

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HOTEL GUEST COMMENT CARDS: A CASE STUDY OF CROATIAN HOTEL INDUSTRY

Analiza vsebine hotelskih vprašalnikov: primer hrvaških hotelov

1 Introduction

During the past few decades, customer satisfaction and service quality have become a major area of attention for practitioners and academic researchers. Both concepts strongly impact business performance and customer behaviour. Service quality leads to higher profitability (Gundersen et al. 1996) and customer satisfaction (Oliver 1997). Furthermore, a number of empirical studies have identified a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Kandampully and Suhartanto 2000; Dimitriades 2006; Chi and Qu 2008; Faullant et al. 2008) as well as between customer satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth (Söderlund 1998). Therefore, one of the key strategies for customer-focused firms is to measure and monitor service quality and customer satisfaction. Several tools are available for measuring customer satisfaction. In hotels, one of the most popular is a guest comment card (GCC), which has the advantages of small size, easy distribution, and simplicity. When analysing data gathered in such a way, managers can acquire information on the attributes that impact guests' satisfaction.

This paper is divided into several sections. First, a brief review of the main concepts of interest is provided. Next, the research methodology used for this study is presented, followed by presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, the article concludes with the primary research findings.

2 Literature review and conceptual analysis

2.1 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been a popular topic in marketing practice and academic research since Cardozo's (1965) initial study of customer effort, expectations, and satisfaction. Despite many attempts to measure and explain customer satisfaction, a consensus has still not emerged regarding its definition (Giese and Cote 2000). Customer satisfaction is typically defined as a post-consumption evaluative judgement concerning a specific product or service (Gundersen, Heide and Olsson 1996). It is the result of an evaluative process that contrasts pre-purchase expectations with perceptions of performance during and after the consumption experience (Oliver 1980).

The most widely accepted conceptualisation of the customer satisfaction concept is the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Barsky 1992; Oh and Parks 1997; McQuitty, Finn and Wiley 2000). This theory, developed by Oliver (1980), proposes that satisfaction level is a result of the difference between expected

Abstract

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If properly designed, administered, and analysed, the process of monitoring customer satisfaction and service quality can be beneficial to any hotel firm and make all the difference between offering a mediocre service and one of exceptionally high quality. The purpose of this study is to examine hotel guest comment cards (GCCs) and customer satisfaction management schemes in Opatija's hotels. This study adopts the applied content analysis approach (Gilbert and Horsnell 1998), comparing and recording findings based on a set of best practice criteria.

Key words: customer satisfaction, service quality, measurement techniques, content analysis, hotel industry

Izvleček

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Primerno definiran in izpeljan proces spremljanja zadovoljstva gostov in kakovosti storitev lahko pozitivno vpliva na poslovanje hotela, saj omogoča ugotavljanje razlike med povprečno in zelo kakovostno storitvijo.

Namen raziskave je analizirati hotelske vprašalnike in postopke merjenja zadovoljstva gostov v opatijskih hotelih. Analiza vsebine temelji na kriterijih, ki sta jih v svoji raziskavi uporabila Gilbert in Horsnell (1998).

Ključne besede: zadovoljstvo gostov, kakovost storitev, tehnike merjenja, analiza vsebine, hotelska dejavnost

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and perceived performance. Satisfaction (positive disconfirmation) occurs when a product or service is better than expected. On the other hand, a worse-than-expected performance results in dissatisfaction (negative disconfirmation).

Studies have demonstrated that customer satisfaction may directly and indirectly impact business results. Anderson et al. (1994), Yeung et al. (2002), and Luo and Homburg (2007) concluded that customer satisfaction positively affects business profitability. The majority of studies have investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer behaviour patterns (Söderlund 1998; Kandampully and Suhartanto 2000; Dimitriades 2006; Olorunniwo et al. 2006; Chi and Qu 2008; Faullant et al. 2008). According to these findings, customer satisfaction increases customer loyalty, influences repurchase intentions, and leads to positive word-of-mouth.

