ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM THROUGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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In tourism, hotels play an important role and contribute to the economic growth in cities and other places endowed with attractions which are universally recognized.
Two elements are essential in the tourism industry system: product quality and human resources.
In terms of quality of the hotel services, that is the one that allows to the tourist enterprise to own a competitive advantage, gain competitive differentiation and reputation among customers by achieving a high degree of customer satisfaction.
Hotel customer satisfaction would be impossible if the hotel management does not perform periodic evaluations on customer satisfaction and quality, which are the focus of this paper. Therefore, this paper focuses on customer satisfaction measured by the SERVQUAL model.

1.Introduction

Tourism is a growing market, especially in Romania, where it started to take increasingly bold wings. This makes room for everyone, but to seek the best from all of them. The difference is not made nor by the hotel offered to the tourist, or program. The tourists are becoming more and more educated. The tourists know what to ask for and appreciate what is offered. Therefore, the difference lies in attitude, awareness, ability to listen and to know how to solve the most relevant wishes of the guests that step into the hotel. Only if you know how to provide an additional shade to the paid services, you will ensure that the tourists will confer again their (or others) holidays again to you, being known the fact that a satisfied tourist brings another 10! Two elements are essential in the tourism industry system: the product quality and human resource.

In the economic life, the most successful organization is the one that is able to satisfy the needs of its customers and strives to maintain its customers satisfied.

Customer satisfaction is achieved when the client believes that the specifications meet his expectations of a service.

Consequently, measuring the customer satisfaction, including a service company's internal research, can lead to higher quality of its services.

In the '80s, the researchers Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, following an extensive research on service quality, have concluded that, compared to the quality of goods offered to the customers, the evaluation of the service quality is a much harder task. According to the three researchers, the five main dimensions that customers use in evaluating the service quality are explained as follows:

- Material assets (tangible): appearance of equipment, personnel and communication materials.
- Reliability: the ability to perform the promised service safely and accurately.
- Responsiveness: willingness to help the customers and provide prompt services.

- Safety: the knowledge and courtesy of the employees and their ability to instil a sense of trust and safety.
- Empathy: the care, individualized attention that the service organization provides to its customers.

To assess these five aspects of service quality, Parasuraman and all. have designed the "Servqual" model which includes a questionnaire with 22 questions. Half of the questionnaire is related to expectations of the customer concerning the services and the other half is related to the customer perception of the consumed services. Hence, it appears that the service quality is given by the relationship: perceptions - expectations = quality.

The Servqual model has many applications (it can be used both in marketing studies, and in comparison among similar services offered by competitors, as Parasuraman and all. said in 1988). The most important use of it, however, is keeping track of the changes happened in the service quality provided by an organization, fact that is done through a regular survey of the customers.

In tourism, the hotels are very important due to their crucial role played in improving the tourism sector and developing a certain region (Hessamaldin M.S.2008).

2. Problem Formulation

Although it is known the important role the hotel plays in satisfying the tourists requests, it is however, very difficult for the hotel to meet the infinite variety of hotel guests' expectations.

In order to obtain an advantage compared to the competing hotels, the hotel managers must provide their customers with quality services and meet their expectations properly by performing periodic evaluations on customer satisfaction and quality improvement using the Servqual model (figure 1).
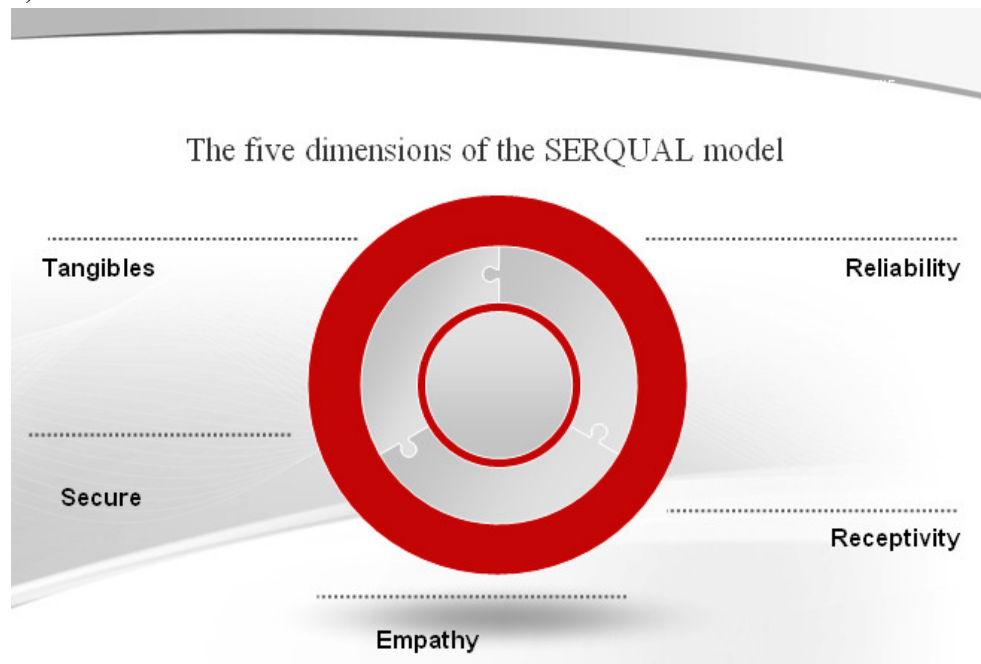

