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"Dimensions of Consumer Satisfaction in Hospitality Services"

Abstract

The importance of consumer satisfaction on the services sector and the relevance of the hospitality sector, as part of the fast growing tourism industry, were the base of the present study. The main objective of this study was to assess the dimensions of consumer satisfaction. In order to achieve it, a study on 4 and 5 stars hotels belonging to hotel chains operating on Portugal was conducted. This study comprehended in-depth interviews and a questionnaire directed to hotel guests. The conclusions pointed out to the existence of five dimensions: one emotional and four based on performance perceptions, which explained 64,7% of the satisfaction with the hotel stay.

Keywords: Consumer satisfaction; Cognitive and Emotional dimensions; Hospitality services

1. Introduction

The importance of tourism on the world economy has been growing, having a share of 30% of the services sector (www.world-tourism.org). An annual growth rate of 6% is forecasted, leading tourism to become the main economic activity worldwide. WTO forecasts that in the year 2020, 717 millions of international tourists will arrive in Europe, contributing to 6% of its employment rate (www.tourismconcern.org.uk/mgazine/2020).

According to Pizam and Ellis (1999), consumer satisfaction is a psychological state that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results when obtaining what is expected from a product or a service. For Churchill and Surprenant (1982) satisfaction is the result of purchase and use, which derives from the comparison between reward and the cost of the purchase considering anticipated consequences.

Westbrook e Reilly (1983) define satisfaction as an emotional response to the experiences associated to products or services. Some researches perceive the satisfaction process as subjective on the expectations but objective on the product or results perceptions. According to Woodruff and Gardial (2001), it has become more and more evident that it is important for the satisfaction measurement, to capture not only the perception, but also the consumer emotion. The greater the emotion (positive and negative) caused by products and services, the more motivated the consumers will be in terms of future behaviour, such as repeated purchase, worth-of-mouth and complaints. Westbrook and Oliver (1991 and 2001) and Westbrook and Reilly (1983) also defends the use of satisfaction measurement based on emotions

Although there is still debate about satisfaction being an emotional construct that includes a cognitive dimension or a cognitive construct that includes an emotional dimension (Babin e Griffin, 1998; Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer, 1999; Crooker and Near, 1998), it seems that emotions are one of the main dimensions of satisfaction (Dúbe and Menon 2000; Schoefer and Ennew 2005; Yu and Dean 2001; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991; White and Yu 2005). According to Oliver (1997), there is a need for more studies to evaluate emotion and satisfaction so that the correspondence between these two variables can be established.

2. Literature Review

Satisfaction has been defined on two ways: as a result or a process (Tam 2000). Satisfaction is defined by Vavra (1997) as the final state resulting from the consumption experience. This final state can be a cognitive state of rewarding or an emotional response to an experience. The traditional approaches of consumer behaviour studies have highlighted the satisfaction concept as the main one on the post-purchase period. It is accepted that satisfaction mediates the learning from consumer past experiences, and that it explains the post-purchase activities such as complaints, worth-of-mouth and product usage (Bettman 1979; Howard 1989). However, recent analysis of products consumption indicate that the post-purchase period can also involve a variety of emotional responses such as joy, excitement, pride, sadness, angry and blame (Havlena and Holbrook 1986; Holbrook et al 1984.; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

Considering that emotions are a primary source of human satisfaction and that they influence to a great extent memory and the thinking process (Kuhl 1986), it is natural that questions are raised about the way consumption, emotion and satisfaction judgment are related and at what

extent they can explain consumer behaviour. The answers to these questions are important for several reasons (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982):

- (1) They can help to clarify the nature of satisfaction as a theoretical construct and to solve out actual debates about the right measurement and conceptualization.
- (2) They can encourage the development of more integrative theories concerning the conjoint determination and effects of both constructs.
- (3) They can reconcile the emergent dialectic between the decision process and experimental perspectives of the construct behaviour study.

Based on the research of Woodruff and Gardial (2001), when a consumer simply says that he/she is satisfied with a product, this represents a nearly neutral state of evaluation. On the consumer mind, the word satisfaction can become more a synonym of “meeting the minimal expectations”, and this is hardly a result that generates emotion. Positive emotions may guide consumers to share the positive experience with others while the negative emotions may result on complaints (Bagozzi, Gopinath e Nyer 1999; Liljander e Strandvik 1997).

Stauss and Neuhaus (1997) suggest that it is inappropriate to assume that all consumers experiment the same emotions and cognitions when they classify their own satisfaction at the same level. Positive emotions tend to be connected to decisions of staying or maintaining the actual state, and the negatives tend to influence decisions like abandon (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer 1999).