Given the vital role of customer satisfaction, it is not surprising that a variety of research has been devoted to investigating the determinants of satisfaction (Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Oliver 1980; Barsky 1995; Zeithaml and Bitner 2003). Satisfaction can be determined by subjective (e.g., customer needs, emotions) and objective factors (e.g., product and service features). In the hospitality industry, numerous studies have examined attributes related to customer satisfaction that travellers may find important. Atkinson (1988) found that cleanliness, security, value for money, and courtesy of staff determine customer satisfaction. Knutson (1988) revealed that room cleanliness and comfort, convenience of location, prompt service, safety and security, and friendliness of employees are important. According to Barsky and Labagh (1992), employee attitude, location, and rooms are likely to influence travellers' satisfaction. A study conducted by Akan (1995) showed that the main determinants of hotel guest satisfaction are the behaviour of employees, cleanliness, and timeliness. Choi and Chu (2001) concluded that staff quality, room qualities, and value are the top three hotel factors that determine travellers' satisfaction.

Providing services preferred by customers is a starting point for providing customer satisfaction. A relatively easy way to determine what services customers prefer is simply to ask them. According to Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) and Su (2004), guest comment cards (GCCs) are most commonly used for determining hotel guest satisfaction. GCCs are usually distributed in hotel rooms, at the reception desk, or in some other visible place. However, studies reveal that numerous hotel chains use guest satisfaction evaluation methods based on inadequate practices to make important and complex managerial decisions (Barsky 1992; Barsky and Huxley 1992; Jones and Ioannou 1993; Gilbert and Horsnell 1998; Su, 2004). The most commonly made faults can be divided into three main areas: quality of the sample, design of the GCCs, and data collection and analysis (Gilbert and Horsnell 1998). To improve the validity of hotel guest satisfaction measurement practices, Barsky and Huxley (1992) proposed a new sampling procedure

referred to as a quality sample, which reduces non-response bias by offering incentives for completing the questionnaires. The components of their questionnaire are based on disconfirmation paradigm and expectancy-value theory. In this manner, guests can indicate whether service was above or below their expectations as well as whether they considered a particular service important or not. Furthermore, Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) developed a list of criteria for GCC content analysis, which is adopted in the current study as well. Furthermore, Schall (2003) discussed the issues of question clarity, scaling, validity, survey timing, question order, and sample size, which should be addressed when gathering satisfaction data.

2.2 Service quality

Service quality is a complex, elusive, subjective, and abstract concept that means different things to different people. The most common definition of service quality is the comparison customers make between their expectations and perceptions of the received service (Parasuraman et al. 1988; Grönroos 1982). Quality is a multi-dimensional concept. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) identified three dimensions of service quality: physical quality, interactive quality, and corporate quality. Similarly, Grönroos (1984) argued that service quality comprises technical quality, functional quality, and corporate image.

Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988) developed the SERVQUAL scale, which became the most popular instrument for measuring service quality. They identified five key dimensions of service quality: reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The SERVQUAL scale consists of 22 items for assessing customer perceptions and expectations regarding the quality of service. A level of agreement or disagreement with a given item is rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The results are used to identify positive and negative gaps measured by the difference between perception and expectation scores to indicate the level of service quality. If the result is positive, perceived service exceeds expected service; a negative result means low quality of service. According to this instrument, service quality occurs when perceived service meets or exceeds customers' expectations.

The SERVQUAL instrument has been widely applied in a variety of service industries, including tourism and hospitality. Research related to this sector can be divided into measuring service quality in historic houses (Frochot and Hughes 2000), hotels (Douglas and Connor 2003; Antony et al. 2004; Juwaheer 2004; Marković 2004; Nadiri and Hussain 2005; Olorunniwo et al. 2006; Wang et al. 2007), restaurants (Heung et al. 2000; Fu and Parks 2001; Namkung and Jang 2008), travel agencies (Atilgan et al. 2003; Martinez Caro and Martinez Garcia 2008), diving (O'Neill et al. 2000), health spas (Snoj and Mumel 2002; Marković et al. 2004; González et al. 2007), ecotourism (Khan 2003), theme parks (O'Neill and Palmer 2003), and tourism and hospitality higher education (Marković 2005; Marković

2006 a,b). The instrument has been used to measure hotel employee quality as well (Yoo and Park 2007).

