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## QUALITY ANALYSIS OF HOTEL SERVICES USING SERVQUAL METHODOLOGY

Analiza kvaliteta hotelskih usluga primenom  
SERVQUAL metodologije

### Abstract

Quality management represents an imperative for all the hotels on the current tourism market aiming to capitalize on customers' satisfaction and create superior value in comparison to the competition. The quality of service is important for keeping the guests and represents a key indicator for further economic activity. The demand for creating better quality related to products and services has become one of the most important strategic priorities currently being faced by hotels. The choice of the method implemented by a hotel in order to provide certain quality, determine related costs, and quantify expenses coming from unsatisfying level of services provided in the hotel industry, is of paramount importance to creating appropriate measures for the improvement of hotel services that is necessary precondition for doing business and surviving on the market.

One of the most popular methods for measuring quality in the service sector is Servqual method based on the comparison of customers' expectations related to service quality with the perception of the actual services provided to the customers. The main result of the analysis is Servqual gap indicating an average variation of guest perception (services perception rating) from the preliminary expectations (services expectation rating). On the basis of the gap between the actual services and expected ones, the hotels determine specific measures directed at further improvement of hotel services.

**Key words:** *quality management, hotel services, SERVQUAL*

### Sažetak

Upravljanje kvalitetom predstavlja imperativ za sva hotelska preduzeća na savremenom turističkom tržištu čiji cilj, ostvarivanje profita, proizilazi pre svega iz satisfakcije potrošača i obezbeđivanja superiorne vrednosti u odnosu na konkurenciju. Kvalitet usluge je od najvećeg značaja za zadržavanje gostiju i kritičan pokazatelj buduće ekonomske aktivnosti. Zahtev za boljim kvalitetom proizvoda i usluga, jedan je od najvažnijih strateških prioriteta s kojim se suočavaju hotelska preduzeća. Na koji način i primenom koje metode će hotelsko preduzeće obezbediti određeni kvalitet, utvrditi troškove tog kvaliteta, kao i troškove koji proizilaze iz eventualno nezadovoljavajućeg nivoa kvaliteta usluga u hotelskoj industriji predstavljaju ključna pitanja prilikom razvijanje mera za unapređenje kvaliteta hotelskih usluga kao osnovnog preduslova za uspešno poslovanje i opstanak na tržištu.

Jedna od najpoznatijih metoda za merenje kvaliteta u uslužnom sektoru je *Servqual* metoda koja se zasniva na poređenju očekivanja korisnika po pitanju kvaliteta usluge sa percepcijom kvaliteta stvarno pruženih usluga. Osnovni rezultat analize je *servqual* jaz, koji pokazuje koliko percepcija gosta („*servperc* rejting“) u proseku odstupa od preliminarnih očekivanja („*servexp* rejting“). Na bazi uočenog jaza hotelska preduzeća predlažu konkretne mere za unapređenje kvaliteta hotelske usluge.

**Ključne reči:** *upravljanje kvalitetom, hotelske usluge, SERVQUAL*

## Introduction

In the period of globalization of markets, growing competition and unpredictable business environment, service quality management and its quantification is becoming one of the most important issues related to marketing and business strategy of the hotels. The quality does not necessarily involve solely high performance products, as sometimes providing an economical and suitable response to customers' needs is sufficient for achieving certain level of quality.

Quality control system and quality management system have been increasingly developing for the last 20 years. In comparison to the system of direct and statistical quality management which dominated in the past, a current quality management system has gained a broader meaning. The prevailing concept of quality control in the enterprises is known as Total Quality Management (TQM) representing "management system focused on people with the aim of increasing customers' satisfaction followed by continuous costs deduction" [7]. TQM (see Figure 1) tackles quality as a dynamic category, insisting on continuous improvement of overall enterprises' performances and continuous costs reduction. This concept monitors the quality of overall business processes within an enterprise and demands the involvement of all employees ignoring hierarchical level within the process of control and quality management. A total quality presents strategic decision of an enterprise. The main focus is on the customers and their needs and quality is quantified by the facts, not by the given opinions (see Figure 2).

In order to improve the quality related to hotel services, managers often encounter the problems related to quality quantification due to lack of appropriate methods for determining the expectations and perception of a guest regarding the quality of services. In other words, hotel managers quite often do not possess information regarding customer's priorities when evaluating hotel products.

