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Research of Customers' Satisfaction in The Hotel Service

Dusica Saneva¹

Sonja Chortoseva²

Faculty of Tourism and business logistics, University Goce Delcev, Stip R. Macedonia,
dusicasaneva@gmail.com

²Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje R. Macedonia,
sonja@tmf.ukim.edu.mk

Abstract: The service quality in the hotel industry is an important factor for the sustainability of its existing capabilities and a possibility for its advancement. Also, it is an indicator for the level of satisfaction of the customers and it refers to factors that characterise one product or service. Securing an excellent service quality and high satisfaction on the side of the customers is an important matter and a challenge for any modern service industry and is for that reason an issue of the contemporary surveys as regards the quality of services in the hotel industry. The quality of hotel services is expressed through their features that ensure fulfilling the needs and expectations of the customers of those services, whereby the customer is the one that gives the final grade as regards the degree of accomplished satisfaction. It is essential to fulfill and achieve better quality of service than the one expected by the customer. Accomplishing satisfaction on the side of the customer means permanent following of the requests of modern tourists, respecting the specific standards and continuous promotion of the hotel service. The satisfaction as regards the quality of the hotel service is the basic precondition for building and stability of the loyalty of the guests. A large number of researchers surveyed the quality of the hotel service. Different criteria have been underlined on the basis of which the consumers assess the quality of the hotel service, numerous measurable and nonmeasurable elements of the service, as well as methods for measuring the quality of the service and the satisfaction of tourists. The objective of this paper is to analyse the nature of the hotel service, the elements, features and approaches for assessing the satisfaction of the users of the hotel service and to design a model for researching this matter.

Key words: quality, service quality, hotel industry, models

Introduction

Quality management as a scientific discipline, practical skill or profession does not have long history, but it has a long prehistory. The quality concept and its philosophy are not always clear for the managers or others involved in quality issues. The primary task is to understand the concept of quality, to influence the education and promotion through various programs, in order to develop a collective quality consciousness. All company functions should be arranged in such a way as to provide better final quality and greater profitability. The word "quality" originates from the Latin word "*qualitas*", which means: ability, value, property or characteristic of a particular object or work, requirements compliance, satisfaction etc. (Vujaklija, 1980). The quality is the key element of the services value upon which the companies can: take place in the market, provide a greater market share, provide higher incomes and contribute to the improvement of employees and customers' satisfaction. According to the American Society for Quality Control, the quality is an overall feature and characteristic of goods or services, expressed through its opportunity to satisfy the expressed or proposed requirements (Kotler and Keller, 2009). The concept of the services quality is explored by many researchers, but because of its intangible, undefined and abstract nature it is hard to differentiate and measure it as so thus only small number of researchers have scientific analysis. The quality of the service is not a coincidence, but it is the choice between possibilities. The quality is the consumers' perception, i.e. the way that the customer has experienced the service and its expectation before getting it. The expected service is the function of customer's previous experience, his personal requirement and word of mouth communication. The perceived service is the result of series of internal customers' decisions and their activities (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985).

The hotel industry has a vast number of services, high level of comfort and number of other hospitality components. Since the service quality is the key element it has to have high level of customer involvement in different aspects of services delivery organization (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). The service

quality is an important aspect for the success of the hotel industry, thus the evaluation of the service quality by the customers is more than necessary. With evaluation of the services quality one can provide the necessary information for the adequate management of the services offered (Uddin, 2015). The hotel industry is making an effort to provide the customers with high service quality level however it is usually lower than their expectations, because the customers are aware of their requirements for higher standards of services received. Customers are continuously complementing and developing their perceptions and expectations, which makes it more difficult for the services providers to measure and manage them efficiently (Kumar, Banga and Thapar, 2011).

