Determining the Quality of Hotel Services in Mamaia Resort

Corina Aurora Marin (Barbu)
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
coribarbu@yahoo.com
Elena Condrea
"Ovidius" University of Constanta, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Romania
elenacondrea2003@yahoo.com

Abstract

The quality of services can give the hotel industry a great chance to create competitive differences for organizations, being considered an essential, significant concept and a critical success factor in this industry.

The quality of the services offered by a hotel is determined primarily by the satisfaction of its customers, the degree of fulfillment of their needs and desires. Numerous tools have been developed to measure the quality of services, which apply to both customers and hotel staff. The application of this tool allows to know the expectations and the level of customer satisfaction, and therefore the improvement of the services offered according to the needs of the guests. The most popular tool for measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL Model which has been applied in various service industries, including tourism and hospitality. This is the tool we also use to measure the quality of hotel services in Mamaia resort.

Key words: quality, hotel industry, services, SERVQUAL Model
J.E.L. classification: M10, M19, Z30, Z31, Z32

1. Introduction

The quality of a service has come into the spotlight of all companies in the last century because it is an aspect considered very important by the buyer who often makes a purchasing decision based on it. In recent years, many studies have been published that include quality as a very important aspect in the field of tourism. The hotel industry is one of the largest industries in the service sector and the aspect of quality is a really important fact in this domain. Providing quality services in the hotel industry faces challenges because the competition is very high in this sector. Many hotels focus on quality and want to offer a high one. It is also clear that some customers make a purchase decision only on the basis of higher quality. Thus, the aim of all hotels should be to increase the level of quality offered and to occupy a favorable position in the market.

The quality of hotel services is the extent to which the different requirements of customers are met through a set of intrinsic features. The quality of services provided by a hotel is given by customer satisfaction. They expect from the quality of services the fulfillment of the performance level and of the relational level, reactivity in case of a problem and predictability of the service quality. In this context, the hotel's focus must be on the customer and his requirements, on all levels, in order to achieve the highest possible level of quality.

New technologies have come to the aid of the hotel industry, which is an advantage in terms of information about what their customers want. The internet plays a key role nowadays, and the relationship between quality management, guest and internet is a new challenge for the hotel industry. The use of technologies helps the hotel to reach customers more easily and to find out their opinions about the services it offers, and can then, based on research, make continuous improvements to the services offered, in order to raise the quality degree offered.

2. Literature review

The tourist services have the role of permanently contributing to ensuring qualitative conditions of rest, relaxation and especially benefits, taking into account the current technical-scientific process and the improvement of management processes. In this context, the organizers of tourist services have the responsibility to organize and carry out tourist programs of the highest quality, designed to diversify the tourist offer, to increase their attractiveness and to meet the requirements and expectations of tourists. (Neagu V., Busuioc M., 2007).

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), "the quality of tourism is the result of a process that involves meeting all legitimate consumer needs, requirements and expectations in terms of product and service, at an acceptable price, in accordance with the contractual terms of a mutual agreement and the adjacent determinants of quality which are security and protection, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmonization of the tourism activity concerned with the human and natural environment ". (as defined by the WTO Quality Support Committee, and amended at the 6th meeting - Varadero, Cuba, 2003)

Quality in the hotel industry involves meeting customer expectations, presenting the characteristics of service quality to meet stated or implicit needs, compliance with specified requirements and usability.

A hotel should also establish a policy regarding the complaints. This can be done, for example, by publishing a guarantee of customer service quality, which will give customers the opportunity to say what they were dissatisfied with during their stay. A recovery strategy should also be implemented as soon as possible - certainly before negative attitudes are established. (Petzer D. J., Steyn T. F. J., Mostert P. G., 2009).

Researching the correspondence between service quality criteria in the hotel industry and customer expectations is of particular interest to researchers. However, it was not intended to disclose the concept of quality on customer loyalty through these studies. This has become relevant because it is not necessarily the greater difference between expected and received quality that will affect customer loyalty.

