



The perception of tourism product quality and tourist satisfaction: the case of polish tourists visiting Bulgaria

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a secondary data analysis examining Polish tourists' perception of tourism product quality offered by Bulgarian hotels. The researchers examined data collected by Itaka travel agency regarding tourists' satisfaction with the package holidays in Bulgaria between 2010-2013. Since the number of Polish tourists visiting Bulgaria has increased over the last years, it has been hypothesized that Bulgarian hotels offer a competitive value proposition and a very good price/quality relationship. The surveyed sample of tourists spent their summer holiday in one of 14 summer resorts located in Sunny Beach and in Golden Sands area, 4 – three-star hotels and 10 – four-star hotels and the total sample volume is 1212 tourists. The quantitative analysis of tourists' perceptions of product quality offered by Bulgarian hotels was performed through the scale based on the evaluation of a list of the hotel attributes representing values important for tourists. The qualitative analysis was based on the tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in Bulgaria.

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Introduction

In tourism markets with enormous competition nowadays between tourism destinations and between resort hotels inside destinations one of the most significant problems for hotel marketers is to know the attributes that determine the accommodation choice of tourists which means to know the hotel

attributes that are perceived as most important by tourists when choosing a resort hotel. On the other hand, every destination hotel is part of the overall tourism product of the destination because the overall tourism product refers to the whole holiday consisting of various components such as transportation, accommodation, meals, image etc.

(Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). Research and studies often link this set of destination product components to tourist quality perception (Blazquesz, Molina & Esteban, 2012). As known the destination product components are on a macro level (Murphy, Pritchard & Smith, 2000) but there is another approach which combines micro level variables with the destination product components. The micro level variables represent tourists' considerations of various product components related to their experience of a specific company such as personnel, information and product variety (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). Empirical research in this subject area enables hotel marketers and managers to develop a relevant product policy by eliminating gaps between customer expectations and product quality perception.

This article presents the results of a secondary data analysis examining Polish tourists' perception of tourism product quality offered by Bulgarian hotels. Bulgaria is perceived as an attractive country for Polish visitors and a very attractive destination for summer holidays. Since the number of Polish tourists visiting Bulgaria has increased over the last couple of years in average by 5-6% annually compared to the period until 2010 (NSI, 2013), it has been hypothesized that Bulgarian hotels offer a competitive value proposition and a very good price/quality relationship. The aim of the research study was to analyze the Polish tourists' opinions concerning the most important hotel attributes with regard to hotels located in the main summer resorts in Bulgaria. Another important goal of this research was to pinpoint quality gaps and the areas of tourists' discontent. The implications of the results on the perception of tourism product quality and tourist satisfaction are discussed with regard to hotel owners and managers as well as to Bulgarian local authorities.

Literature Review

A variety of studies explore the hotel attributes importance and their impact on hotel selection as well as their perception by the tourists (Lewis, 1984; Wind, Green, Shifflet & Scarbrough, 1989; Saleh & Ryan, 1992; Tsaur & Tzeng, 1995; Clow et al, 1994; Callan, 1995, 1998; Hurley & Estelami, 1998). In the research

article of Dolnicar & Otter (2003) a comparative review is made of 21 studies on this problem published in the last decades in various tourism research and business journals. In this study a total of 173 attributes are extracted and classified in groups where similar items are pointed together. According to Dolnicar and Otter (2003) as far as the studied hotel areas concerns the data reveal that 95% of the studies include service items, 90% include attributes of the hotel, 86% use items from the location and room category, 76% use F&B and price values items, image and security in 62% of the cases and marketing issues- in 38% of the cases. Callan (1995, 1998) lists 166 hotel attributes under following headings: (1) location, (2) image, (3) price/value, (4) competence, (5) access, (6) security, (7) additional services, (8) tangibles- bedroom, (9) tangible- other, (10) leisure facilities and (11) service provider.

