

DEMOGRAPHIC PREDICTORS WITHIN LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication process within local public administration. In order to extend satisfaction research in the public sector, were analyzed citizens' expectations and perceptions considering local public administration within Crisana Region.*

Design/methodology/approach- Using a quantitative methodological approach, a survey based on SERVQUAL instrument was applied in order to evaluate local public communication. Data from a sample of 380 citizens within Western Romanian were analyzed. Specific demographic predictors that can influence citizens' satisfaction regarding the quality of communication are analyzed.

*Findings-*By analyzing data it was possible to determine citizen satisfaction and to assess its relationship with different demographic characteristics. The results illustrate that gender does not significantly affect satisfaction, instead age, marital status, residence location (urban versus rural), income, education and occupational status of the respondents significantly affect satisfaction regarding local public communication. In addition, the findings confirm a relationship between the citizens' satisfaction and the age, income, education and occupational status of the respondents.

Research limitations/implications- Owing to the budget and time limits, only a one-shot survey was conducted, therefore the comparison between "before" and "after" analysis could not be performed. In addition, further research should investigate the local public communication within national contexts.

Practical implications -The adapted SERVQUAL scale may be used by institution managers to objectively assess communication performance and local authority service quality.

Originality/value- There continues to be a lack of research regarding the communication process within local public administration and the effect of demographic predictors of communication satisfaction. This paper examines both the perceptions and the expectations of citizens regarding public communication. The results offer insights into residence location, age, income, education and occupational status effects on evaluations of communication satisfaction. Finally, the study contributes to studies of perceived service quality by bearing out the link between communication efficiency and several demographic characteristics in a public-sector context.

Keywords: satisfaction; communication; expectations; perceptions; demographic characteristics

JEL classification: H83

1. Introduction

The assessment of communication as a determinant of satisfaction appears in several studies on satisfaction with health services (Mazzei, Russo, Crescentini, 2009), police services (Chu, Huey-Long Song, 2008), service quality in public sector (Agus et. al., 2007, Wisniewski 2001).

Service quality is an abstract concept considered by many specialists in quality and

marketing as being particularly difficult to define and measure. Parasuraman et al. (1988, p.12) developed "a 22-item instrument (called SERVQUAL) for assessing customer perceptions of service quality in service and retailing organizations". Although the SERVQUAL model was accredited by marketing and management academics, the model has attracted critics who have motivated that cannot be used the same model for all the different contexts and situations in which service quality operates (Agus et. al., 2007, Bowers et al., 1994; Brady and Cronin, 2001; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Gronroos, 1982; Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982; Rust and Oliver, 1994).

2. Method

Before data collection, the developed survey instrument was pre-tested and validated (Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above 0,7). The statements from the questionnaires used a five-point Likert type scale (1 -strong disagreement, 5 - strong agreement). Data from the socio-demographic questionnaires were used to characterize respondents by using nominal and interval scales.

Data were collected this year over a one month period. The face to face survey was used in order to collect data from a 380 sample of citizens. The representative sample was chosen using a stratified multistadial sampling design. Of the sample, 51 percent live in residencies, 52 percent were females, their average age was 39, 54 percent were currently employed, and they had an average of 12 years of education. In terms of income 32 percent earn less than 600 RON; 35 percent earn between 600 and 1000 RON; 26 percent earn between 1001 and 2000 RON; 0,5 percent earn between 2001 and 4000 RON; and 0,01 percent earn more than 4001 RON. After collecting the questionnaire data analyzed using SPSS version 20.0.

Three statistical analysis methods were employed to test the research hypotheses:

- Cronbach's alpha coefficients: to measure scale reliabilities;
- Independent Samples Test to investigate the relationship between perceptions of satisfaction, gender and citizens' provenance;
- Spearman's rho: to investigate the relationship between perceptions of satisfaction level of education, occupational status, age, and income.

In our opinion, satisfaction represents the gap between citizens' perceptions regarding local public communication and their expectations on this concern. The SERVQUAL score is:

SERVQUAL Score= Perceptions- Expectations

3. Findings

H1. There are significant differences on the five dimensions of citizens' satisfaction (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) on the communication of local public administration depending on the citizens' gender.

