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## **Pomiar satysfakcji klientów korzystających z usług biur podróży z lubelszczyzny jako kluczowy element marketingu współczesnego**

### **Survey upon satisfaction of customers using services of travel agencies from Lublin province as a key element of contemporary marketing**

*Article addresses an issue of the relationship between the level of service quality and the customer satisfaction who decided to purchase it.*

*The paper presents results of survey carried out by means of Servqual method in 2012 among 200 customers of travel agencies from Lublin region. The aim of the study was to determine the level of customer's satisfaction with the services provided by travel agencies (determination of the difference between the quality of service provided by travel agencies and the quality expected by customers). Based on the study, it is concluded that the level of satisfaction with the services is satisfactory to customers, although the difference between provided and expected quality of services forces the travel agency owners to take into considerations that there are critical points that require their immediate intervention to maintain the current level of customer's interest in their services. Significant impact on the level of customer satisfaction has the financial dimension of the service package as well as trust and professionalism of the staff.*

**Key words:** customer's satisfaction, level of service quality, expected quality, travel agencies, Lublin region

#### **Introduction**

Marketing is both the science and art of acquiring and retaining customers as well as cultivating relationships with them<sup>1</sup>. The future companies will increasingly be based on the full commitment of all employees to the objectives of the company. Quality of staff work will aim to increase competitiveness by means of the development and improvement<sup>2</sup>.

Gaining the competitive advantage in today's rapidly changing environment is extremely difficult. In particular, it can be seen on the Polish services market. The increasing number of new service providers offering their customers a wide range of services makes it increasingly difficult to get a competitive advantage on a market by means of well-known marketing tools. In such situation, to draw attention to satisfaction

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<sup>1</sup> Ph. Kotler, Jak tworzyć, zdobywać i dominować na rynkach, Wydawnictwo Helion, Gliwice 2006, 199.

<sup>2</sup> W. Pawlak, Od TQM do TQL, Problemy Jakości 2004, nr 6, 6.

of customers being the most important link within the whole process of services providing, becomes necessary<sup>3</sup>. Maintaining a permanent dialogue with customers allows for exploring their ever-changing expectations and learning to adapt by service providers<sup>4</sup>.

In a market economy, where supply exceeds demand, the customer always chooses a provider who offers him a wider range of services and provides greater satisfaction, which is the most important factor for a long-term success of the company<sup>5</sup>.

Satisfaction is a psychological phenomenon, which is defined as an emotional state that appears to a purchaser while making the comparable processes. A customer confronts his/her experiences after using the services with his/her own expectations, desires, individual standards, or a specific model of evaluation. If these expectations are met or exceeded, the customer is satisfied with the services<sup>6</sup>.

Satisfaction is the result of consuming the service and evaluating its characteristics. The consumer assesses the quality as high or low. Level of service quality is assessed by comparing the customer's expectations with the perception of features and characteristics of a services being consumed. Satisfaction is closely associated with the quality<sup>7</sup>.

## Method of research

Tourists are particularly vulnerable customers, who have relatively high demands on the quality of services provided by travel agencies. In the case of an unsatisfactory level of service quality, in other words, the level of satisfaction with a consumption of a purchased service, they often do not report any complaint, choosing the competition<sup>8</sup>.

Quality of services is an important issue in the literature upon marketing and in service companies. The need for a substantial measure of perceived service quality has become essential. Researchers and practitioners suggest that for potential buyers, who put their rates, quality and satisfaction resulting from their consumption is associated with a loyalty and will to maintain a long-term relationship with a given company<sup>9</sup>.

Due to the fact that the competition is becoming more intense and environmental factors more hostile, the concern about the quality of service increases as well. If the quality of services has to become the fundament of marketing strategy, the vendor must have the means to measure it. The most common measure for the service quality is a

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<sup>3</sup> G.Urbaneck, Jakość, satysfakcja, rentowność – łańcuch przyczynowo – skutkowy, Marketing i Rynek 2004, nr 6. s. 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, s. 7

<sup>5</sup> J. Brillman, Nowoczesne koncepcje i metody zarządzania, PWE, Warszawa 2002, s.53.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lisowski, Określić satysfakcję klienta, Marketing w Praktyce 1999, nr 5, s. 16.

<sup>7</sup> L. Nieżurawski, A. Kobylanski, B. Pawłowska, Pomiar satysfakcji klientów i jego znaczenie dla przedsiębiorstw – problemy badawcze, Problemy Jakości 2003, nr 3, s.8.

<sup>8</sup> B. Sawicki, J. Wojciechowska-Solis, TQM a potencjał konkurencyjny biur turystycznych województwa lubelskiego i obwodu winnickiego, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego nr 591, Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług nr 53, Szczecin 2010, s. 460.