## Defining the quality of service activities

Quality as the concept is not easy to define and therefore a large number of different definitions appearing in the literature should not be surprising. The simplest definition says that quality is conformance to predefined requirements [12]. This definition assumes that quality management is based on predefining the requirements and standards that should serve as an objective inspection benchmark and the parallel improvement of realistic performances. The other approach [19] defines quality as conformance of product or service to customer's needs. In other words, only product or service satisfying consumer's or customer's needs is a quality product or service. If they are carefully considered, it is noticeable that the previous two definitions are complementary. Namely, only customer may assess the quality as the conformance of product or service characteristics and performances with the declared needs of the very customer. The point at issue is the concept of customer's perception of quality, analyzed by a larger number of authors (for example, [29]).

If the analysis is focused on the area of service quality, a logical question is raised in which way it is possible to explicitly define customer's perceptions of service to serve as the standard for measuring service quality. Observed in a simplified manner, it is quite possible to differentiate the objective quality measures which can be exactly determined from subjective measures which are based on less visible customer perceptions of service. So for example, *Swan and Combs* [37] make difference between two dimensions of service quality: instrumental and expressive. Instrumental dimension refers to relatively measurable aspects of service, such as time spent at cashier register in supermarket. Taking into account that service is delivered in an interaction between service provider and customer, the customer's experience during service provision and consumption has an increasing importance to service quality. This is expressive dimension of service

Figure 1: Development of quality system



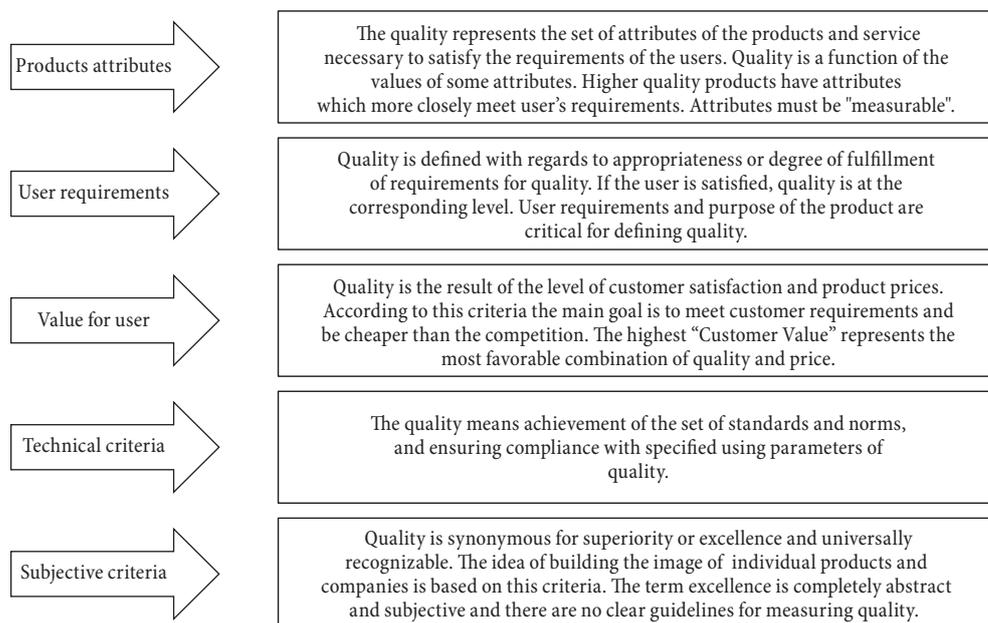
quality which can neither be precisely visualized nor measured. An example can be perception of personnel courtesy in supermarket.

It should be emphasized that the measurement and management of service quality is much more demanding than in case of product, bearing in mind the domination of expressive component and the fact that service is at the same time produced, delivered and consumed, which is not case with products that can be stored [14]. Consequently, the issue of defining the standard for measurement of quality remains open. General absence of measureable criteria requires insight into abstract service attributes, i.e. into abstract customer expectations. This means that customers assess the quality of services on the basis of comparison of their perceptions after consuming the service with the previous expectations, i.e. that the same service may be assessed as under-average by a customer with high initial expectations or over-average by a customer with lower preliminary expectations. Additional aggravating circumstances for measurement of the quality of services are their intangibility or immateriality, changeability in the course of time, heterogeneity and completeness (customer of more services observes them as a single package), which means that one service offered more times in identical ambient can be differently assessed by the same customer.

Special attention should be paid to the analysis of relationship between quality and satisfaction. Authors usually define satisfaction as the emotional reaction or psychological condition in which customers are after consuming the service, since their expectations have been confirmed or surpassed [28]. A significant number of authors claim that the difference between satisfaction and quality is in the fact that satisfaction is related to one transaction and the relationship between perception and expectation within such transaction, while quality is related to general assessment of service system of a concrete company, taking into account empiric dynamics during a longer period of consuming service [30]. In addition, for many years a battle has been fought in literature to prove whether satisfaction is the assumption of quality or vice-versa. Leaving aside this debate, it can be concluded that the quality undoubtedly affects customer satisfaction, but also that customer satisfaction affects assessment of service quality, i.e. that both attributes are vital for customer decision-making whether to consume concrete service in future.

