Analysis of Consumer Perception Regarding the Quality of Services Offered by Casa Ecologica Guesthouse

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Abstract

This paper explores the analysis of consumer perception in the context of services provided by the Casa Ecologica Guesthouse. The study investigates how customers perceive the quality, sustainability, and overall experience offered by this ecologically oriented guesthouse. The obtained results provide a profound understanding of customer expectations and satisfaction, thus offering valuable perspectives for the continuous improvement of services within the ecological hospitality sector.

Key words: consumer perception, service quality, consumer satisfaction
J.E.L. classification: M31, Z32

1. Introduction

In the current era of increasingly fierce competition in the hospitality industry, a deep understanding of consumer perception plays a crucial role in maintaining and developing businesses. This scientific work focuses on the analysis of consumer perception regarding the services offered by the Casa Ecologica Guesthouse.

The context of this research is presented in an environment where accommodation options are growing, and consumers are becoming more demanding. In this context, Casa Ecologica Guesthouse has chosen to carefully examine how its customers perceive the quality of the services offered, with the aim of continuously adapting and improving to meet the changing market expectations.

The goals of this research are multiple and include assessing the level of customer satisfaction, identifying key factors that influence their perception of accommodation services, and developing effective strategies to enhance customer experience. By deepening the understanding of consumer perception, Casa Ecologica Guesthouse aims to create a solid framework for strengthening its reputation and attracting and retaining customers in a competitive environment.

Through this paper, we intend to contribute to the field of tourism and hospitality research, providing relevant data and useful conclusions for industry professionals and researchers interested in the dynamics of consumer perception within guesthouses.

2. Literature review

Understanding consumer decisions is an essential foundation for marketing strategy, especially in the context of consumer behaviour in the tourism industry, which relies on certain assumptions about the decision-making process.

The travel decision-making process involves a series of choices regarding various aspects of the vacation itinerary. Some of these decisions are made before departure, while others are made upon arrival at the destination. The importance of situational factors in shaping tourist decisions is evident, and the travel decision-making process unfolds independently of other consumption decisions.

Tourist decisions can include both planned and unplanned purchases, often being susceptible to impulsive or spontaneous influences. Travel is no longer just a rare purchase but becomes more frequent and integrated into everyday life. Therefore, a closer examination of routine aspects of travel decisions is necessary, especially when new destinations or even previously visited destinations or already consumed travel products are involved. This comprehensive approach contributes to a better understanding of factors influencing tourist decisions and the development of marketing strategies tailored to the specific needs and behaviours of consumers in the tourism industry.

In the context of marketing, values exert a significant influence on consumer behaviour, shaping their choices regarding product categories, brands, and product attributes. These values guide consumers' actions, attitudes, emotions, judgments, and behaviour in an essential manner.

In the specialized literature, particular attention is given to two types of values: instrumental (external) and terminal (internal). Instrumental values focus on objective aspects and rely on a detailed understanding of the object, such as the goal, experience, or situation. In contrast, terminal values are oriented towards categories of objects rather than specific objects themselves.

Motivation plays an essential role in the field of tourism, significantly influencing marketing decisions, including market segmentation, product development, advertising, and positioning. There are four main types of tourist motivations: the search for novelty, the desire for escape/relaxation, relationship enhancement, and self-development. However, it is important to emphasize that tourist motivation cannot be reduced to a single behaviour or a strictly cognitive approach but represents a combination of both aspects.

Tourists are guided in their travels by biological and emotional needs, and certain holiday destinations become attractive to them. This process is moderated by factors such as personal involvement, images associated with the destination, and the emotions generated by it. Motivation exerts a considerable influence on pre-visit factors, such as expectations and attitudes, as well as on post-visit factors, including destination loyalty.

By deeply understanding tourist motivations, the tourism industry can adapt marketing strategies to meet the varied needs and desires of different tourist segments. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of motivation in tourism is essential for developing quality offerings and building lasting customer relationships.

