

EXPLORATORY STUDY REGARDING THE QUALITY ASSESSEMENT OF SERVICES OFFERED BY AN AUTO REPAIR SHOP IN CLUJ-NAPOCA

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The quality of services should be treated as a resultant derived from the satisfaction of the costumers participating in the service consumption, which requires prior knowledge on the predictable behaviour and reactions of the clients to the offered services. In its turn, the service monitoring system's design must be shaped according to these behaviours: service delivery, service delivery management and service quality control are therefore inherently subject to a double purpose: obtaining consumer satisfaction and stimulating them to seek, in the future the services of the same tender.

It is obvious that, in the case services, their intangible character makes quality aspects to be rarely identified in physical or quantifiable indicators, which means that service quality measurements remains largely subjective or up to the client. As a result, each manager must choose some criteria for establishing the principles used in quality assessment and, ultimately, the practice under market competition conditions, is the one that will approve or not, on the long run those criteria, therefore the service's quality and its adequacy for a particular customer segment.

Key word: service quality, global quality, client satisfaction, questionnaire, services.

JEL codes: M10, M20, M30.

In drafting the study conducted in the auto repair shop we covered the following steps:

1. Defining study objectives and setting the existing constraints;
2. Researching the best suited survey basis, most adapted to the situation, taking into account the quality and cost issues as well as the choice of survey method and the sample creation;
3. Observation;
4. Checking and coding the questionnaires. Preparing the data for processing;
5. Data processing and analysis;
6. Final report and the result evaluation.

We summarized below the aspects that we considered relevant for each covered stage.

1. Defining study objectives and setting the existing constraints.

The survey aimed to identify the quality level of services offered by the auto repair shop in terms of beneficiary's point of view. Since it is not the kind of activity to involve a large number of customers daily, we performed an exploratory study and not a market research or a rigorously underlain scientific survey.

2. Researching the survey basis and creating the sample.

Regarding the survey's basis for the performed study, it was composed of all the garage's customers during the timeframe February-March 2012, which were 67 people.

3. Statistical observation.

Since observation is the act of gathering information concerning statistical units according to rigorously defined criteria, covering this stage involved the following steps:

- ✦ We identified variables that were going to be studied and which later led to the development of the questionnaire;
- ✦ I developed and tested the questionnaire;
- ✦ I chose the data collection technique (taking into account the study objectives and the complexity of the information that we wanted to pick up, I chose the direct administering of the questionnaire through investigation, to potential customers of the car repair shop; this has allowed us to use any type of question because we were able to provide some explanations about certain questions; it even allowed us to get answers for

open questions, that are usually avoided by the respondents, for lack of time or other reasons.

- ✘ I set the place and time of observation, therefore the administering of questionnaires was performed during February-March 2012.

4. Checking and coding the questionnaires

Out of the 67 questionnaires administered to potential customers or car owners who entered the garage during the study, given the direct administering of the questionnaires, there were no inaccuracies.

5. Data processing and analysis.

Not to use outdated data in the analysis, as a questionnaire was completed, we proceed towards organizing the data and registering them into the computer.

6. Final report and the result evaluation

The final report is the relationship between actual research and actions that will follow its results. The research report can be considered a "product" to be capitalized and therefore it must have the following characteristics:

- it should satisfy a need, which is the need for information to be able then to make a decision;
it addresses precise users who were generically called "target" of the research report;
- it must be properly conditioned - to have an adequate presentation;
- it must be an action of communication – we should be able to talk about promoting the report;
- it must be distributed correctly – the dissemination of the report should be made, taking into consideration the above guidelines and the that he may also end up being read by people other than the "professionals", which implies an increased concern with editing.

Because in our case, the research aimed to inform the manager about customer satisfaction, promotion and distribution were very limited.

Development and testing of the questionnaire:

The questionnaire is the "basic tool used for data collecting, conditioning to a high degree the success of the research." [1] Developing a survey involves studying economics, statistics, sociology, psychology, computer science, because it is a difficult problem with multidisciplinary character.

The questionnaire has a critical role and position in marketing research because it has to translate the objectives of the research into precise, specific questions to obtain the desired information from the investigated subjects.

Although there is no generally valid pattern for drafting questionnaires, the results of theory and practice specialty have pointed out that a "good" survey must meet certain conditions [2]:

- ⤴ it should be as short as possible, but also cover all the questions necessary to obtain relevant, significant information;
- ⤴ it should be proper for the investigated subjects, namely:
 - ✘ it should be explicitly built for the subjects to understand it;
 - ✘ it should use appropriate language for the intellectual level of the subjects;
 - ✘ it should be easy to fill up, in a concise, interesting, fluent and logical manner.
- ⤴ it should be easily manageable, enabling quick response recording and encrypting;
- ⤴ it should allow easy listing of the information;
- ⤴ it should be translatable, ensuring transmission of the subject's feelings, opinions and thoughts, the findings and recommendations arising from their answers, to satisfy in particular the thirst for information of the managers.