Most of the studies in this research field explore the perception of product attributes of hotels (Juwaheer, 2004; Poon and Lock-Teng Low, 2005; Markovic, Raspor, Ivankovic and Planinc, 2013) but only a few studies are related to resort hotel attributes and service quality which are more specific because the resort hotel perception is closely related to the natural environment and the resort characteristics. Mc Cleary, Weaver and Hutchinson (1993), Griffen, Shea and Weaver (1996), Dube and Renaghan (2000) investigate the business traveller segment and in particular the hotel attribute preferences. The majority of the studies implement a questionnaire design where the travellers point the importance value of the attributes and only Dube and Renaghan (2000) use open-ended questions in the survey format where the highest scored attribute is "hotel location". A literature review reveals that studies investigating hotel service quality perception in South Central Europe are rather limited and concerning Central European tourists' perceptions of hotels in Bulgaria even more limited (Snoj and Mumel, 2002; Marković, 2003; Marković and Raspor, 2010; Markovic, Raspor, Ivankovic and Planinc, 2013).

Resort hotels have the basic character of the service industry, such as intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability, and inseparability

of production and consumption. Service quality is the extent to which the services provided at the travel site satisfy tourist needs and expectations (Chuang, Chen & Chen, 2010). It is the difference between the customer's subjective judgments regarding how much expectations and perceptions conform. Quality service is the conformity to expectations or exceeding tourist expectations and needs (Lin, 2008). According to Cronin and Taylor (1992), one of the most complex actions concerns in how to assess service quality in a proper and accurate way. In spite of the numerous considerable published works on the service quality field all over the world there are some lacks of consensus between the managers and marketing researchers concerning the real meaning of service quality (Freitas & Costa, 2012). The only existent consensus is that service quality is still an elusive and abstract construct that is difficult to define and measure (Parasuraman et. al., 1985, 1988; Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). A literature review reveals that there are many authors who believe that there is a casual relationship between service quality and satisfaction in which service quality affects future customer intentions to purchase those particular services (Hurley & Estelami, 1998). The research practice and literature point out that many service industry researchers usually used a one-side survey to measure only satisfaction levels and due to this lack it is suggested that the importance of the attributes must be assigned to the items surveyed (Carman, 1990). There are many customer satisfaction tools like SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985) and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) that measure only the degree of customer satisfaction and only the IPA- method includes such importance ranking in its analytical instrument (Martilla and James, 1977).

Costa et al (2007) reported that one of the most commonly used procedures to evaluate and classify the quality of services is by measuring the user's degree of satisfaction concerning a set of relevant criteria. As far as the hotel product attributes concerns, this study uses as criteria some of the hotel attributes which are investigated in other studies and are accepted as important by the customers. At the same

time the study adds aspects of hotel attributes that are related to the experience of the tourists in the resort – "Entertainment in the hotel", "Attractions nearby" and an attribute that is important to the tourists in sea side resorts- "Beaches nearby" whereby 6 of the hotel attributes are intangible and only 2 are tangible- standard of rooms and meals.

The IPA- method, developed as a tool for market researchers (Martilla & James, 1977) is based on the concept that satisfaction is a result of a preference for an object or service and judgments of its performance (Myers & Alpert, 1968). The scale in use for this analytical tool is relatively easy to administer and is based on the assumption that consumer satisfaction is affected by both the importance of an attribute and perceived performance on the same attribute. Although the relevance of IPA as an instrument for the measurement of quality perceptions is well documented in the marketing literature (Ennew et. Al, 1993; Slack, 1994; Matzler et.al, 2003), there is still a lacking of research that provide empirical application to tourism destination management and to hotel marketing and management. According to some authors Importance-performance analysis is better than both customer satisfaction tools- SERVQUAL or SERVPERF, because it has the importance attribution to the items and in addition is a strong evaluation tool especially for practitioners for identifying attributes that are well performed and attributes that need to be improved and require actions immediately (Wong, M.S., C. Fearon & G. Philip, 2009). Other researchers criticize the use of expectations in tourist satisfaction surveys like in SERVQUAL, because of the difficulties in obtaining a realistic measure of tourists' expectations. In this connection, it has been argued by Casarin and Andreani (2003) that the time and space dimensions play a relevant role in the development of the expectations and such dimension should be adequately considered in designing tourist satisfaction surveys. Tourists, in reality, build up their expectations before leaving and in their own place of origin. The evaluation of the expectations at the destination, after the interaction with the consumed services, may lead to a distortion of the data and,