The concept of self or an individual's personal identity represents the set of cognitive beliefs one holds about oneself. In the tourism sphere, the concept of self is understood as a complex construction that integrates personal identity with social and aspirational aspects in an individual's self-description. Therefore, measuring the concept of self is done through four distinct dimensions: real self-image, ideal self-image, social self-image, and social ideal self-image. These dimensions are essential to explain and anticipate consumer behaviour in the tourism industry.

Specifically, tourist behaviour investigates how self-image influences perceptions of destination image, destination selection processes, the choice of tourist services or products, and travel intentions. This multidimensional approach recognizes the complexity of personal and social identity in the context of tourist experiences, highlighting the significant impact of self-perception on individual decisions and preferences in the tourism industry.

Personality manifests through certain individual characteristics and behaviours that influence how a person responds to stimuli in their surrounding environment. In tourism, personality is an essential factor in shaping the motivations, perceptions, and tourist behaviour of an individual.

One of the most studied dimensions of personality is sensation-seeking, especially concerning recreational and adventure experiences. This personality trait influences how people choose and engage in tourist activities, seeking new sensations and stimuli in their experiences.

Personality traits are also investigated as antecedents to tourist choices and emotions. They provide insight into how individuals perceive and respond to different aspects of travel, contributing to understanding the motivations underlying tourist choices and the emotional evaluation of their travel experiences. Thus, personality becomes an essential component in explaining the variety and individuality of tourist behaviour.

Expectations play an essential role in determining the level of satisfaction, loyalty, and other behaviours that consumers exhibit after making a purchase. In perspective, expectations are defined as consumers' desires, reflecting what they want or expect to experience. On the other hand, expectations can also reflect the standards consumers consider norms when evaluating the attributes of a product or service offered.

Expectations can take various forms, including those related to effectiveness and outcomes, those that are predictable and ideal, those desired and based on experience. They can also be met, exceeded, or remain unfulfilled during service delivery (Olteanu, Cetină, 1994).

Therefore, understanding and managing consumer expectations appropriately becomes crucial for service and product providers, directly impacting consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall evaluation of the post-purchase experience. Appreciating the diversity and dynamics of expectations can contribute to a more tailored offering and the improvement of the quality of the relationship between the consumer and the provider.

Attitudes represent an expression of consumers' perceptions and evaluations of tourist services, reflecting their key attributes or beliefs about a particular object or service. This evaluation becomes crucial in attitudinal responses as individuals assess subjects as good or bad based on accessible beliefs, concepts, objects, or behaviours.

Attitudes can be susceptible to change as contextual factors evolve, such as how information is presented or an individual's affective states. In tourism behaviour research, the construction of attitude carries significant weight. Sometimes, attitude is measured towards key attributes of an object (such as destination attributes contributing to destination image formation), while other times, overall attitude is measured (such as the overall image).

Studies on consumer attitudes in the specialized literature address a variety of issues, including post-travel attitude changes toward hosts, attitudinal differences regarding complaints, anti-tourist attitudes, perceptions of the climate impacts of air or sea travel, evaluations of souvenir products, and other attitude-related aspects. This extended perspective on attitudes contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how consumers perceive and respond to different aspects of the tourism industry.

Consumer perceptions are commonly shaped by expectations, based on familiarity, previous experiences, values, and individual motivations. Differences in perception often lead to variations in behavioural intention. In the tourism sphere, perceptions, along with attitudes, are crucial aspects in building visitor engagement, shaping destination image, achieving satisfaction, and providing high-quality services.

Often, there are significant differences between the anticipated and perceived service quality by consumers. Tourists frequently face perceptions related to risks and safety, including aspects such as terrorism and diseases, or concerning sensation-seeking and travel to destinations considered riskier. These perceptions influence tourist decisions, and proper management and understanding are essential to ensure a positive and safe experience for travellers.

Finally, perception is an overall mindpicture of the world, shaped by information that people filter and then retrieve (Ravichandran, 2019).

Satisfaction is seen as a central pillar of consumer behaviour, considering that consumers' satisfaction levels influence their future decisions, impacting profits, market image, and market share of a business.