The sketching and drawing up of the questionnaire involves getting through the following steps [2]:

1. Clearly defining the necessary and desirable information

The questions in the questionnaire followed the main aspects of the offered /received services as well as their quality level, according to the questionnaire in the 1st Appendix.

2. Establishing the type of questions (questionnaire's structure)

Given the information we wanted to achieve, we used both open and closed questions (with coded, pre-established answers) as well as questions with scale answers, even if they were more difficult to interpret and there was a need for extra explanations to be offered to the respondents.

3. Formulating questions

We have paid special attention to the formulation of questions, being aware that any changes in the formulation of questions can lead to very different answers. Therefore we tried to use a clear and concise formulation, as short as possible, to avoid ambiguity and to use plain language without "preciosity". We also tried to avoid getting insincere responses influenced by the respondent's predisposition for a certain answer as well as the restriction of the investigated subject's expression possibilities.

4. Establishing the succession of questions

Since the sequencing of questions must trigger and maintain the interest of the investigated subject throughout the entire inquiry, the questions in the administered questionnaires had the following the sequence:

- a) Introductory questions, general ones, that were polite, non-threatening, intended to heat the atmosphere; generally they were simple questions, which could be answered directly and easily;
- b) Complicated questions, with "worked" answers which refer to the investigated subject's views and options and which were mainly assessed using the scale responses.

5. Questionnaire's design

In creating the questionnaire we intended it to give the impression of an important document, simple and pleasant to look at. We numbered each question, each and every page of the questionnaire and every survey and to facilitate the work of the respondents the size of the assigned letters and spaces were large enough. To avoid any confusion, questions and their afferent answers ended on the same page.

6. Questionnaire's pre-testing

Since all the textbooks present this stage as being absolutely necessary, we conducted the questionnaire's pre-testing, pursuing the following aspects: the understanding degree of the questions, their clarity, the sequence of questions and sufficiency of answers formulated in the questionnaires as well as the time needed to fill in a questionnaire.

Following this pre-testing, we eliminated some questions that proved to be unnecessary and we introduced others, according to the information we wanted to obtain; we replaced some words that had proved to be interpretable and / or confusing and we made changes in the sequence of questions to eliminate some discontinuities.

7. Review and final editing

We made the changes required after pre-testing the questionnaires, we checked the design prior to these changes and we drafted their final form.

8. Questionnaire's implementation

As I said before, we used the direct administering of the questionnaires, on the customers of these companies or to visitors.

Conclusions we reached after data processing:

General observations:

We retrieved (based on the answers to questions 7, 8 and 9 of the questionnaire) the following observations:

- 24 out of the 67 interviewed people, came up with private car, which means that most of them (64.18%) came with their work car;
- 41 people, which is 61.19% had previously scheduled the visit to the car repair shop, while the remaining 26 people had no scheduling;
- most of those interviewed said that they visit / contact a car repair shop every three or four months, as follows:

Table 1.

The time frame for visiting / contracting a car repair shop

	Time frame					Total
	1 month	2 months	3 months	4 months	More than 4 months	
Number of people (%)	-	4,48	35,82	47,76	11,94	100

Observations of the visit:

We retrieved (based on the answers to questions 1 and 2 of the questionnaire) the following observations:

- most respondents had been to the garage before (46 people out of the 67 surveyed) and those who have not been there before, reached it by receiving recommendations from loved ones (19 respondents) while only two people entered the car repair shop by passing by, as follows:

Table 2.

Aspects that determined the visit of the interviewed people

	Determining Aspects				Total
	Advertising	Close people	Previous experience	Others	
Number of people (%)	-	28,36	68,66	2,98	100

There are two aspects to be noticed in this context, given the responses of those who were interviewed:

- a positive aspect – the fact that most of them came back which makes us assume that they were satisfied with the services
- a negative aspect – lack of advertising and therefore the absence of its influence – which in the present economic conditions and on a highly segmented market is imperative for a company working in the field of services.

Features related to the quality assessment of service offered by the car repair shop:

The answers to the third question of this questionnaire, applied to the various respondents who visited the garage, will help us identify the quality of the offered services from the customer's perspective; we tried to identify the quality level of services by determining the marks or the average values of each question that covered a specific attribute (feature); with this purpose, analyzing the responses to the applied questionnaire, we determined the following:

Table 3.