Moreover, it is very important to analyze relationship between customer satisfaction, quality and financial performances of a service company. *Hesket et al.* [18] in their service-profit chain analysis have proved a strong correlation between internal service quality (for example,

**Figure 2: Criteria for quality defining**



Source: [19]

quality of working environment in a hotel), employee satisfaction (manifested in keeping quality personnel and increasing their productivity), external service quality (courtesy, fast delivery of service to guest), customer satisfaction and loyalty (assured by satisfaction index) and profitability increase of service company. *Zeithaml et al.* [40] have identified positive correlation between service quality and financial results, proving that customers are willing to pay a premium for higher quality services and remain loyal even when service prices are increasing. It is quite clear that service quality may not be managed unless there is the systematized manner of measuring service quality. *Ramaswamy* [33] proposes three groups of quality measures:

1. Internal measures,
2. Market measures, and
3. Financial quality measures.

Internal quality measures refer to the performance of internal processes in producing and providing services (for example, fulfillment of technical requirements). Market measure refers to customer perceptions when consuming the service. Financial measures refer to financial health indicators of a service company. Correlation between internal and market measures defines the quality from the customer's point of view, while relationship between market and financial measures defines the impact of perceived quality on profitability of service company. This approach greatly reminds of the logic of strategy maps introduced by *Kaplan* and *Norton*, where financial measures are at the top, as lagging indicator, while market and internal indicators have the status of leading indicators [20].

A large number of authors agree that service quality has five key dimensions [41, p. 82]. These are: reliability (the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (the willingness to help customer and provide prompt service), assurance (the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence), empathy (the understanding of customer's needs, individualized attention to customer), and tangibility (the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials).

## Characteristics of services in the hotel industry

If we disregard service quality attributes previously mentioned in generic form, hotel service is specific by very frequent contacts between bidder and customer, making this sum of contacts the base for creation of guest's final perception about the level of provided quality. The consequence of the above-mentioned is that hotel service quality management is dominantly based on guest contact management [40]. For this reason, it is no surprise that many hotel companies have invested huge amounts of money into the development of service delivery system which would continuously provide customer with high quality service in each individual contact with representative of a hotel company.

Many authors call the contact of employee and guest a "moment of truth" [14], [22], [23]. It is the moment of contact between the guest and delivered service (personnel or self-service equipment) when the guest's perception about quality level of the delivered service is spontaneously formed. In this shorter or longer moment, careless mistake by an employee, a rude behavior or an unanticipated request by the guest can result in a dissatisfied guest, irrespective of other service attributes (for example, food quality in hotel restaurant) being excellent [22, p. 353]. For example, hotel guest may, during his/her stay in hotel, experience several contacts when booking a room, checking-in at reception desk, carrying the luggage to room, having meals in hotel restaurant, using various in-house services and checking-out from hotel. During these contacts, guests form a single image of hotel service quality. For the very hotel, each new contact with guest is an opportunity or chance to improve guest's perception or keep the existing one if it is at the satisfactory level. Moreover, each service contact entails the risk that the initial positive perception of guest can be jeopardized.

*Zeithaml and Bitner* [41, pp. 102-104] identify three types of contacts between hotel and guest in terms of physical proximity: remote, phone and face-to-face contact. Remote contact is not based on the relationship between people. Good example is booking a room via Internet. This is usually the first contact of the guest with hotel, where potential guest becomes familiar with hotel

web page and technical quality of booking procedure. Similar form of the contact, to be fair, with interactive human component, is phone contact (booking a room or a table or exchanging information on hotel facilities by phone). Base of service quality in this case can be: voice of hotel personnel, courtesy, readiness to listen, as well as knowledge and speed to respond to inquiry. Finally, face-to-face contact of guest and hotel personnel is critical for formation of guest's perception. At that point, all hotel service attributes become prominent, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, but also visible elements, such as appearance of the interior, equipment, personnel, taste of food, odor of premises, etc.

More methods used to reduce probability of the occurrence of hotel guest dissatisfaction with service quality are mentioned in literature. *Zeithaml* and *Bitner* [41] specify four key themes to which attention should be paid: service recovery, adaptability, spontaneity and responsiveness. Service recovery refers to the response of hotel employees to the occurrence of major failure. The essence is to acknowledge the problem, assume responsibility, explain causes, apologize and compensate guest as necessary. Adaptability is the employees' adjustment to the guest's requests or needs. The essence is in anticipation of the guest's needs and requests and timely adjustment of service delivery system. Spontaneity refers to deep personnel's reaction, through being attentive in service delivery, listening to the guest, providing feedback and showing empathy according to the guest's needs. Responsiveness is availability of employees at any time and possibility to provide complete service packing.

