
Managing the Hotels Service Products and E-Services. Case Study: Researching Tourists' Satisfaction Regarding the Hotels Services in Romania

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The objective of a hospitality business is to provide guests with a place where they feel welcome and appreciated, and where they can relax and have an enjoyable experience. Service is what an establishment does to and for its guests to achieve this objective. Service is not about smiling and servility. It is a strategy that considers the customer while serving the interests of the hotel. Service excellence gives an organization a competitive edge. Outstanding service makes a lot of money for a hospitality industry because the business of a hotel is people.

The paper tries to define the hotel service as a product that requires objectives, strategies, and measurable management criteria. A quantitative marketing research about tourists' satisfaction regarding the hotels services in Romania accompanies the paper and highlights the importance of the hotels service products and e-services in the globalization age.

Keywords: services, hotel, management, strategies, satisfaction

Introduction

In the literature review regarding the hotel service management everyone says how important services are (Foley et al, 2000; Asch and

Wolfe, 2001; Baum, 2007; Briggs et al, 2007). And yet, in an industry that claims to be totally committed to service, the disappointments of customers with the service they have received, and complaints reflecting their disappointment, are still prevalent.

What seems to be the problem? Are customers expecting too much? Are they being educated to expect service beyond that which can reasonably be supplied?

Some of the problems are caused by the fallibility of human beings, our inability to work consistently to a standard, but we think that the problem is more likely to be due to management not knowing what service is. Management often thinks that service is something that the staff does, and that it simply means being pleasant and helpful to the customers (Holloway, 2002).

Most books on management and marketing fail to give service more than a passing mention, and merely acknowledge its importance (Lumsdon, 2000; Kotler et al, 2005; Makens, 2005; Pender, 2005; Tribe, 2005; Mackintosh, 2006; Marin-Pantelescu, 2009). Only a few books set out to define service as a product that requires objectives, strategies, and measurable management criteria (Beckwith, 2001; Wearne and Baker, 2002; Foster, 2003).

In the course of their stay, customers are part of a series of activities from when they come through the front door until they eventually depart. Each activity in this series is handled by a different department and the customer is passed from one to the other. Many different service products are involved, but in too many places no one is responsible for making sure that the transitions happen smoothly. The duty manager waits for a complaint, but meanwhile assumes that all is functioning as it should.

Some hotels have implemented a fully automated check-in process, stepping back from personal contact and relying on an electronic process to meet the customer's needs. The arriving guest need only swipe his or her credit card and be automatically allocated a room. The guest's card is debited with the accommodation charge. The same process generates a coded card that allows access to the room. This process, which is part of what is sometimes called 'e-service', suits some market segments, notably the overnight traveler, but it should not be relied upon to replace personal service entirely. Similarly, the booking system that preceded the guest's

arrival might not have involved any personal contact, but might have been completed through the Internet, which suits some, but not all customers. The whole service experience for the customer is the sum total of myriad smaller experiences. According to Wearne and Baker (2002) for all the service products to be supplied effectively and concurrently to the guest's complete satisfaction, several control factors are necessary at the service level, including the e-service level.

- There has to be a strategy that identifies when, where, and how the service product will perform.
- There have to be systems with measurable criteria for each of the working procedures involved in providing the service. If a service is to be managed it must be capable of being measured.
- The people providing the service have to be 'people-to-people', those who are interested in others, care for their welfare, and make their comfort and satisfaction the top priority. Understanding the preferences of the customers is crucial to service success. Procedures are only as effective as the people performing them.
- The people providing the service directly to the customer must have the support of everyone else. Management's primary function must be to monitor and maintain the service standards and to ensure that nothing impedes the delivery of service. The management must help those providing the service. If there are delays or upsets, what or who is causing them? Is it a procedural problem? Is there a weak link in the staff chain? Is extra training needed? Perhaps the person is wrong for the job? Would a new or different item of equipment solve the problem?

The hotels primary servicers' products usually do its job of satisfying the customers without much comment. It is the extras give the establishment a competitive edge. These are the things that customers go away and talk about. According to Berry (1995) the hotels need to work for the 'service surprise', which little extra that exceeds expectations and make the tourists say 'wow'.

Although the hotel objective is to meet the satisfaction of the tourists, money has to be made. At the end of a service period, the dollars earned by a product have to be checked to ensure that services meet corporate objectives.

In developing a service strategy, certain steps are necessary to provide a sustainable competitive advantage over the competition. These steps are the follows according to Baker and Huyton (2001): establish customer needs and wants using market segmentation, ask the customers for their opinions and advice, review existing products and procedures by research and analysis, set objectives for improvements or changes, identify key strategies for achieve the objectives and realize the required outcomes, establish measurable criteria for the strategy, allocate tasks and responsibilities looking for team leaders, remove demotivating systems and staff, gain commitment to the objective and strategies, make physical changes where necessary, experiment with the changes, measure and manage, ask the customers to evaluate if the service product is satisfactory for them by maintaining a regular research program, modify where necessary, and measure again.

