

Satisfying the Needs of Consumers - Tourists in Terms of the Quality of Services Provided

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Abstract

The scientific research of the tourist phenomenon in terms of the quality of services provided integrates a wide thematic area of investigation of conceptual notions related to this topic, and highlighting the determinants, trends and manifestations of quality are based on contemporary realities of tourism consumption.

The aim of the study is to determine the role of quality on the mission of the tourism enterprise in relation to the consumer-tourist, as well as to formulate proposals that would contribute to improving the performance of tourism enterprises, with the implementation of quality management.

The objectives of the research are to elucidate with scientific rigor the complexity of the problems related to the quality of the tourist service in relation to the consumers-tourists involved in tourist consumption, as well as the reporting, analysis and characterization of the typology of deficiencies.

Key words: quality, consumer-tourist, tourist products and services, tourist enterprise

J.E.L. classification: M1, L15

1. Introduction

The quality of tourism products and services on the tourism market must represent one of the main focuses of the quality management. Quality expresses the satisfaction of consumers-tourists towards the value of using the tourist products and services.

As shown in most specialized works, quality has now become a strategic element of business management, as it determines to the highest degree the competitiveness of tourism products and services domestically and internationally. At the same time, quality is also a main factor in regulating the market through the consumer-tourist, because he has the right to choose what best suits his needs and expectations.

Considering these aspects, it can be said that currently the issue of quality is essential for tourism companies operating in an international business environment, marked by the phenomena such as regionalization or globalization.

Through a correct quality management, it is possible to increase the satisfaction of the tourist-consumers of the tourist enterprises and implicitly to its development, thus ensuring the premises for the expansion of the sales market and the diversification of the tourist products and services provided by these enterprises.

2. Theoretical background

Recent studies conducted on the market of international tourist services report that consumer-tourist behavior is constantly evolving and changing. Thus, the main mission of service providers in the tourism industry is to adapt to these changes in order to be in trend.

A tour operator or a retail travel agency that aspires to quality management, must have as a priority the satisfaction of the needs and desires of its customers. In this respect, the tourism enterprise must be aware that long-term survival is possible only by adapting the tourism products and services to the needs of consumer-tourists. Quality is what the customer wants, not what the travel company decides what is best for them. Thus, the identification and satisfaction of customer requirements must be the starting point of all activities in the tourism enterprise. Quality must be related to the requirements of consumers-tourists, requirements determined by their needs, desires and expectations.

All these considerations determined the authors to carry out a scientific research in the field of quality management of the tourist services, it being a determining factor in the tourist service.

As arguments that are required for the research of this topic are:

- studying the theoretical and methodological foundations regarding the quality of the tourist services and products;
- elucidating the deficiencies related to the definition of the quality of the tourism products and services;
- determining the role that quality has on increasing the performance of the tourism enterprise;
- arguing the role that quality has on the perception of the tourist product by the consumer-tourist.

The aim of the research is to determine the role of quality on the mission of the tourism enterprise in relation to the consumer-tourist, as well as to formulate proposals that would contribute to improving the performance of tourism enterprises, with the implementation of quality management. The theoretical-methodological support of the investigated topic will be provided by the works of scientists, who have conducted research in this field.

3. Research methodology

In the process of writing the article, the authors used *4 research methods*, as follows:

The scientific research of the tourist phenomenon through the prism of the quality of the services provided integrates a wide thematic area of investigation of the conceptual notions on this aspect, related to the highlighting of the determinants, evolution trends and forms of quality manifestation. From this perspective, it appears necessary to approach with scientific rigor the complexity of the deficiencies that the quality sums up in relation to the protection of the consumers that are involved in the tourist consumption.

The fundamental research allowed the elucidation of the current tendencies regarding the quality provision of the tourist services, reflecting at the same time the issue that is attested in the researched field. The fundamental research included investigations in the form of theoretical studies that led to the formulation of scientifically argued conclusions.