furthermore, tourists may not remember precisely the expectations they had before leaving and this makes the SERVQUAL model not very reliable. As mentioned by Yoon and Uysal (2005), some contributions suggest making use of a “norm” or “comparison standard” instead of expectations as reference points to have a disconfirmation process (Francken and van Raaij, 1981; Cadotte et al., 1987). Other authors suggest making use only of the actual perceived performance, avoiding any kind of comparative element (Tse & Wilton, 1988; Fuchs & Weiermair, 2003). According to such approach, the actual performance and initial expectations should be considered independently; the evaluation of tourists’ satisfaction with their experience is considered regardless of their expectations and of their past experience. In such a way, all the methodological problems related to the evaluation of expectations are avoided, but, at the same time, it is impossible to interpret high levels of satisfaction as the result of low expectations or superior quality of service provider (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2003). Despite of its disadvantages SERVQUAL has been implemented as a basis for at least four other instruments and their variants (Ekinici, Y., & Riley, M., 1997): LODGSERV- developed for the measure of customer satisfaction related to lodging services (Knutson et al., 1990), DINESERV-developed to evaluate the perceived quality of dining services (Stevens et al, 1995), RECQUAL- an instrument developed for the evaluation of recreational centres) and HOLSAT- developed for the measurement of satisfaction in a tourist destination (Tribe & Snaith, 1998).

If the survey research was prepared originally by the authors the best analytical instruments in this case should be the “importance - performance” method but in this case due to the lack of survey data about importance of the attributes the researchers applied the SERVPERF tool.

The analysis is based on customer satisfaction measured through a modified SERVPERF tool applied for hotel product perception. Edvardson (2005) pointed out that service quality perceptions are formed during the production, delivery and consumption process.

SERVPERF, being based on the perception component alone, has been conceptually and methodologically considered by the researchers as a better scale than the SERVQUAL scale which has its origin in disconfirmation paradigm. As the study is based on secondary data, the analysis has implicitly some limitations in a sense that the researchers could not use the whole range of all possible hotel product attributes. In difference to the original SERVPERF number of attributes, the list of items was reduced to the number of 8 for which there was available survey data.

Research methodology

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the Polish tourists’ perceptions of their holiday experience in Bulgarian hotels in order to identify the quality gaps with regard to the valuable hotel attributes for tourists. It was hypothesized that Bulgarian hotels located in main summer resorts offer a competitive value proposition and a good price/quality relationship. Moreover, the researchers assumed that the mean tourists’ assessments of main tourism product attributes do not differ between three- and four-stars hotels. Another assumption was made with regard to the variability of tourism product attributes. It was assumed that all distinguished attributes are markedly correlated with the tourists’ perception of price/quality relationship.

The research objectives included:

- ✓ the assessment of the tourism product quality with regard to the attributes valuable for tourists related to their holiday experience in the hotels;
- ✓ the comparison of tourists’ responses regarding their assessments of the tourism product attributes in three- and four-star hotels,
- ✓ the analysis of the variability of tourism product attributes,
- ✓ the identification of quality gaps and areas of discontent with regard to the attributes valuable for tourists.

Data collection

The researchers analyzed the data, concerning tourists’ satisfaction, with the package holidays in Bulgaria collected by Itaka travel agency between 2010-2013. Itaka travel agency

collects data concerning tourists' satisfaction with the package holidays. The empirical data collection is an online questionnaire filled in by the respondents. Tourists are asked questions regarding their assessments of important

package holidays attributes. Numerical evaluation of all attributes is made with ratings ranging from 1 to 6. The questionnaire is sent to the tourists after they return from their holidays. Tourists who are willing to respond fill

Table 1. The sample characteristics

Characteristic		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Gender	Valid	Male	585	48.3	48.7	51.3
		Female	616	50.8	51.3	100.0
		Total	1201	99.1	100.0	
	Missing Total	System	11	0.9		
Age	Valid	20-25	204	16.8	16.9	16.0
		26-30	232	19.1	19.2	36.1
		31-40	463	38.2	38.3	74.4
		41-50	180	14.9	14.9	89.3
		Above 50	129	10.6	10.7	100.0
		Total	1208	99.7	100.0	
	Missing Total	System	4	0.3		
Travelling with	Valid	Partner	537	44.3	44.5	44.5
		Family members	524	43.2	43.4	87.9
		Friends	146	12.0	12.1	100.0
		Total	1207	99.6		
	Missing Total	System	5	0.4		

