

# In the Eyes of the Beholder: Students' Degree of Satisfaction with Traditional versus Suite Style Residence Halls

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**Abstract** This study aims at comparing the degree of students' satisfaction in relationship with traditional and suite style residence halls. A sample population of 209 students residing in four traditional and suite style residence halls participated in the survey from April to June 2015. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe some demographic information of the sample. To test the hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was used to analyze the data. Following the data analysis, a series of interviews were conducted with 20 students. The results of quantitative data showed that suite style residents were less satisfied with their housing. Analyzing the interviews revealed that even though the suite style residents had enjoyed a better design, physical condition and maintenance compared to their counterparts from the traditional residence halls, they held higher expectations about the hall environments and felt that reality were short of their expectations.

**Keywords:** *traditional residence halls, satisfaction suite style residence halls*

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## 1. Introduction

Despite the temporary nature of student housing, it is very important to take into account the students' needs requirement and satisfaction. Previous studies have shown that housing satisfaction plays a mediating role between individual's fulfilled preferences for a place and a sense of attachment to it [9]. Accordingly, the more students are satisfied with their residence halls, they are more likely to develop a sense of attachment to them. Several studies have focused on positive and negative aspects of both traditional and suite style residence halls [3,4]. Here a question arises, are the suite style residence hall students more satisfied with their residence comparing traditional residence hall students? In the other hand is there any association between residence hall type and students' satisfaction? By comparing of two residence halls from 2 universities in Iran, the current study aims to answer these questions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Student Housing Satisfaction

A vast array of studies has investigated the positive aspects of living on campus. On campus students seem to be more engaged with the academic environment [2], achieve a greater personal growth (Schroeder & Mable,

1994), have a better social interaction with the other peers (Ballou, Reavill, & Schultz, 1995), indicate a better academic performance [11], are significantly open to diversity in comparison with off campus students [14], and get significantly higher grade point average [17].

Students hold different views about the same residence hall they are staying in. Previous research show that differences in the views of students is associated with gender and other demographic backgrounds [1].

A Perusal review of literature highlights the role of physical attributes in the residence hall students' satisfaction. For example, Kaya and Erkip [7]'s study found a relationship between the floor height and the students' perception of room size. In particular, they found that those who were staying on the highest floor of the residence halls perceived their room larger and less crowded comparing to those who were on the lowest floors. Give such an association, Kaya and Erkip postulated that the more students perceived their rooms private they were more likely to be satisfied with them.

Karlin et al.'s study [6] examined the negative influences of overcrowded rooms on the students' academic achievement and satisfaction. In their study, three students were put in a room that was designed for two students. The result revealed that the students' GPA dropped dramatically and they were also significantly less satisfied, felt unhappier and more depressed than the two students who had to stay in a double sharing room.

This question is that whether the students' satisfaction differs significantly in low rise and high rise buildings? In

their study, Holahan Wilcox [5] found that the students who stayed in low rise buildings were significantly more satisfied with their residence hall than their counterparts at mega dorms. They even established “more dormitory based friendship” (p. 237). Residence hall fees, distance from university, facilities, room safety, room size, hostel security, and hostel facilities were reported as predictors of the students’ satisfaction (Khozaei et al., 2010).

Apart from the available facilities and services, the social environment of residence halls can also influence the students’ overall satisfaction with halls. Li et al. (2007) found that “interpersonal environment was more important than cleanliness and maintenance variables in predicting students’ satisfaction with their residence experiences” (p.50).

## 2.2. On Campus versus off Campus Residence Halls

In a study conducted by Stoner in 1981, “Students residing in suites were significantly more satisfied with housekeeping services, programming opportunities, and resident assistant performance than were students residing in traditional type halls” Stoner (1981). One benefits of living in suite style residence halls was developing a greater sense of belonging and increasing higher activity level [15]. However, the literature is not just limited to the physical aspects of residence halls. Some studies have focused on the other aspects of the halls. For example,

Delgadillo and Erickson (2006) suggested that “apartment manager’s responsiveness and fairness explain 50% of the variance in determining student satisfaction with off-campus housing. Variables that measured aspects of the off-campus housing.”