A viable hotel that is committed to a service culture for its customers will change with the tourists, and will not 'sit' on past achievements. If the organization does not move with its tourists, the tourists will move elsewhere.

Material and method(s)

The paper aimed to undertake a quantitative marketing research about tourists' satisfaction regarding the hotels services in Romania accompanies the paper

Research methodology

Defining decision-making

Domestic and international touristic activity intensified lately thus producing considerable income for the hotels. The problem we raised when we started this research was to see the tourists' satisfaction regarding hotels services in our country. The research is meant to find the position on which hotels are placed among tourists' satisfactions for buying touristic services products.

The purpose of the research

The general reason of the present research consisted in identifying the satisfaction of the Romanian tourists regarding the hotels services in our country.

Research objective

- Evaluation of the tourists' satisfaction regarding the hotels services

The research sample

The research took place at the International Exhibition of Tourism at Romexpo, Bucharest, the XXVI edition, between 3 and 6 of November 2011, with a 12 closed questions survey; the sample basis included people from different areas of the country who came to visit the Exhibition. The view and sample units were the same in this case and took into consideration the individual. The building of the research sample was accomplished using a method of random sampling-the normal random sampling, whose implementation lead to the attainment of 384 questionnaires, using the following formulas:

$$n = t^2 * p(1-p) / \Delta\omega^2$$

For example, for a coefficient "t" of 1.96 which corresponds to a probability of 95% guaranty of results and a limit error accepted of 5%, the size of the sample is 384 questionnaires.

The profile of the respondents

Regarding the respondents occupation surveyed are most employed, namely 172 people, 122 are students, 13 are unemployed, 33 are chiefs, 24 are pensioners and 20 are self-employed.

According to research conducted, it appears that 186 of the respondents graduated from high school, 157 have graduated college, 33 had postgraduate studies and 8 have graduate elementary school.

Regarding the sex of respondents, 203 of the respondents are female (53% of the total respondents) and 181 are men (47% of the total respondents). Age of respondents ranged from 18-65 years. 36.98% for individuals aged between 18 and 24 years old, 29.17% for segment age range 25-34 years old; 14.06% have between 35 and 44 years old; 11.99% have between 45 and 54 years old; 3.9% have between 55 and 64 years old and only 3.91 have over 65 years old.

The income of respondents varies, but most of them earn less than 1,000 lei/month (31.51% from the total respondents). 20.05% of the respondents earn more between 1,001 and 1,500 lei/month and 19.27% earn up to 2,000 lei per month. In the category of income between 2,001-3,000 lei/month falls almost 15.89%, and only 13.28% of the respondents earn over 3001 lei/month.

Finally, regarding the environment, of the 384 respondents 234 are from urban areas (61%) and 150 people came from the rural areas (39%).

Results and discussions

Following the satisfaction of hotel services research conducted on 384 participants, the question about the satisfaction with the quality of services in Romanian hotels has generated the following responses: 47 respondents are very satisfied (12.24% of the total respondents), 204 are satisfied (53.13%), 63 are neutral (16.41%), 66 are dissatisfied (17.19%) and 4 respondents are very dissatisfied (1.04%).

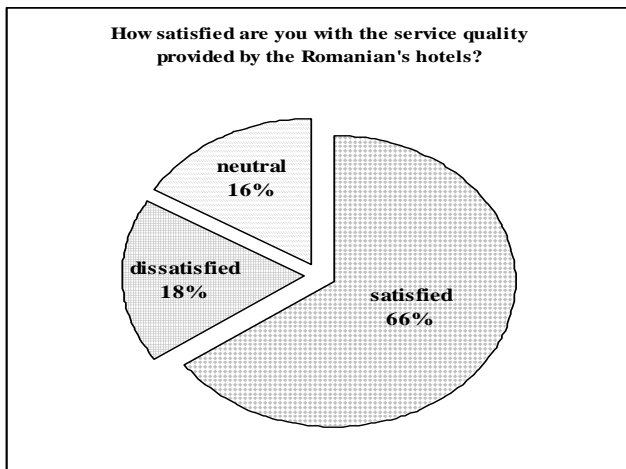


Figure 1: How satisfied are tourists about the service quality provided in Romania hotels

Source: authors' research results

Romanian hotels make possible the perception of tourists on the quality of services provided because of the quality management systems implemented. Systems that are based on the following aspects: knowledge of tourists' expectations, their satisfaction, teamwork, maintenance and upgrading buildings, providing extensive services and facilities, cooperating with other partners and so on.