<sup>9</sup> D. Iacobucci, K.A. Grayson, A.L. Ostrom, (1994), "The calculus of service quality and customer satisfaction: theoretical and empirical differentiation and integration", in Swartz, T.A., Bowen, D.A. and Brown, S.W. (Eds), Advances in Services and Marketing and Management, Vol. 3, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT and New York, NY, p. 1-67.

method of marketing survey Servqual, which is an instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1985-1995<sup>10</sup>.

Servqual method focuses primarily on the quest for continuous improvement, taking into account the whole enterprise in this process. It involves all employees to create an open and effective communication system. It may be one of the key indicators to define areas that need to be reformed, and to identify actions worth of continuing<sup>11</sup>.

The Servqual method is to determine the difference between the perceived quality of the service and quality provided by a specific company, in this case, by travel agency, which will assess the degree of customer's satisfaction with the service. The evaluation is made in terms of the five following dimensions of the service quality - material frames of service, reliability of service, responsibility of service providers / response to customer's needs, reliability of service and accessibility of service.

The research carried out applying Servqual method consists in using specially designed questionnaire survey divided into two parts, each comprising 22 questions.

Assessments of statements were measured using a five-degree scale, which allowed for graduating the level of expectations and perceptions of services: from *strongly disagree - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree*.

When using the method, it is important to determine which dimensions are relevant to the customer. The last part of the survey consists of the table to assign the importance degrees to particular dimensions. Tourists were asked to identify to what extent each of these characteristics is important to them. The fixed sum method was used in calculations. Each respondent received 100 points, that had to be split between those areas.

The aim of the study was to estimate the level of customer's satisfaction with the service by identifying the gap between the quality guaranteed by travel agencies and the quality expected by customers.

Research upon the quality of services affecting the customer's satisfaction was conducted among tourists using the services of travel agencies from Lublin region and referred to the category of abroad trips / round trips in 2012. The study involved 200 respondents, who were asked to complete the first part of the Servqual questionnaire before their departure, while the second part - after the tour.

## Results of research

Analysis of the research results referring to customers using the services of travel agents in Lublin, reveals that the assessment of the service quality is usually subjective, and it is carried out not only at the end, but also during the service. Lack of clear definition of the service quality means that the customer creates his/her own assessment criteria and he/she quits using that travel agency in the case of any failure.

Achieving a non-weighted Servqual result, it can be concluded what elements of the service should be subjected to further analysis in order to reach the most optimum level of the service provided.

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<sup>10</sup> P. Asubonteng, K. J. McCleary, J. E. Swan, (1996) "SERVQUAL revisited: a critical review of service quality", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 10 Iss: 6, p. 62 – 81

<sup>11</sup> Gilmore A., *Usługi - marketing i zarządzanie*, PWE, Warszawa 2006, p. 47

Calculated non-weighted Servqual result can be positive, negative, or zero. A positive result means for higher quality / satisfaction, than was expected by the customer, while a negative result stands for failure in meeting customer's expectations. The most optimum situation is when the result is zero, which means that the service exactly meets customer's expectations.

Calculations were carried out for sample n=200 using the following formula:

$$SQ_{n1} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^5 [(S_1 - O_1) + (\dots) + (S_{200} - O_{200})]}{200}$$

where:

$S_i$  – real assessment for the service provided,

$O_i$  – assessment of customer's expectations related to the service provided.

Another indicator calculated within Servqual method is Servqual index. It is obtained from the third part of the survey questionnaire, in which respondents were asked to give importance weights to particular areas and to non-weighted Servqual indicators. Making calculations using the following formula, mean weighted Servqual result can be achieved:

$$SQ_w = \sum_{i=1}^5 w_i * SQ_{ni}$$

where:

$SQ_w$  – weighted Servqual index;

$w_i$  – importance of the dimension for respondent;

$SQ_{ni}$  – non-weighted Servqual index.

Applying the weighted Servqual index allows for evaluating the quality of services from the perspective of importance weights (importance of various dimensions for the respondents). If the index is positive, level of customer's expectations referring to the service quality has been successfully exceeded. Such quality level should be maintained, or where possible, develop. If the result is negative, correcting and/or repairing activity should be launched.

The obtained results show the assessment of the quality of tourist services provided by travel agencies from Lublin region in more realistic way, because they are in fact mean values correlated with the importance of dimensions determined by customers.

Assessment of the quality of tourist services made by customers led to determination of the following indices: non-weighted ( $SQ_{n1} \dots SQ_{n5}$ ) and weighted ones ( $SQ_{w1} \dots SQ_{w5}$ ) for individual quality criteria (Table 1.), as well as non-weighted Servqual ( $SQ_n$ ) and weighted Servqual ( $SQ_w$ ) measures.