## 3. Research Methodology

A sample population of 209 students participated in the study. Both suite style and traditional residence halls have bathrooms, laundry, TV room, prayer room, shop. However, neither of them has a storage room to keep the students’ less used stuff. The traditional residence halls were built in 1992 on four separated blocks. Two of these blocks are allocated to undergraduate students, and two others to graduate students. Figure 1, shows the typical plan of these residence halls. The suite style residence halls were selected from another university. This university has 11 blocks, of which six is allocated to female students. Four of the residence halls are traditional and two are suite style. The target population was selected from the two suite style residence halls. Of 209 female students who participated in the survey, 102 were living in the traditional residence halls and 107 were residing in the suite style residence halls. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the sample.

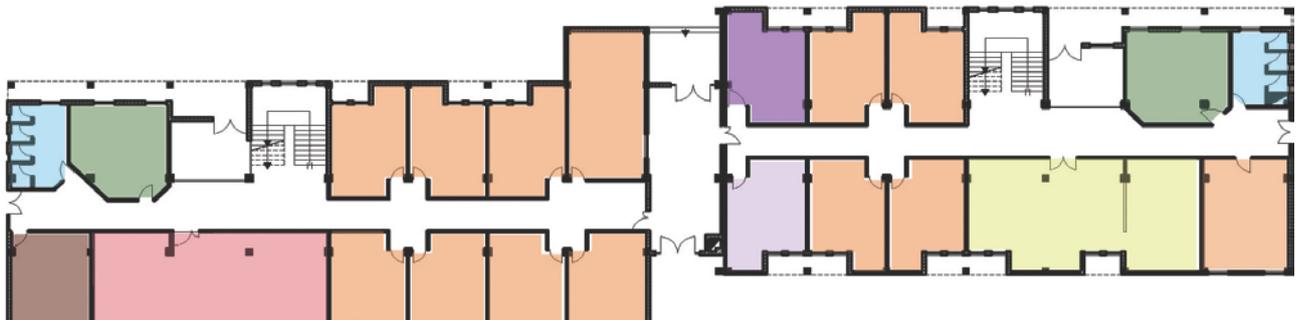


Figure 1. the typical plan of a traditional residence hall

## 3.1. Data Procedure

Each participant was initially requested to fill up a demographic form. The demographic form sought information about age, study level, duration of staying in residence hall. Prior to distribution of the Hostel Satisfaction Questionnaire, the students signed a consent form in which the purpose of study was clearly explained. Data was collected from 3<sup>rd</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items on satisfaction with residence halls, total satisfaction with room, room privacy, kitchen size, number of roommates, distance from university café, location of study room, location of playgrounds, room size, double bunk beds, distance from university facilities, security control at the entrance and exit, possibility of keeping valuable things in the room, and possibility of studying at room. The students were requested to rate each item on 5-point rating scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5).

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe some demographic information of the sample. To test the hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was used to analyze the data. The participants of the study consisted of 209 students from suite style and traditional residence halls. 48.8% of the students were from the traditional residence halls and 51.2% were from the suite style residence halls. Their age ranged from 18 to 34. Overall, students with less than 1 year length of living (24.4%), 1 to 2 years (38.8%), and more than 2 years (36.8%) made the total sample (See Table 1 for demographic information). Majority of the students were undergraduate (86.6%) and only few participants were master (11%) or PhD students (2.4%).

**Table 1. Respondents' demographic information**

| Demographic variables | Percentage | Demographic variables | Percentage              |                   |       |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| <b>Age</b>            | 18 to 20   | 40.7                  | <b>Duration of stay</b> | Less than 1 year  | 24.4. |
|                       | 21 to 23   | 45.9                  |                         | 1 to 2 years      | 38.8  |
|                       | 24 to 26   | 6.7                   |                         | More than 2 years | 36.8  |
|                       | 27 to 29   | 4.3                   | <b>Staying at</b>       | Traditional       | 48.8  |
|                       | Over 30    | 2.4                   |                         | Suite style       | 51.2  |
| <b>Education</b>      | BA         | 88.6                  |                         |                   |       |
|                       | Ma         | 11                    |                         |                   |       |
|                       | PhD        | 2.4                   |                         |                   |       |