Applied research that had the task of providing data for directing the practical activity, in order to increase the methodical work. The result of the applied research had as a consequence the formulation of some conclusions regarding the quality assurance in the tourist service.

The research for development aimed at using those procedures and devices that can directly influence the practical activity in the field of consumer protection regarding the quality of the tourist service. Thanks to the use of that method, it was possible to demonstrate in practice the need to ensure the quality of service in the activity of the tourism enterprises.

4. Findings

The consumer-tourist is the main reason for the existence of a tourism enterprise, and customer loyalty is the only measure of organizational success.

Certainly, consumers-tourists will not jeopardize their own interest in the act of buying out of loyalty to a tourism company whose tourism products and services do not properly perform their

functions for which they were designed and will purchase the tourism product or service from a competitor of it.

In the current conditions, the mission of the tourism enterprises is to become the preferred provider of consumer-tourists by "fixing" in the consciousness of customers, that they are the best in the tourism market.

High-performance tourism enterprises go beyond the satisfaction of their customers, emphasizing the need to satisfy them and offering them more than what is established in the contract for the provision of tourism/travel services. These companies are also now talking about gaining consumer tourists and deep loyalty to them. The intelligence of this situation can be clearly understood when one considers the situation in which a travel company offered more than the customer expected (for example, an extra glass of wine at the charter race catering, a manager on sales that exceeds the default behavior to be politer and kinder and provide more detailed information).

A customer-oriented tourism company must make considerable efforts to anticipate the future expectations of its consumers, and by working with them in long-term relationships, they will support customers in determining the needs of the requested tourist destination. Tourism companies, at the same time, must consider the expectations of consumers-tourists, in order to obtain a clear vision of the customer experience in terms of their rest.

We believe that the objective of the tourism enterprises should consist in ensuring the quality from the moment of designing the tourism product. Thus, the authors identified a series of questions, which can be addressed to consumers-tourists, in order to design the tourist product in conditions of a maximum quality:

1. What are your favorite tourist destinations?
2. What services should be included in the package of tourist services?
3. What would be the price available for them to pay?
4. What are the main concerns of the consumer-tourists?
5. What are the expectations of the consumers-tourists on quality?
6. How well is the brand of the tourist company respected?
7. What are the main complaints or grievances regarding the quality of the service?
8. What suggestions could consumers-tourists have on improving performance?

James Evans supports understanding customer requirements when he says a product is of quality if it "*justifies its price and is good to use*" (James,2008.)

According to ISO 9000, quality is "*the set of properties and characteristics of a product or service that give it the ability to meet the expressed or implied needs*" (Militaru, Drăguț, Zanfir, 2014, p. 11).

In the opinion of F. Haist and H. Fromm, quality "represents the correspondence with the customer's requirements, requirements regarding the functionality, price, delivery time, safety, reliability, environmental compatibility, consulting, etc." (Haist, Fromm,1989).

According to Law 105, Regarding the consumer protection, "*quality is a set of characteristics of a product, service, which gives it the ability to meet, according to destination, explicit or implicit needs*" (Legea nr. 105, 2003).

Also, quality is the result of a reasoning that belongs to the beneficiary of the product or service that is based, in the formulation of the reasoning, on the satisfaction of its requirements. On this basis, quality can be defined as "*the degree of satisfaction of the requirements negotiated with the beneficiary party*".

In the authors' opinion, quality in tourism "*represents the set of characteristics of the tourist product or service, which correspond to the requirements and expectations of the consumer-tourist, ensuring its satisfaction by eliminating possible deficiencies*".

Particular importance is attached to defining the company's quality requirements. These are obligations arising from laws, regulations, rules, codes, statutes, etc., and they mainly concern the protection of life, personal health and the environment, the proper use of natural and human resources intended for use in tourism.

