

ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION FOR THE "PROVINCE" EVENT HALL USING THE SERVQUAL MODEL

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Abstract: The aim of the conducted study is to identify the expectations and perceptions of customers regarding the Province event hall in the town of Bencecul de Jos, Timis County, in order to provide high-quality services. The questionnaire was designed based on the SERVQUAL Model, which facilitates the assessment of customer satisfaction with the presented product (event hall). Quality perception in this case, and not only, is a highly subjective concept, as it depends on the expectations of each individual.

Key words: *SERVQUAL model in hospitality, service quality, customer satisfaction in event services*

INTRODUCTION

The event hall "Province" is located in Timis County, in the village of Bencecul de Jos, away from the hustle and bustle of the city but close to nature and rural life. The project was undertaken to bring the possibility of organizing events in a free and natural setting to the western part of Romania, directly inspired by village life. The initiative for this project came from a group of young people who were interested in offering the public a different kind of space for private or corporate events [13].

The event hall is also known as "Șura" and is part of a complex in an old Agricultural Production Cooperative (CAP) dating back to 1965. The project aimed to introduce a modern "barn" into everyday life and hosts events throughout the year. The complex also includes two other event halls and two terraces that can host events surrounded by a generous area of green spaces [14]. The barn is the only newly constructed building, with a design borrowing the lines of an American barn, featuring high doors and visible beams [14].

Spread across 3 hectares, surrounded only by agricultural fields and landscapes with golden fields and cherry orchards, Province is a place where outdoor events and more can be a source of wellbeing [14].

In the field of public services, providing high-quality services to customers is of fundamental and paramount importance. Therefore, objective methods of assessing the quality of service delivery are essential for achieving and maintaining high-quality services [4, 6, 9].

There has been a rapid growth in event halls entering the market due to the very high demand in recent years and the diversification of locations. From the demand perspective, locations are becoming increasingly diverse, ranging from mega and specialized events to small family gatherings [6, 8].

Cities have also used event venues as a basis for regeneration and economic development, thus stimulating the growth of the private and public sectors by creating new jobs and more [5].

The event venue sector encompasses a wide range of different subsectors, such as hotels, motels, tourist attractions, educational venues, conference centers, and so on. Each subsector will have its own characteristics that differentiate it from others [4].

To understand the requirements and expectations of customers regarding the "Province" event hall, the SERVQUAL method was employed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

SERVQUAL, a key tool in service quality assessment, examines customer-centric dimensions—Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Tangibles assess physical attributes, Reliability evaluates consistent service, Responsiveness gauges promptness, Assurance measures competence, and Empathy focuses on understanding individual needs. Through surveys, SERVQUAL quantifies the gap between perceived and expected service, aiding organizations in targeted improvement for enhanced service quality [7, 12].

In 1988, Parasuraman et al. devised SERVQUAL, a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions. The scale was based on a concept of 'perceived' quality (the consumers' judgment of the services they had received) [12].

This method is based on identifying discrepancies between customers' expectations and their actual perceptions of the services received. SERVQUAL measures these discrepancies across five fundamental dimensions, as shown in Figure 1 [2]:

Reliability: The ability to deliver promised services accurately and consistently.

Responsiveness or Promptness: The speed and availability of staff in providing services.

Assurance or Safety: The competence and ability of the staff to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy: The attitude and attention given to the individual needs of customers.

Tangibles: The physical, material, or visual aspects of the services provided, such as equipment, physical environment, etc.



Figure 1. Service quality dimensions in the SERVQUAL method

Source: [15], 2023

To assess these dimensions, SERVQUAL uses a set of questions and evaluation scales that help measure customers' perceptions of the quality of services compared to their expectations. These assessments provide organizations with a deeper understanding of areas where their services can be improved to better meet the needs and requirements of customers.

Although SERVQUAL was initially designed for the service sector, its core concepts have been adapted and applied in other areas to assess the quality of products and customer experiences, such as in the dining and food industry, through the DINESERV methodology [1, 10]. Furthermore, together with AHP and other methodologies, SERVQUAL serves as an important factor in decision making [3, 11].

This method provides organizations with the opportunity to identify weaknesses and improve them to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Using SERVQUAL can lead to improving overall organizational reputation and performance.

The procedure for measuring and evaluating service quality using the SERVQUAL method involves the following main steps:

Step 1: Establishing requirements for service quality;

Step 2: Collecting data through questionnaires and interviews;

Step 3: Calculating and determining service quality indicators;

Step 4: Presenting and interpreting the results.

The survey was applied to 56 respondents of a diverse background, using convenience sampling.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the questionnaire are analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Differences between expected and perceived values

Name	Expected value (EV)	Perceived value (PAV)	EV-PAV
Tangibles	4,70	4,62	-0,08
Reliability	4,82	4,70	-0,12
Responsiveness	4,75	4,64	-0,11
Assurance	4,78	4,67	-0,12
Empathy	4,56	4,61	0,05

Source: own calculations, 2023

In terms of Tangibles, there is a slight negative gap (-0.08), indicating that customers' perceptions of the physical aspects of the service fall slightly below their expectations. This suggests that improvements in the equipment and overall physical environment may enhance customer satisfaction.

For Reliability, the negative gap is more pronounced (-0.12), signifying a noticeable difference between customer expectations and their actual perceptions regarding the consistent delivery of promised services. There is room for improvement to ensure a more reliable service.

In the dimension of Responsiveness, a negative gap (-0.11) suggests that customers perceive a gap between their expectations and the actual speed and availability of staff in providing services. Enhancements in staff responsiveness may address this gap.

The Assurance dimension also shows a negative gap (-0.12), indicating that improvements can be made to instill more confidence and competence in service staff. Customers' perceptions fall slightly below their expectations in this aspect.

On the positive side, in terms of Empathy, there is a small positive gap (0.05). This suggests that the organization is doing well in understanding and addressing the individual needs of its customers, slightly exceeding their expectations in this dimension.

In summary, the analysis indicates opportunities for improvement in tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness, as negative gaps exist in these dimensions. Addressing these gaps could lead to better alignment between customer expectations and perceptions, thereby enhancing overall service quality. Additionally, the positive gap in empathy reflects a strength that can be further leveraged to meet or exceed customer expectations in this dimension. It is essential to emphasize that these variances were minimal, as outlined in Table 1.

CONCLUSIONS

Our investigation revealed a subtle trend where the anticipated values marginally surpass the perceived service quality across four variables in the SERVQUAL model—Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Assurance. Notably, Empathy stands out as an exception, with the perceived value exceeding the set expectations.

Empathy scores higher in perceived value than in expectations, suggesting that customers perceive a higher level of understanding and consideration than they initially anticipated. This could be indicative of a positive customer service experience, as exceeding empathy expectations may contribute positively to overall customer satisfaction.

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