TOURISM SERVICES: QUALITY DIMENSIONS

DIMENSIUNILE CALITĂŢII SERVICIILOR ÎN TURISM

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Abstract: *Economic literature records numerous attempts to define the quality dimensions of services.*
The model for quality service highlights the main requirements to be met by a service, so that it reaches the level desired by the consumer.
Analysts have concluded that on the quality of a tourist service a set of at least five key factors has influence: fairness, responsiveness, safety, customization (personalization) and tangible elements.

Key words: *tourism, quality, services, consumer.*

INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the ongoing process of providing tourist services allows highlighting the following key issues, which will positively or negatively influence the quality of services:

a) The processes of providing tourist services have the character of commercial transactions between the bidder delivering associated services, usually, in various proportions with the consumption or use of specific products and the tourist - the service recipient;

b) Because of their variability, the content of tourism services varies from one benefit to another. In other words, most of the times provided services have unique fingerprints, their performance must be nuanced by individual customer preferences. It thus comes to designing personalized

services in a manner that allows chaining activities "ad-hoc", so that they meet the highest possible customer expectations.

c) Relations between travel companies staff and clients are interactive relationships and, as such seller-buyer relationships express how the provided service quality is perceived by both trading partners. Quality depends on the travel service provider, but also on the service quality.

The customer perceives quality not only technically, but also functionally.

In the view of consumers, usually appear three levels of quality assessment services, grouped in order of difficulty evaluation:

- *desired quality*: desired service characteristics, which the customer has met and found and that he can evaluate before consumption;

- *experimental quality*: service characteristics, which the customer can evaluate during and after their consumption;

- *reliable quality*: service characteristics, that the customer can not properly evaluate even after consumption, but towards which he manifests trust (for e.g. a psychoanalyst services, religious services, fortune-teller services, etc.).

According to this grouping clients give more importance to experimental quality and reliable quality services.

d) In most cases, the client considers in a subjective matter quality benefits compared to other similar consumption situations experienced in the past. From this point of view, in case of a custom service benefit, various degrees of subjective quality assessment services can be distinguished:

- excellent services - if in the view of the consumer the perception of received services exceeds the quality level of benefits expected by the client;

- quality services - if customer expectations are consistent with the provider's promises and/or if his expectations correspond with the level of quality services received by the consumer in similar past situations;

- services assessed as quality satisfactory - whether in some pressing

situations (for e.g., the appearance of emergency cases in obtaining the service) for that specific client prevail as importance one or more facilities offered by the services; in these conditions the customer accepts as satisfactory services of mediocre quality, if in his view the benefits fall within an allowable tolerance zone (gray area), related to perceived prices;

- poor quality services - whether the consumer, due to his past experience, believes that received services are below his expectations in relation to the paid price.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Economic literature records also other numerous attempts to define the quality dimensions of services (according to some authors the qualitative characteristics). For example, GRÖNROOS Cristian distinguishes the following qualitative characteristics, assessed to be crucial in the assessment of service performance process:

tangibles;
reliability;
responsiveness;
assurance;
empathy;
recovery.

Reliability of tourism services is a vital issue for evaluating the quality of services. In general terms, reliability represents services' feature to be offered and supplied continuously, in the logical sequence of their consumption, any disruption of this "logical chain" of benefits causes "waiting threads" or substitution efforts of a tourist service with another with similar content.

Although the substituted service will have superior characteristics compared to the initial scheduled service, it will not generate the desired satisfaction for tourists and, to a large extent, even for providers.

Consequently, a tourism service is considered reliable if it was offered correctly, at the given terms, according to the destination for which it was designed and offered. As such, the reliability of the entire tourism product will depend, ultimately, to the reliability of its components. Defined in terms, reliability is the probability that a service functions correctly, within a scheduled time and in the prescribed conditions of use, and the contrary notion to reliability - the probability that a service may not work properly - so with a minus in consumers reviews on all tourism products components.

Of course, the meaning and importance of these features varies considerably from one situation to another, depending on the nature and temporal dimensions, spatial and structural properties of each service provided to customers.

Therefore, ISO 9004-2/1994 recommends a clear definition of the "service" concept both in terms of observable characteristics from the client and in terms of characteristics that are not always noticed by the client, but that influence direct service performance.