A study conducted by Singh (1991), also concludes that concerning satisfaction, managers should be focused on the most relevant aspects for the guests, instead of the “zero defects“ theory of the total quality management literature.

As a conclusion, it can be stated that the cognitive component of satisfaction is about the consumer evaluation of the perceived performance compared to some kind of patterns (Liljander and Strandvik 1997; Oliver 1980; Wintz, 1993). The emotional component concerns various emotions such as happiness, surprise and disappointment (Cronin, Brady e Hult, 2000; Oliver, 1993; Stauss e Neuhaus, 1997).

3. Methodology

The main objective of this study is to assess the dimensions of the tourist satisfaction during a hotel stay, namely:

- To assess the influence emotions have on the consumer satisfaction level.
- To assess the influence performance perceptions have on consumer satisfaction level.

Twenty 4 and 5 stars hotels from hotel chains operating in Portugal were contacted. The questionnaire was applied on 11 hotels, between September and October 2005. 257 questionnaires were validated for further statistical analysis: 66 on three 5 stars hotel and 191 on eight 4 stars hotels.

The first part of the questionnaire (questions about feelings) was made after the Barsky and Nash (2002) research work that also studied emotions experienced by guests during hotel stays.

The second part of the questionnaire (questions about performance) was developed after 109 in-depth interviews made to hotel guests, with the objective of identifying the relevant

attributes of consumer satisfaction. This data was analysed using the content analysis method. The results indicated that for the holiday segment, the most important attributes were: staff (21%), facilities (16%), food (15%), room (12%), entertainment (10%), service (10%) and location (9%). For the business segment the most relevant attributes were: staff (18%), room (18%), service (16%), location (14%), facilities (14%) and quietness (10%).

All the scales were between 1 and 9. The data collected through the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive and multivariate statistical methods: means, standard deviation, factor analysis and multiple regression.

4. Results

4.1 Respondents characterization

The sample can be characterized as follows: 51% were men and 47,5% women. Regarding the level of education 70,8% had higher degrees and 23,3% concluded high school. Concerning nationality, 26,8% of the respondents were English, 23% Portuguese and 8,2% were Spanish. For 72,8%, it was the first stay on the hotel and for 9,3% it was the second stay. Concerning the motives of the stay, 50,2% of the guests were on holiday, while 37% were travelling for business and 11,3% were in a congress. Related to the average time of the stay, 42% remained for 1 or 2 days at the hotel, 11,7% stayed for 3 days and 11,3% about 7 days. The choice of the hotel was influenced by the travel agency for 35,8% of the respondents, for 26,5% it was a company decision; for 16,3% the decision was made because of a personal recommendation, and through the Internet for 12,5% of the respondents.

By analysing the means, it can be concluded that the hotel location was the best-evaluated factor (7,79). The quietness and the external appearance of the hotel were the only variables between 6 and 7. Regarding the feelings evaluation, the lowest mean was feeling sophisticated (6,86) and the highest was feeling respected (7,84).

4.2 Cognitive and emotional dimensions of satisfaction

A factor analysis of principal components was conducted considering the answers to the performance perceptions and to the emotions experienced by guests during the stay at the hotel. The results were: 5 factors explained 74,43% of the variation: 53,6% for the factor Emotions; 6,5% for the factor Room and Exterior Appearance of the Hotel; 5,5% for the factor Restaurant Service; 5,1% for the factor Reception; 3,5% for the factor named Tangibles that included Location, Quietness, Food and Decoration and Comfort of the Restaurant. The items, after an Equamax rotation, were loaded on each factor as presented in table 1.