Table 1: How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the Romanian hotel services?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Service quality provided	12.24	53.13	16.41	17.19	1.04
Hotel tariffs	3.39	28.91	14.32	42.19	11.20
Staff behavior	10.68	42.97	22.40	20.83	3.13
Cleanliness and ambience of the hotel	15.10	48.18	19.01	15.36	2.34
Hotel diversity of services	7.29	29.69	25.26	29.95	7.81

Source: authors' research results

Of the 384 respondents, only 3.39% said that they were very satisfied with the rates charged in Romanian hotels, 28.91% were satisfied, 14.32% were neutral, 42.19% were dissatisfied and 11.20% were very dissatisfied.

The largest share, 42.19% of the responses offered by the 384 respondents, is owned by those who said they were dissatisfied with the rates charged in Romanian hotels, followed at a considerable distance from the percentage of those satisfied with them, 28.91%. Dissatisfaction with the tariffs could be attributed to the economic recession, which is in full swing. Thus, tourists have limited income for vacations and hotels cannot reduce tariffs too much due to fiscal policies and lack of government assistance.

Following the satisfaction of hotel services research conducted on 384 participants, the question about the satisfaction with the staff behavior in Romanian hotels, has generated the following responses: 41 respondents were very satisfied, 161 were satisfied, 86 respondents were neutral, 80 were dissatisfied and 12 respondents were very dissatisfied.

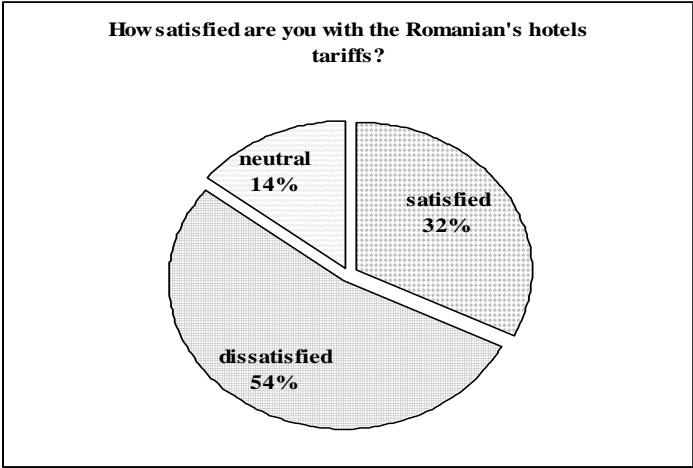


Figure 2: How satisfied are Romanian people with the tariffs hotels

Source: authors' research results



Figure 3: How satisfied are people of the staff behavior from the Romanian's hotels

Source: authors' research results

Staff behavior in Romanian hotels is closely related to tariffs. It may be noted that in terms of tariffs, 42.19% of the respondents are dissatisfied and 28.91% are satisfied, and in terms of staff behavior, 42.97% are satisfied and 20.83% unsatisfied.

Hotels that keep high tariffs can afford to promote a fair employee motivation, such behavior is the measure of financial satisfaction. Hotels practicing lower rates cannot afford to pay their staff well deserved, so they feel frustrated, which leads to unjustified conduct, inappropriate to hotel customers, which generate tension and dissatisfaction among them.

Following the satisfaction of hotel services research conducted on 384 participants, the question about satisfaction with the cleanliness and ambience of the Romanian hotels has generated the following responses: 58 respondents were very satisfied, 185 were satisfied, 73 respondents were neutral, 59 were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied were 9 respondents. Relatively high, 48.18% is held by respondents satisfied with the cleanliness and ambience of the hotel, followed by the weight of neutral, 19.01%.

The answers cannot be analyzed carefully, because it should hold more information, such as the number of stars of the hotel where the respondent was accommodated, tariffs, the area where the hotel was located, and others. But we believe that a large proportion of respondents have stayed in respected hotels that respects its customers, perhaps 3-star hotels, which were based on a quality management system that generated the satisfaction of tourists. In general, due to regular inspections of consumer protection, most hotels keep some limits on the cleanliness and ambience offered to customers.

In the research on the satisfaction of the hotel services, the question on satisfaction with the diversity of offers in the hotels showed the following responses: 28 respondents believed that they were very satisfied with the diversity of offers in the hotel, 114 respondents were satisfied with the diversity of offers in the hotels, 97 respondents had a neutral view on the diversity of offers in the hotel, 115 respondents were dissatisfied with the diversity of offers and 30 respondents were dissatisfied with the diversity of offers in the hotels. Therefore, observing the responses of 384 participants in the research on diversity of offers in the hotel it can be seen that the highest percentage of 29.95% is held by those who are dissatisfied with the diversity

of offers in the hotels. This can be based on the questionable quality of services offered, weak infrastructure, prices.