The result of the study reveals a significant difference between the students from the suite style and traditional residence halls.  $t(207) = -2.612, p < .000$ ). Surprisingly the overall satisfaction of the students from the traditional residence halls ( $M=2.8824, SD=1.20473$ ) was higher than the residents from the suite style halls ( $M=2.4953, SD=.92526$ ). As for satisfaction with the rooms, students from the traditional residence halls were significantly more satisfied  $t(207)=1.371, p<.001$ . The significant higher mean score for the students from the traditional residence halls ( $M=2.8824, SD=1.20473$ ) in comparison with the students from the suite style residence halls was unexpected. To explore the reasons for the unexpected results, unstructured interviews were conducted with the residences of both halls. On the variables of kitchenette size  $t(207) = -5.654, p<.000$ , number of roommates  $t(207)$

$=1.977, p <.000$ , distance from the university restaurant  $t(207) = 1.304, p<.010$  balcony size  $t(207) = 3.901, p<.001$  and security control  $t(207) = .334, p <.045$  significant differences were found in the satisfaction level of students living in traditional or suite style residence halls. The residents from the suite style halls were significantly more satisfied with the kitchenette size ( $M=2.3725, SD=1.06168$ ) than the students from the traditional residence halls ( $M=3.2991, SD=1.29013$ ). However, the residents from the traditional halls were significantly more satisfied with the number of the roommates ( $M=2.6667, SD=1.31506$ ), balcony size ( $M=3.3922, SD=1.21180$ ) and security control ( $M=2.6275, SD=1.33440$ ) in comparison with their suite style counterparts ( $M=2.3458, SD=1.01964$ ), ( $M=2.7944, SD=.99753$ ), ( $M=2.5701, SD=1.14193$ ).

**Table 2. Independent sample t test**

| Variable   | Residence hall type                         | N                          | Mean   | Std Dev | T       | df     | Sig (2-tailed) |      |
|------------|---|----------------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|------|
| <b>S1</b>  | Overall satisfaction with residence hall    | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.8824  | 1.20473 | 2.612  | 207            | .000 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.4953 | .92526  |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S2</b>  | Overall satisfaction with rooms             | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.7745  | 1.31184 | 1.371  | 207            | .001 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.5514 | 1.03005 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S3</b>  | Room privacy                                | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.8922  | 1.20154 | .138   | 206.702        | .574 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.8692 | 1.21379 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S4</b>  | Kitchenette size                            | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.3725  | 1.06168 | -5.654 | 207            | .000 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 3.2991 | 1.29013 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S5</b>  | Playground numbers                          | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.8922  | 1.12494 | -6.659 | 205.466        | .899 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 3.9245 | 1.11011 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S6</b>  | Number of roommates                         | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.6667  | 1.31506 | 1.977  | 207            | .000 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.3458 | 1.01964 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S7</b>  | The study at room                           | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 3.5098  | 1.30304 | .941   | 203.907        | .712 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 3.3429 | 1.24675 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S8</b>  | Distance from restaurant                    | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.5588  | 1.23138 | 1.304  | 207            | .010 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.3551 | 1.02103 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S9</b>  | Study room location                         | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 3.5784  | 1.29306 | 2.705  | 141.890        | .683 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.6822 | 3.16108 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S10</b> | Play ground location                        | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.8529  | 1.04736 | -7.059 | 206.614        | .173 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 3.8785 | 1.05249 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S11</b> | Room size                                   | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 3.0693  | 1.31345 | .712   | 202.482        | .245 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.9439 | 1.21959 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S12</b> | The ability to keep valuable stuffs in room | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.8431  | 1.23276 | -.102  | 203.607        | .276 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.8598 | 1.13643 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S13</b> | Balcony size                                | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 3.3922  | 1.21180 | 3.901  | 207            | .001 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.7944 | .99753  |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S14</b> | Bed   | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 3.4020  | 1.23689 | -1.886 | 205.625        | .336 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 3.7196 | 1.19586 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S15</b> | Distance from other facilities              | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 3.4118  | 1.03745 | .807   | 206.394        | .238 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 3.2897 | 1.14932 |         |        |                |      |
| <b>S16</b> | Security control                            | Traditional residence hall | 102    | 2.6275  | 1.33440 | .334   | 207            | .045 |
|            | Suite style                                 | 107                        | 2.5701 | 1.14193 |         |        |                |      |