Table 2. The characteristics of tourism product attributes

Tourism product attribute	Characteristics
<i>Price/Quality relationship</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tourists' perceptions of the tourism product quality evaluated relatively to the price they paid for package holidays
<i>Standard of rooms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> room location, the view as well as the size, quality, and type of furnishings and amenities offered room amenities required by tourists include: air conditioning, cable TV, telephone, free Wi-Fi. The standard of the studio additionally refers to the quality and appropriate amount of cooking facilities
<i>Location of the hotel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> nice environment of the hotel, quietness, a surrounding garden easy access to the beach, restaurants, and gift market
<i>Customer service</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> refers to all service personnel of the hotel, including: the housekeepers, the front desk staff, the waiters, and the animators professionalism and positive attitude towards tourists the ability to communicate in English and other foreign languages
<i>Entertainment in the hotel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> animation program organized in the hotel, including sports activities, fitness activities, crazy games, and mini club activities with a special program to entertain children aged between 4-12 years old
<i>Meals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an evening program with shows, performances, and live music depend on the hotel's offer, which varies from BB (bed and breakfast), HB (breakfast and dinner), to All inclusive (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) as well as alcoholic drinks, hot and soft drinks, and snacks served between meals
<i>Beaches nearby</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diversity, taste, and quality of the served dishes the quality of beaches located nearby the ease of the access to the seaside the cleanliness of the beach
<i>Attractions nearby</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> restaurants, cafes, pubs, clubs, discos, souvenir market other possible options for entertainment located in the vicinity of the hotel (aqua park, amusement park, dolphinarium, etc)

out the questionnaire. Tourists' opinions concerning package holidays are published on the company's website (www.itaka.pl). The analysis presented in this study includes tourists evaluations with regard to their summer holidays in Bulgaria in three and four-star hotels.

Sample characteristics

An analyzed group of tourists spent their summer holiday in one of 14 summer resorts located in Sunny Beach and in Golden Sands area, 4 – three-star hotels and 10 – four-star hotels. The survey sample is by type a “convenience” sample and its size is 1212 tourists out of which 446 were visiting three-star hotels and 766 – four-star hotels. According to the survey results presented in Table 2, out of respondents who answered the questions, 51.3% were females and 48.7% males. 38.3% of respondents were within the age bracket of 31-40 years, 36.1% were between ages of 20-30, 14.9% between ages of 41-50, and 10.7% were more than 50 years old. 44.5% of tourists were travelling with their partner, 43.4% with the family members, and 12.1% with friends.

The analysis of the data in this study consisted of the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

✓ The analysis of the attribute-based items was concerned with the measurement of attributes representing the values important for tourists.

✓ The t-test (Harmon, 2013) was used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between tourists' perceptions of main tourism product attributes with regard to three- and four-star hotels.

✓ The Principal Component Analysis was used to describe the variability among the observed, correlated tourism product attributes in terms of unobserved variables called factors. Varimax rotation was carried out to interpret the factors.

✓ The qualitative analysis was based on the tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in Bulgarian hotels.

The researchers decided to analyze eight attributes valuable for tourists related to their summer experience in the hotels located in summer resorts in Bulgaria. Those included:

price/quality relationship, standard of rooms, location of the hotel, customer service, entertainment in hotels, meals served in hotels, beaches nearby, and attractions nearby. Despite the fact that the tourist attractions and the beaches located in the vicinity of the hotel cannot be classified as typical hotel attributes, they significantly influence tourists' holiday experience. Moreover, tourists make their purchasing decisions based on other tourists' opinions regarding their holidays, so their choice of a specific hotel is usually determined by a combination of factors, including the price/quality relationship, standard of rooms, customer service, meals, and entertainment as well as a good location of the hotel, available tourist attractions and the quality of the beaches. Thus, all the distinguished attributes presented in Table 2 should be the subject of the analysis.

Research findings

The analysis of the data in this study comprises the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis. The research provides the aggregated results from 14 hotels including 4 three-star hotels and 10 four-star hotels. Therefore, the research results reflect tourists' perceptions of hotels in the destination as a whole, not the quality of individual properties.