Table 1. Non-weighted and weighted Servqual indices for particular quality dimensions in opinion of customers of Lublin travel agencies  
 Tabela 1. Wskaźnik Servqual nieważony i ważony dla poszczególnych wymiarów jakości w ocenie klientów lubelskich biur podróży

SQnw and SQww for particular dimensions				
Dimension	SQnw		SQww	
1 – tangibles (material dimension of the service frames)	SQn1 = -0.28		SQw1 = -5.27	
2 – reliability	SQn2 = -0.16		SQw2 = -3.84	
3 – responsiveness (the response to the expectations)	SQn3 = -0.09		SQw3 = -1.85	
4 – assurances (competence and confidence)	SQn4 = -0.23		SQw4 = -5.44	
5 – empathy	SQn5 = -0.19		SQw5 = -2.58	
	Mean non-weighted measure	<b>SQn = -0.19</b>	Mean weighted measure	<b>SQw = -3.80</b>
<b>SQnw – non-weighted Servqual index for j-th dimension</b>				
<b>SQww – weighted Servqual index for j-th dimension</b>				

Source: Own study  
 Źródło: Opracowanie własne.

Figure 1 presents both Servqual indices :non-weighted (SQn) and weighted (SQw), along with the indicators measures for particular dimensions: material frames of service (SQn1, SQw1), reliability of service (SQn2, SQw2), response to customer’s expectations (SQn3, SQw3), competence and professionalism of service (SQn4, SQw4), as well as empathy – communication of the staff (SQn5, SQw5).

Servqual weighted index (SQw) for the quality of tourist services was assessed for -3.80 points, whereas the non-weighted Servqual index (SQn) for -0.19 points. According to respondents’ opinion, the service did not bring the expected satisfaction and did not meet their expectations. All dimensions were given with a negative score–their assessment was negative.

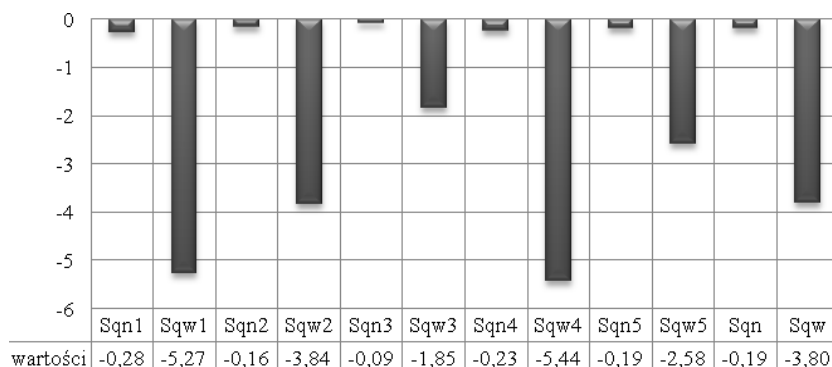


Fig. 1. General and synthetic non-weighted and weighted Servqual results for services provided by travel agencies

Rys. 1. Ogólny oraz syntetyczny wynik Servqual nieważony i ważony dla usług biur podróży  
 Source: own study.

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

The largest difference is felt by customers in contact with dimension 1(-0.28), i.e. the material dimension of the service frames: design of travel office, its equipment, staff, and information materials. The study shows that the first impression is very important for customers to decide if to use the services. The higher the standard of material frames, the larger probability that the customer will be satisfied with the service received. That a given dimension received the highest negative rating means that the service provider should first focus his/her attention on factors composing that dimension in order to analyze and eliminate any irregularities.

Other dimensions were also negatively assessed by customers (Figure 1); they are as follows in descending order: competence and confidence (4), empathy (5), reliability (2), the response to the expectations (3).

It should be noted that the response to customer's expectations received value very close to zero, which means that the expectations almost coincided with the observations, but at the same time other dimensions may require some analysis and correction of irregularities.

Results of the study should provide a basis for the situation analysis: diagnosis, developing a plan for corrective action, and efforts to systematical monitoring the current opinion about the level of service quality, i.e. customer's satisfaction survey.

In contrast to the original Servqual instrument, the questionnaire used in present survey was completed with additional questions. Respondents were asked to rate certain elements of the tourist product they purchased, and to list three factors that make the respondent feels satisfied with the service as well as three factors that made this assessment negative. The results are shown in Figure 2.