Generally, the services are characterized by intangibility, which creates need for the introduction of larger dose of materiality or tangibility in the very context of delivered service. For example, in the restaurant ambiance it should be insisted on presenting the process of physical food preparation in front of the guest, whereby the probability of later dissatisfaction is reduced. Nonverbal communication is of the great importance when providing hotel services. Expressed friendly attitude, responsiveness and enthusiasm to go out to meet the guest's requests significantly affect their total quality assessment of delivered service. Communication signals have a particular value, like

glances, nodding the head, shaking the hand, smiling, distance, body posture during communication, color and pitch of voice and personnel's physical appearance. The authors point out that hotel personnel must be continuously trained in improving nonverbal communication skills.

### Measuring customer satisfaction by using SERVQUAL methodology

Models of service quality measurement have their roots in the frame established in the 1980s and the 1990s by *Parasuraman* and his colleagues [30], [31], [32]. This model is based on the analysis of five gaps (see Figure 3):

1. Gap in understanding customer's needs (the difference between customer's expectations and management's perceptions of customer's expectations).
2. Gap in service quality specifications (the difference between management's perceptions of customer's expectations and service quality specifications).
3. Gap in service performances (the difference between service quality specifications and performances of actually delivered service).
4. Gap in communication (the difference between performances of delivered service and information related to service to consumer).
5. Gap in service quality (the difference between service quality expected by customer and customer's perception of actually delivered service after consuming it).

The first gap may be the result of imprecise information from market analysis, poor interpretation of information related to customer's expectations, inadequate analysis of feedback by customers through complaints or formalized positive attitudes, as well as of high organizational structures with slow or deformed information flow. The second gap is the result of an inadequate planning system, improperly set organizational goals and insufficient support of the top management to service quality improvement. The third gap occurs due to insufficient training or indiscipline of the personnel. The fourth gap results from an inadequate communication strategy of the company, unsynchronized market efforts, as well as poor internal communication

between different sectors within the company. The first four gaps are the base for forming the fifth gap, being the basis for measuring service quality, given that it is focused on the deviation of delivered service performances from predefined customer expectations as the standard of comparison.

Logic of SERVQUAL methodology is based on the gap number five, i.e. on the comparison of subsequent perceptions with preliminary expectations, of course, from the customer's point of view. More precisely, indirect comparison of subjective expectations is carried out prior to consuming service and perceptions after consuming service. Service quality is determined on the basis of the mean value between expectations and perceptions within 22 attributes. 22 mean values for each individual attribute are further grouped into five differential scores for each dimension or factor. Basic result of the analysis is SERVQUAL gap which shows how much the guest's perception (SERVPERC scale) in average deviates from the preliminary expectations (SERVEXP scale). SERVQUAL results can be used for identifying the service components which are extremely good or bad. Furthermore, they can be used for monitoring service quality in the course of time,

for comparison of service performances with competition, and for measuring customer satisfaction by its individual elements and integral service packing.

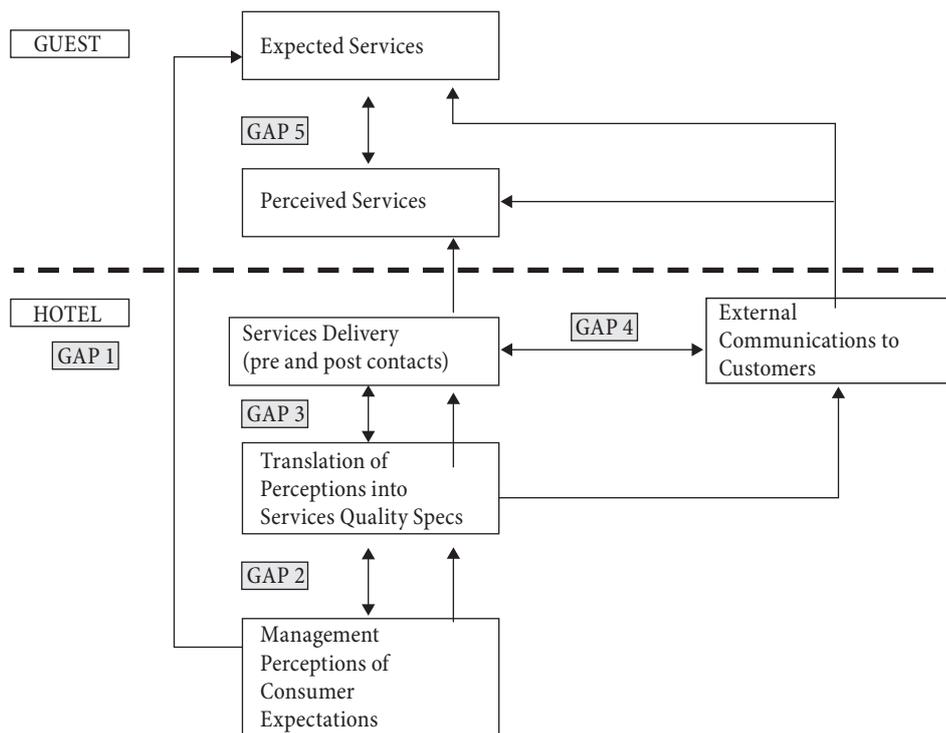
SERVQUAL methodology foresees a form of survey consisting in total of 22 questions within five service quality dimensions:

1. Tangibles – questions 1-4,
2. Reliability – questions 5-9,
3. Responsiveness – questions 10-13,
4. Courtesy and security – questions 14-17,
5. Empathy – questions 18-22.

The result of the implemented survey of predefined samples of hotels and guests is the mentioned gap analysis. The base for gap analysis is numerical data being entered into the form of table (see Table 1). Numerical data are obtained, as we've already mentioned, on the basis of the standardized questionnaire.

The next step is to credit each of five service quality dimensions with a weighing factor or importance by guests and based on weighing factors from the sample, to derive weighted SERVQUAL score. It is further subject to the qualitative analysis and improvement by impact on the individual attributes where the negative gap is the largest.

Figure 3: Conceptual service quality model based on the analysis of five gaps



Source: [30]

Table 1: Numerical gap analysis when using SERVQUAL methodology

Dimension	Answer	Assessment of expectation	Assessment of perception	Gap score	Average value for dimension
Tangibles	1				
	2				
	3				
	4				
Reliability	5				
	6				
	7				
	8				
	9				
Responsiveness	10				
	11				
	12				
	13				
Courtesy and security	14				
	15				
	16				
	17				
Empathy	18				
	19				
	20				
	21				
	22				
Unweighted SERVQUAL score:					

Different authors propose different modifications of the basic SERVQUAL model, in the first place, through change in the service attributes being assessed. For example, in the hotel sector, which is the focus of our analysis, many research studies have been conducted with the objective to determine which service attributes are more or less significant in creating complete assessment by a guest. Literature review suggests that cleanliness [4], [16], safety and security [21],[16], employees' competence and empathy [10],[25], macro and micro location [21], value for money [16] and tangibles [10] are the attributes to which hotel guests give the highest ponder when evaluating quality of service package in a hotel.

*Akan* [1] developed modified SERVQUAL questionnaire with the idea to apply it to high category hotels in Turkey. He identified the following seven critical dimensions of service: courtesy and competence of personnel, communication and transactions, tangibles, knowing

and understanding guests' needs, speed and accuracy of service, solution to problems and reservation system efficiency. He concluded that courtesy and competence are the most valued attributes among guests. Other modifications of SERVQUAL model refer to the change in gap list, which was earlier elaborated. *Luk* and *Layton* [24], *Shahin et al.* [35] and *Tsang and Qu* [39] identified additional gaps, as the bases used to measure quality. For example, *Tsang and Qu* [39], in addition to the five specified gaps, added another two important gaps into service quality analysis. The sixth gap is the difference between guest's perception of the service delivered and management's belief what actually has been delivered. This gap practically answers the following question: Does hotel management overestimate its service delivery? Namely, studies have shown that hotel managers tend to overestimate their competences and performance [11]. In other words, they frequently believe that service delivery

was more successful than it was perceived by the guests. The seventh gap is the difference between managers' perception of guests' expectations and managers' perception of the service actually delivered. This gap analysis attempts to answer the question: Does hotel management believe that the hotel delivers as much as it believes that customers expect? Measurement of management's perceptions of quality is as significant as the measurement of perception of quality from the perspective of guests themselves.

### Critical analysis of SERVQUAL methodology

Notwithstanding its widespread application, SERVQUAL model has been criticized by a number of researchers [9], [5], [38]. Their criticism is directed towards conceptual and operative base of the model itself, primarily towards its validity, reliability, operationalization of expectations of customers and dimensional structure.

