamping agency founder from Pembrokeshire. Those findings only begin to reveal some insights into quality in glamping from providers' point of view, undoubtedly, further and more thorough research is recommended.

Conclusion

There is also no shared opinion on quality and standardisation in Glamping. Quality is seen as a very important part of Glamping success, however, providers expressed different opinions on standardization of the industry. Part of the participants stressed that developing Glamping standards will help to improve service quality and reassure customers. Whereas others argued that there is no need to standardise Glamping industry as it will increase costs for providers and possibly over-regulate the industry which already compiles with the existing regulations. As such, there is considerable scope for further research to find a more pragmatic solution considering the fact that Glamping industry in UK is growing at a very fast pace.



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