The level of satisfaction can define holiday experiences in various ways: in line with established expectations, considered satisfactory with high performance in all tourist aspects in the area, highlighting a significant level of fairness.

Therefore, satisfaction is not just a subjective reaction but an essential indicator of a business's success in the tourism industry. High consumer satisfaction can strengthen the image of the destination or services offered, positively influencing consumers' future decisions, and contributing to the growth of business performance.

Trust is the most powerful tool in building and maintaining customer relationships. Long-term consumer loyalty is not possible without a solid foundation of trust. Trust develops through a dynamic process that involves continuously exceeding consumer expectations and providing repeated satisfaction over time. Therefore, it plays a central role in determining the level of loyalty and shaping future behaviour.

Customer buying behaviours are closely associated with the level of trust in a product and service. In this context, trust can be perceived either as an attitude or belief or as a behavioural intention. Travelers become loyal to a single destination, and the clear distinction between genuine and assumed loyalty becomes essential.

Attitudinal loyalty is also seen as a precursor to behavioural loyalty. There are different types of loyalty, including vertical, horizontal, and experiential. Vertical loyalty refers to the fact that tourists can show loyalty at different levels in the tourism system simultaneously (e.g., towards a travel agent and an airline). Horizontal loyalty involves loyalty to multiple providers at the same level of the tourism system (e.g., multiple hotels), while experiential loyalty refers to attachment to certain styles or types of vacations (Tsiotsou, 2012).

3. Research methodology

In this study, the starting point is the idea that in recent times, guesthouses have become a popular option for tourists seeking to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and enjoy a relaxing and authentic experience in a natural environment. Concerns for the environment and sustainability have significantly increased, and such aspects are becoming increasingly important for consumers in choosing their holiday destinations. In this context, the Eco-friendly Guesthouse has emerged as a successful example, offering services oriented towards environmental protection and providing an authentic experience in an ecological setting.

The aim of this study is to explore and understand consumers' perception regarding the quality of services offered by the Eco-friendly Guesthouse. By carefully analysing these perceptions, the study seeks to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of customer experience in this environmentally oriented guesthouse. Thus, it aims to obtain a detailed picture of how the services are perceived, identify customers' ecological preferences, and provide recommendations for improving the quality of services offered.

To analyse consumers' perception of the quality of services offered by the Eco-friendly Guesthouse, a quantitative research approach was chosen, based on a questionnaire distributed at the guesthouse's reception. The questionnaire structure consists of 15 closed-ended questions. Out of the 15 questions, 10 are content-related questions, and 5 questions represent identification criteria, including gender, age, monthly income, occupation, and respondents' place of residence.

The research was conducted from June to August 2023 on a sample of 130 people residing in Romania, ranging in age from under 18 to 55 and above. Of these, 77 respondents are female, and 53 are male. The majority of them hold the status of employees, with incomes ranging from 1,500 lei to 3,500 lei and above. A few respondents are students, homemakers, retirees, and unemployed, including respondents with no income.

4. Findings

The way consumers deal with purchasing decisions is very diverse, because their reactions are mostly determined by the environmental issues in which they live their lives (Dinu, 2018).

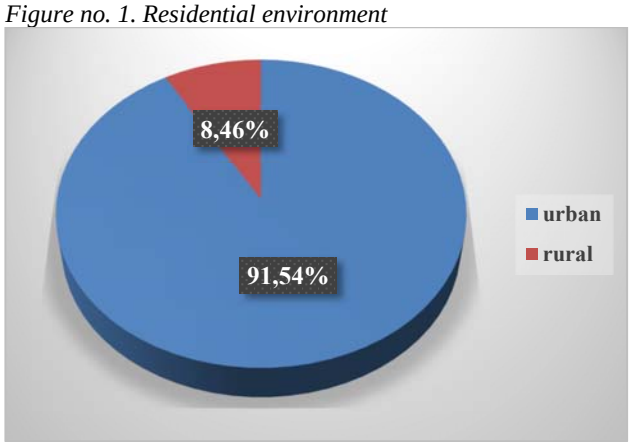
Interestingly, the percentage of women (59.23%) who visited the Eco-friendly Guesthouse is higher than the percentage of men. This might indicate a greater preference among women for this destination or a marketing strategy specifically targeting the female audience. However, it's important to note that these figures only reflect the gender distribution among the guesthouse visitors and do not provide information about other characteristics or preferences.

