
The Gaps in the Quality of Hotel Services in Poland

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Abstract:

Purpose: The study's objective is to assess the perceived quality of hospitality services in Poland in the view of domestic and foreign customers by determining the gaps between the perception of service during a guest's stay at a hotel and the quality guaranteed by 3-star hotels.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research was conducted using the Servqual method in three-star hotels located in Poland. In the research process, 800 hotel guests participated.

Findings: From the research conducted in Poland, there is a difference in the perception of hotel services between domestic and foreign guests. However, the tendencies are identical. It is proved by the perceived quality of services expressed with the values of the Servqual index calculated depending on the assessment of individual criteria by the two abovementioned groups of respondents who rated as definitely negative the criteria of tangibles, reliability, and assurances, with a positive rating for the criteria of responsiveness and empathy.

Practical Implications: Practical implications concern the popularization of this research method, which, in the assessment of the quality of services, takes into account, first of all, consumer's satisfaction, becoming a simple way to obtain clear answers on the issue of adaptation of services to the customers' requirements.

Originality/Value: Results of the conducted research indicate that enterprises, while providing substitute services on the intersectoral market are entering increasingly difficult requirements of shaping the market advantage (EU). There is an urgent need to activate demand preferences in this situation, mainly by improving the quality, availability, competence, timeliness, responsibility, and security of service provision.

Keywords: Quality, accommodation, hotel, Poland, Servqual.

JEL codes: L15, L83, M19.

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1. Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century in Poland, with the change of political and economic systems, a dramatic change in hospitality management appeared. More attention was paid to both the tangible and intangible components of hospitality services, and through the increase of quality standards, attempts were made to build a competitive advantage of market players. The quality of hospitality services is difficult to assess, both due to the lack of accurate research methods and several interrelated factors. Research in this field is challenging and sparse yet building a hospitality brand is clearly indispensable.

2. The Quality of Hotel Services

In the age of common access to information, hotel services' quality is perceived as one of the most important market competitiveness factors, which is aimed at enticing the customer to purchase a product of particularly rarely encountered features. Moreover, Hjalager (2002) considers perfecting an already existing product's quality as the first of five distinguished innovation categories.

Generally, quality is understood as the level at which a product satisfies a potential purchaser's requirements, yet this issue is more complex in the practice of providing hospitality services. For instance, many authors (Gobelna, 2002; Borkowski, Wszendobyl, 2007; Górník and Świdroń, 2010) refers to quality as the ability to meet the needs and expectations of customers, both internal and external, with considerations for technical and functional components. According to Grönroos (2008), hotel image is composed of the following: technical quality (devices and machines, equipment, decor, information systems, technical solutions, parking space, amenities for the disabled, staff qualifications) and functional quality (communicativeness, appearance, corporate culture, customer relations, readiness to serve, empathy, interpersonal relations within the hotel premises) (Mazurek-Kusiak, 2011).

Managing the functional quality is more difficult than managing the technical one, as the former influences winning regular customers to a greater degree. The approach presented above can be expanded with the considerations for architecture, city planning, and spatial management of the surroundings, which indicates the complexity of the investigated issue. The measure aimed at addressing this issue is the categorization of hotels since the stars inform of the basic and additional service standards (they are easy to count, assess, and rate), but to a larger degree, they refer to the quality of service provided to different groups of recipients (Wei *et al.*, 2013). On account of the above considerations, the hospitality sector has introduced the norms of quality management and ISO quality systems, which constitute a marketing tool promoting hotels on the market. The certificates of compliance with ISO norms should be proof for the customer that a given entity fulfills the highest quality requirements, scrutinized by a certifying company (Gobelna, 2002).

Hospitality companies are continually seeking new, more innovative, and advanced methods and forms of influencing the market (Dhar, 2015) organizationally.

In order to facilitate planning advertising campaigns for service providers and establishing principles and guidelines for a system of marketing communication, a model of effectiveness hierarchy (unawareness – proof – knowledge – likeability – preference – transfer – purchase), which visualizes how a customer, through consecutive stages of awareness and acquired knowledge, approaches the purchase decision, was developed (Blythe, 2009). It is also indispensable that the quality of the product is appropriately managed. It constitutes the guarantee for finding buyers through an appropriate market information process and actual fulfillment of hotel service buyers' needs, which are often difficult to predict. To manage a hotel appropriately and effectively, one must continually obtain information on customer satisfaction (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). It could be accomplished both through passive and active measures, which should be mutually complementary. Passive measures refer to the analysis of reported problems (information), which allows for detecting only the reasons for losing guests.

