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CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN SERVICES AS A MARKETING INSTRUMENT FOR INCREASING CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION IN TOURISM PRODUCTS

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Abstract

The development of service sector – as a defining trait of modern market economy – demands permanent improvement of theory and applications in the domain of quality. Following this statement one can notice a considerable evolution of the advanced approach associated to the concept of quality management in services of specialists bringing to attention modalities and instruments that are more and more sophisticated with the intention to give consistent answers to the management teams of all activities included in the field of services. In this context modern marketing is able to give specialists from academic or real economic environment scientific fundamental approaches that are capable to bring closer together the desired efficiency and efficacy to real consumers' requests and perceptions. The quality management approach at tourist's services level underlines important particularities, creating a symbiosis between percepts and theoretical concepts and the practical need to fundament decisions in the tourist's services quality management. In a modern vision these are approached gradually, in four steps: quality control, quality insurance, total quality control and total quality management. For each step are specified the operational type of quality, level of approach considering marketing activities and users typology. According to each step of knowledge there are developed the instruments, techniques and work methods, fact that amplifies the opportunities to detail this kind of approaches to operational level – with special address to tourism management.

Keywords: quality, quality management, marketing, customer satisfaction

JEL Classification: M 31, L 83, M 10

Introduction

The concept of "quality in services" penetrated the tourism industry later than in other activity sectors – starting with the second half of the XIXth century – and was mainly referring to public alimentation sector, in which companies that understood the necessity of quality imposed, dominated and are still dominating the market (for example, McDonald's).

Due to the complexity and diversity of tourist's services, on one hand (diversification of recreation activities, tourist's transport sector, especially by using high speed transport vehicles, and the permanent enrichment of tourist destinations that can be easily accessed

through more and more sophisticated informational means etc.), but also because of the increased exigencies of potential tourists with financial possibilities. On the other hand indicators that measure services quality do not have the rigor of the ones associated with different products, this making the services evaluation not always very accurate. In consequence, services evaluation is more sophisticated, usually linked to specific attributes perceived by the customers (trust, sensitivity, competence, politeness, communication, credibility, security etc.).

In the same time, the risk perceived by services user regarding eventual un-satisfactions is much higher, compared to the one associated, in general, with products.

In the present paper, the authors intend to draw a conceptual line between the concept of „management in services’ quality” and- methodological correspondence, the main instrument marketing used in marketing research for evaluating user’s satisfaction – statistic survey based on structured questionnaire.

1. General conceptual context

The main objective of the total quality system is about the way that the user perceives the quality of tourist’s services offered by a certain specialized company. Usually there is a difference between products/ services performances and the users’ requests (needs, desires, preferences, expectations etc.). The methods, techniques and main instruments used in identifying such behavioral components belong to marketing.

Specialists underline five categories of mismatches: between users’ expectations and company management perception; between users’ expectations, perceived by company management and the quality characteristics of the service; between the quality characteristics of the service and the service delivery; between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to the consumer, which will “form” the expectations; between consumer expectations and their perceptions on actual quality of the service supplied.

Starting from those five points underlined by specialists (Parasuraman, Zeithmal și Berry, 1985), in order to reach to a higher quality level of the service it is needed to direct and optimize company’s efforts that make the object of quality management system.

In this context specialists recommend following some specific steps like (Dinu, V., 2005): informing the entire personnel regarding the quality of services supplied; selection, from among the personnel members, of the ones that will study thoroughly this information transforming it into knowledge, practice and models of activity; design and actual implementation of the total quality management within a company specialized in tourism.

These steps can be applied to different operational modalities, according to the company activities’ specificity. However, there is a common denominator for the applied methodology level that makes compatibles different approaches, including possible considerations at national and international level.

Between service quality (user satisfaction, respectively) and marketing – “ the main function of organization and a set of processes through which value is created, communicated and delivered to clients, and long term relations with them are handled; relations that bring benefits to the organization and its partners” (AMA, 2004) – there is an

ambivalent connection, respectively qualitative progress and progress in marketing domain, and vice versa – see figure no. 1.