Noteworthy from data centralization is that the highest percentage of visitors falls within the age range of 36-45 years (36.92%), followed by the age group of 26-35 years (23.85%). This may indicate that the Eco-friendly Guesthouse attracts primarily young adults and middle-aged individuals. However, these figures provide only a general overview and do not offer detailed information about the reasons or preferences of visitors based on age.

The Eco-friendly Guesthouse attracts a diverse spectrum of guests with different income levels. There are visitors with lower incomes, average incomes, and above-average incomes, suggesting that the guesthouse attracts a varied range of clients.

The majority of guests visiting the Eco-friendly Guesthouse (91.54%) come from urban areas, while a smaller proportion (8.46%) comes from rural areas. This may suggest that the guesthouse attracts mainly people living in urban areas who want to enjoy a relaxing experience in a rural environment. The guesthouse might be more well-known and accessible to residents from urban areas but still draws a significant number of guests from rural areas.

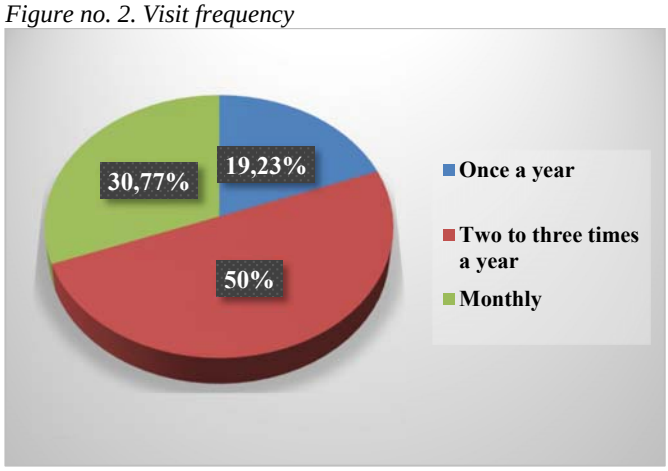
Figure no. 1. Residential environment



Source: Authors' contribution

Regarding the frequency with which respondents visit the Eco-friendly Guesthouse, approximately 19.23% visit the guesthouse once a year. This may indicate that a small but significant segment of respondents choose to stay at this guesthouse only once a year, due to personal preferences or less frequent travel plans.

Figure no. 2. Visit frequency



Source: Authors' contribution

The majority of respondents (50%) visit the guesthouse two to three times a year. This suggests a significant preference for this guesthouse and indicates a moderate frequency of choosing its services.

About 30.77% of the interviewed subjects visit the guesthouse monthly. This group represents a significant segment that frequents the guesthouse regularly, demonstrating high loyalty or a consistent preference for its services, suggesting a stable and trustworthy relationship between them and the guesthouse.

Monthly frequency may suggest that the guesthouse manages to create an attractive environment and a positive experience for guests, encouraging them to return regularly. It is important to analyse and understand the reasons for this monthly visitation frequency to strengthen these positive aspects and address any issues that may contribute to a less frequent experience for other customer segments.

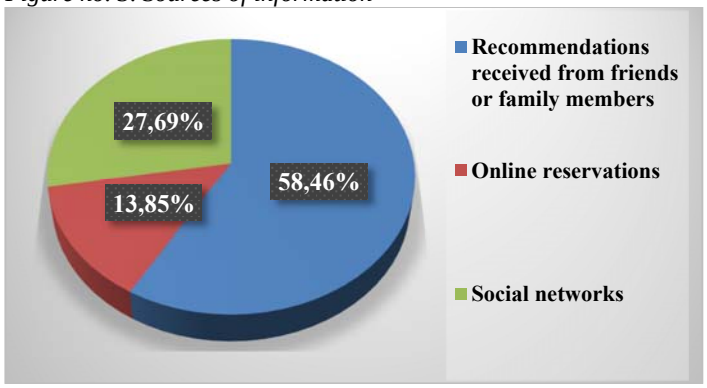
Overall, these results show that the Eco-friendly Guesthouse attracts a significant number of visitors with a variety of frequencies.