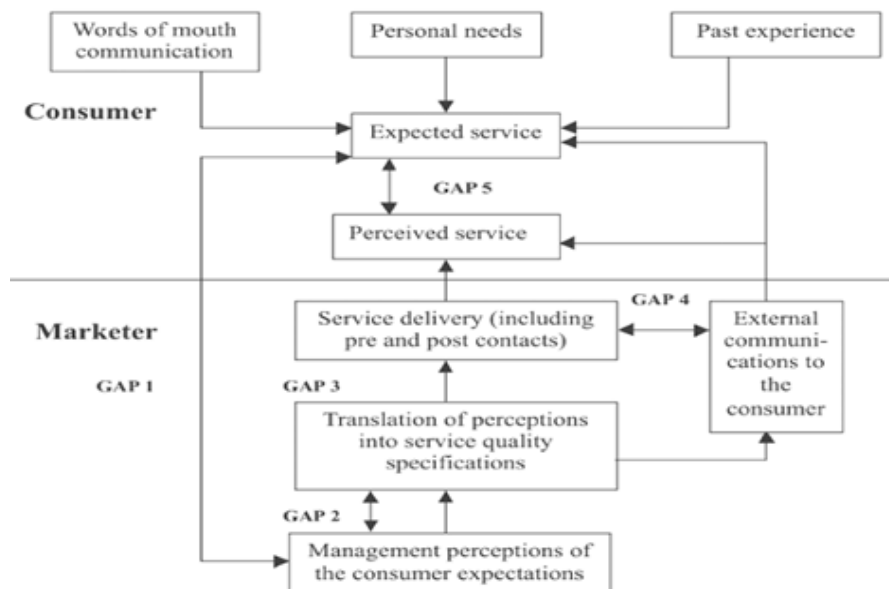
On the other hand, active measures rely on a frequent assessment of customer satisfaction with the service provided, monitoring changes, eliminating mistakes, and predicting threats. One of the most known methods of measuring the level of service satisfaction is the Servqual Method. Servqual method assumes that providing the right quality of service means meeting the expectations of the consumer. It is based on measuring the difference between the client's quality and the quality that this client expects from a given service (Stefano *et al.*, 2015).

Servqual is a service quality measurement system, which assesses the level of fulfilment by organizations (in the opinion of the customer) of five main requirements:

- reliability,
- responsibility,
- trust,
- empathy
- ensuring access to equipment, materials, and personnel.

The Servqual method was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithamlai and Berry in the years 1983-1985. With Servqual, service providers can predict customer expectations and identify the level of service users' assessment of their services (Figure 1).

The objective of the study is to assess the perceived quality of hospitality services in Poland in the view of domestic and foreign customers, by determining the gaps between the perception of service during a guest's stay at a hotel and the quality guaranteed by 3-star hotels, thus influencing customer expectations.

Figure 1: Model of Service Quality

Source: Parasuraman et al., 1984.

3. Methods

The research was conducted using the Servqual method in three-star hotels located in Poland. In the research process, 800 hotel guests participated. The task was difficult and required considerable discipline, as guests were requested to fill in the first Servqual questionnaire before commencing to use hotel services (expectations) and another identical one after using the hotel services (perception). A principle was adopted whereby only guests residing in a hotel longer than three nights were questioned. The questionnaire included 22 questions, to which every respondent was able to reply using grades from 1 (I do not agree) to 5 (I definitely agree) by Likert's scale. Each of the 22 questions related to one of the following 5 criteria: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurances, empathy. In preparing the questionnaire results for analysis, based on the obtained ratings (5-grade scale) for each category, the difference between perception and expectations. The Servqual method is often expressed as follows:

$$S = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n [(P_1 - E_1)w_1 + (P_2 - E_2)w_2 + \dots + (P_n - E_n)w_n]}{N}$$

where:

P_i – perception,

E_i – expectations,

I – specific research result,

n – number of research results,

N – number of respondents,

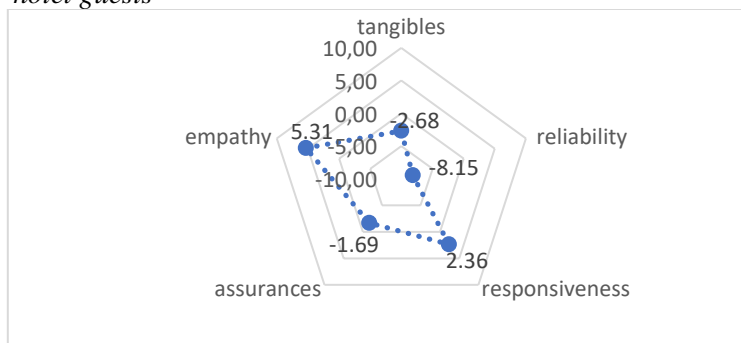
w_i – rating of consecutive questions by hotel guests.

In the research process a hypothesis was assumed whereby foreign guests place higher expectations in relation to hotel services than domestic guests and there might appear various ratings regarding particular criteria and detailed issues.

4. Results

In the first stage of the research, the Servqual index was calculated for domestic guests, and in the second stage – for foreign guests. The index Servqual serves to conduct a deeper assessment of the service quality level concerning respondents' weights to particular criteria (Figure 2).

