

IMPLEMENTATION OF A QUALITY STRATEGY BASED ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ANALYSIS. CASE STUDY: HOTEL MARKET

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Abstract: *The quality of services in hotel management is crucial for the development of brand value and the growth of the customer base. Every hotel should strive not only to improve the quality of services, but also to exceed customer expectations. Such a mentality is very beneficial especially for the field of hospitality management, where competition is constantly increasing. In light of this, a research was carried out, in order to evaluate the quality of services provided within the Alpin hotel unit so that the company can acknowledge customer dissatisfaction and implement the appropriate quality strategy towards positive outcomes.*

Key words: *quality strategies, customer satisfaction, quality of services, research*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the quality of services is the basic criterion for customer satisfaction and company profitability. A high level of quality will lead to a greater customer satisfaction, usually by reducing costs, increasing profits and ensuring the competitiveness of services in the market.

Taking into account these aspects, the main purpose of this paper is to present how to implement a quality strategy in order to improve the quality of services provided by the hotel. The quality of the services provided within the Alpin hotel unit was analyzed, and in order to fulfill the purpose, objectives were established as follows: to evaluate the respondents' expectations regarding the quality of the hotel services; to determine and evaluate the perceptions regarding the quality of hotel services; to examine the differences between perceptions and expectations. On the basis of the results, it was proposed to implement a quality strategy in order to improve the quality provided by the hotel.

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2. Literature Review

According to the definition of the concept of quality (Sălăgean et al., 2015), in the present economic context, quality itself has become a source of competitive advantage. Organizations that want to achieve excellence must perceive quality as something natural, for without human or financial resources, an organization cannot function.

Following the World Tourism Organization, "quality is the result of a process that involves meeting all the needs of tourism products and services, requirements and expectations of consumers at an affordable price, in accordance with quality standards related to safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, communication, infrastructure, facilities and services "(Madar, 2014), and, according to the ISO 9000 standard, quality is "the degree to which a set of intrinsic characteristics meet the requirements "(ISO, 2021).

In the hotel industry, Service Quality Management is considered the essence of the life of all operations. With the progress made in everyday life, quality no longer illustrates only a philosophical concept, but also an economic one, thus nowadays it has become a general concern of all organizations, being achievable through management (Sandru, 2015).

In order to be more competitive and to provide customers with reliability, manufacturers must implement their own quality strategies, where investing in new technologies, implementing quality standards and obtaining a solid certification, has a high credibility on the market (Neacşu, 2017).

In light of this, previous research (Claver et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012) has shown that hotel units implement quality management systems because they are regarded as a means of improving the quality of services, training employees, developing a culture of quality, achieving the desired economic efficiency (internal impact) and creating a favorable image (external impact).

Therefore, obtaining high quality products or services is the key to customer satisfaction and a significant premise for business survival; to achieve the proposed quality objectives, organizations must consider implementing various quality strategies (Madar, 2017).

In the contemporary literature, several methods for evaluating the quality of services have been developed, such as SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, INTSERVQUAL and INSQPLUS. Various measurement scales, such as LODGSERV, HOLSERV and DINESERV, have been developed for the purpose of assessing the quality of services in the tourism industry.

The SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al, 1985) is based on five dimensions of service quality, namely: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, trust and empathy. This model provides an appropriate conceptual framework for research and measurement of service quality, based on the customer's assessment of service quality.

3. Company Presentation

Alpin Hotel is located in Poiana Braşov resort, being classified as 4 star hotel; it has managed to impose itself on the market through professionalism, being available to customers with a wide range of services.

Alpin Hotel in Poiana Braşov consists of: accommodation units, food units and units offering leisure and recreation services. The functional structure of the complex accommodates 850 guests in 3 different accommodation facilities, namely, Alpin Hotel (150 rooms), Alpin House (25 rooms and 7 apartments) and Alpin ApartHotel (144 apartments) (Alpin, 2021).

The complex offers its guests 4 restaurants, 2 terraces and summer gardens. Along with the catering units and accommodation units in the service system, the Alpin Hotel also has a modern conference center, with 6 conference and event rooms with a capacity of 100 to 700 people (Alpin Conference Center, 2021).

The complex also houses the Aquadreams Club, the Vitarium Spa, a gym, a dry and wet sauna and a seasonal shower. Alpin Resort also has a ski school and a ski storage room in winter, as well as a cycling school and a bicycle rental service in summer, and organizes hiking trips and excursions throughout the year.

According to the data provided by the Ministry of Public Finance, the evolution of the main financial indicators of the company in the last five years can be found in table 1.