It should be noted that service quality and customer satisfaction are distinct concepts, although they are closely related. According to some authors, satisfaction represents an antecedent of service quality (Carman 1990; Bolton and Drew 1991). In this sense, satisfactory experience may affect customers' attitudes and their assessment of perceived service quality. Thus, satisfaction with a specific transaction may result in positive global assessment of service quality. Other authors argue that service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Churchill and Suprenant 1982; Anderson et al. 1994; Oliver 1997; Oh 1999; Zeithaml and Bitner 2003; Jamali 2007). This group of authors suggests that service quality is a cognitive evaluation that may lead to satisfaction. Hence, customer satisfaction is the result of service quality.

To sum up, the relationship between quality and satisfaction is complex. Some authors have described it as Siamese twins (Danaher and Mattsson 1994; Jamali 2007). Although many unresolved questions remain, it can be concluded that service quality and customer satisfaction can be perceived as separate concepts that have causal ordering.

2.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is an observational research method used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communications (Kolbe and Burnett 1991). It provides scientific, objective, quantitative, and generalisable description of content. Content analysis can be performed on virtually any medium with verbal and/or visual content—printed material, radio and television programmes, recorded meetings, movies, songs, etc. It has been extensively used in marketing and consumer behaviour research (Kassarjian 1977; Wheeler 1988; Sayre 1992; Guthrie and Abeysekera 2006).

The basic technique of content analysis entails counting the number of times pre-defined categories of measurement appear in a given content. An effective content analysis should meet several requirements (Kassarjian 1977; Guthrie and Abeysekera 2006). First, a representative, randomly drawn sample should be selected. Second, the units of measurement—that is, the criteria of analysis—must be clearly defined. These units can be specific (e.g., a word, phrase, theme, paragraph, symbol, picture, or table) or simply the existence or non-existence of some event or claim. Third, data categorisation must be systematic. It must be clear that an item either belongs or does not belong to a particular category. Finally, statistical analysis and interpretation of data can be conducted.

Reliability and validity of the instrument and collected data should be demonstrated as well. Krippendorff (1980) identified three types of reliability for content analysis: stability, reproducibility, and accuracy. Reliability can be achieved by using several coders (judges) for processing the same content. Discrepancies between them should be

minimal. Another factor to consider is the reliability of the coding instrument, which reduces the need for multiple coders. Meanwhile, validity is defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. In the field of content analysis, the choice of categories and content units enhances or diminishes the likelihood of valid inferences (Kassarjian 1977).

3 Methodology

This study aims to examine hotel GCCs and customer satisfaction management schemes in hotels of Opatija Riviera (Croatia). To this end, GCCs were gathered and analysed. Furthermore, personal interviews with hotel managers were conducted to determine the ways in which GCCs were distributed and processed. Data were gathered from July to August 2007.

This study adopts Gilbert and Horsnell's (1998) applied content analysis approach to examine GCCs of 25 hotels in Opatija Riviera. Based on prior studies, these authors created a GCC checklist, incorporating 32 categories. These categories, used to analyse the content of hotel GCCs, fall under five general areas of analysis: (1) focus and management value of GCC attributes, (2) GCC attribute measurement techniques (attribute measurement scales), (3) GCC measure of overall customer satisfaction and loyalty, (4) GCC marketing measures (for identifying key market segments), and (5) effective layout of questions. Table 1 outlines the meanings and references for each category of analysis.

Gilbert and Horsnell's categories of analysis have been expanded with seven additional categories. Mumel and Snoj (2007) used categories that refer to introduction sentences, instructions where to leave completed GCCs, an indication of the name of a hotel employee, assessment of service value, and guests' expectations. Furthermore, Schall (2003) proposed including a "not applicable" response and the assessment of some of the main attributes of hotel services.

In the current study, GCCs were personally gathered by the authors. Of the 25 hotels included in the study, 19 (76%) use GCCs for measuring hotel guests' satisfaction, while 6 of them (24%) do not. In one hotel, GCC was not available. As the majority of hotels in the Opatija Riviera belong to one of three hotel chains, seven different GCCs were gathered. Additionally, 25 hotel managers were interviewed by authors to identify customer satisfaction management practice in Opatija's hotels.