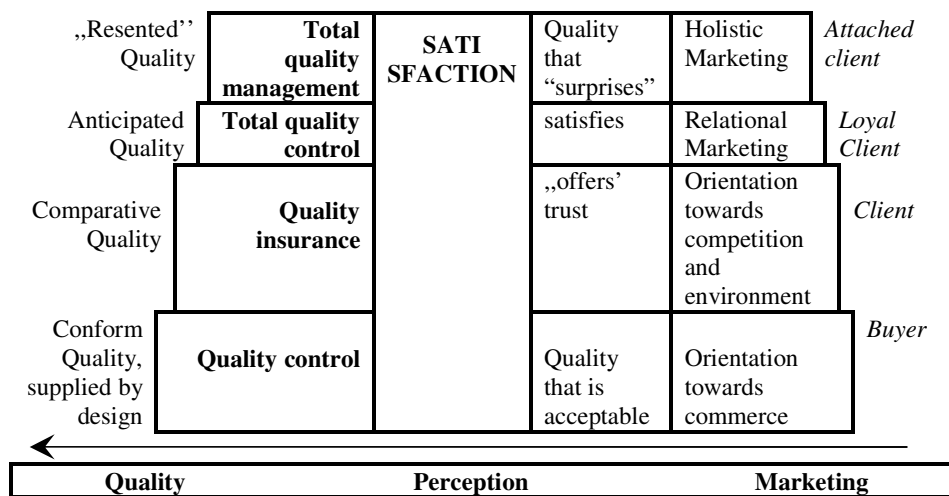


Fig. no 1 Relation Quality Management – Satisfaction – Marketing

The gradual approach of the satisfaction level associated to tourists' services induces a causal link between quality, tourism management and marketing activity.

The link between quality and users satisfaction underlines the traceability of the qualitative level from the designed quality of service to the quality felt by user, passing through different intermediary stages like comparative quality and anticipated quality.

As it can be deduced from figure 1, the gradual perception of user's satisfaction allows the reorientation of real marketing in a tourism company towards relational marketing, which has as direct result, the evolution from buyer to attached client, and this is being done in accordance with all requests for using the fidelity concept in tourism.

In this context, fidelity can be obtained exclusively on a high degree of satisfaction for touristy users.

The marketing importance in the quality system results from the following objectives: sets out/ identifies the qualitative level asked by the market segment or the targeted market by the company; communicates to the company's management team all users requests (necessities, desires and preferences etc.) and shapes a “profile” of client expectations, transformed in technical, functional and aesthetical specifications of the product that is to be realized through different instruments/techniques; sets a *feedback* for received information from clients, so that the qualitative level offered (of product/ service) on the market to correspond to the qualitative level asked by it.

Requests satisfaction supposes defining, understanding, fulfilling and verifying them, requests followed by the marketing systems in tourism, plus, assuming that the Total Quality Management is applied as a marketing strategy, starting with the way that product/ service image is perceived and until the decision to buy is made and the actual use takes

place. This supposes: a certain anterior experience; a good knowledge of own needs and desires; a good communication from the side of touristy company; a good communication of the client with the company. In other words, an excellent marketing activity of the company, developed through specific instruments/ techniques/ methods, in all stages, before buying the service, during the period of service consumption, and after its use (in order to prepare clients for loyalty to the company).

According to specialists, the configuration of these instruments is: (see Table no. 1)

Instruments and working techniques

Table no. 1

Steps / Characteristics	Instruments / techniques / working methods	Quality assesment
Quality control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key concept - „acceptable quality level” • purpose: correction of the obtaining process, in order to improve the qualitative level of the final products • low level of personnel involvement 	Statistic control methods (control by survey)	Determining the quality basic indicators' set using the technique of buying decisional process associated to tourists.
Quality insurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key concept - „to have and to give trust” • purpose: to prevent defects and mistakes • the degree of involvement in quality is assured to all employees 	The working methods are contained in a management system that works through coordination of all activities based on written procedures for each department, starting with the marketing one.	Setting out minimum level for all touristy associated activities.
Total quality control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key concept - „procedural approach of activity and holding under control the organization in the quality domain” • purpose: improving organization's performances • total degree of involvement, including partners from the supply and distribution chain 	Methods and procedures are following the Dening cycle– P.E.V.A (plan, execute, verify act)	Development and application of integrated evaluation indicators for tourism quality, when quality is approached as a system.
Total quality management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key concept - „excellence”, „overtaking clients expectations” 	Methods and procedures include personnel training and motivation, set out of quantifiable indicators for all satisfaction factors	Setting out different levels of performance associated to services quality integrated