Quality requirements are defined as those "*representing expressions of needs, or their translation into a set of requirements, of the characteristics of an entity, expressed in quantitative or qualitative terms, to enable the realization and examination of that entity*" (Oprean, Țițu, 2008, p.107).

In order to ensure the quality of service to the tourist consumer, according to article 1595 par. 1) of the Civil Code of the Republic of Moldova, before assuming a contract or any corresponding offer, the tour

operator and, as the case may be, the retail travel agency, are obliged to provide the traveler with the following information:

1. the characteristics of the package of tourist / travel services;
2. trade name of the economic operator (retail travel agency or tour operator);
3. the cost price of the package of tourist/travel services (including taxes and commissions);
4. payment terms and conditions;
5. the minimum number of persons required for the services in the package to be provided;
6. general information on passport and visa requirements;
7. the manner and conditions of termination of the contract;
8. the manner and conditions for covering the costs of termination of the contract in the event of illness or death.

Deviations from the nominated specifications mean a decrease in quality for the consumer-tourist. Under these conditions, the consumer-tourist has the right to receive adequate compensation from the retail travel agency or from the tour operator for the discrepancy between the conditions stipulated in the contract for the provision of tourist services/travel concluded and improper service as a result of performance.

The quality of the products can be defined through the costs and implicitly of the prices at which the tourist products and services are marketed. A tourist product is considered "quality" when it offers certain performance at an acceptable price level.

Consumers-tourists are willing to pay to receive that value, thus establishing the increase in demand for tourism products and services. Demand, closely linked to the available supply, determines the market price. Those involved in marketing see quality as the thing that adds value, but then focus on how the consumer-tourist perceives value.

In order to determine what customers want in the process of quality defining, the tourism enterprises face the following shortcomings, which are reflected in **Table 1**.

Table no. 1. Deficiencies in defining the quality of tourism products and services

N/o	Type of deficiencies related to the definition of quality	Difficulty analysis
1.	The consumer-tourist does not know the characteristics of quality	The perception of quality by consumers-tourists begins when consuming the purchased tourist product or service.
2.	Consumers-tourists are specific and have different preferences regarding the way of organizing the rest, but the retail travel agency or tour operator tries to form and market a product that will satisfy several categories of customers.	The price-quality ratio can be the solution in solving this situation. For example, some consumers-tourists will buy a tourist product or service that will satisfy them to a certain extent, if the price is in line with expectations, even if it does not offer them everything they want.
3.	Defining quality in relation to consumers-tourists.	The cooperation of experts and specialists in public relations is needed to determine what consumers-tourists understand in relation to quality.
4.	Quality costs money.	Consumers-tourists need to be aware that a quality tourism product or service costs more.
5.	Consumers-tourists react to advertising with reference to new tourism products.	The consumer-tourist can react to certain promotional actions of the company in order to diversify the way of organizing the holiday.
6.	Consumers-tourists are demanding.	Even as a simple person, people are demanding. But often the term "consumer-tourist" refers to a group of people. Even if the tourism product or service were sold to a company consisting of one person, that person buys and perceives the same value of the product or service both as an individual and as a member of a collective.
7.	The final real value of the tourist product or service is often not perceived before the time of purchase.	In the case of consumption of the tourist product or service, the consumer-tourist fully perceives its value in terms of quality of service.
8.	Influencing the wishes of the consumer-tourist, through branding and marketing is an alternative to discover what the customer really wants.	Only after the tourist consumer has consumed the tourist product or service, the question arises whether a necessity has really been met, or only a perceived need has been met.

Source: Adapted by the authors after (Sitnikov, 2014)

All these deficiencies are human in nature. What makes quality management a challenge is that a successfully defining quality and delivering it to the consumer - tourist requires the use of three skills:

1. The managers skills of the tourism enterprise are necessary to establish the requirements and needs of the consumer-tourist in order to manage the team involved in the creation of tourism products and services, in order to satisfy them.