To this end, the Standard ISO 9004 - 2/1994 recommends taking into consideration the following service features:

- facilities (plants and equipment), capacity, number of staff and materials;

- waiting time, duration of service benefits, duration of the proceedings;

- hygiene, security, reliability;

- responsiveness, accessibility, courtesy, comfort, environment aesthetics, competence, safety in exploitation (for e.g. a hotel elevator), precision (accuracy), completeness, technical level, reliability, effective communication.

One of the ways in which a service entity can be differentiated from other competing companies consists in adopting total quality management, aiming throughout this to provide higher quality services than those of competition.

In the spirit of Carlzon's phrase, - the famous president of the Scandinavian Airline Systems company (SAS), - "it is better to be 1% better than competitors regarding 100 provided services, than to be 100% better at a single service."

Analysts' researches have shown that consumer satisfaction is influenced by the high quality of services, which influences purchase intentions.

Unlike product quality, tourism services quality is more difficult to define, to judge or to express in quantitative terms, because the service has little physical dimensions, such as performance, functional characteristics or maintenance costs, which could be used for comparison or measurement.

Because of the inseparability of production and consumption of services, quality must be defined regarding both the process of tourism service delivery and the actual results expressed by consumer satisfaction. Therefore the problem of measuring service quality has the following solution: determining how consumers evaluate the received benefits. In other words, consumer reviews are the comparison results between customers' expectations and the actual service performances. To obtain a differential advantage, providers must improve quality by trying to overcome consumer expectations in perceiving quality, for this purpose, tourism enterprises must identify the following:

- Which are the main factors of offered service quality?
- Which are the consumers' expectations, who appeal to the services of the enterprise?
- How do consumers evaluate business services compared to their own expectations?

A study by analysts A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml and L.L. Berry reveals the existence of ten factors for quality service perception, based on the criteria used by consumers' for assessing the service:

accessibility (service is accessible and offered in time?)

credibility (is the entity providing services reliable?)

awareness (the service provider knows and understands customer

needs?)

trust (the service is consistent and so reliable to the consumer?)

safety (the client is convinced that the requested service is safe and it does not involve risks?)

competence (the staff is competent, having the necessary training and knowledge to provide quality services?)

communication (how well did the provider explain and communicate the content of the travel service?)

politeness (the tourism staff is polite and considerate to the wishes expressed by the client?)

sensitivity (the staff is hospitable, prompt and operative in providing services?)

the obvious physical tourism benefit (staff, environment, technical equipment and other attributes reflect a high quality?)

Knowing customer needs and the capacity to provide consistent and useful tourism services are the result of business travel management activities and recruitment efforts, training and making staff permanent. These measures increase the client's credibility towards suppliers and it reduces distrust towards quality tourism benefits.

When the consumer trusts the provider, he expects that the service requested will be safe and without risks. Credibility can be improved by interactive communication in the benefits process, through advertising and through satisfied tourists.

RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

The model for quality service highlights the main requirements to be met by a service, so that it reaches the level desired by the consumer.

The analysis of the model for quality service highlights the following possible differences in the perception of tourism services:

1. The difference between consumer expectations and the level of

quality benefits - as it is perceived by business travel managers. Management does not always perceive correctly what customers want;

2. The difference between the level perceived by management and tourism service quality characteristics. Management may perceive correctly tourists needs, but without mentioning precisely the level of benefit to be performed;

3. The difference between quality characteristics of tourist service and its delivery (performance). The staff may be insufficiently trained, exhausted, incapable or hostile, which contributes to customer distrust in the quality standards proposed or promised by the provider.

4. The difference between service distribution (delivery) and communication between customer and company. Customer expectations are also determined by the statements made by company representatives and by those presented in promotional activities.

5. The difference between perceived service and desired service. This discrepancy occurs when the consumer subjectively estimates the performance made by a tourist company and improperly perceives quality service.

CONCLUSIONS

Consequently, analysts have concluded that on the quality of a tourist service a set of at least five key factors has influence:

♦ Fairness, the company's capacity to provide the promised service accurately and carefully;

♦ Responsiveness, the provider’s desire to meet the consumer and to provide a prompt service;

♦ Safety, the provider's ability to inspire confidence in consumers throughout professional competence and ability through which travel services are delivered;

♦ Customization (personalization), namely the concerns and the efforts of providers to treat with due attention and solicitude every tourist;

♦ Tangible elements, namely the presence of material facilities,

equipment, personnel and advertising materials appropriate for the service.

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