Analyzing the customers' satisfaction regarding the quality of the additional hotel services in Romanian the results are provided in the table 3.2.

Table 2: How satisfied are you with the quality of additional hotel services in Romania?

	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very dissatisfied (%)
Car parking	10.94	32.55	26.56	20.57	9.38
Tourist information	5.73	39.58	24.48	23.96	6.25
Room-service	8.85	29.17	42.19	15.89	3.9
Food & beverage	14.84	52.08	18.75	11.2	3.13
Laundry washing and ironing	8.07	37.5	39.84	10.94	3.65
Spa and sports	9.9	27.6	40.36	17.19	4.95

Source: authors' research results

Evaluating the responses of participants on the degree of satisfaction in terms of the Romanian hotel services in connection with additional car parking, it is noted that most respondents were satisfied with this aspect.

Analyzing the percentage values, it has been identified the following statement of the degree of satisfaction of respondents in terms of the additional hotel services in Romania regarding tourist information: 5.73% of respondents were very satisfied with this, 39.58% of participants were satisfied with this parameter, 24.48% of respondents had a neutral attitude towards this issue, 23.96% of participants were dissatisfied with this measure, and 6.25% of the respondents were very dissatisfied with the level of this parameter.

The survey investigating attitudes in relation to the quality of Romanian hotel services more on restaurants has revealed the following situation: 57 respondents said they were very happy with this indicator, 200 respondents were satisfied with this aspect of quality hotel services, 72 of the participants had a neutral attitude with respect to this parameter, 43 participants were dissatisfied with this measure, and 12 participants said they were very unhappy with this.

Analyzing the responses of participants on the degree of satisfaction in terms of the additional Romanian hotel services (washing and ironing of linen; room-service and spa and sports), it is noted that most respondents are neutral on these issues.

Asking customers if they will recommend the hotels services to relatives and friends over 56% of the total respondents said they will not recommend the Romanians' hotels services.

A classic example of bad management is the follows: everybody knows that the hotel foreign exchange counter in most countries is a rip-off. No guest, except the inane or the super-rich, really changes much money here with its outrageous exchange rates. Most guest would walk or take a cab to the nearest bank (he's lucky if it's near or open) or some hole-in-the-wall foreign exchange booth in which he risks getting mugged, short-changed, or being handed fake bills. The hotel forex counter is not really a customer service since it compromises the finances, safety and convenience of its guest. Hotels should not make money in all its operations, or every time a customer makes a move. It should make money in delivering the total service package - thus it must be willing to break-even or even lose in some operations just to provide quality customer service. In Japan, famous for its passion for customer service excellence, it is refreshing to discover that the forex rates in all hotels and airports are the same as the bank rates.

Guests seldom take the time and effort to provide the hotel feedback on its service quality. They simply spread the good or bad word around without the hotel's knowledge. They and their friend either come back, or never return to that hotel again. To conclude, service quality in the hotel industry is the super sensitivity to, accurate assessment of, and anticipation of customers' or guests' needs and problems.

Conclusions

Following the satisfaction of hotel services research conducted it seemed that customers are in part satisfied with the hotels services provided, but don't think the same way about the hotels tariffs.

Observing the responses of the customers in the research on diversity of offers in the hotel it can be seen that the highest percentage of 29.95% is held by those who are dissatisfied with the diversity of offers in the hotels. In this way we proposed a diversification of tourists services of the Romanian hotels.

The research also indicated that concepts of service quality often remain producer-driven, rather than customer-driven. Romanian hotels must develop a common service quality standard which secures consensus around definitions and determinants, which has the flexibility to cope with differing levels and determinants, but which also gives equal weighting to tangibles and intangibles.

In the world of the 'informed customer' the quality of reliable and meaningful information at the point of purchase is a critical factor in closing this gap. The findings also suggest that most customers are not in fact overly demanding and are satisfied with a personal service which represents value for money and provides accurate information. The main difference between excellent and poor service relates to the absence of the personal touch and how staff deal or do not deal with customer problems.

The study also raises some fundamental implications for service managers. Customers are essentially delighted by certain basic behaviors including, 'helpful', 'friendly', and 'caring'. This suggests that the focus of training in 'behavioral' approaches to customer satisfaction will give a significant return in high contact encounters. The study also signals a need to focus on the individual customer which can again be linked to the behavioral approach and focused training. Finally, the study suggests the importance of quality and reliable information and its influence on redressing the experience gap in the Romanian hotels services.

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