According to Berry and Parasuraman (1991) customer satisfaction is influenced by the availability of customer service, which is why the provision of quality services has become a major concern of all businesses. (Parasuraman A., Leonard L, Berry V., Zeithaml A., 1991). According to another author, "customer satisfaction is like a state of mind in which the customer's needs, desires and expectations throughout the life of the product or service have been met or exceeded, leading to subsequent acquisition and loyalty." (Anton, 1996). This is not the comparison itself (ie, the process of deconfirmation), but the customer's response to the comparison, satisfaction also having an emotional component.

Lee et al. (2015) in their study entitled "An Analysis of the Hotel Service Quality GAP and Customer Satisfaction" examined the discrepancy between performance and expectation in five dimensions of service quality and found that there are statistical differences in the customer satisfaction degree, between HGG (large gap group) and LGG (low gap group). Their analysis highlights that there is a discrepancy between expectation and performance in terms of the degree of hotel quality. The degree of discrepancy between performance and expectation in the five dimensions of service quality showed significant differences between hotel classes. This means that customers have a high expectation, but the quality of hotel services is low, which indicates dissatisfaction. Among the five dimensions of service quality, the score between the expectation difference and performance was the lowest in the receptivity dimension, but the gap score was the highest in terms of hotel class materials. (Lee N., 2015). Thus, service quality is assumed to be a function of employee-customer interactions if variations in customer contact performance lead to differences in service quality.

According to another study applied to hotels in the UK, it has been shown that in any service activity, the quality of service and customer satisfaction are the most important key marketing strategies for competitive differentiation and customer retention. Understanding this issue will help businesses be more successful. Due to competition in the service business, measuring customer satisfaction has become a common practice in hotels around the world in order to assess the quality of existing management practices and suggest the direction for improvement. (Mohamed, 2012).

The aim of this study was to research the components of hotel quality services and to examine the perception of service quality according to different customer segments. A questionnaire survey based on the SERVQUAL model was used to measure the quality of services. The result revealed that the SERVQUAL scale and other related variables are reliable and valid. In addition, the conclusions obtained from the application of the independent test showed that there is a significant difference in the perception of service quality at different customer segments / groups. (Mohamed, 2012).

Saleem and Raja (2014), in their study entitled "The impact of service quality on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and brand image", showed that the reason for this study is to analyze the association between hotel service quality and analyze the cause of customer satisfaction, brand image and customer loyalty. The conclusions suggested that a high quality of services increases customer satisfaction and then this satisfaction will strengthen customer loyalty. (Saleem H., Raja N., 2014).

Qualitative and quantitative studies show that hotels can successfully adopt quality management practices. In the case of studies that show positive results, it can be emphasized that such benefits are related to improved customer, employee and other stakeholder satisfaction, improved operational results, improved efficiency which, in turn, leads to the improvment of the hotel image and its differentiation on the market.

Service excellence is the key to improving the customer-supplier relationship, but it can only be achieved if the customers' needs are known in detail. Services are an important element in the hotel industry that needs to be improved in order to survive nowadays and in the future. (Badler H., 2004). Quality and related services are the standard requirements of today's customers who will be the deciding factor in the future.

3. Research methodology

Given the fact that he is the one who directly benefits from the services, the customer is the one who decides the quality according to the degree of satisfaction of his needs. The needs of the client are the requirements that motivate him to act to satisfy them and the characteristics of the hotel service must satisfy these needs. The customer can be in this sense the main pillar in all activities and processes and evaluations of satisfaction of hotel services. For the organization, customer feedback is paramount and allows for quality improvement, from this approach resulting in the fact that the products and services offered by a hotel must be designed according to customer needs and preferences. (Reeves C., Bednar D., 1995).

Thus, the process of establishing the quality of hotel services is left to the guests. The heterogeneity and complexity of the technical, organizational and personnel structure of a tourist service and a hotel service, as a material basis, as well as the degree of specialization of a hotel product reflect the level of tourist development in certain areas.