The basic theoretical-conceptual objections can be summarized as follows. Firstly, SERVQUAL is based on a disconfirmation paradigm and not on attitudinal paradigm. The model itself disregards established economic and psychological theories, as it is entirely based on the expressed state of disconfirmation by customer, i.e. on clear inductive reasoning. Secondly, it is not easy to prove that the exclusive basis for measuring quality is the gap between expectations and perception, although there are many research arguments in favor of this thesis. Thirdly, the model is more focused on the process of service delivery than on the result of service encounters itself. Fourthly, the five selected dimensions cannot be universal and comprehensive. The dimensions should be adjusted to the context being analyzed.

From the operative aspect the objections would be as follows. Firstly, customers' expectations need not be of subjective character. Customers very often use absolute and objective standards to define their expectations. Secondly, the attributes within each of the five defined dimensions cannot adequately include variability within the dimensions because of insufficient number of attributes. Thirdly, client's assessment of individual attributes may depend on the "moment of truth", i.e. on the moment the survey is being conducted. Fourthly, although 7 point

Likert scale is recommended, in practice better results are obtained with 5 point scale.

The authors such as *Brown et al.* [8] criticize statistical validity and reliability of the model. One criticism refers to the approach to differential score calculation. Namely, these authors agree that reliability of the obtained final score and the score by dimensions is significantly lower than reliability of the scores at the level of individual attributes, thus decreasing predictive capability of the model itself. The second criticism refers to the measurement of the expectations themselves. By its structure SERVQUAL includes different types of expectations that cannot be measured in identical way. Some expectations are ideal, some are based on minimum tolerance level, whereas some are exclusively connected with the brand perception of the hotel itself. Therefore, aggregate analysis of all expectations is subject to the problems connected with validity and reliability of the results.

### Case studies of measuring quality of hotel service using SERVQUAL methodology

*Saleh and Ryan* [34] are the first authors who applied SERVQUAL methodology to the hotel industry. Their results slightly departed from the original SERVQUAL structure. Namely, the analysis showed that the four factors (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness and consistency) account for about 63% of the total variability of service quality. Also, these authors showed that 5 point scale gives different final results as compared to the 7 point Likert scale and that the attributes within the first dimension of SERVQUAL model (tangibles) are not precisely defined and consequently lead to contradictory responses obtained from the respondents.

*Mei et al.* [27] (1999) assessed the dimensions of service quality in the hotel industry in Australia. They used SERVQUAL base to develop HOLSERV model that is entirely adjusted to measuring quality of hotel service. They established that three dimensions are critical for measuring service quality: employees, tangibles and service reliability. *Fick and Ritchie* [13] applied SERVQUAL model within four sectors (air transport, hotels, restaurants and ski centers). By applying correlation analysis, they concluded that key

expectations of customers are connected with reliability and observance of the predefined standards.

*Antony et al.* [3] measured service quality in six hotels belonging to one British hotel chain, using modified SERVQUAL methodology. A three-star hotel chain in question belongs to the medium price segment. This research was motivated by observed problems, such as complaints of guests in the restaurant part of the hotel, attitude and motivation of the employees, problems encountered with the hotel housekeeping sector, poor communication between management and front-line personnel, as well as slow service in the entire hotel. Using standardized questionnaire the guests assessed five service dimensions. Responsiveness was identified as the most important service dimension and empathy was identified as the least significant dimension. After the guests had completed the questionnaire a series of interviews was conducted with the hotel management in order to analyze other gaps in service quality. Based on the conducted research project, the authors recommended specific measures for improving service quality. Firstly, hotel managers should be closer to their guests in order to better understand their needs and expectations. Secondly, management should delegate more competences and responsibilities to hotel personnel in order to provide higher level of responsiveness and service adjustment. Thirdly, staff needs training in communication with guests and perceiving their needs. Fourthly, at least once a week it is necessary to hold a meeting between management and personnel in order to provide more frequent and better exchange of information and decision making. Fifthly, standardized procedures were not adhered to in the hotel. It was recommended more frequently to conduct direct monitoring of the critical processes and results, say within hotel housekeeping. Sixthly, praises and complaints should be always exchanged with hotel management and the entire chain, to ensure that everybody is aware of the good and bad things in conducting hotel operation. The last recommendation is that additional attention should be paid to the staff recruitment process i.e. it would be the best to standardize this process.

*Akbaba* [2] analyzed service quality in one luxury hotel in Turkey in order to study guests' expectations, estimate

appropriateness of the selected SERVQUAL dimensions and measure the significance of individual dimensions from the guests' point of view. This study was conducted during 2002. Its results confirmed appropriateness of the dimensional structure of SERVQUAL model, which, nevertheless, had to be adjusted to the specificities of hotel business and cultural context within which this research was conducted. The dimension with the highest rating among guests was comfort, followed by the dimensions, such as, tangibles, adequacy of the service provision system, understanding of and care for the guests' needs by hotel personnel.