The second question explores the sources of information and influence on the decision to choose the Eco-friendly Guesthouse. The results indicate that a significant proportion, 58.46%, comes from recommendations received from friends or family members. This suggests a significant impact of personal recommendations and the previous experiences of others on consumers' decisions.

At the same time, a smaller percentage, 13.85%, indicates that some respondents prefer to make online reservations for the Eco-friendly Guesthouse. This emphasizes the importance of digital channels in the travel decision-making process.

Additionally, 27.69% of respondents state that social networks played a role in influencing their decision to choose this guesthouse. This result suggests that a strong presence and effective promotion on social platforms can have a significant impact on attracting and convincing potential customers.

Figure no. 3. Sources of information

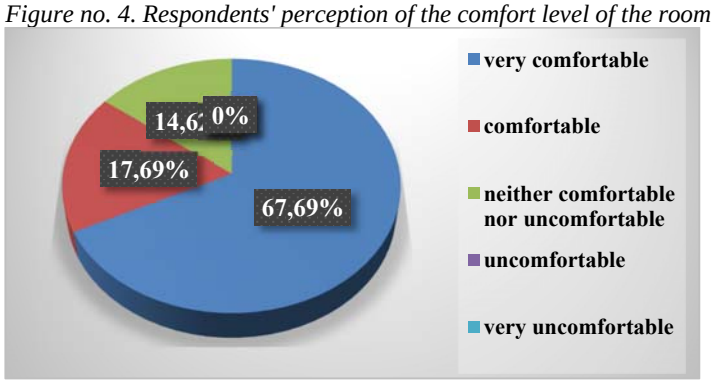


Source: Authors' contribution

Overall, the results indicate a variety of sources of influence, with a significant emphasis on personal recommendations, highlighting the importance of reputation and previous experiences for consumers in the process of choosing this guesthouse.

Regarding respondents' perception of the comfort level of the room they stayed in, the results suggest that a significant proportion, 67.69% of participants, considered the room to be "very comfortable." This high percentage indicates that the majority of respondents experienced a high level of satisfaction regarding the comfort of their rooms.

Figure no. 4. Respondents' perception of the comfort level of the room



Source: Authors' contribution

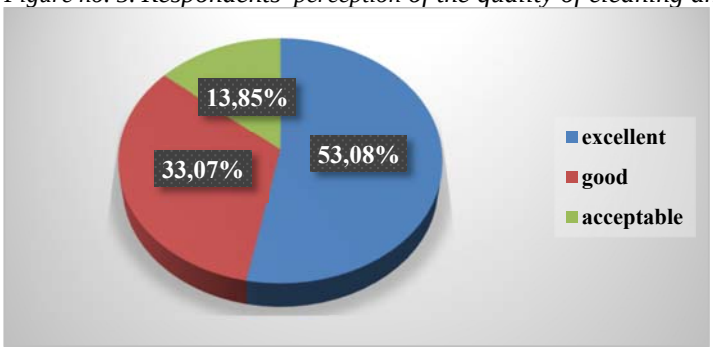
Also, 17.69% indicated that they considered the room "comfortable," emphasizing that they also had a positive experience, although not at an extremely high level.

For 14.62% of respondents, the room was perceived as "neither comfortable nor uncomfortable." This category suggests a diversity of perceptions, with people who had a more neutral or balanced experience regarding comfort or that there were some aspects that did not completely meet their expectations regarding comfort.

It is noteworthy that there are no responses in the categories "uncomfortable" or "very uncomfortable," indicating a relative absence of significant negative experiences among the participants. This provides essential information to guesthouse owners regarding the positive aspects of customer experience but also potential areas for improvement to maintain and enhance the overall comfort level provided by the guesthouse.