In this context I chose to apply a practical model accompanied by the research tool that has already been applied and tested through studies and research: SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL method understands quality as a reflection of customer satisfaction. It is based on the presumption that a customer's satisfaction is a reflection of the difference between his expectations and the perception of the level of service required. The dimensions of a quality service, which are mentioned above, are evaluated as basic characteristics of the quality of a service from the customer's point of view. (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990).

A standardized questionnaire was used for the measurements in which the statements are represented by five dimensions of a quality service. The objective of the study is to find out the opinions of some clients regarding 21 quality characteristics related to the services offered by the hotels in Mamaia resort, Constanța county. These quality characteristics were grouped into 5 dimensions of service quality: tangibility, availability, competence, security and empathy.

Two different customer evaluations were required in the measurement process; the first finds the level desired or expected by the customer from the hotel services, and the second reflects the customers' perception on the services offered by the hotel. The difference between the evaluation of expectation and perception is formulated through the so-called SERVQUAL score.

The structure of the questionnaire was slightly modified for the needs of research in the hotel industry - the questions from the initial SERVQUAL questionnaire were reformulated and, at the same time, some questions were omitted due to their low relevance to the hotel industry.

The questionnaire applied to the respondents contains 3 parts. The first part of the questionnaire specifies personal data related to: sex, age, education and occupation. The second part consists of the actual questionnaire consisting of 22 items, grouped in 4 dimensions. The last part offers the respondent the possibility to offer suggestions, complaints or compliments regarding the quality of the services he/she received.

The sample consists of a number of 870 respondents, customers of hotels in the Mamaia resort. Through them, the evaluations of a number of 12 hotels could be carried out. The questionnaires were applied between 05.08-05.09.2019. The questionnaires were completed by the hotel guests on a tablet before the check-in and after the end of the services, for a better accuracy of the answers.

It is necessary to specify that all 12 hotels benefit from a quality management system, being chosen precisely for this reason. Thus, hotels try to obtain information on customer satisfaction by applying these available questionnaires to be completed at the hotel reception. This method was chosen because the recovery of questionnaires placed in hotel rooms is minimal.

The aim of this study was to determine the quality factors of perceived hotel services that have the greatest impact, respectively, the least impact on consumer satisfaction.

In assessing the content of the questionnaires, respondents had to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the services specified in the statements, taking into account their expectations of what a hotel offers in general and then of the quality of the conditions and services they benefited from. Score 5 indicates the highest level of expectations; score 4 indicates a high level of expectations; score 3 indicates an average level of expectations; score 2 indicates a low level of expectations; score 1 indicates a very low level of expectations.

In the study were noted with A.P – the predictive expectations and with A.R. – the achieved expectations, averaging for each dimension. P- the perception on the felt quality was calculated by the following formula: A.R.-A.P. = P.

4. Results

The measurement of the 5 dimensions (tangibility, availability, empathy, competence and security) by the customers, showed that, on the one hand, hotel guests have quite high expectations from the hotel service provider and, on the other hand, their perception of the level of services offered is also assessed quite high. From the comparison of the average expectations and perceptions for the entire group of respondents we can see that all the attributes of a quality service are considered by the guests to be very significant.

We thus averaged the predictive expectations, resulting from the application of the first questionnaire on customer expectations regarding the quality of services offered by hotels and then the average results of the second questionnaire on customer opinions on the quality of conditions and services offered, representing expectations met. Following the calculations performed, we were able to determine a comparison of the predictive expectations with those achieved in terms of the analyzed hotel services (see Figure no.1).