*Tsang and Qu* [39] analyzed perceptions of service quality in the Chinese hotel industry from the perspective of both foreign guests and managers of the hotels being analyzed. A questionnaire was used to survey in total 90 hotel managers and 270 foreign tourists who visited China and stayed at hotels in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The data were analyzed by use of descriptive statistical methods (paired t-test and independent t-test). This analysis was focused on four gaps: between tourists' expectations and their actual perceptions; between managers' perception of tourists' expectations and the actual expectations of tourists; between managers' perception of a hotel's service quality and tourists' actual perception of the service by tourists; and between managers' perception of tourists' expectations and managers' perception of service quality. The results showed that tourists' perceptions of the quality of the delivered service were consistently lower than their initial expectations and that the managers overestimated quality of the service delivered to their guests compared to tourists' actual perceptions.

*Gržinić* [15] designed empirical model for measuring service quality in the hotel industry. The model was applied in the region of Opatija Riviera. The idea of this research was to evaluate guests' expectations and perceptions on a selected hotel sample, to calculate and interpret SERVQUAL gap, to test reliability of SERVQUAL model in the hotel industry and to define more precisely the dimensions of hotel service quality using factor analysis. From a practical perspective, the research project intended to test the adjusted SERVQUAL model for measuring service quality from the guests' viewpoint. The survey was conducted in

16 hotels totally in the region of Opatija Riviera (Opatija, Lovran and Mošćenička Draga), during December 2001 and January 2002. SERVQUAL gap was calculated as the difference between average value of perception and average value of expectations. Results of this analysis are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates several major conclusions. Firstly, average rating of perceptions is lower than average rating of expectations for all five SERVQUAL dimensions. This resulted in negative total SERVQUAL gap. The greatest negative gap was recorded with the dimensions “reliability” and “tangibles”. The guests were mostly satisfied with empathy of hotel personnel given that the gap for this dimension was the narrowest. It is interesting that this study showed that tourists from different countries have different level of initial expectations as regards hotel services. Tourists from Great Britain have the highest expectations, whereas Japanese tourists have the lowest expectations. The dimension to which all guests gave the greatest significance is reliability. Especially disturbing finding of this study, but also of other analyzed studies, is an enormous gap between expectations of the guests, viewed from the aspect of hotel management, and actual expectations of the guests. In other words, hotel management was not well-informed about guests’ expectations, indicating that there is a need to conduct deeper analysis of relevant guest segments.

Following above described example *Marković* and *Raspor* [26] measured guests’ perceptions within the Croatian hotel industry. The objective of this research was to evaluate the observed service quality within the selected hotel attributes and to identify the structure of summary factors or dimensions. Modified SERVQUAL scale was used to evaluate perceptions of domestic and foreign guests in the Croatian Littoral. Twenty nine service

attributes were evaluated in total within five standard SERVQUAL dimensions and two additional dimensions (hotel accessibility and quality of tangibles). The data were collected within 15 hotels (two-, three- and four-star hotels) in the region of Opatija Riviera during the summer of 2007, using standardized questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed of two parts: questions concerning service attributes (7 point Likert scale) and questions concerning demographic profile of the guests (closed questions with multiple-choice answers). The data were analyzed by using the technique of descriptive statistical analysis and factor analysis. The results indicate that there are rather high guests’ expectations as regards service quality. Reliability, empathy, personnel competence, site accessibility and tangibles are the dimensions domineering guests’ expectations. Ability to solve guests’ problems, ability to provide precise service, employees’ attitude, adequate location and exterior and interior are the most significant among attributes. At the same time, these are the attributes with the highest disconfirmation score and to which, according to the recommendations of the authors, hotel managers should pay the greatest attention in the future.

*Blešić, Romelić* and *Bradić* [6] did the research in order to evaluate the quality related to hotel services using the example of Western Moravian resorts in Serbia. They did research using the sample of 10 hotels in 5 resorts (Vrnjacka Banja, Mataruska Banja, Bogutovacka Banja, Gornja Trepca and Ovcara Banja). Four hundred and fifty three guests were interviewed, which is a substantial number in comparison to the similar research studies where the sample was usually comprised of 200 guests at most. Domestic guest prevailed within the sample structure (90.9%). The total number of foreign tourists within the sample accounted 56 guests, i.e. 9.1%. Out of

Table 2: Survey results

Dimensions	Assessment of expectations	Assessment of perception	SERVQUAL gap
Tangibles	6.36	5.70	-0.66
Reliability	6.44	6.00	-0.44
Responsiveness	6.38	5.99	-0.39
Courtesy and security	6.38	6.00	-0.39
Empathy	6.02	5.70	-0.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.32</b>	<b>5.88</b>	<b>-0.44</b>

Source: [15]

56 guests, 46 came from former SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) countries, while small percent (1.6%) came from other European countries (Greece, Germany, Russia, France, Sweden, Switzerland and Italy). Analyzing gender structure, the sample includes 54.5% of women and 45.5% of men. Furthermore, 66.5% of the sample represents working population, while 27.2% are retired and 2.3% are students.