Services quality and customers' satisfaction in the hotel industry

The researches in the field of the hotel industry have shown that offering a superior services quality is one of the key aspects for the industry success (Atilgan, Akinci and Aksoy, 2003). The service quality has a key importance for the hotel industry success and has the key role in the improvement of the total service experience value (Mey, Akbar and Yong, 2005). The service quality is very important to win and keep the customers, and thus to reduce costs, increase profitability and strengthen the market position (Klidas, Berg and Wilderom, 2007; Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Kamalannabhan, 2001). The hotel customers are evaluating the service quality according to their perception of the service provided. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the most important characteristics which are determining the hotel services quality. The most important characteristics that determine the quality are as follows (Barjaktarovic, 2013):

The heterogeneity of the hotel structure is a characteristic that directly or indirectly is taking part in the development of the hotel services and significantly contributes for its quality with a vast number of different subjects; *The intangibility of major hotel services* resembles an intangible whole which affects the total hotel services quality. Many of the hotel services are invisible, non-material and insensitivity before their use and is impossible to experience them before staying in the hotel; Another characteristic that determines the services quality is the indivisibility of services i.e. the simultaneous occurrence of both "production process" and hotel services consumption unlike the manufacturing sector where the process of production and consumption are separated by space and time. *The production service aspect of the work* with its diversity of hotel structures and its highlighted characteristics determine the specificity of the working process in this industry; *The specific way of communication and hotel services sale* is a characteristic which significantly contributes to the improvement of hotel services sale, because it is performed before their use and for users who are outside the area where the hotel is; The hotel services are based on the relation between staff and customers, relation among staff and relation among customers, thus it is important to have a high level of interpersonal relations of the staff and customers; A number of different elements participate in the formation of the hotel services, thus their variability or *changeability of significant hotel parts is present*; The hotel services can't be owned because the service is sold to the customers, thus there is a *lack of ownership of the hotel services in the hotel industry*. This means that the customer only pays for the service use or rental, and it is not its owner. Thus, the hotel service is felt and experienced, and as such is a measure of the quality and the level of pleasure experienced by the customers. Another characteristic that determines the services quality is the *highlighted seasonal aspect of the activity and sensitivity to all kinds of changes*. The seasonal aspect of the work in the hotel industry depends on the tourism trends and customers' requirements. Beside the seasonal aspect, hotel industry is *dependent on* factors such as weather, economic, political, and other variations aspects.

The service quality in the hotel industry has the following features (Perović and Krivokapić, 2006):

- 1) Reliability – the ability to provide service as specified in terms of content, quality and time.
- 2) Responsibility – relation of the top management, management and all employees to the demands of customers.
- 3) Competency – knowledge and ability of the employees to provide services;
- 4) Courtesy – the ability to provide guests with fast service and help;
- 5) Access – the service must always be available without waiting, in the right place and at the right time.
- 6) Communication – the customer must be well informed.

- 7) Creditability – the staff members improve the image of the hotel with their actions and keep it positive.
- 8) Security – knowledge of the staff and its willingness to bring trust and reliability. Appearance of every risk is prevented.
- 9) Understanding/knowing the customers – hotel management and staff are constantly getting to know the requirements, needs and expectations of the customers.
- 10) Tangibility – physical facilities, equipment and contact persons.

Model for measurement of the services quality

The definition and measurement of services quality has caused great attention and debate among researchers (Wisniewski, 2001). Many researchers have given effort to evaluate the services quality in the hotel industry. Service quality can be observed, measured and improved by a suitable measurement model. The service quality measurement provides comparison of the changes before and after, quality problems detection and it sets clear standards for services delivery (Shahin, 2006). The initial point in the development of services quality is analysis and measurements (Edvardsen, Tomasson and Ovretveit, 1994). Services quality evaluation provides the necessary information for proper services management and ability to find out the level of efficiency with which the managers can meet the demands and needs of the customers in accordance with their perceptions (Mohamed, 2007). Beside forth-mentioned, service quality measurements in the hotel industry can help in identifying and prioritizing customers' needs, requirements and expectations.

The GAP measurement model for services quality was developed in 1985 by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry. According to this model, the service quality is a function of the consumers' perception, i.e. the way consumer has defined the service and expectation which is formed before receiving the service. Five gaps has been identified that can be the causes for customers dissatisfaction with the services received:

- Gap 1: Consumers expectations and management perception
- Gap 2: Management perception and service quality specification
- Gap 3: Specification of service quality and services provided
- Gap 4: Received service and external communication
- Gap 5: Expected service and service provided

Service quality perceived and measured by the consumer will especially depend on the value of Gap 5, which is a function or sum of the previous Gaps 1, 2, 3 and 4. According to this model managers who are committed to deliver continuous service quality should implement the following activities: to follow customers' perception of services quality, to identify the reasons for service quality decline and to take proper measures to improve the service quality. The most popular, most utilized and mostly discussed measurement model of customer's satisfaction and service quality in the hotel industry is the SERVQUAL model. This model highlights the main components for obtaining high service quality (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1988).