Respondents' assessment concerning the quality characteristics of the offered services

-%-

No. crt.	Assessed aspects	marks					Total
		Very good (5)	Good (4)	Indi-ferent (3)	Satisfying (2)	Unsatisfying (1)	
1	How do you appreciate the global quality of the performed service?	64,18	35,82	-	-	-	100
2	How do you appreciate the time frame necessary to deliver the solicited service?	61,19	38,81	-	-	-	100
3	How do you appreciate the quality/price report for the delivered service?	58,21	31,34	10,45	-	-	100
4	How do you appreciate the cleanliness in the car repair shop?	28,36	50,75	20,89	-	-	100
5	How do you appreciate the information/ consultancy received from the car repair shop ?	23,87	58,21	11,94	4,48	1,5	100
6	How do you appreciate the communication channels offered by our (fax, tel., e-mail, etc)?	35,82	47,76	-	16,42	-	100
7	How do you appreciate the diversity of services offered by our garage?	37,39	4,41	-	55,22	2,98	100
8	How do you appreciate the professionalism degree of our employees?	16,42	83,58	-	-	-	100
9	How do you appreciate the repair warranties?	59,70	37,32	-	2,98	-	100
10	How were the complaints about the services offered by our garage dealt with?	56,72	38,80	-	4,48	-	100
11	How do you appreciate the company's image advertising campaign (as it is reflected in the media, on the internet, etc)?	1,5	13,43	28,36	-	56,71	100

If most of them appreciate as 'good' and 'very good' the overall quality of services, the time necessary for service to be delivered, the quality / price ratio, the cleanliness, the professionalism of the staff, the warranty offered for repairs, the treatment of complaints – there is an obvious need for framing and profoundly understanding the reasons why the following aspects were recorded:

- 55.22%, which is 37 of the respondents are satisfied only by the diversity of the services offered in the car repair shop, while 37.39% (25 respondents) values the diversity of services as being very good. These answers lead us to

wonder whether there are services that customers would appreciate but are not provided by the car repair shop

- 56.71% of the respondents (38 people) appreciate the company's promotional activity with its services as being absolutely unsatisfactory – which proves once again, the negative effect of the fact that the garage has no website and it does not assign a budget for various promotional activities. Interesting is the opinion of 28.36% of respondents (19 people) stating that it is all the same for them, if they read, hear or see something about this car repair shop in the media, on the internet etc. They are the ones who have become loyal customers in time and are only influenced by the quality of the services they have already received?! Here's a question that needs an answer!

The marks obtained for each of the evaluated characteristics were:

Table 4.

Respondents ratings concerning the quality characteristics of the offered services

No. crt.	Evaluated aspects	marks					Mark
		Very good (5)	Good (4)	Indi-ferent (3)	Satis-faying (2)	Unsatisfying (1)	
1	How do you appreciate the global quality of the performed service?	43	24	-	-	-	4,64
2	How do you appreciate the time frame necessary to deliver the solicited service?	41	26	-	-	-	4,61
3	How do you appreciate the quality/price report for the delivered service?	39	21	7	-	-	4,47
4	How do you appreciate the cleanliness in the car repair shop?	19	34	14	-	-	4,07
5	How do you appreciate the information/ consultancy received from the car repair shop ?	16	39	8	3	1	3,98
6	How do you appreciate the communication channels offered by our (fax, tel., e-mail, etc)?	24	32	-	11	-	4,02
7	How do you appreciate the diversity of services offered by our garage?	25	3	-	37	2	3,17
8	How do you appreciate the professionalism degree of our employees?	11	56	-	-	-	4,16
9	How do you appreciate the repair warranties?	40	25	-	3	-	4,56

10	How were the complaints about the services offered by our garage dealt with?	38	26	-	3	-	4,47
11	How do you appreciate the company's image advertising campaign (as it is reflected in the media, on the internet, etc)?	1	9	19	-	38	2,03

If we consider the characteristics assessment scale starting with 1 - for the minimum grade, 5 - the maximum grade, knowing that the differences between the maximum score and the evaluation's results that exceed 1.5 points are critical in the provider's activity, we can highlight the following:

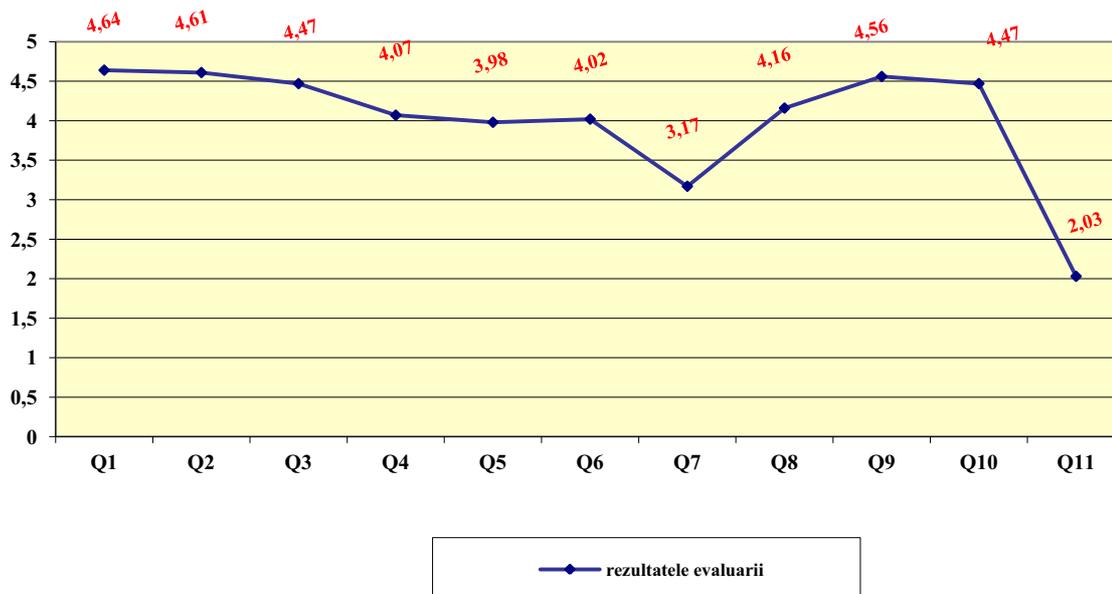


Fig.no.1. The marks obtained by respondents evaluation

The graphical representation of the evaluation results shows that the provider company's manager must take very quick measures, in terms of:

- first of all the company's promotion activity and its services - and here perhaps the creation of a website with contact data (the ability to contact the staff via e-mail) would be the first necessary step;
- then, efforts should focus on the range of offered services, which refers to their diversification;
- and last but not least, it should turn its attention to the relationship between customers and staff, to identify the reasons for dissatisfaction concerning the information, the specialty consultancy, provided by the garage's employees.

The 4th question seeks to identify elements that are important to the respondents (customers or potential customers) about the quality of services, so that they can be used later to improve the quality of the company's offered service or even to diversify them. Thus between the elements stated by respondents as being able to determine an increased in the quality of the offered services, the following emerged:

- bringing the car repair shop up to date and improving the training of the staff (28.45%);

- other issues (8.37%) such as:
 - diversifying the range of offered services;
 - faster solving of minor technical problems;
 - creating a waiting area;
 - the possibility of paying with credit card;
 - a website should be available to offer information about tariffs and services;
 - extending of the opening hours and work on Saturdays;
 - a stock of items necessary for "minor" interventions should be available

Issues affecting the service quality assessment:

The 5th question sought to determine the important elements that have an overwhelming influence in assessing the quality of services offered by a car repair shop, by giving marks from 1 to 10 and ranking some items according to their importance for the respondent. Thus, we determined a mark for each hierarchy's element, producing a score for each item by summing the grades given by respondents and dividing by the number of analyzed questionnaires (which is the number of respondents) we obtained the following results:

Table 5.

The answers to the 5th question

The element	Number of answers for each mark										Final mark
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Service tariffs	41	17	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.36
Repair warranty	48	15	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.66
The diversity of service range	11	15	21	23	7	-	-	-	-	-	8.57
Garage's equipments	10	21	35	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.60
Employees professionalism/technical abilities	12	21	33	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.66
Promptitude/honouring the deadlines	26	35	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.30
The space fitted for the working area, and the waiting area	10	14	37	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.42
Received consultancy/information	12	28	26	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.76
Credibility	29	13	19	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.97
The garage's working hours/schedule	16	18	23	10							8.60

According to the assessments made by respondents we have acquired the following classification of elements having an influence on quality:

Hierarchy of elements that influence a car repair shop quality assessment of services

Rank	The respondents drafted hierarchy
1	Repair warranty
2	Service tariffs
3	Promptitude/honouring the deadlines
4	Credibility
5	Received consultancy/information
6	Employees professionalism/technical abilities
7	Garage's equipments
7	The garage's working hours/schedule
9	The diversity of service range
10	The space fitted for the working area, and the waiting area

The most important element in assessing the quality of services was the warranty granted for the repairs, followed in order by service fees, promptness / timeliness and the credibility of employees and the company in general.

Equally important for the respondents are the garage's equipments and its working hours and almost insignificant is the space fitted for service and waiting are.

The information obtained by the instrumentality of this question is particularly valuable for the company because in the future they will understand better what elements they need to use as background for their offering strategy and for establishing the services with their related tariffs (for example, they will not insist too much on highlighting potential investment in spatial arrangements, as long as the majority does not care about this aspect, but certainly they will be very careful in highlighting the warranties granted for the performed services or in informing the customers about tariffs and generally about the practiced discounts) understanding now, that these elements and the care for their judicious settlement, come to meet the wishes of the customers and to increase their satisfaction.

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