4 Results

4.1 Personal interviews with hotel managers

First, results of personal interviews with hotel managers are presented.

Frequency of gathering information: All hotels in the sample that measure hotel guests' satisfaction (n=19) gather information on a regular basis. GCCs are placed in every taken room.

Ways of gathering information: In all 19 analysed hotels, information is gathered using GCCs. During the interviews with hotel managers, 74% answered that they gather information via complaints and praise as well. Personal contact with guests is used in small luxury hotels. Almost 38% of hotel managers revealed that they receive information on hotel services from guests' letters, comments on the hotel's web sites, or internal comments made by the hotel's employees.

Response rate: The number of returned GCCs is low. The majority of the hotels in the sample (42%) have a response rate ranging from 5 to 10%. In five analysed hotels, the number of completed GCCs is estimated to be up to 30%, while in only two hotels the response rate is higher than 50%.

Sampling methods: In 95% of the hotels analysed, GCCs are distributed to all guests. In only one hotel are guests selected randomly. This is consistent with Gilbert and

Table 1: *Gilbert–Horsnell GCC checklist*

Area	Categories	Meaning	References
Focus and management value of GCC attributes	1. Number of questions	Assess if a fatigue effect exists due to too many questions or too few, which would offer little management insight.	Aaker et al. (1995)
	2. Number of intangible delivery attributes	Check that both tangible and intangible attributes are being measured.	Danaher and Haddrell (1996)
	3. Number of tangible delivery attributes		
	4. Standardisation (hotel chains only)	Given the standardisation of brands to confirm, a consistent approach should be used.	Jones and Ioannou (1993)
	5. Placing independent drivers together as one attribute	The questions should be clear; questions that include two aspects create problems.	
	6. Breaking hotel operational areas into actionable drivers of satisfaction		
GCC attribute measurement techniques (attribute measurement scales)	7. A direct expectations-met scale	Understand the purpose of scales and ensure the inclusion of one or more scales that reflect customers' psychological attitude response.	Barsky and Huxley (1992), Cadotte and Turgeon (1998), Danaher and Haddrell (1996), DeVeau et al. (1996), Jones and Sasser (1995), Lewis and Pizam (1982), Lockwood (1994)
	8. A Likert-type scale		
	9. An excellence-rating scale		
	10. A pictorial-rating scale		
	11. A yes/no scale		
	12. An open comment box but no scale		
	13. An open comment box and a scale		
	14. Importance scale relating to areas or attributes		
	15. Space for general open comments		
GCC measures of overall satisfaction and loyalty	16. Provide a direct or indirect measure of overall satisfaction	Ensure an accurate gauge of customers' overall satisfaction.	DeVeau et al. (1996), Holloway and Robinson (1995), Jones and Sasser (1995)
	17. Provide a direct or indirect measure of loyalty		
GCC marketing measures (identify key market segments)	18. Purpose of visit	Provide improved marketing information as well as allow cross-referencing of findings to different market segments.	Barsky and Huxley (1992), Jones and Ioannou (1993)
	19. Previous stays in this hotel/hotel chain		
	20. Name or room number		
	21. Company		
	22. Position in company/occupation		
	23. Salary range		
	24. Age range		
	25. Sex/title		
	26. Nationality/country		
	27. Provide sections relating to specific market segments		
	28. Test marketing channel effectiveness		
	29. Identify competition		
Effective layout of questions	30. The overall satisfaction score is at the beginning of the card	The design of a questionnaire will affect response and accuracy based on the logical flow of questions.	Aaker et al. (1995)
	31. Attribute ranking questions are toward the beginning of the card		
	32. Marketing and demographic questions are toward the end of the card		

Source: Gilbert and Horsnell (1998)

Horsnell's (1998) study, which noted that approximately one in five analysed hotel chains distributed GCCs randomly.

Process of GCC dispersal: In 79% of hotels in the sample, GCCs are distributed by the housekeeping department staff according to the check-in data. Completed GCCs are analysed in the marketing department. In three hotels, the analysis is conducted by the operations department. In one hotel, GCCs are distributed via the reception desk. The results of the study conducted by Su (2004) in Taiwan's hotels also showed that in-room distribution is the most common way of GCCs dispersal.