Figure no.1. Comparison of average predictive expectations and average expectations of quality services in the analyzed hotels
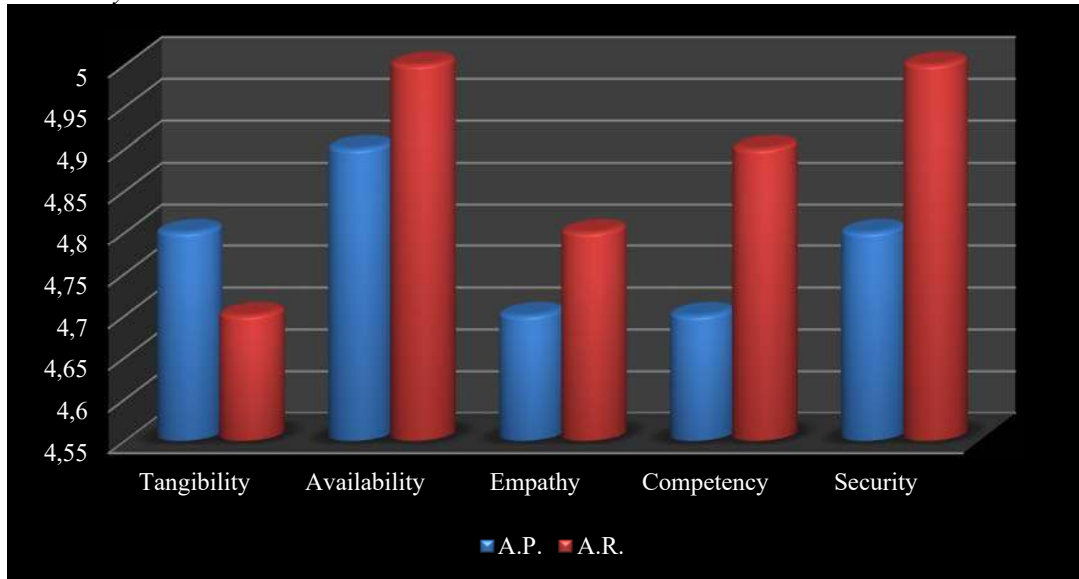
Source: Research data processing

If none of these attributes are triggered, the guests believe that the hotel has fully met them or even exceeded their expectations. Despite this, the difference between perception (A.R.) and expectations (A.P.) – the so called gap difference is significant. (Figure no.2). The largest gap is seen by respondents in the case of security and competence attributes, in the sense that A.R. is higher than A.P., which demonstrates that the satisfaction felt is greater than expected. There is only one dimension in which the predefined expectations were higher than the expectations, this being in the case of tangibility where there is an average negative gap of -0.1.

Figure no.2. The gap between predefined expectations and achievable expectations

	Tangibility	Availability	Empathy	Competency	Security
P	-0,1	0,1	0,1	0,2	0,2
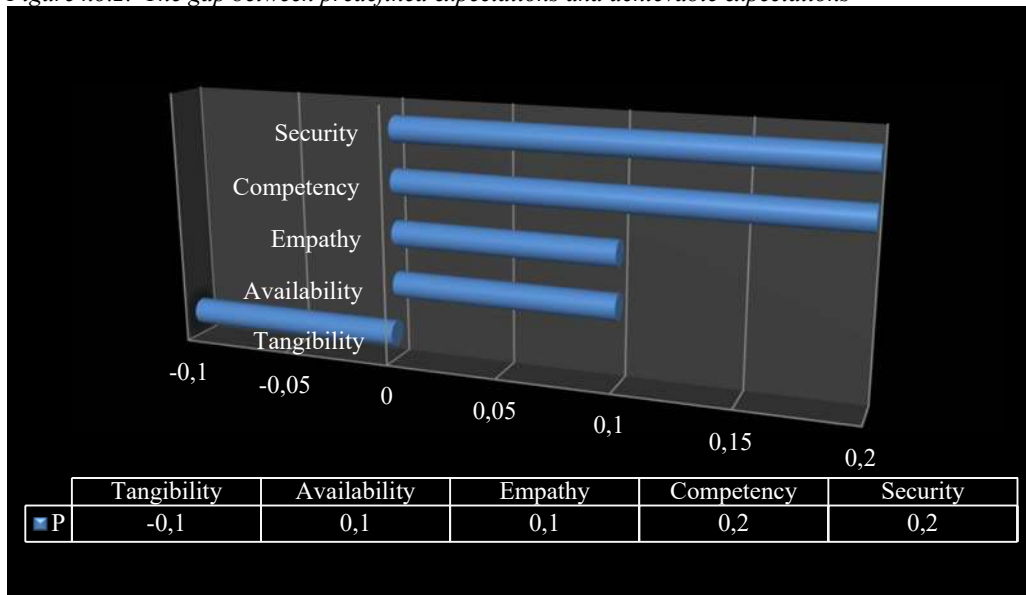
Source: Research data processing