Service quality can be observed through many dimensions, but in this model it is measured through the consumer service perception. When customers' expectations are greater than their perception of the service provided then the service quality is considered as low. The hotel industry utilizes the SERVQUAL model to measure and manage the service quality by using a questionnaire that measures consumer expectations of services quality, in terms of 5 dimensions, and their perception for the service provided. The five dimensions that define customers' perception of service quality are as follows:

- 1) *Tangibility*, refers to the service elements that can be felt and are physically visible, e.g. physical facilities, employees, communication objects, technical equipment and similar.
- 2) *Assurance*, ability to provide the promised service - accuracy and consistency. This dimension refers to promises fulfilment, prices and dealing with complaints.
- 3) *Responsibility*, employees' readiness to provide customers with the support in a quick, reasonable period of time. This dimension indicates the positive attitudes of the employees during services delivery and requires the employees to pay attention to the customers' requests, questions and complaints.

4) *Certainty*, knowledge and courtesy of the employees and ability to gain customers trust, physical and financial security.

5) *Empathy*, readiness and ability, to provide personal services, to meet special customers' requirements and their understandings as individuals with different needs and requirements.

The concept of measuring the difference between the expectations and perceptions according to the SERVQUAL instrument has proven to be very useful for the assessment of the services quality level. With minor changes, SERVQUAL can be customized for any service organization. Besides, they claim that the service quality information can help managers to find out where to best improve the performance for efficient services offer. SERVQUAL model is widely used in various service activities, such as: banking (Ravichandran, Prabhakaran and Kumar, 2010), in retail chains (Sum and Hui, 2009), health care sector (Butt and De Run 2010; Lian, and Suki, 2011), education (Udo, Bagchi, and Kirs, 2011) and transport sector (Barabino, Delana, and Tilocca, 2012). Also, SERVQUAL method is used to assess the services quality in various sectors including, hotels (Grzinić, 2007), restaurants (Markovic, Komsic and Stifanic, 2013) and air transport tourism (Pakdil and Aydin, 2007). The instrument LODGSERV which contains 26 measurement points of the customers' expectations for services quality has been created on the basis of SERVQUAL (Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, Patton and Yokoyama, 1991). The model SERVPERF is used as an alternative to SERVQUAL for measuring the services quality (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). The main conclusion of their research was that the services quality should be measured as the customer's attitude. Services quality dimensions in the hotel industry in Australia were evaluated based on SERVQUAL approach, but with newly developed scale called HOLSERV scale as a new instrument for the services quality measurement in the hotel industry (Mei, Dean and White, 1999). Their conclusion was that the services quality can be represented in three dimensions in the hotel industry, as employees, tangibility and certainty.

Despite the discussion on weaknesses, a certain advantage of SERVQUAL is that it is used and verified instrument. SERVQUAL is considered as an adequate tool for measuring the services quality in the hotels (Fernández and Serrano, 2005). Many of the authors and researchers decide to use the original SERVQUAL method, while others decide to design new instruments on the basis of the original model to measure the services quality.

Research model and discussion

Researches concerning the measurement of services quality have been mainly focused on whether and how to meet or exceed the expectations of customers and to see the services quality as a measure for matching the services delivered with the customers' perception. Based on the above literature review, a conceptual framework is developed and a research model has been proposed to examine the service quality in the hotel industry, by setting the following hypotheses:

1. There is a significant statistical difference between the expected and received service quality.

The specific nature of the services hardly contributes to provide measurement and maintenance of their quality. Customers see the services as variations of properties that can, in various ways, contribute to the realization of their desires and the perception of services quality (Ghobadian, Speller and Jones, 1994). Although researchers (Grönroos 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985, 1988, 1991) focus on the management of various aspects of service quality, they all agree that the focus should be on customers. With descriptive statistical analysis, factor analysis and analysis of trust fairly high customers' expectations for services received has been indicated (Ahmad, Ghazali and Othman, 2013). Empirical research carried in order to determine the service quality using primary data (preliminary analysis and reliable analysis) showed that the expected results are higher than the results perceptions, thus indicated the low level services quality with no significant statistical difference between expected and received service quality (Markovic and Raspor, 2010; Markovic, Komsic and Stifanic, 2013).