2. The skills of using the data and information available at the enterprise are necessary, in order to transform the requirements of the tourist consumer into the tourist products and services requested by him.

3. Professional skills are needed to create and deliver quality tourism products and services.

The key point in this process is the specification of the consumer-tourist requirements. If information can be collected from the consumer-tourist about his wishes and needs and these can be transformed into a clear vision of his requirements, then tourism enterprise will surely be on the wave.

In order to ensure compliance, we consider that the tourism company must take into account the three levels of quality and the key elements specific to each level, which are reflected in Figure 1.

Figure no. 1. Quality levels



Source: Adapted by the authors after (Knowles, 2011, p.192).

At the organizational level, quality focuses on meeting the requirements of external customers. The tourism company must regularly request information from consumer-tourists in order to define the quality at the organizational level. The information is obtained by requesting answers to the following questions:

- What tourist products and services meet expectations?
- Do the components of the tourist services package meet expectations?
- What types of transport would be preferable in traveling for tourism?
- Which tourist destinations would be interesting to operate in the future?
- Are tourist products or services provided that are not needed?

At the procedural level, the organizational structures are divided into departments. Because most processes in the tourism business are multifunctional, there is a danger that managers of certain departments will try to optimize the activities for which they are responsible, which can undermine the activities of the tourism business as a whole. At this level, managers need to ask specific questions in order to be able to connect the internal requirements with the external ones of the consumer-tourists:

- Which services from the package of tourist services are the most important for the consumer-tourist?
- What would be the preferred way to pay for the package of tourist services?
- How can the package of tourist services be delivered to the consumer-tourist?
- What impediments prevent the tourist consumer from purchasing the package of tourist services at the moment?

- Which processes have the most significant effect on the quality standards oriented towards the consumer-tourist?
- Who are the external customers and what are their needs?

At the level of the executor, the standards of service quality must be based on the fulfillment of the wishes of the consumer-tourist. These quality standards include the requirements for achieving characteristics such as: professionalism, accuracy, completeness, innovation, promptness. The questions asked are:

- What is requested by the consumer-tourist in terms of information?
- Which tourist destination is interested to him?
- What services must the package of tourist services contain?
- What is the period in which he wants to organize his vacation?
- What is the duration of the stay?
- What is the composition of the family?
- What price is available to pay for the package of the tourist services?

5. Conclusions

Satisfying the customer's wishes requires a rigorous substantiation of all decisions on the design and implementation of a product, based on market research.

By these terms, the fulfillment of the customer's wishes presupposes a rigorous substantiation of all the decisions regarding the design and realization of a product, based on market studies.

The requirements identified and defined by these studies must be duly reflected in the specifications that will be used for the marketing of tourism products and services. Therefore, the specifications are not absolute quality criteria, but only necessary means to meet the expectations of consumer-tourists.

Consequently, as a totalization of what is reported we can deduce the following conclusions:

1. Quality management must be customer-oriented, and the tourism company providing services must organize its entire activity in order to meet the needs of consumers-tourists.
2. Tourism companies must understand not only the needs of the consumer-tourist, but also the ability of their own entity to meet these requirements.
3. The size of the quality of the services provided is largely determined by the activities carried out by the staff of the tourism company. Correctness, receptivity and inspired trust highlight the role of service providers who come into direct contact with the consumer-tourist.
4. As the improvement of the quality of services and the increase of productivity are in an inverse relationship, there is a need to carry out the activity in a way that ensures a balance between the quality and quantity of services provided, a balance that is a specific objective of staff use.
5. Only when all employees and all departments meet the expectations of the consumer-tourist, the tourism enterprise gains and maintains its trust.
6. In order for the quality management system to be effective in the tourism business, organizational processes and techniques must be adjusted to quality standards.
7. In order to satisfy the requirements of consumers-tourists, it is necessary to improve the quality at all stages of activity of the tourism enterprise and not only in those involved in the creation and marketing of tourism products and services.

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