The quantitative analysis of tourists' perceptions of tourism product quality

The quantitative analysis of the attribute-based items was carried out on the basis of the tourists' evaluations of the tourism product attributes by applying a scale ranging from 1 to 6. The analysis of the tourists' perceptions of the main attributes was carried out with regard to three-star hotels, four-star hotels, and all hotels. The results of the quantitative analysis of tourists' perceptions of main tourism product attributes are presented in Table 3.

According to the survey results, the highest rated tourism product attributes included: standard of rooms, location of the hotel and customer service. Other important attributes, such as: price/quality relationship, beaches nearby, and entertainment were also highly rated by tourists. Meals served in hotels and attractions situated nearby received lower rates. The relatively high rating of price/quality

Table 3. Tourists' perceptions of main tourism product attributes

Tourism product attributes	Three-star hotels		Four-star hotels		All hotels	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Standard of rooms	4.69	0.976	4.64	1.063	4.66	1.032
Meals	4.13	1.266	4.54	1.243	4.39	1.266
Customer service	4.60	1.194	4.68	1.184	4.65	1.188
Entertainment *	4.16	1.558	4.61	1.373	4.49	1.440
Location of the hotel	4.47	1.213	4.78	1.133	4.66	1.172
Beaches nearby	4.79	1.080	4.38	1.308	4.53	1.245
Attractions nearby	4.31	1.235	4.11	1.410	4.18	1.351
Price/quality relationship	4.62	1.005	4.51	1.118	4.55	1.096

Note: * Five surveyed hotels did not have any animation programs in their offers, which resulted in the guests' lower evaluations of this attribute. For this reason, the quantitative analysis with regard to the entertainment activities was limited to the tourists' assessments of the hotels which offered animation programs.

relationship is worth noting, since it shows the attractiveness of value proposition offered by Bulgarian hotels. Customers usually base their purchasing decisions on the evaluation of all benefits related to the market offering and the price they have to pay. The more favorable the relationship between *the* benefits and *the* price is, the more customers are eager to buy a product.

In order to determine whether tourists' perceptions of the main tourism product attributes differ between two groups of hotels, the t-test was conducted preceded by the Kolomogorov-Smirnov test used to determine the normality of the distribution of responses. In the case of standard of rooms, customer service, attractions nearby and price/quality relationship the test revealed the normal distribution. In the case of meals, entertainment, location of the hotel and beaches nearby the test did not reveal the normal distribution, so additionally the Mann-Whitney test was conducted to compare the mean tourists' assessments of three and four-star hotels with regard to those attributes.

According to the results of the analysis presented in Table 4 and Table 5 there are no statistically significant differences in the average tourists' assessments of main tourism product attributes between three- and four-star hotels with regard to the standard of rooms, customer service, and price/quality relationship. In all those cases the significance level was above 0.05. However, a statistically significant difference can be observed in the mean tourists' assessments of three- and four-star hotels with regard to other attributes, including:

meals, entertainment, hotel location, beaches, and attractions situated nearby. The significance value in those cases was lower than 0.05.

Meals, entertainment and location of the hotel were evaluated higher in 4-star hotels while beaches nearby and attractions nearby were evaluated higher in three-star hotels. Given the differences between the mean assessments of two groups of hotels, it can be concluded that such tourism product attributes as meals and entertainment should be carefully examined and improved especially in three-star hotels in which they received relatively lower rates. Moreover, good location of the hotel, highly valued in four-star hotels, should be accompanied by more appealing tourist attractions as well as well-maintained beaches.