Regarding the respondents' perception of the quality of cleaning and maintenance services in the rooms they stayed in, the provided responses offer a detailed overview of the evaluation of these services. For approximately 53.08% of participants, the quality of services was described as "excellent." This significant percentage suggests that a considerable majority of respondents had a positive experience regarding the cleanliness and maintenance of their rooms.

Figure no. 5. Respondents' perception of the quality of cleaning and maintenance services



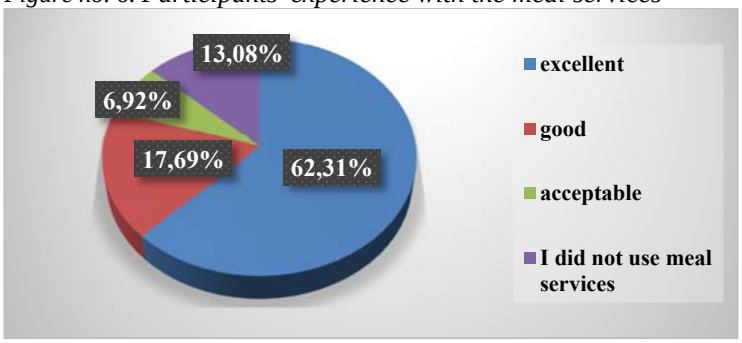
Source: Authors' contribution

For 33.07% of respondents, the quality of services was perceived as "good," indicating solid satisfaction but with minor aspects that could be improved. Additionally, 13.85% of respondents considered the quality of services to be "acceptable." This indicates a range of perceptions, from neutral to experiences that, in some way, could be improved.

In conclusion, the results indicate an overall positive evaluation of the quality of cleaning and maintenance services. However, it is important to analyse specific feedback to identify any areas that require attention and improvements. Appreciating and understanding customer feedback can significantly contribute to maintaining and improving the overall guest experience.

Regarding participants' experience with the meal services provided by the guesthouse, the provided responses offer a perspective on the quality of food and the level of satisfaction with these services. Approximately 62.31% of participants rated the quality of food as "excellent," indicating a significant majority that had an extremely positive experience with the meal services, suggesting a high appreciation for the quality and taste of the food offered by the guesthouse.

Figure no. 6. Participants' experience with the meal services



Source: Authors' contribution

For 17.69% of respondents, the quality of food was perceived as "good," indicating solid satisfaction with areas for improvement or adjustment. There is also a small proportion, 6.92%, who rated the quality of food as "acceptable." This suggests a diversity of perceptions, with some participants considering the food acceptable but with room for improvement.

Additionally, 13.08% of respondents stated that they did not use meal services, which could reflect personal preferences or decisions to eat elsewhere. Overall, the results suggest that the majority of customers had a positive culinary experience, and the guesthouse provides a high standard of quality in terms of food. However, it is important to analyse specific feedback to identify any areas for improvement and to effectively respond to customer needs and preferences.

Next question explores the criteria and factors considered essential by respondents in the process of selecting a guesthouse. It provides a broad framework for understanding the motivations and individual priorities of consumers when choosing accommodation. The results reveal a variety of influences and preferences, thus offering the guesthouse a deeper understanding of customer needs.

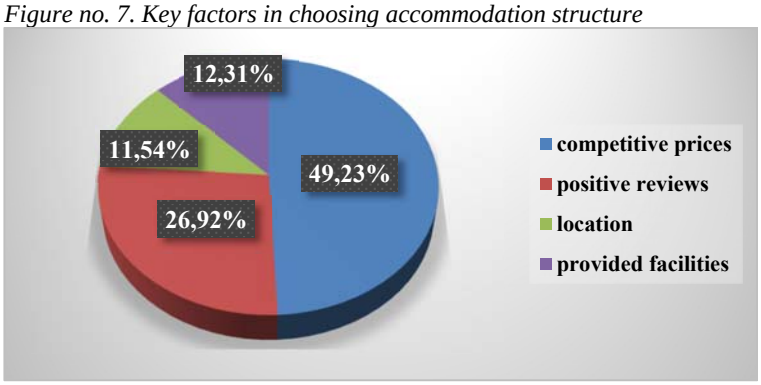
For a significant proportion of respondents (49.23%), the financial aspect is a key factor in decision-making. This suggests that competitive prices are crucial for many people when selecting a guesthouse.