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purpose: long term client satisfaction • objective: surpassing clients expectations • degree of involvement: all employees, and first of all top manager, as well as partners companies (suppliers, distributors, sellers) 	(methods and instruments old and new).	indicators so that the effects on users' satisfaction level will determine a high degree of fidelity towards services supplier.
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Source: after Stanciu I., 2003

If, from the commercial orientation, specific to the '60^{ties} – 70^{ties} of the last century, marketing was understood as a “modality to value performance of a company merchandise”, the new concept of marketing – the “holistic” marketing – supposes as well, a relational, integrated marketing, all present inside organization and social responsible (Kotler, Ph., Dipak, C.J., Maesince S., 2002, quoted by Pop, N. Al., Vlădoi A.-D., 2009).

2. Methodological and operational frame

Satisfaction represents “a veritable key of modeling client's behavior of acquisition, that is supported by three groups of variables: of *cognitive order* (based on the qualitative superiority of merchandise given by performance), of *affective order* (based on emotions induced/ provoked to consumer) and of *co-native order* (based on the interaction between buyer and supplier in the act of buying) (Meyer-Waarden, 2004, quoted in Brătianu, C., Lixăndroiu D., Pop N. Al., - editors, 2006). Moreover, in tourism, the static vision of satisfaction a state of fact in relation with the user is gradually replaced and completed by the “cumulated satisfaction” notion (Schüler, Fuchs, 2004; Mithas, Krishnan, Fornell, 2005 quoted in Pop N.-Al., Stăncioiu A.-F., Teodorescu N., Pretorian S., 2008).

In a similar way, from the marketers point of view, in order to understand, anticipate and “sense” the quality desired by user, marketer attributes must reunite “intellectual skills (spirit of observation, analysis and synthesis, abstract and concrete thinking, spatial view, aesthetic sense, taste and creative imagination) with the memory skills (visual, scent, gustative etc) and with skills connected to efficiency qualities (attention, patience, tenacity, rigor and spirit mobility, trust in own strength, prudence and cooperation spirit)” (Pop, N. Al., Vlădoi A.-D., 2009).

This way, when modeling the services quality management system in tourism marketing, considering the actual use of tourist's services, one can elaborate a methodological sketch of a statistic survey based on a questionnaire, structured on sections appropriate to the followed purpose, considering reasons for traveling, criteria of destination selection as well as factors that induce satisfaction, grouped on basic factors, desired factors and enthusiasm factors (Homburg Ch. and Stock R., 2001).

Designing and implementing a statistic survey is capable to answer to this complex desiderata based on a structured questionnaire, which contains significant evaluation sections for tourism user satisfaction: evaluation of informing possibilities, regarding the set of alternatives; used criteria in evaluation and election of a certain tourism company or of a certain kind of touristy services; evaluation of all service components (transport,

hosting, food, services with added value etc.); evaluation post-buying, respectively the maintenance in acceptable limits of the inevitable cognitive dissonance.

Using this kind of research instrument one can determine specific quality/ satisfaction indices at the level of considered variables, as well as aggregated indices which uniquely cumulate the satisfaction degree described through individual indices. With this purpose there can be used more approaches, described by statistical comparative type analysis. For example, in this manner, can be used numerous types of scales and analyses meant to synthesise the cumulative influence of all variables that concur to ensure a certain level of tourism user satisfaction.

The obtained results can constitute starting points for a future in total quality management systems in services, respectively for future users of different tourism products.

Conclusions

The evolution of the quality management system and its integration in complex marketing decisions, specific for modern marketing, demands pertinent approaches of quantitative type, the statistic surveys being the main operative instrument for specific variables that describe tourism user satisfaction. Results of such statistic surveys can be particularized to any tourist's activity or destinations, this fact offering them superior valences of control and management.

The existence of a conceptual – methodological frame scientifically based for determining the satisfaction degree regarding tourist's services is, also, a management instrument that allows the use of experimental applications based on real users' perceptions regarding tourist's services. This way, the quality management for tourist's services goes beyond the hypothetic frame of academic approaches, bringing to the fore, according to marketing essence, the real needs and preferences associated to a specific, clearly defined segment of users.

Finally, by applying the modern concept of services management the tourism organization can answer in real time to users' requests through a pro-active behavior, with benefic effects for their entire activity, including the area of competition control.

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