Analyzing Table 3 it can be easily concluded that 5 out of 10 indicators belong to the determinant tangibility. The highest average grade refers to question tackling personal and material safety of hotel guests. The question related to hotel rooms hygiene and food quality appears as important issue as well. However, SERVQUAL model does not pay enough attention to tangible elements of services provided, i.e. 4 out of 22 questions are referring to the visible aspects of hotel product. The gap between perceived and expected quality of services is negative in all quality determinants, except compassion variable. The positive gap related to this variable is influenced by low level of expectations (3.9709). The highest level of expectations by the guests is related to safety variable, followed by accountability and reliability. Analyzing small absolute difference within averages, the conclusion is that all the above-mentioned indicators are equally important for the guests. Furthermore, the guests revealed high expectations as well for tangibility (4.5746).

In conclusion, the survey results revealed the fact that small percentage of the guests is satisfied with service provided, that is, their expectations were higher than the quality gained. The biggest SERVQUAL gap refers to determinants analyzing tangible elements of the services (object appearance, food and beverage quality, additional contents). Creating development strategy along with short term and long term plans and stimulating investments

in resort tourism are the ways for overcoming current problems. The survey showed as well that SERVQUAL model does not cover all determinants regarding hotel services quality important for the guests.

Several conclusions can be derived from the analysis of the conducted research. Firstly, the authors apply different modifications of SERVQUAL model as regards selection of dimensions and accompanying service attributes. Some authors developed entirely adjusted SERVQUAL models exclusively for the analysis of service quality in hotels and restaurants. Secondly, SERVQUAL methodology itself has large number of research applications in the hotel sector, but it is also widely applied in other service industries. Thirdly, the focus of the analysis of a large number of authors is on measurement of service quality of individual hotels, and less on systematized analysis of service quality of a larger hotels sample within some tourist destination. Exceptions are *Marković and Raspor* [26], *Gržinić* [15] and *Gutierrez et al.* [17]. Fourthly, all authors analyze the data in more or less similar way, using descriptive analysis, hypotheses testing and occasionally factor analysis, where reasonable. Namely, factor analysis had sense only in the studies aimed at analyzing validity of the selected service attributes and their encircling into statistically meaningful sets or factors. Finally, different studies gave different results. In other words, it is impossible to unify study results of the above-mentioned authors, although dominant trend of negative SERVQUAL gap is noticeable for majority of the analyzed hotel service attributes.

## Conclusion

The supply of services of the highest quality represents the best way for the hotel to gain competitive advantage and to create good relation with the guests. When

**Table 3: Difference between expectation and perception of service quality (Servqual gap)**

Determinants of quality	Perception (p)	Rank	Expectation(o)	Rank	Servqual gap = p-o
<i>Tangibles</i>	3.8274	5	4.5746	4	- 0.7472
<i>Reliability</i>	4.5599	2	4.7152	3	- 0.1553
<i>Responsiveness</i>	4.5431	3	4.7686	2	- 0.2255
<i>Courtesy and security</i>	4.7114	1	4.8889	1	- 0.1775
<i>Empathy</i>	4.2260	4	3.9709	5	0.2551
<b>Total SERVQUAL gap</b>	<b>4.3580</b>		<b>4.5836</b>		<b>- 0.2256</b>

Source: [6]

modifying and creating their vision, the managers should ignore short-term financially oriented goals and focus on creating long-term partnership with their target groups. Concepts such as: expected values, perceived values and guests' satisfaction should have an important role in management decisions. Evaluation of guests' expectations and calculation of SERVQUAL gap (perception minus expectation) represent best method for detecting the absence of quality. The key goals of this paper were to evaluate expectations and perceptions of the guests in the hotels, to calculate the difference between perceived and expected services quality, and to determine quality determinants important for the guests.

As the result of the criticisms, other models for measuring service quality have been created. However, none of the offered alternatives succeeded to replace SERVQUAL in practice. Despite a barrage of criticisms of the model, there is a general consensus that SERVQUAL model is currently the most acceptable model for measuring service quality and that the analyzed attributes are reliable predictors of integral service quality. However, the issue that surely will continue to be discussed in academic circles is whether service quality can be measured as the relationship between previous expectation and subsequent perception of customers.

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