Table 1
Evolution of the main economic indicators in the last 5 years

Year	Turnover (lei)	Net Profit (lei)	Number of employees
2016	5 720 301	55 672	32
2017	45 073 801	1 520 845	263
2018	50 007 691	5 571 345	284
2019	55 045 513	4 861 719	240
2020	23 721 214	-3 879 810	129

According to table 1, the net turnover of the Alpin hotel increased from 2016 to 2017 by 87.3%, respectively from 5,720,301 RON in 2016 to 45,073,801 RON in 2017. This indicator has grown steadily over the next two years, with increases of 9.8% and 9.1%. Subsequently, respectively from 2019 to 2020, the turnover decreased by 56.9% from 55 04 513 RON to 23 721 214 RON. From 2016 to 2017, the net profit registered the highest increase (96.3%), respectively, from 55672 RON in 2016 to 1 520845 RON in 2017. Subsequently, namely, from 2019 to 2020, it decreased by over 100% from 4,861,719 RON in 2019 to - 3,879,810 RON in 2020. The decrease of the value of these indicators is due to the conditions in which the tourist activity took place after the beginning of the COVID -19 pandemic.

Hotel guests are mainly from the business area. Adapting to the local market, the hotel has turned to other directions: events (festive meals, private parties, even

weddings) smaller groups (usually from top management), which come for conferences, seminars or business meetings.

The competitors of the Alpin Hotel are: Teleferic Grand Hotel, Ana Hotels, Dracula's house, Aurelius Hotel, Piatra Mare, Silver Mountain Resort & SPA, Escalade Hotel. In the situation where the hotels in Poiana Braşov resort address the same needs, offering more or less the same type of services, we can speak of a direct competition, the direct competitors of the Alpin hotel being the 4-star hotels.

Relations with suppliers are based on mutual respect, which implies from the company Alpin 2003 SRL, both economic and social responsibilities, such as: promoting trust and fairness to suppliers on prices, exchanges of information and collaborations on economic planning and payment obligations in a timely manner and in accordance with contractual relationships.

Hotel Alpin's quality policy is to provide specific services promptly and safely, at a high quality level, at an optimal quality-price ratio, under conditions of a stable financial balance and in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

Currently, due to the current context of declaring the state of global epidemic with the new coronavirus (Covid-19), for the safety of customers, measures have been imposed and implemented to prevent infection with Covid-19 (Alpin Conference Center, 2021). Alpin Resort Hotel received the "Safe Guard" certification in accordance with the best practices for preventing infection with the new Coronavirus, becoming the first hotel in Poiana Braşov resort, which obtained this certification (Bureau Veritas, 2020).

4. Research Methodology

This research was conducted in order to determine customer satisfaction following certain aspects of the quality of services provided within the Alpin Hotel unit, using as a tool of analysis the SERVQUAL model, in an attempt to establish customer dissatisfaction and implement the appropriate quality strategy, in order to reach a full satisfaction.

To carry out this research, the following objectives have been established:

- to evaluate respondents' expectations regarding the quality of hotel services;
- to determine and evaluate perceptions regarding the quality of hotel services;
- to examine the differences between perceptions and expectations;
- to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the hotel.

The questionnaire was completed in Google Forms, subsequently pre-tested among 10 people and applied between April and May 2021.

The method used to collect the data is a quantitative one, namely, the survey-based survey and the tool used is the questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire includes 6 questions to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents but also other key characteristics of their journey.

The second part identifies customer expectations: it contains 20 statements and aims to identify respondents' expectations regarding the services offered by the Alpin Hotel unit, before their accommodation at the hotel. The third part of the questionnaire looks at customer's perceptions and consists of 20 statements that allow the identification of perceptions regarding the services offered by the Alpin Hotel unit after hotel

accommodation. The measurement scales used in the present study are of the interval type on five levels, both for expectations and perceptions, the distance between the scale levels being equal to the possibility of a single choice.

The sampling method used for this research is the non-random method. The basic population of this research is made up of the clients of the Alpin Hotel. Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 80 respondents.

Sample structure

Table 2

Sample structure by gender		
Gender	Absolute frequency (nr.)	%
Male	35	43,8
Female	45	56,3
Total	80	100
Sample structure according to age		
Age	Absolute frequency (nr.)	%
Under 20 years	3	3,8
20-29 years	5	6,3
30-39 years	27	33,8
40-49 years	30	37,5
50-59 years	14	17,5
Over 60 years	1	1,2
Total	80	100

It can be seen from table 2 that, out of the total of 80 respondents, the largest share is held by females (56.3%) and males (43.8%). Depending on their age, most of the respondents surveyed were between 40-49 years old, with a number of 30, representing 37.5% of the total of 100% given by the 80 respondents.