Analyzing the final SERVQUAL scores for each pair of statements found that the greatest satisfaction is observed with the behavior of hotel employees - guests positively assess the friendliness of the staff, interest in solving problems and appropriate language that evokes the trust of hotel guests. On the other hand, negative statements where expectations were higher than the services offered by the hotel are found in the size of tangibility. Guests have negatively rated the concordance of the services specified on the internet with the reality, hotel location and parking space. However, the hotel's modern furniture and facilities are positively rated as some of the tangible elements of the services they have received.

What is observed is that only 20% of the total claims regarding the quality services offered by the hotels that applied the questionnaire to its customers were evaluated negatively, representing 55% of the tangibility dimension. (see table no.1). This shows that all other dimensions were evaluated positively by the customers (80%). Because of the fact that the percentage of affirmations evaluated positively is higher, the results are that the clients are satisfied with the quality of the services they received. However, the hotels concerned must take into account the variables that have been assessed negatively and take action.

In what the statements regarding the expectations dimmension is concerned, it was noticed that the guests emphasize the following aspects of tangibility that they evaluated in a positive way: modern furniture and facilities, spacious and clean rooms, well-groomed staff. All other elements of the dimensions: availability, empathy, competence and security were evaluated positively.

Table no.1. Appreciation of the size found compared to thatexpected for each statement

Dimensions	Quality apreciation
Tangibility	
Modern Furniture	POSITIVE
Modern Facilities	POSITIVE
Spacious and clean rooms	POSITIVE
Attractive interior	NEGATIVE
The concordance of the services specified on the internet with reality	NEGATIVE
Neat appearance of the staff	POSITIVE
Placing the hotel in an accessible area	NEGATIVE
Existence of adequate parking space	NEGATIVE
The existence of a variety of foods and beverages	NEGATIVE
Availability	
Performing services without error	POSITIVE
Accurate and prompt information	POSITIVE
Very friendly staff	POSITIVE
Showing a sincere interest in the problems encountered	POSITIVE
Availability of rooms at a reasonable time	POSITIVE
Empathy	
Real interest in solving problems	POSITIVE
Promptness of staff	POSITIVE
Adequate staff language	POSITIVE
The interests of customers come first	POSITIVE
Competence	
Acquiring the necessary knowledge by staff	POSITIVE
Knowledge of a foreign language	POSITIVE
Security	
Behavior that expresses confidence	POSITIVE

| Hotel position	POSITIVE
Security at the entrance to the hotel	POSITIVE

Source: Research data processing

From the results of the SERVQUAL score for the individual dimensions, the total weighted SERVQUAL score for this hotel was calculated, reaching the value of -0.10. (see figure no.3). We can see that the contradiction between the expectation and the perception of the guests is minimal. However, the calculation of this score would be of much greater importance if we want to compare several mutual accommodation facilities, for example individual hotels in a hotel chain or to monitor the development of this index over time.

The analysis of the contradiction between the expected and the felt quality has a positive value regarding the negative gap of the tangibility dimensions, they also present the contradiction between the customers' expectations and the management's understanding or, possibly, the recognition of the hotels management about these expectations. It is considered to be the most important contradiction on the part of the service provider, precisely because it transcends the imaginary boundary between a provider and a customer.