26.92% of respondents consider the previous experiences of other customers, expressed through positive reviews, as an important factor. This highlights the importance of social feedback and reputation in the decision-making process.

For a small proportion of participants (11.54%), the location of the guesthouse is a key criterion. This aspect may reflect a priority for proximity to tourist attractions, transportation, or other facilities.

For another segment of respondents (12.31%), the facilities provided by the guesthouse are an important aspect in the decision-making process. This may include room amenities, additional services, and more.

Figure no. 7. Key factors in choosing accommodation structure

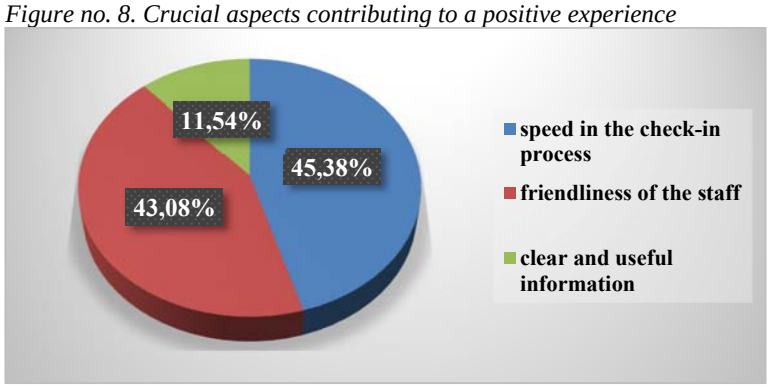


Source: Authors' contribution

Concerning reception and check-in services, emphasis is placed on identifying crucial aspects contributing to a positive experience. The aspect of speed in the check-in process, at 45.38%, represents a significant concern, indicating the importance of efficiency and promptness in providing these services. Additionally, the friendliness of the staff, at 43.08%, is recognized as a determining factor in creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for customers.

There is also a highlighted need to provide clear and useful information, evaluated by 11.54% of subjects. This suggests that transparency and relevance of information provided during the check-in process significantly impact the overall perception of the customer experience.

Figure no. 8. Crucial aspects contributing to a positive experience



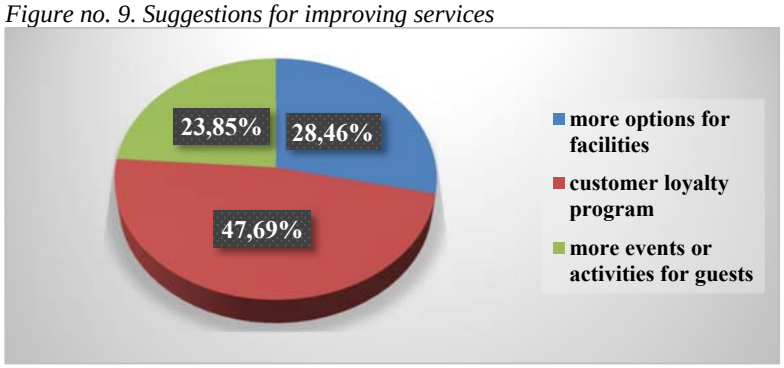
Source: Authors' contribution

The next question aims to evaluate the degree to which respondents appreciate the provider's efforts to personalize services based on individual needs. The results indicate a significant level of satisfaction, as 67.69% of respondents rated the efforts as "excellent." This significant percentage suggests that an overwhelming majority of customers positively appreciate the company's initiatives in personalizing services to match their individual needs and preferences.