Staff: In all hotels in the sample (n=19), hotel staff are familiar with the process of measuring hotel guests' satisfaction. Regarding the way in which GCCs are distributed, hotel managers believe that hotel employees do not need additional training in order to motivate their guests to complete GCCs. As such, employees are not rewarded for motivating guests. However, staff motivation was recommended by Gilbert and Horsnell (1998).

Results presentation to management: Just under half (42%) of the interviewed hotel managers claim that they receive an analysis report once a month. In two cases, the answer was "other", with the explanation that management is informed occasionally, sometimes even daily.

Handling complaints: When a complaint is received, management takes appropriate measures to fix the problem (apology, repair, etc.).

Methodology of GCC design: In all hotels in the sample, GCCs are designed according to the managers' personal experience. Two hotel managers indicated that they adapted some questions from other hotels.

Timing the survey: In all 19 analysed hotels, GCCs are distributed to hotel guests during their stay. Conducting the survey during checkout or a few days after leaving the hotel is not practiced.

GCC accessibility: In 63% of hotels, GCCs can be found in a folder on a room table. In five hotels, GCCs are placed in a visible place in the room (e.g., on the bed, table). Only in two of the hotels analysed are GCCs accessible at the reception desk. One possible reason for low response rates could be that the GCCs are not placed in visible places, considering that in the majority of hotels they are hidden in a folder.

Foreign languages: In addition to the Croatian language, GCCs are also translated into English (all hotels), German (15 hotels), and Italian (12 hotels) languages. It can be concluded that not all analysed hotels have GCCs translated into the German and Italian language, although travellers from these countries are repeat customers to the Opatija Riviera.

Special request letter: In order to indicate the importance of guests' attitudes about hotel services, Barsky (1995) recommends writing a special request letter. According to Gilbert and Horsnell (1998), this practice is employed in two hotel chains in the United Kingdom. However, hotel

managers in the current study do not use this technique as a way of motivating guests to complete the GCC.

Returning the GCCs: According to the interviewees, hotel guests have several possibilities for returning completed GCCs. In the majority of hotels in the sample (63%), completed GCCs can be put into a box near the reception desk. Guests can return their answers to the check-in staff or leave them in their room as well.

Incentives to guests: In order to encourage guest response, Barsky (1995) recommends offering various incentives (e.g., discounts, gifts). The majority of the analysed hotels (68%) do not provide any kind of incentive to the guests. In six hotels, a partial incentive is provided for returning the questionnaire; rather than rewarding all the guests who complete the survey, the incentive is given only to randomly selected guests. In Gilbert and Horsnell's (1998) sample, incentives were provided in one hotel chain, were being considered in another, and were not provided in three other hotel chains. Su (2004) reported a similar conclusion.

Reasons for not conducting GCC surveys: As previously indicated, out of 25 hotels in the current sample, 24% do not use GCCs to measure guests' satisfaction. Interviewees provided several reasons for this, including the fact that guests ignore the questionnaires, hotels do not want to disturb guests with the cards, hotels are considering the GCC practice, or hotels are just not interested in it.

4.2 Content analysis results

Following the best practice criteria for assessing GCC, the content analysis was conducted. The results are presented next.

Number of questions: The total sample indicates that GCCs have from 8 to 32 questions. The majority of GCCs (57%) contain up to 20 questions, while one includes less than 10. GCCs should contain between 40 and 60 questions in order to collect enough information for decision making (Gilbert and Horsnell 1998). Thus, the GCCs in the sample do not include enough questions to offer adequate management information.

Number of intangible and tangible delivery attributes: The majority of questions should be oriented toward intangible service delivery performance. In only 29% of GCCs analysed in this study did a positive ratio of tangible attribute questions to intangible attribute questions exist. This result is consistent with the findings of Su (2004) and Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) (44:1 and 18:13 on behalf of the intangible aspects, respectively).