## 4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

The initial goal of the current study was to compare the satisfaction level of students with respect to the traditional and suite style halls. The alternative hypothesis predicted that students from the suite style residence halls are significantly more satisfied with their residence halls. The result of study confirmed the alternative hypothesis. Given that the results of study were in contrast with the findings of the previous studies, a series of unstructured interviews were conducted with the students to explore their perspectives about the residence hall attributes. Students from the suite style residence halls were significantly less satisfied with the halls in general and more specifically with the kitchenette size, number of roommates, distance from restaurant and security control.

### 4.2.1. Students from the Traditional Residence Halls were Significantly More Satisfied with Their Residence than Students from the Suite Style Residence Halls.

During the interviews, the traditional students were asked to explain why they were satisfied with the residence halls. Surprisingly even though the appearance of the traditional residence halls were not as appealing as that of the suite style residence halls, their residents were more satisfied with them because of the availability of the facilities. For example, two students stated:

*Because we have all necessary facilities that suppose to be in a residence hall.*

*What else do you expect a residence hall to have? For female students it is very essential to live in a safe place, as long as I am not enforced to live off campus I am pretty much satisfied with my residence hall.*

This factor was frequently highlighted by the residents from traditional halls during the interviews. It seemed that this group had a minimum expectation of their student housing. Therefore, simply the availability of the facilities could fulfill their expectations and there were no complaints about the service quality.

Interestingly, all the facilities in traditional residence halls were also available in suite style residence halls. Such an availability seemed to be more important than a better service quality, provided facilities or physical attributes of residence halls and were the main reason justifying the students' satisfaction with residence halls, not. The fee that the traditional style residents pay each semester is almost three times less than the fee that students from suite style residence halls pay for their housing.

On the other hand, the residents of suite style residents complained about the attributes that were rarely mentioned by traditional residence hall residents. The initial interviews with the suite style residents revealed that they consistently compare their place with a private residence hall or their house. That might explain why they held higher expectations from the halls compared to the students living in the traditional residence halls. This can be seen in one of the students' talk as follows:

*In comparison with my house I am not happy with the suite style residence hall, it is not comparable all.*

It is not surprising that if the students compare the residence halls with the house, they may feel dissatisfied.

What rationales lie behind such a comparison? In suite style residence halls there are three rooms, a kitchen a

toilet and bath room for 12 students in each unit. An apartment like housing raised the students' expectations, being small for 12 students has led to higher dissatisfaction rate. The result of the study revealed that they were dissatisfied with toilet and kitchen.

*Early in the morning everybody is in rush to get ready to attend the classes, and it is difficult to use toilet and bathroom.*

The other possible reasons behind the dissatisfaction of the suite style residents were the improper design and location of the toilet and kitchen. Some of the suite style residents stated that the location of the toilet sink outside the bathroom made them uncomfortable because they weren't given a space to change their kitchen slippers. They highlighted that it is culturally unacceptable to use the bathroom slippers in the kitchen

### 4.2.2. Students from Traditional Residence Halls were Significantly More Satisfied with Their Room than Students from Suite Style Ones

Why were the suite style hall residents less satisfied with their room? The interviews with the students revealed they were unhappy with their overcrowded residence halls. Each room in the suite style residence hall is about 12.21 msq allocated to four students while the most congested rooms in traditional residence hall are about 42.5 msq. This means that the approximate space allocated to each student in suite style residence halls ( $12.21/4=3.05$ ) are less than the more congested rooms in the traditional residence halls ( $42.5/12=3.54$ ) and an area of 12.21 msq for four students was considered to be overcrowded. Even though the traditional students also believed the room size is small, they had a more positive outlook and less expectation about rooms in the residence halls. For instance one of the participants said:

*The room is small for 7 people but it's ok, what else do you expect from a residence hall*

Initially the architects designed each room for two students, but later the residence hall organizers occupied the rooms with double bunk beds for four students. Students from the suite style residence halls were dissatisfied with the limited space of the closets. The closets were 60 meter wide and about 2 meter long and they were divided into two parts. The students complained that the closets were too small to keep their stuff in and added that the closets could be divided into different parts to use the space wisely. The students from the suite style buildings were dissatisfied with insignificant aspects of the residence halls such as dirty walls. Though the appearance of rooms in the traditional residence halls were worse, there were no complaints about them.

Another complaint by the students from the suite style halls was the absence of control over heating and cooling system in the residence halls. Even though the students from the traditional residence halls had the same problem, they never complained about it during the interviews.

### 4.2.3. Students from Traditional Residence Halls were Significantly More Satisfied with the Number of Their Roommates

While the students from the suite style residence halls were displeased with the number of students they shared their room with, the students from the traditional residence halls, highlighted that having four or more roommates was

rewarding. It is because in the absence of one or two other students who may leave the university to visit their family, they would not feel lonely. These two various perspectives also highlights the effect of human being perspective on the perceived situations.

#### 4.2.4. Students from Traditional Residence Halls were Significantly More Satisfied with the Kitchenette Size

In the suite style residence halls, each 12 students share a kitchen which is about 12 msq, ( $12/12=1$ ), approximately 1 meter for each student. In the traditional residence halls, on each floor, there is one 50 msq kitchen. Each floor accommodates about 58 students. ( $50/58=.82$ ). Both of the residence halls have café; thereby the students can have either choice of eating out.

#### 4.2.5. Students from Traditional Residence Halls were Significantly More Satisfied with the Security Control

Both universities have 24 hour security guards, and the doors of the both residence halls are closed at 8 pm and the students are not able to enter or exit the halls. When the students from the traditional halls were asked why there were satisfied with the security service of their hostels, they frequently mentioned that the people who enter the residence hall are checked twice, once upon arrival at the yard of the residence halls and the second time at the entrance of each block. The security room in the traditional residence halls is located at the main entrance of the halls. Given the location of the security room, security officers have a great control upon every ones' entrance and exit. However, in the suite style residence halls each two blocks shares only one security control which doesn't guarantee the control over the entrance or exit of students or any strangers.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The main purpose of the current study was to highlight the positive aspects of suite style residence halls in comparison with those of the traditional residence halls. Initially, it was assumed that students living in suite style halls are more satisfied with their hall environments than students residing in traditional halls. Such an assumption however changed when the primary interviews with the residents of both halls revealed that the suite style

residents were significantly less satisfied with their residence halls. Data collection significantly confirmed the research hypothesis. The study found that the residents from the traditional residence halls were significantly more satisfied with their residence halls, the room, kitchen size, security control and number of the roommates. The follow up interviews revealed that the students living in the suite style residence halls had higher expectations about their residence halls than their counterparts in the traditional residence hall. Before moving to the room in the suites though the students were told that they have to share an apartment with others. However, the students discarded this issue. When they faced the reality of sharing a suite with 12 students, they felt their initial expectations were not met as a result they became more dissatisfied. On the other hand, the students from the traditional residence halls reported no mismatches between what they knew about the student housing and what they got in the reality. As one of the participants stated that *the room is small but what else to do expect a residence hall?* Such an exception was in lines with the fees of the traditional halls. The fees in this hall were almost three times lower than the fees of the suite style halls. However, the students from the suite style residence hall didn't get their money's worth. Figure 2, shows the structure of expectation- confirmation theory proposed by Oliver (1970, 1980). In this model the users' expectations influence their disconfirmation of beliefs and it subsequently can affect the satisfaction level. From the results of the study it can be concluded that for the students from the suite style halls, such an environment always conjured up the images of an apartment rather than typical traditional residence halls. That is why they had a positive perception about the suite style halls. Such an image raised their expectations about the halls. However, their early expectations were not realized as they simply overlooked the large number of students in the rooms. As a result their essential beliefs about the hall environment were disconfirmed and their disappointed expectations reinforced the negative images of the halls. That is why students exaggerated the other minor problems and finally felt less satisfied with the halls. Considering this factor, Figure 3, suggests the modified model of expectation confirmation theory.