Figure 1. The dimensions of the Servqual model (source: made by the author)

The elements of the Servqual model are: material goods (tangible), reliability, responsiveness, security and courtesy, which are considered to be the five criteria in considering the quality of the services provided for guests, aiming to:

- Indicate the difference between the customer perceptions and expectations in the tangible dimension;

- Indicate the difference between the customer perceptions and expectations in the reliability dimension (ability to perform the promised service safely and accurately);
- Indicate the difference between the customer perceptions and expectations in the receptivity dimension (desire to help the customers and provide prompt services);
- Indicate the difference between the customer perceptions and expectations in the secure dimension (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to instil a sense of trust and safety);
- Indicate the difference between the customer perceptions and expectations in the empathy dimension (care, individualized attention that the hotel offers to its customers).

3 Problem Solution

For each of the 5 dimensions of quality (tangibles, reliability, receptivity, secure, empathy) there are determined the customers expectations before using the services, and, after the service consumption, there are determine the customers perceptions.

In the questionnaire, customers respond on:

1. tangibles, referring to:
   - Attractiveness of the exterior structure
   - New and modern hotel facilities
   - Staff discipline and cleanliness
   - Attractiveness of the hotel interior decorating

2. reliability, referring to:
   - Room service
   - Adjust the room to customer expectations
   - Adequacy of the available room facilities
   - Speed in answering to customer orders

3. receptivity, comprising:
   - Hello and welcome
   - Response to the guests requirements
   - The rate of customer information by the hotel staff
   - The operational speed of the staff serving the clients

4. secure, referring to:
   - The skills and experience of the staff
   - Politeness of the staff
   - The rate between services and their price
   - Providing a calm place
   - The efforts of the staff in providing and maintaining a secure environment

5. empathy, referring to:
   - Access to the hotel
   - The attention of the staff in establishing effective relations with the tourists
   - The flexibility of staff
   - The predictions and perceptions of the top management regarding the customer needs

Each dimension (tangibles, reliability, receptivity, secure, empathy), which was evaluated by the tourists, receives points from one to five, the highest score representing the maximum degree in customer satisfaction.

The difference between customer expectations and perceptions regarding the material assets, reliability, receptivity, secure and empathy, ultimately reflect these items' quality which was felt by the guests.

For example, a hotel that presents the data from the table 1, is a hotel that was not able to provide quality services in order to satisfy its customers, the poor quality being reflected in all the five dimensions.

Table 1

The gap between customer expectations and perceptions on service quality judged on the five dimensions of the Servqual model

Quality dimensions	Expectations (E)	Perceptions (P)
Tangibles	3,96	2,90
Reliability	3,90	2,63
Receptivity	4,78	3,20
Safety	5,19	3,93
Empathy	3,87	2,88
TOTAL	**4,34**	**3,11**

In the present case-study, the value between the total perceptions and total expectations is negative. In conclusion, the overall quality is not reaching the customers expectations (figure 2).

By using the Servqual model, the hotel management has now the necessary information regarding the weak points of the services the hotel provides and can take the necessary actions to improve hotel's service quality.