Figure no.3. The contradiction between the expected and the felt quality
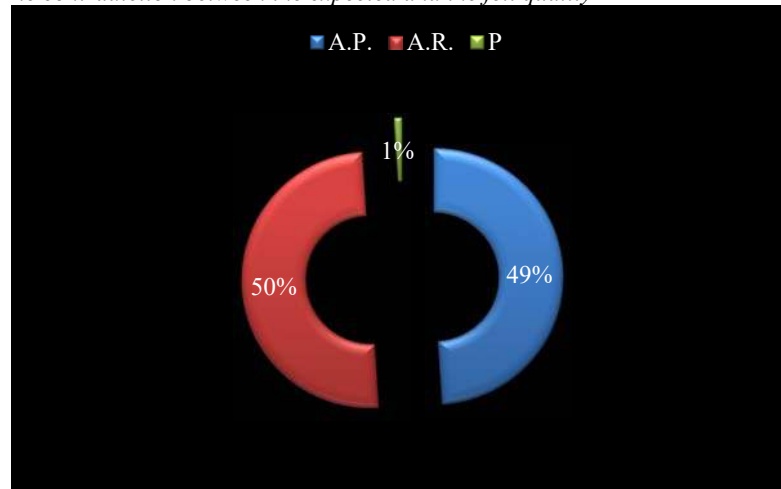
Source: Research data processing

The results of the analysis showed that within the dimensions, with the exception of five attributes, the expectations of the guests exceed the perception of the hotel management on these expectations. So, we can estimate that hotels may not understand the expectations and requirements of its customers correctly. As in the case of hotel guests and in the case of hotel management, the relative importance of the individual attributes of a quality service was found.

The most notable negative difference was found in the case of the parking space attribute, which is considered important by guests. On the other hand, this aspect took by surprise the management of the hotels which considers that it is not such an important criterion. This result shows a possible problem that could be reflected in low customer satisfaction.

Measuring customer satisfaction in terms of hotel location, parking space, concordance of services presented on the internet with the reality and diversity of food, which indicates the incorrect perception of hotel guests' expectations by hotel management. On the other hand, the total positive score shows that guests have lower expectations than expected by the hotel management. Thus, the analyzed hotels can exceed the expectations of the guests and this will bring them a higher level of satisfaction.

5. Conclusions

The application of the SERVQUAL method as a tool for measuring customer satisfaction in 12 hotels in Mamaia resort, allowed the measurement of the quality expected by customers and the quality obtained from the services provided by the hotel. The results obtained showed the existence of a positive gap between expectations and the satisfaction felt, the hotels offering customers in total, quality services, above customer expectations. This analysis also made it possible to verify the possibility of quantifying customer satisfaction by forcing the gap model, assessing the general applicability and presenting suggestions for possible hotel adaptations to customer requirements.

Hotels usually direct their services to different market segments. By applying the SERVQUAL model, it is possible to perform the analysis of the target segments, ie to study the degree of satisfaction of these different segments, in order to compare perceptions with customer expectations. For a hotel it might be interesting, and even recommended, to compare the results based on geographical segmentation (internal or foreign guests) or to compare the segment of corporate clients with that of other individual, recreational guests. The company can also obtain important information about the difference in expectation and perception through demographic segmentation based on gender, age, income and so on.

The advantage of the SERVQUAL technique is that different branches of the service sector can be used transversally. However, for the research needs of the hotel industry, the technique was easily adapted for this branch - some questions in the initial questionnaire were reworded and some of them were even omitted due to their lack of relevance to the hotel branch.

The application of such a method should be adopted by any hotel that wants to provide quality services to its customers. The quality offered must be one that meets the needs of customers and not one that reflects the opinion of hotel managers about what they should offer their customers. Measuring the satisfaction degree of a hotel guest is essential to give the hotel management the opportunity for continuous improvement.

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