Subsequently, the researchers decided to investigate the correlation coefficients between each pair of variables. Table 6 shows the correlation matrix which enables spotting highly correlated tourism product attributes. Looking at the matrix, it is possible to distinguish many correlations above 0.3, so it was decided to carry on with the analysis in order to identify the correlated variables making clusters. The Principal Component Analysis was used to describe the variability among observed, correlated variables in terms of unobserved variables called factors. Varimax rotation was carried out to interpret the factors. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 7. On the basis of scree plot test three factors were tested. Factor loadings presented in the table show the correlation between a specific observed variable and a specific factor. Higher

Table 4. Independent-Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Standard of rooms	Equal variances assumed	3.450	0.063	-0.713	1210	0.476	-0.44
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.729	995.353	0.466	-0.44
Meals	Equal variances assumed	0.193	0.661	5.458	1210	0.000	0.407
	Equal variances not assumed			5.432	916.866	0.000	0.407
Customer service	Equal variances assumed	0.446	0.504	1.158	1206	0.247	0.082
	Equal variances not assumed			1.156	922.547	0.248	0.082
Entertainment	Equal variances assumed	17.481	0.000	8.677	1133	0.000	0.900
	Equal variances not assumed			8.440	766.327	0.000	0.900
Location of the hotel	Equal variances assumed	5.443	0.020	4.399	1207	0.000	0.305
	Equal variances not assumed			4.321	880.816	0.000	0.305
Beaches nearby	Equal variances assumed	29.396	0.000	-5.637	1205	0.000	-0.413
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.925	1071.667	0.000	-0.413
Attractions nearby	Equal variances assumed	7.640	0.006	-2.515	1202	0.012	-0.203
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.605	1018.925	0.009	-0.203
Price/quality relationship	Equal variances assumed	1.433	0.232	-1.819	1206	0.069	-0.119
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.847	972.892	0.065	-0.119

Table 5. Mann-Whitney Test

	Meals	Entertainment	Location of the hotel	Beaches nearby
Mann-Whitney U	138789.5	105366.5	145435.5	140239.5
Wilcoxon W	238470.5	187176.5	245116.5	430942.5
Z	-5.621	-8.144	-4.373	-5.200
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 6. Correlation matrix

Correlation	Standard of rooms	Meals	Customer service	Entertainment	Location of the hotel	Beaches nearby	Attractions nearby	Price/quality relationship
Standard of rooms								
Meals	0.386							
Customer service	0.552	0.502						
Entertainment	0.341	0.378	0.388					
Location of the hotel	0.318	0.210	0.251	0.145				
Beaches nearby	0.195	0.159	0.119	0.069	0.492			
Attractions nearby	0.352	0.232	0.269	0.177	0.516	0.470		
Price/quality relationship	0.566	0.525	0.550	0.446	0.408	0.335	0.443	

Table 7. Rotated Component Matrix – three components

	Components		
	1	2	3
Standard of rooms	0.823	0.212	0.052
Meals	0.566	0.100	0.478
Customer service	0.828	0.067	0.214
Entertainment	0.209	0.049	0.915
Location of the hotel	0.219	0.784	0.026
Beaches nearby	-0.023	0.837	0.087
Attractions nearby	0.264	0.756	0.058
Price/quality relationship	0.628	0.397	0.396

values of factor loadings mean a closer relationship.

Standard of rooms and customer service load heavily on the first factor, hotel location, attractions nearby and beaches nearby on the second, and entertainment on the third. In those cases loadings were higher than 0.7. However, for exploratory purposes, it is possible to use lower levels for loadings, which enables to distinguish more variables highly correlated with given factors. The researchers decided to use loadings higher than 0.5 to interpret the correlation between independent

variables and particular factors. Thus, highly correlated variables with the first factor include: standard of rooms, customer service, meals, and price/quality relationship. Location of the hotel, attractions situated nearby, and beaches nearby are highly correlated with the second factor, and entertainment with the third factor. Moreover, it is important to notice that a quite close relationship can be observed between entertainment and meals and the third factor.

In addition, the researchers decided to extract two factors in order to observe the variability among observed variables and fewer number

Table 8. Rotated Component Matrix – two components

	Components	
	1	2
Standard of rooms	0.700	0.276
Meals	0.736	0.105
Customer service	0.799	0.118
Entertainment	0.695	-0.016
Location of the hotel	0.179	0.795
Beaches nearby	0.015	0.821
Attractions nearby	0.235	0.768
Price/quality relationship	0.734	0.412

of factors. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 8. The tourism product attributes which are highly correlated with the first factor include: standard of rooms, meals, customer service, entertainment, and price/quality relationship, whereas location of the hotel, beaches nearby, and attractions nearby are highly correlated with the second factor. The factor loading for a price/quality relationship and the second factor exceeds 0.4, so this correlation cannot be qualified as high, however, it's a noticeable relationship. Thus, all analyzed attributes, which are making up the holiday experience, are markedly correlated with the tourists' perception of the price/quality relationship.