The Servqual model has been used successfully over time in the tourism sector, with results showing that in different parts of the world, quality is perceived differently by the tourists, and so, the model can be completed with more elements to meet the costumers expectations (Juwaheer and Ross (Juwaheer T.D., Ross, D.L. 2003: 15(2) have identified nine dimensions of the quality, "responsiveness", "reliability" and "assurance" being considered as main determinants of the service quality).

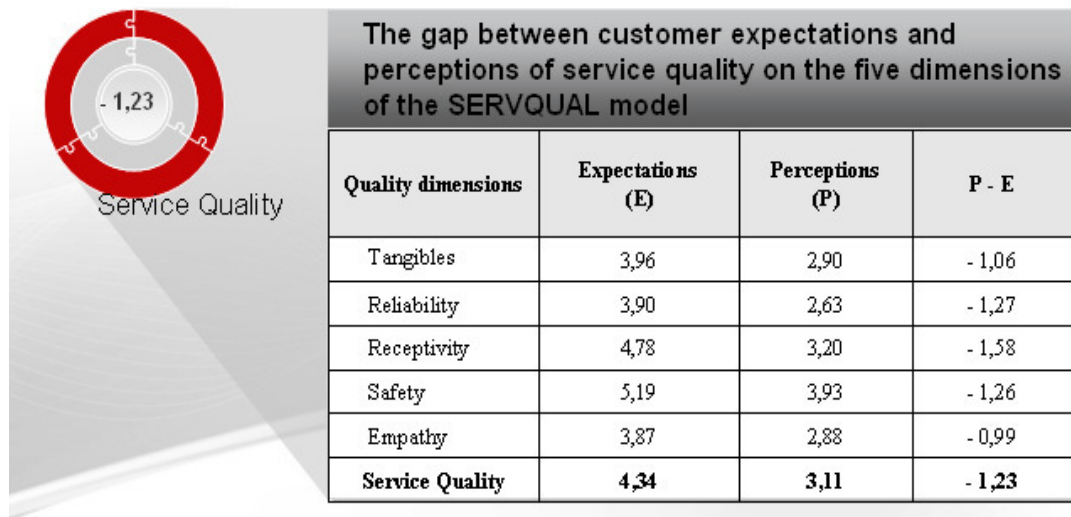| The gap between customer expectations and perceptions of service quality on the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model			
Quality dimensions	Expectations (E)	Perceptions (P)	P - E
Tangibles	3,96	2,90	- 1,06
Reliability	3,90	2,63	- 1,27
Receptivity	4,78	3,20	- 1,58
Safety	5,19	3,93	- 1,26
Empathy	3,87	2,88	- 0,99
Service Quality	**4,34**	**3,11**	**- 1,23**

Figure 2. The Service quality in the studied hotel using the Servqual model (source: made by the author)

Over time, the Servqual model had and still has supporters, but also opponents. Thus, some authors reproach that the scale of the model is not sufficiently comprehensive, as other reproaches refer to how relevant the model is for the quality in situations involving multiple stakeholders due to the fact that the model ignores several stakeholders (Sararoudi M.B. 2008).

By grouping the difficulties regarding the use of the Servqual model, we can speak of the following five main categories:

- the gaps issue and their use;
- reliability of the gaps
- little predictive and convergent validity;
- ambiguity in shaping the expectations;
- the unstable dimension of the model.

Although the Servqual model has been criticized on theoretical and operational criteria, Ausbonteng et al. concludes that "until there will appear a better model, but as simple, the Servqual model will prevail itself as a measure of the service quality" (Sararoudi M.B. 2008).

4 Conclusion

The Servqual model provides, due to its five key factors (tangibles, reliability, receptivity, secure, empathy), a detailed description of the customer needs, perceptions and expectations, the information provided by Servqual being used in order to adapt the services to the customers' priorities. However, there is possible to arise problems linked to the uniform application of this measurement tool across multiple service sectors because the five dimensions are not universal.

For many organizations in the hospitality industry, the Servqual model implementation involves many difficulties. It involves such a profound transformation of the organization that there is inevitable the emergence of a strong resistance. For this reason it is necessary to take into account the huge effort that is required to resolve the difficulties in this process.

The conclusion is: *quality is a goal, an objective which must mobilize all the units of the service organization. Quality shows the direction towards which the action must be oriented.*

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