In addition, 32.31% of respondents gave a rating of "good," indicating a solid appreciation, although not at the maximum level. The absence of negative ratings, such as "acceptable," "poor," or "very poor," suggests that most customers perceive personalization efforts as satisfactory or better. In conclusion, the results indicate a considerable success in personalized service approaches, generating a positive reaction from customers.

A majority of customers, 47.69%, express interest and desire for a customer loyalty program. This could mean that participants desire rewards or benefits to remain loyal to the guesthouse. 28.46% of respondents believe that having more facility options would be beneficial, indicating a demand for diversification of offered services.

Figure no. 9. Suggestions for improving services

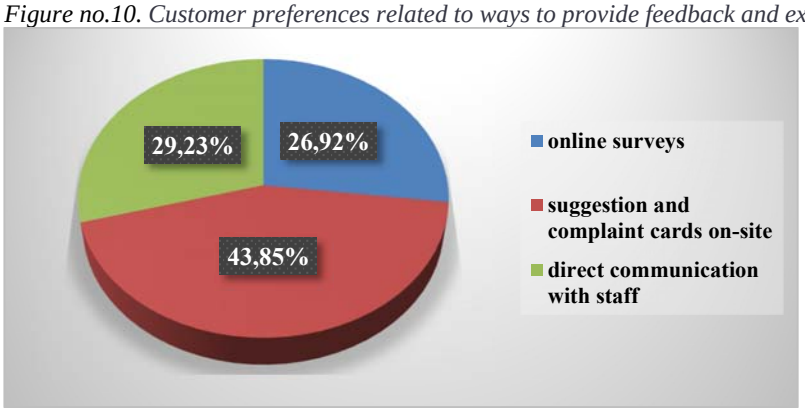


Source: Authors' contribution

Regarding the desire for more events or activities for guests, reflected in the percentage of 23.85%, it suggests that a significant portion of respondents would appreciate a more varied range of experiences and interactions in addition to existing services.

Regarding customer preferences related to ways to provide feedback and express opinions about the services offered by the company, 43.85% of subjects prefer to express their opinions through suggestion and complaint cards available at the company's physical locations. This indicates a desire to provide real-time and direct feedback, within locations where they interact with the offered services.

Figure no.10. Customer preferences related to ways to provide feedback and express opinions



Source: Authors' contribution

On the other hand, 29.23% of the interviewed individuals prefer to communicate directly with staff to express their opinions. This underscores the importance of human interaction and personalized dialogue in the feedback process. A significant percentage of respondents, 26.92%, indicate a preference for using online surveys to provide feedback. This suggests a trend towards the use of the digital environment and online platforms to provide structured opinions and feedback on services.

In conclusion, the question reveals the diversity of customer preferences regarding feedback channels, allowing them the freedom to choose the methods that best suit them to express their opinions about the services offered by the company.

It is suggested to have continuous contact with the tourist customer to determine the level of satisfaction towards the performance of company service (Oraibi, 2020).

5. Conclusions

The study on customer experience at Casa Ecologica Guesthouse generally indicates a positive image of the services provided. Customers seem to appreciate the high level of room comfort, the quality of cleaning and maintenance services, as well as the culinary offerings. Additionally, the results suggest that efforts to personalize services and loyalty strategies have been well-received.

However, there are limitations regarding generalization, as the study is based on the experiences of a specific group of respondents and may not fully reflect the diversity of all customers. Moreover, there is a potential subjectivity in the provided evaluations since they are based on individual perceptions of accommodation and services experiences.

Limitations also include the absence of significant negative evaluations, which could indicate some customers' reluctance to express negative feedback or a possible filtering of information. The interpretation of results could be influenced by certain trends, such as the optimism of the subjects or a hesitation to openly criticize.

In conclusion, the study provides a valuable perspective on customer experiences but should be interpreted with caution within the specific context of this guesthouse. Validity and credibility are supported; however, generalization and objectivity may be affected by the identified limitations.

Overall, the study offers a useful and valuable insight into customer experience, serving as a useful tool for the owners and managers of Casa Ecologica Guesthouse in their efforts to continuously improve offerings and maintain a high level of customer satisfaction.

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