5. Research Results

The data obtained from the research were entered in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 20) for processing. The obtained results are systematized and arranged in a way that allows the evaluation of respondents' expectations towards hotel services, the evaluation of respondents' perceptions towards the hotel services under study, as well as the examination of differences between respondents' perceptions and expectations.

Most of the values of the average expectations were over 3, which means that the respondents have above average expectations in terms of the quality of services offered at the Alpin Hotel in Poiana Braşov.

The highest value of the average expectations is found in the statements that involve: implementation of safety standards and hygiene protocols in accordance with legal norms, compliance with best practices in the prevention of Covid-19, orientation towards high customer satisfaction. At the lower limit there is only one variable, respectively, the existence of facilities for spending leisure time for customers (swimming pool, gyms, spa).

The average perceptions have values between 4.73 and 2.70, dominated by those between 3.98 and 3.16. The highest averages refer to the perceptions regarding the implementation of safety standards and hygiene protocols in accordance with legal norms, and the observance of best practices in the prevention of Covid-19, the flexible reception schedule, the careful appearance of the staff. At the lower limit are the variables that refer to: the attractiveness of the interior and exterior of the hotel.

In order to evaluate the quality of the services of the Alpin Hotel unit in Poiana Braşov, the difference between perceptions (level of satisfaction perceived after hotel accommodation) and expectations (level of satisfaction expected before hotel accommodation) was calculated.

The result shows that only 4 values are negative, while in the case of 16 variables the perceptions of the respondents exceed the expected level. The biggest negative difference concerns the attractiveness of the interior and exterior of the hotel. Other values that bring dissatisfaction among the respondents refer to: the accessibility of the parking space and the endowment of the rooms. These results imply the improvement of the quality of services for the differences registered with negative values, as well as for those with small or medium positive values.

6. The Implementation of the Quality Strategy

According to the research results, the need to improve quality was determined by the negative values of the differences between perceptions and expectations, as well as the small and medium positive values. Therefore, the application of the strategy of continuous improvement in the case of the Alpin Hotel unit will first of all imply the continuous improvement of the constructive characteristics and endowments. In this regard, the following can be considered:

- Ensuring an optimal level of lighting. A method by which customer comfort can be increased involves the integration of LED lamps with adjustable power, which customers can adjust as needed;
- Replacing obsolete furniture with new ones. As the impression left on the guest is paramount, it is recommended to replace obsolete furniture with laminated chipboard furniture, as it has better mechanical strength;
- Interior design. This refurbishment must be based on the main facilities and amenities of the hotel rooms. Carpets, with some heavy traffic, can be replaced with a mixture of wool and polyamide drapes and curtains because they must allow complete darkness in the room. TVs with a minimum size of 81 cm can be used to ensure a pleasant experience for guests, the mandatory presence of minibars in each room, shavers and hair dryers. Decorative elements can also be considered to relax the atmosphere, as well as soothing musical chords in the specially arranged areas for rest;
- Improving the exterior. It is recommended to paint the exteriors and varnish the wooden parts.
- Expansion of the parking space.

The approximate costs for implementing this quality strategy are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Costs of implementing the quality strategy

Endowment	Medium category	Superior category
Finishes (exterior-exterior walls) + labor	830 €	1 060 €
Furniture (including assembly)	1 500 €	4 000 €
Textiles	400 €	700 €
Lighting objects	350 €	500 €
Equipment	350 €	550 €
Other objects (quilt, pillow, towels)	200 €	250 €
TOTAL	3 630 €	6 000 €

As shown in Table 3, the investment needed to implement the continuous improvement strategy does not require significant financial efforts (Alpit Hotel has this money), but it can increase customer satisfaction and improve the hotel's image.

7. Conclusions

Although service companies seem to offer similar services, customers perceive differently what is offered to them, due to the distinct level of quality of services offered. Therefore, it is the customers who ultimately decide whether to turn to a provider because they perceive more value in its services compared to those offered by the competition.

The research conducted in the paper showed that the Alpin unit benefits from a favorable image among its customers, but the analysis of the differences of each variable also highlighted some aspects that do not match this overall picture. Thus, a not very favorable impression among the customers was related to the exterior of the hotel, as well as to the interior, the opinions of these variables being uniform and being below the average of satisfaction. Other unfavorable assessments concerned the parking space and the equipment of the rooms.

According to the research results, the strategy of continuous improvement was found to be the appropriate strategy in order to satisfy customers more. This strategy has taken into account changes in terms of improving construction features and facilities by ensuring an optimal level of lighting, replacing obsolete furniture with new ones, redesigning the interior, improving the exterior, and expanding the parking space.

The results of this work can be a source of information for the hotel management and a starting point for the implementation of the strategy in order to exceed the expected level to a greater extent.

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