Table 1: Independent Samples Test - to test de perceptions differences depending on the citizens` gender

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
TP_E	EVA*	.185	.667	-.311	378	.756	-.02778	.08939	-.20353	.14798
	EVNA*			-.311	376.480	.756	-.02778	.08919	-.20315	.14759
FP_E	EVA*	1.659	.199	.206	378	.837	.01819	.08838	-.15559	.19198
	EVNA*			.207	377.999	.836	.01819	.08789	-.15461	.19100
RP_E	EVA*	.892	.346	.804	378	.422	.06841	.08508	-.09888	.23571
	EVNA*			.803	370.829	.423	.06841	.08523	-.09919	.23601
SP_E	EVA*	.019	.889	.727	378	.468	.07704	.10596	-.13131	.28538
	EVNA*			.728	376.056	.467	.07704	.10577	-.13094	.28501
EP_E	EVA*	.010	.920	.526	378	.599	.13148	.25016	-.36040	.62336
	EVNA*			.526	375.712	.599	.13148	.24980	-.35969	.62266

EVA*-Equal variances assumed

EVNA*-Equal variances not assumed

Source: Processed by authors

H4.a. There are significant differences on the tangibility dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration depending on the citizens` gender.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to - 0,311 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,756$, so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -0,975 and -0,947 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from - 0,203 to 0,147. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H1.a. is rejected.

H4.b. There are significant differences on the reliability dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration depending on the citizens` gender.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 0,206 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,837$, so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -1,126 and -1,144 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from - 0,155 to 0,191. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H1.b. is rejected.

H4.c. There are significant differences on the responsiveness dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration depending on the citizens' gender.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 0,804 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,422$, so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -0,951 and -1,019 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from -0,098 to 0,235. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H1.c. is rejected.

H4.d. There are significant differences on the assurance dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration depending on the citizens' gender.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 0,727 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,468$, so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -1,343 and -1,420 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from -0,131 to 0,285. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H1.d. is rejected.

H4.e. There are significant differences on the empathy dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration depending on the citizens' gender.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 0,526 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,599$, so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -3,300 and -3,431 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from -0,131 to 0,285. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H1.e is rejected.

Table 2: Independent Samples Test- to test de perceptions differences depending on the citizens' provenance

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test-t-test for Equality of Means for Equality of Variances								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
TP_E	EVA*	.640	.424	.884	378	.377	.07887	.08924	-.09660	.25435
	EVNA*			.882	371.076	.378	.07887	.08945	-.09702	.25477
FP_E	EVA*	.015	.901	-.380	378	.704	-.03353	.08831	-.20717	.14011
	EVNA*			-.380	376.720	.704	-.03353	.08826	-.20707	.14001
RP_E	EVA*	1.212	.272	1.094	378	.275	.09292	.08496	-.07413	.25997
	EVNA*			1.092	373.763	.275	.09292	.08506	-.07434	.26018
SP_	EVA*	1.328	.250	2.934	378	.004	.30735	.10477	.10134	.51336

E	EVNA*			2.931	374.21 1	.004	.30735	.10488	.10113	.51357
EP_	EVA*	1.093	.296	3.030	378	.003	.74876	.24709	.26292	1.2346 1
E	EVNA*			3.027	374.26 1	.003	.74876	.24733	.26243	1.2350 9

EVA*-Equal variances assumed

EVNA*-Equal variances not assumed

Source: Processed by authors

H2. There are significant differences on the five dimensions of citizens' satisfaction (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) on the communication of local public administration according to the citizens' provenance.

H2.a. There are significant differences on the tangibility dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration according to the citizens' provenance.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 0,844 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,377$ so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -0,923 and -1,002 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from -0,096 to 0,254. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H2.a. is rejected.

H2.b. There are significant differences on the reliability dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration according to the citizens' provenance.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to -0,380 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,704$ so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -1,151 and -1,117 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from -0,207 to 0,140. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H2.b. is rejected.

H2.c. There are significant differences on the responsiveness dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration according to the citizens' provenance.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 1,094 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,275$ so because this value is more than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -0,939 and -1,032 does not differ statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from -0,074 to 0,259. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H2.c. is rejected.

H2.d. There are significant differences on the assurance dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration according to the citizens' provenance.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 2,934 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,004$ so because this value is less than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -1,231 and -1,539 differs statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from 0,101 to 0,513. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H2.d. is confirmed.

H2.e. There are significant differences on the empathy dimension of citizens' satisfaction regarding the communication of local public administration according to the citizens' provenance.

Using equal variance assumed test, t is equal to 3,030 with a degree of freedom 378 and a significance level $p=0,003$ so because this value is less than 0,05 and this shows that the mean of the two groups -3,001 and -3,750 differs statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval of difference between the mean which is from 0,262 to 1,234. Since the interval includes 0,00 the difference is not statistically significant two-tailed 5%, therefore the research hypothesis H2.e. is confirmed.

H3. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the citizens' level of education and their satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions.