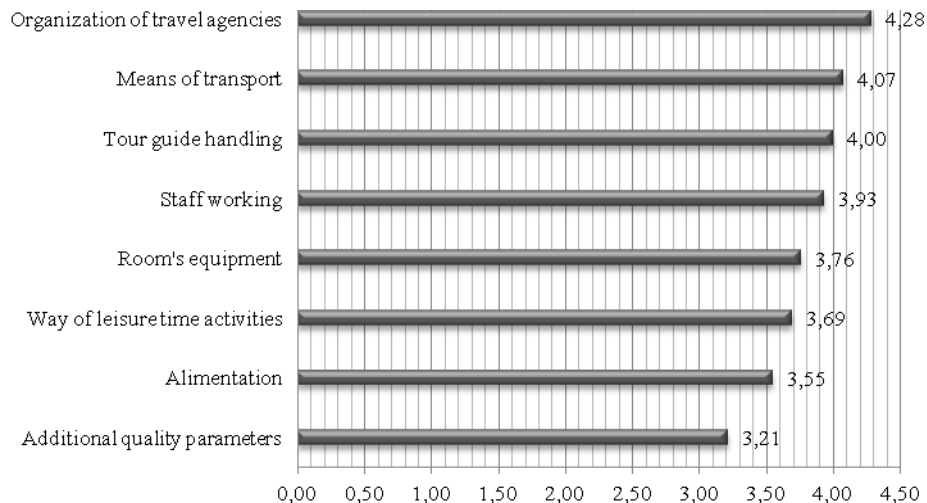


Fig. 2. Assessment of elements associated with a trip

Rys. 2. Ocena elementów związanych z wyjazdem

Source: Own study.

Źródło: Opracowanie własne.

The “organization” itself was assessed the best achieving the highest number of points among all the elements surveyed. The “mean of transport” was ranked in the next place. Given that there have been serious accidents due to quite poor technical condition of both coaches and planes in recent years, travel agencies needed to take care of more modern and safer transportation means. The third place was assigned to the “staff competence”, while “food” was ranked at the last place. The reason for such negative feelings may result from differences in cultural tastes of Poles and cuisine served in the target countries.

Asked for the factors making satisfaction, the respondents most often listed as following:

- comfort of transportation means,
- polite staff of travel agency,
- good organization of tours,
- driver’s competence,
- satisfactory amount of information on subsequent points of tourist interest.

Among factors affecting negative assessment of respondents, there were:

- low standard of hotels,
- bad cuisine,
- no marking of the group during tours,
- too short breaks during the tour,
- incomplete information on the total cost.

Measurement and evaluation of the services quality provided by travel agencies operating in the market should be carried out regularly, because they allow for monitoring the changes in customer’s expectations with time, as well as should lead to the improvement of service processes.

## Conclusions

Conclusions resulting from the survey indicate that:

1. An effective system of information on the service quality must be a permanent and continuous process based on the research made by customers, competitors, and their own employees. Measurement and evaluation of the service quality of travel agencies operating in the market should be carried out regularly, because it allows for monitoring of changes in customer’s expectations with time, and should reflect in the improvement of service processes.
2. The satisfaction indicator can be treated only in cognitive aspect of the customer service. One have to realize that it applies to the customer’s experiences from the past, sometimes very distant. Therefore, it is necessary to continue the communication with customers and ongoing monitoring of their behavior as well as to detect all kinds of dissatisfaction and problems related to the service.
3. Customer’s satisfaction begins with a quick and determined elimination of the reasons causing the dissatisfaction<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Wisz – Cieszyńska M., Badanie postaw i satysfakcji klientów instytucjonalnych z oferowanego poziomu obsługi, Świat marketingu – internetowe czasopismo marketingowe, Listopad 2002.

The empirical material collected among clients of travel agencies Lublin Region helped to develop a standard service desk in the opinion of the customer, and allow to propose a timetable for the proceedings leading to growth satisfaction (which is the result of improvement of quality of service) and customer loyalty of travel agents. The proposal of solutions have been presented to interested travel companies.

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## Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienia zależności pomiędzy poziomem jakości świadczonych usług a satysfakcją klientów którzy z nich korzystają.

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych metodą Servqual w 2012 roku wśród 200 klientów lubelskich biur podróży. Celem badań było określenie poziomu satysfakcji klienta ze świadczonych przez biura podróży usług (określenia różnicy pomiędzy jakością świadczoną przez biura podróży, a jakością oczekiwaną przez klientów). Na podstawie przeprowadzonych badań stwierdza się, że poziom satysfakcji ze świadczonych usług jest zadawalający dla klientów, aczkolwiek różnica pomiędzy jakością świadczoną a oczekiwaną daje właścicielom biur podróży do myślenia, że są punkty krytyczne wymagające natychmiastowej ingerencji z ich strony, aby utrzymać dotychczasowy poziom zainteresowania klientów ich usługami. Znaczny wpływ na poziom satysfakcji klientów mają wymiar materialny obudowy usługi, a także fachowość personelu i zaufanie do niego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** satysfakcja klienta, poziom jakości obsługi, jakość oczekiwana, biura podróży, region lubelski

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