Table 1 - Rotated Component Matrix

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling Comfortable	,637	,339	,342	,108	,267
Feeling Relaxed	,685	,155	,251	,182	,323
Feeling Respected	,751	,054	,219	,391	,145
Feeling Pampered	,724	,201	,294	,210	,099
Feeling Sophisticated	,620	,399	,207	,075	,230
Feeling Welcomed	,792	,006	,083	,362	,221
Feeling Important	,782	,200	,151	,225	,210
Localization	,061	-,125	,068	,403	,708
Quietness	,273	,070	,117	,024	,690
Exterior appearance	,029	,539	,237	,149	,438
Reception Facilities	,144	,367	,118	,618	,334
Reception Courteous staff	,322	,270	,341	,749	,121
Reception Competent staff	,296	,218	,402	,735	,188
Reception Prompt service	,298	,278	,492	,611	,076
Reception Individual attention.	,336	,176	,468	,681	,112
Food Variety	,285	,418	,342	,155	,476
Food Quality	,256	,451	,401	,139	,474
Restaurant Decoration	,116	,372	,252	,042	,694
Restaurant Comfort	,225	,243	,423	,198	,657
Restaurant Prompt service	,242	,243	,717	,250	,358
Restaurant Courteous staff	,178	,152	,852	,173	,155
Restaurant Competent staff	,238	,149	,793	,328	,249
Restaurant Individual attention	,133	,222	,817	,276	,211
Room service Prompt service	,262	,645	,254	,446	,240
Room service Courteous staff	,268	,647	,199	,505	,277
Room service Competent staff	,294	,649	,227	,486	,252
Room service Individual attention	,181	,684	,268	,432	,193
Room Comfort	,394	,497	-,032	,328	,468
Room Size	,074	,483	,109	,456	,311
Room Decoration	,292	,640	,307	,306	,191
Room Technical devices	,137	,670	,345	,175	,055

Using the 5 factors as independent variables and satisfaction as the dependent one on a multiple regression analysis, it could be concluded that those explain 64, 7% of the satisfaction with the hotel stay (table 2).

Table 2 - Model satisfaction dimensions

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
,804(a)	,647	,629	,658	,647	35,217	5	96	,000

From table 3 it can be drawn the regression equation, concluding that emotions have the most important contribution to satisfaction, followed by the restaurant service and the tangibles:

$$\text{Satisfaction} = 7,68 + 0,652 * \text{Emotions} + 0,356 * \text{Restaurant Service} + 0,346 * \text{Tangibles} + 0,207 * \text{Room and External Appearance} + 0,204 * \text{Reception}$$

Table 3 - Coefficients of the model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	7,686	,065		117,896	,000
Emotions	,652	,066	,603	9,952	,000
Room and External Appearance of the Hotel	,207	,066	,191	3,158	,002
Restaurant Service	,356	,066	,329	5,433	,000
Reception	,204	,066	,189	3,111	,002
Tangibles	,346	,066	,320	5,280	,000

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study corroborates the findings of Singh (1991), Woodruff and Gardial, (2001), Barsky and Nash (2002) Dube and Menon(2000), and Westbrook and Oliver (1991). These results confirm that satisfaction is composed by both a cognitive and an emotional component, corroborating the evidence that emotions play a significant role on satisfaction. This is in accordance to some researches which defend the use of satisfaction measures based on emotions (Oliver, 1989; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991 and 2001, and Westbrook and Reilly 1983).

Barsky and Nash (2002) also concluded that a hotel could increase its occupancy rate and have a higher profitability if it would be able to create specific feelings during the stay, and that the emotions were critical to consumer satisfaction and loyalty. On the higher segment the most important emotions that affect the intention to return to the hotel were: feeling comfortable, important and welcomed. On the luxury segment the most important emotions were: feeling joyful, relaxed and sophisticated. The results of the present study are according that one, regarding the feelings experienced by the higher segment guests.

Based on the results obtained it is important for managers to be able to identify emotions as well has to search attributes with greater potential to provoke positive and negative emotions. This implies that managers should (Woodruff and Gardial, 2001):

- Identify the actual unavailable and unknown dimensions to be added in future offers.
- Understand how the existing dimensions could be improved or eliminated when causing negative feelings.
- Understand which dimensions should be used on marketing communications.

Regarding the performance perceptions results and their influence on tourist satisfaction, the most important items that managers should focus on their communications is the restaurant service: prompt service, courteous and competent staff and individual attention to guests; and the tangibles: location, quietness, food and decoration and comfort the restaurant.

On a study conducted by Chadee and Mattsson (1996), it was concluded that the important variables regarding lodgement were those of location, the room cleanness and the facilities availability, and that these factors were positively related with satisfaction. Saleh and Ryan (1992) on a research made on a Canadian hotel concluded that the factors affecting the choice of the hotel are the existence of a restaurant, the internal decoration and external appearance of the hotel. On the present study, the restaurant and the hotel location were also important factors that influenced guests' satisfaction.

This research findings' emphasized the relevance of the emotional component of a tourist experience. About 64, 7% of the satisfaction was explained by the factors Emotions; Restaurant Service; Tangibles, Room and External Appearance of the Hotel and Reception. Concerning limitations, the size of the sample limits the degree to which the results can be generalized as well the prevalence of the 4 stars hotel holiday segment. For future research it is suggested to replicate this study to other category of hotels and to make business segment more representative.

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