Standardised GCCs for all hotels in the chain or brand: Of the 25 hotels in the sample, 56% belong to one of the three hotel chains in the area. Hotels in a chain have unique GCCs, so the standardisation criteria are met. According to Ioannou (1993), such criteria are important for two reasons. First, GCCs provide information for the individual hotel in the

chain. Second, they are used as a tool for benchmarking and maintaining consistency across the hotel chain estate.

Placing independent drivers together as one attribute: The use of compound or “double-barrelled” questions that ask more than one thing at a time can cause problems with question clarity and response interpretation. This type of question is included in three of the GCCs analysed; two include one such question while the third GCC has three compound questions. Questions of this kind are usually applied for assessing intangible service attributes (e.g., friendliness and efficiency of staff, quality and variety of food, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with staff members).

Breaking hotel operation areas into actionable drivers of guest satisfaction: Questions should be asked in a way that clearly indicates which attribute of hotel service is being assessed. For example, in the reception department, attributes such as staff, accurate reservation, and prompt service can be assessed. In 43% of the analysed GCCs, detailed questions are included to assess the services of a particular hotel department. One GCC has too generally formulated questions regarding these criteria.

Attribute measurement scales: Research has indicated that the most effective scale for measuring satisfaction is the expectations-met scale. However, none of the GCCs in this study used this scale. Su (2004) analysed GCCs in Taiwan's hotels and reported the same findings. Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) noted that in only 6,7% of analysed GCCs in United Kingdom hotels was the expectations-met scale employed. The most common scale in this study is the excellence rating scale, which is used in 86% of the sample. A yes/no scale is included in 43% of GCCs, while one GCCs uses the pictorial rating scale. These results are consistent with studies conducted by Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) and Su (2004). Furthermore, in the total sample, seven different scales are used to assess guest satisfaction and service quality. In four GCCs, a four-point scale is used; in two cases, a three-point scale is employed; and in one GCC, a two-point scale is used. The majority of GCCs include only one type of scale, and none of the analysed GCCs has more than two different types of attribute measurement scales.

A space for open comments: All of the GCCs in the sample include a space for open comments. In 57% of GCCs, this space is provided at the end of the card. In the remaining 43%, open-ended comments are possible after each question. GCCs differ in the space allowed for open-ended comments, varying from one line to one page. The whole page is provided in only one GCC. It should be noted that lack of space for open comments influences information quality (Gilbert and Horsnell 1998).

A direct or indirect measure of overall satisfaction and a measure of loyalty: Of the total sample, only 29% of GCCs include an overall satisfaction question (be it direct or indirect) while 57% ask about loyalty. Results indicate that only one GCC includes both questions, and in 29% of the sample, these questions are not included at all. The low per-

centage shows that hotel managers may not perceive these measures as important. Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) and Su (2004) noted that, in GCCs, assessment of loyalty is more common than assessment of overall satisfaction. This conclusion can be applied in the study of GCCs in the Opatija Riviera as well. However, guest satisfaction does not always guarantee guest retention (Bowen and Schoemaker 2003). Moreover, intent to return is not necessarily the consequence of satisfaction with the service.

Marketing measures: In addition to measuring guest satisfaction, GCCs provide an opportunity to obtain information about guests for marketing purposes. Questions relating to guest demographics are included in all GCCs in the sample. The most frequently asked questions (57% of GCCs) are purpose of visit, marketing channels, room number, and contact (address, e-mail). In 43% of GCCs, questions about the duration of stay (date of arrival and departure) and guest name are included. Only one GCC asks about the guests' age and occupation. On average, GCCs have between one and six questions for marketing segmentation, with the average being three. None of the analysed GCCs includes questions of general demographic information pertaining to salary and sex or questions about previous stays in the hotel or hotel chain. Questions relating to address, e-mail, and guest name or room number indicate that GCCs are not anonymous.

Provide sections relating to specific market segments: None of the GCCs in the sample includes a specific section for completion by guests from special market segments (e.g., business travellers), which indicates a lack of focus on market segmentation. Similar results were shown in the studies conducted by Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) and Su (2004).

Testing marketing channels effectiveness: Questions like “How did you find out about our hotel?” provide important information about the relative effectiveness of a hotel's advertising and marketing channels. Indeed, 57% of GCCs in this study include questions relating to these criteria.