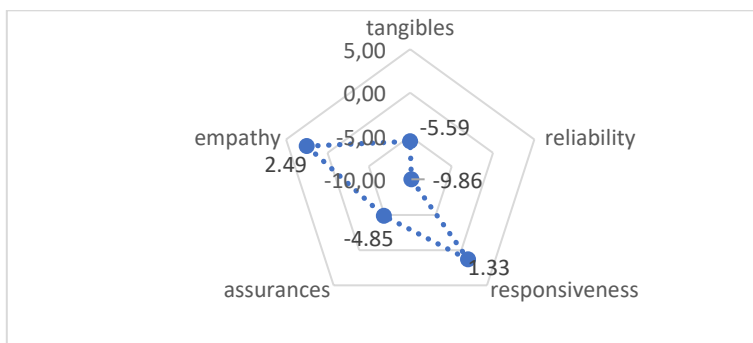
Figure 2: The Servqual index depending on the assessment expressed by domestic hotel guests



Source: Own study.

Figure 2 presents the results of research in hotel services in Poland, conducted among domestic guests. It follows from the analysis of the calculated Servqual (S) that three criteria were rated negatively, which is understood as negative ratings given by hotel guests. Reliability (-8.15) was definitely rated the lowest, followed by the assurances criterion (-1.69) and tangibles (-2.68).

Figure 3: The Servqual index depending on the assessment expressed by foreign hotel guests



Source: Own study.

In the case of ratings given by foreign hotel guests the situation was similar to the ratings assigned by domestic guests, since they rated negatively such criteria as: tangibles (-5.59), reliability (-9.86), assurances (-4.85) and gave positive ratings for empathy (2.49) and responsiveness (1.33) (Figure 3).

Table 1: Comparison of perceived quality of hotel services

Hotel guests	tangibles	reliability	responsiveness	assurances	empathy
domestic	-2.68	-8.15	2.36	-1.69	5.31
foreign	-5.59	-9.86	1.33	-4.85	2.49
difference	2.91	1.70	1.03	3.16	2.82

Source: Own study.

It is very clearly shown in Table 1. What follows from this is that foreign guests, in a similar fashion to domestic guests, assess such criteria as reliability and assurances. In the case of such criteria as tangibles, empathy, and reliability, differences in the perceived assessment of services are considerably greater for foreign guests, which testifies their higher expectations regarding the cited factors than for domestic guests.

5. Discussion

In the tourism industry, hoteliers are constantly seeking forms of appealing to customers. Hence a considerable demand for methods of research meeting their requirements is generated (Dziadkowiec, 2006). In the 80s of the twentieth century in the USA, a conceptual model of service quality was developed, subsequently refined to become the SERVQUAL method (Page, 2011). In Poland, these issues have been studied by only a few scientists because research requires adherence to a difficult procedure (Borkowski and Wszendobyl, 2007; Górnik and Śwodroń 2010).

In the tourist industry, domestic guests constitute a significant market segment, yet one ought to attend to foreign guests particularly well since it is thanks to them, we export our tourism attractions and services. Apart from this, in given country hoteliers know the requirements and culture of foreign guests to a lesser degree than domestic ones. Hence, the approach presented here is critical and infrequent in the field research (Dziadkowiec, 2006; Hasan *et al.*, 2019).

The analysis of obtained results indicates that the assumed research hypothesis has been largely confirmed, as the perception of hotel service quality by domestic and foreign guests was like the criteria. Still, there appeared differences in the assessment of individual questions. For hotel staff, of great importance is an appropriate analysis of responses to particular questions included in a specific criterion, because even with a generally negative rating for criteria defined as tangibility and reliability, positive responses were noted with certain questions, which shows in which specific range one ought to work to improve the rating for a given criterion. A similar opinion also is offered by Laning (1999). In the available literature, full confirmation of the collected research results was not found, but in most studies, similarly as in this one, guests had

higher expectations about hotels than what they received in their perception (Grobelna, 2002; Blythe, 2009; Dhar, 2015).

What follows from the above is the need to conduct systematic studies in the scope of perceived quality of hotel services, which should translate into the development of the tourism industry, and particularly into tourism export development.

6. Conclusions

1. From the research conducted in Poland, there is a difference in the perception of hotel services between domestic and foreign guests. However, the tendencies are definitely identical. It is proved by the perceived quality of services expressed with the values of the Servqual index calculated depending on the assessment of individual criteria by the two abovementioned groups of respondents who rated as definitely negative the criteria of tangibles, reliability, and assurances, with a positive rating for the criteria of responsiveness and empathy.
2. The foreign guests perceive the quality of hotel services with more criticism than domestic ones, and the greatest discrepancy in this regard refers to the criterion of tangibles.
3. The conclusions shown above constitute the basis for the creative shaping of guests' quality of service and thus building a competitive advantage in providing services to both domestic and foreign customers. Systematic assessment of the quality of service should form the basis for consolidating the quality of service in line with the customer's expectations.

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