2. Managers do not know what are the customers' expectations.

The quality system is based on principles such as management commitment, focus on service customers, staff and facts, continuous progress and cooperation. Research conducted in several companies in the

field of services supply showed that managers are not concerned entirely to respond to customers various desires, needs and expectations and most managers do not know what are their customers' expectations. One of the main reasons for failure of the design of services quality is the lack of understanding of customers' needs and desires development (Nalk, Gantasala and Prabhakar, 2010). Also, important characteristics of successful service company are its ability to establish its competitive position in the market and to satisfy the customers better than its competitor (Ravichandran, Prabhakaran and Arun 2010).

3. The dimensions of the service quality considered as most important do not coincide with those that are most important to customers.

Managers do not know about their service customers' expectations because the dimensions of the services quality they consider as most important do not match to those that are most important to customers, as proven by the total SERVQUAL gap (Gržinić 2007). The results generally have shown that customers are not satisfied with the services received because the dimensions of service quality managers consider to be most important, do not match with those that are most important to customers. Their expectations were higher than those received except for the factor of "empathy" which was positive due their lower expectations (Blesic, Ivkov-Dzigurski, Stankov, Stamenković and Bradić, 2011). The management task is to implement a new business strategy that will bring not only short-term profit, but also permanent customers and long-term success. The goals realization can be achieved by applying the principle – to provide a service in accordance with customers' requirements and needs (Jones, Mason and Benefield 2011).

4. For excellent services quality it is necessary to apply an adequate model for quality measurement.

Customers see the quality as multidimensional concept and therefore the services quality measurement is of great importance despite its specific nature, thus for excellent service quality it is necessary to apply an adequate model for quality measurement. SERVQUAL scale is the most popular instrument for services quality measurement (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). This model is applied in various service activities, including the hotel and hospitality industry. A modified version of the SERVQUAL model has been proven as a suitable method to be used by managers, because it resulted in reliable data acquisition concerning services quality (Rao and Charan, 2013). The results obtained with the SERVQUAL instrument, have shown that this model can provide the managers with useful information for assessment of customers' expectations and perception, in order to detect the gaps in the dimensions of the individual services quality (Zhao and Benedetto, 2013). The companies firstly need to investigate the offer of services quality in accordance with the customer's answers, including intentions that can lead to behaviors which can be favorable or unfavorable for the company by using adequate methods (Stefano, Casarotto, Barrichello and Sohn, 2015).

Conclusion

Services quality in the hotel industry is essential for meeting services customers' requirements. The application of a suitable model for the services quality measurement will provide useful information to assess the expectations and perceptions of customers and to set the standards for services quality assurance in the hotel industry. It will also identify the strengths and weaknesses of the services quality in order to meet customers' expectations. By measuring the services quality, managers will be supported in the evaluation of the hotel competitive position as well as in strategic and operational decision making. Improving services quality in the hotel industry will increase consumer satisfaction and strengthen their loyalty, but will also improve the hotel industry by generating bigger incomes.

Measuring services quality can provide specific data that can be used for quality management, hence, the hotel industry will be able to monitor and maintain service quality. Also, an important issue is the relation between service quality inside and customers' satisfaction outside as to meet employees and customers services quality. Knowing how customers perceive the services quality and the possibility for it to be measured, the hotel industry can have the benefit of it in a quantitative and qualitative way. To fully appreciate the benefits of using services quality measurement methods, research should be carried out

every year in order to allow an annual comparison, to determine how the improved service has an impact on customers' perception and to determine the effectiveness of the development and improvement of the initiative services in the indicated dimensions. Perceptions measurement for the received service can increase the expectations and the frequent measurement could result in the loss of customers due to their motivation to respond properly. Also, there is no benefit from the measurement of service quality if someone is not ready to take adequate action for the findings. The development of the hotel industry depends on future continuous implementation of the total quality management (TQM), which will be applied within the frames of the entire organization which goal is to continuously improve the quality in all organizational processes, products and services. The approach to management within the frames of the organization is directed towards quality, based on the participation of all members, in the direction of long-term success by meeting customers' needs and for the benefit of all members of the organization and society.

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