A question on competition: Previously conducted studies indicate that questions on competitors are not common on GCCs (Gilbert and Horsnell 1998; Su 2004), which the results of the current study confirm.

Effective layout of questions: All GCCs in the sample include attribute-ranking questions in the first part of the card. In one GCC, the question on overall satisfaction is placed at the beginning and, in another, at the end of the list. In addition, 29% of GCCs include marketing and demographic questions toward the end of the card while 71% place these at the beginning and the end of the card.

Introduction sentences: Introduction sentences are used in order to thank the guests for staying at the hotel and for filling out the GCC. These introductions also indicate that answers will help hotel management improve hotel services. Such sentences are included in 86% of the GCCs analysed in this study.

Instructions for where to leave completed GCCs: All analysed GCCs include instructions about where guests should leave the completed questionnaire. In 43% of GCCs, instructions can be found at the beginning, within the introduction sentences, while in most cases (57%) instructions are provided at the end. Mumel and Snoj (2007) reported that, in Slovenian hotels, 62% of GCCs include these instructions.

Indicating the name of hotel employee: In all GCCs in this study, it is possible to indicate the name of a hotel employee who made a special impression on guests. Only one GCC asks about employees with whom guests were dissatisfied. In one case, guests are asked to state reasons for identifying a particular employee. Mumel and Snoj (2007) noted that 36% of GCCs in their study met these criteria.

Assessment of service value: Only 14% of GCCs in the sample assess the value-for-money ratio of the hotel and its services. Similar results were shown in a study conducted in Slovenian hotels by Mumel and Snoj (2007).

Guests' expectations: Only one GCC asks about meeting guests' expectations. None of the questionnaires assess satisfaction and service quality compared to guest expectations using the expectation-met scale.

Not applicable response: None of the analysed GCCs provides the option of assessing the services with a "not applicable" response. However, this criterion is important because it gives guests an easy way to answer a question that does not apply to them (e.g., if a guest did not use room service). This is a neutral response that should be included on a GCC in order to prevent guests from skipping questions that do not apply to their experience.

Assessment of the main attributes of hotel services: The analysis indicated that all GCCs include the assessment of the hotel room (cleanliness, comfort, amenities in the room) and restaurant (quality and variety of food). In 86% of GCCs, guests can assess sports and leisure facilities (e.g., wellness, swimming pool, animation, entertainment). The reception department can be assessed in 71% of GCCs. Questions on staff friendliness and efficiency as well as assessment of room service are included in 43% of GCCs. Only one questionnaire includes a question on the hotel's beach. None of the analysed GCCs provides assessment on the hotel's parking area or surroundings (e.g., neatness, cleanliness).

5 Conclusion

This study can be of great use to hotel managers by providing directions on how to conduct and modify the existing practice of measuring customer satisfaction in hotels. The primary objective of GCCs is to understand guests' needs, gather their opinions and comments, and—most importantly—assess their satisfaction with services provided. Although 76% of the hotels analysed recognised GCCs as an important tool for measuring guest satisfaction, results indicate that most hotels' measurement practice should be improved.

Based on the findings, most hotels' GCCs can be found in a folder on a room table and are not distributed randomly. Guests can complete GCCs during their stay at the hotel. However, response rates are low, and no incentives are provided for completing questionnaires. GCCs are designed according to managers' personal experience, and managers usually receive analysis reports once a month. Furthermore, the diversity of GCC design is evident, and no single GCC within the survey sample meets all the best practice criteria. The majority of GCCs do not utilise effective question order; only a few provide measures of overall satisfaction, and only one includes a question about meeting guests' expectations.

In conclusion, this study combines an analysis of customer satisfaction management schemes and GCC content analysis in the hotels of the Opatija Riviera. Most of the findings are consistent with similar studies conducted by Gilbert and Horsnell (1998), Su (2004), and Mumel and Snoj (2007). It can be concluded that the efficiency of customer satisfaction measurement with GCCs depends on the measurement methodology. It is clear that guests should be additionally motivated and that GCCs should be designed with a greater impact of a scientific approach. Only reliable and valid data can provide valuable information for management decisions regarding a hotel's offerings.

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