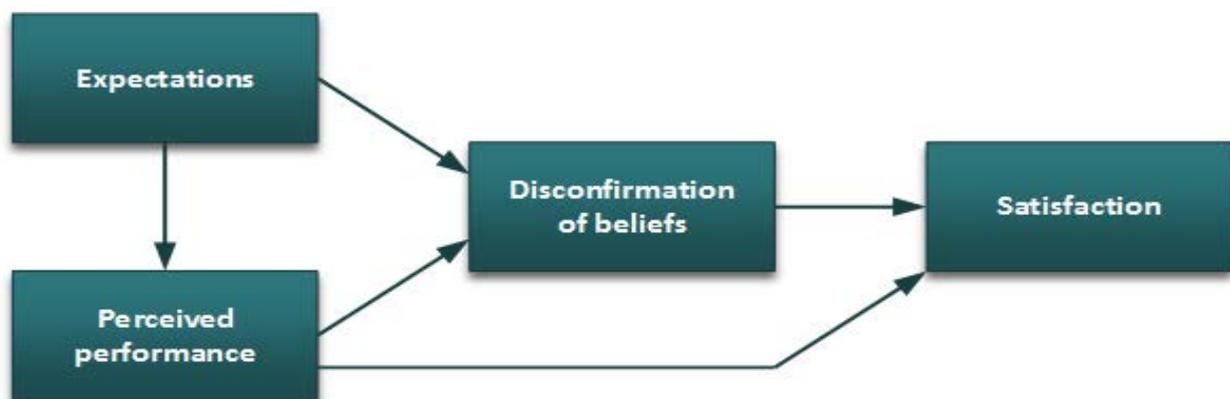


Figure 2. A model of expectation confirmation theory

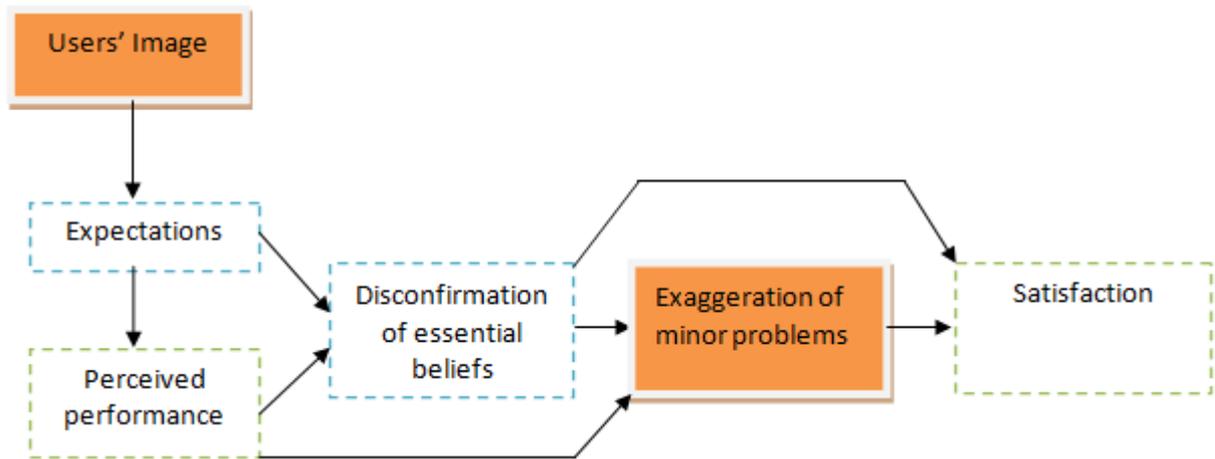


Figure 3. modified model of expectation confirmation theory

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