As is evident from Table 3 there is a weak positive relationship between the citizens' level of education and their satisfaction regarding the marketing communications from local government institutions ($r = 0,189$, $p= 0,000$ and is less than 0,05) so that the null hypothesis is rejected. The higher is level of education, the higher the citizens' satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions. Accordingly, we can say that the satisfaction of marketing communications in local government institutions increases with the education level. Therefore the research hypothesis H3 is confirmed.

Table 3: Correlation between the citizens' level of education and their satisfaction

Correlations

			GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Education
Spearman's rho	GAP_Perceptions_Expectations	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.189**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	380	380
	Education	Correlation Coefficient	.189**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	380	380

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Processed by authors

H4. There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the citizens' age and their satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions.

From the correlation analysis presented in Table 4 there is a weak negative relationship between citizens' age and their satisfaction regarding the marketing communications from local government institutions ($r = -0,167$, $p= 0,001$ and is less than 0,05) so that the null hypothesis is rejected. As expected, younger and older individuals ranked differently satisfaction. The younger the citizen it is, the higher the citizens' satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions. Accordingly, we can say that the satisfaction of marketing communications in local government institutions decreases along with aging process. Therefore the research hypothesis H4 is confirmed.

Table 4: Correlation between the citizens' age and their satisfaction
Correlations

			GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Age
Spearman's rho	GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.167**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	380	380
	Age	Correlation Coefficient	-.167**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	380	380

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Processed by authors

H5. There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the citizens' occupational status and their satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions.

Table 5: Correlation between the citizens' occupational status and their satisfaction
Correlations

			GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Occupation
Spearman's rho	GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.128*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.013
		N	380	380
	Occupation	Correlation Coefficient	-.128*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.
		N	380	380

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Processed by authors

As is evident from Table 5 there is a weak positive relationship between the citizens' level of education and their satisfaction regarding the marketing communications from local government institutions($r = -0,128$, $p = 0,013$ and is less than 0,05) so that the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the employed citizens are more satisfied with marketing communications from local government institutions than the citizens who do not have a job (unemployed, retired people or students). Therefore the research hypothesis H5 is confirmed.

Table 6: Correlation between the citizens' income and their satisfaction

Correlations

			GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Income

Spearman's rho	GAP_ Perceptions_ Expectations	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.111
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.030
		N	380	380
	Income	Correlation Coefficient	.111	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.
		N	380	380

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Processed by authors

H6. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the citizens' income and their satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions.

From the correlation analysis presented in Table 6 there is a weak negative relationship between citizens' income and their satisfaction regarding the marketing communications from local government institutions ($r = -0,111$, $p = 0,030$ and is less than $0,05$) so that the null hypothesis is rejected. The higher is the citizens' income, the higher the satisfaction regarding the marketing communication of local government institutions. Therefore, the research hypothesis H6 is confirmed.

4. Conclusions

The present study analyzed the specific demographic predictors that can influence citizens' satisfaction regarding the quality of communication. The analysis leads to a clearer awareness of the general appreciation regarding local public communication. Considering that citizens' expectations have not been encountered by their perceptions regarding communication of local government, the SERVQUAL Gap was negative (-1,07).

Accordingly to other studies (Benedict et al., 2000, Chermak et. al., 2001, Davis, 1990, Huang and Vaughn, 1996, Worall, 1999) it can be mentioned that gender has no effect on perceptions of the quality, thus the first hypothesis was rejected. After testing the second hypothesis on the assurance and empathy dimension of communication quality there were differences in citizens' perceptions regarding local public communication according to the citizens' provenance. The results indicate that residents from urban communities appreciated the communication process within local public administration more negatively. Likewise, there some studies which indicated that residents of urban communities view the police more negatively than residents from rural residents (Huang and Vaghn 1996, Worall, 1999). The third, fourth, fifth and sixth hypotheses were confirmed, thus citizens' age, level of education, occupational status and income affect their satisfaction regarding marketing communications from local government institutions.

The academic research concerning the effects of a person's income and level of education is ambiguous. The research that focused on police services has found that as a person's income increased, so did their levels of confidence in the police (Frank et al., 2005; Murty et al., 1990). Instead, Dowler (2003) found that as income increased, confidence in the police decreased while Cao (2001) noticed that there was no statistically significant correlation between the two variables.

Further research should investigate less investigated predictors of satisfaction. The emotions that consumers feel when consuming a service, past experiences, the frequency of the citizens' contact to local authorities, types of contact have not been explored in either perceived service quality or customer satisfaction models.

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