The qualitative analysis of tourists' perceptions of tourism product quality

The qualitative analysis was based on tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in Bulgarian hotels with respect to the distinguished attributes valuable for tourists. 883 tourists out of 1212 made comments about their holiday experience. All those comments have been carefully examined in order to identify good experiences as well as the areas of discontent. The most frequently repeated positive and negative tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience are presented in Table 9.

The standard of rooms was considered with regard to the room location, the view as well as the quality, size, and type of furnishings and amenities offered. Generally, tourists were satisfied with the room standard and appreciated roominess, nice view, and room equipment; however, some inconveniences were emphasized. The most typical complaints

were connected with the used furniture, and insufficient cleanliness of the room equipment, such as mold in the bathroom, stained carpets and mattresses, lack of free Wi-Fi in the rooms and lack of Polish channels on the TV. Those who stressed the lack of Polish channels on the TV, emphasized also that the only available channels were Bulgarian, English and German.

The location of the hotel, which refers to the environment of the hotel and surrounding garden, was considered along with the attractions situated near the hotel and the distance from the beaches. Comments regarding the appearance of the garden and the nearby beaches were also taken into account. The majority of the hotels are nicely situated according to the opinions of the tourists. The visitors appreciate the most: the vicinity of the beaches, easy access to restaurants, cafes, and a gift market. In a number of cases the tourists were disappointed with the location of the hotel stressing too far distance from the beach and a noisy area. Some critical comments were in connection with the surrounding garden pertaining to the cleanliness and equipment. Hotel guests noticed that in some hotels there was an insufficient number of umbrellas and deck chairs, some of which were broken and not adequately cleaned. Sometimes, there were empty glasses, plates, and other items near the swimming pool. A number of visitors complained about cold water in the swimming pool. Some tourists were disappointed with the hygiene of the beaches due to the scattered cigarettes and trash as well as occasional seaweeds, however, many stresses the beauty of the Bulgarian seaside.

Since entertainment is a very important aspect of the holiday experience, one of the responsibilities of hotel owners and managers is to provide an animation program as well as the evening program to entertain the guests. In the majority of cases, those hotels which organized different forms of entertainment, got positive comments. Tourists stressed the animators' involvement, care, their friendly attitude towards tourists, their diversified activities, and their ability to create a great atmosphere. Sometimes, they even mentioned the animators' names to express their gratitude for a wonderful time. In some hotels, the only critical opinions were related to the lack of an animation program in Polish. The hotels which did not organize any form of entertainment got poor rates in this respect. Lack of entertainment and lack of an animation program in Polish were the most frequently repeated negative comments regarding this attribute.

Customer service is a significant component of the overall service experience. Therefore, hotel managers need to carefully select, train, manage, and evaluate all hotel staff, including the front desk staff, the waiters, the animators, and the housekeepers. Professionalism, friendly attitude, communication skills, and good command of foreign languages are very important for a positive evaluation of customer service. Considering all the tourists' opinions regarding service personnel, positive comments prevailed; however, there were also areas of discontent. Some guests expressed problems related to communication in English, negative attitude towards Polish tourists, and lack of personnel reaction to noisy people at night. Other complaints were concerned with the inaccurate room cleaning and too infrequent changes of towels and bedding.

The quality and diversity of meals are also very important for tourists, especially when they buy

Table 9. Most repeated tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience

Positive comments	% of indications	Negative comments	% of indications
Hotel well maintained, clean, nice, super, comfortable, beautiful, recommendable	33.5	Repetitive men	12.7
Very tasty meals, delicious, good food, lots of food, delicious cuisine, diversified menu	23.7	Not sufficient cleaning: rooms, hotel, restaurant, garden, swimming pool area	9.1
Hotel personnel: friendly, nice, helpful, kind, polite, smiling, positive attitude	22.2	Bad location, far from the beach, noisy	6.1
Great location, good location, nice, close to the beach, close to attractions	22.2	Impolite hotel personnel, unkind, distant, unfriendly towards Polish tourists	5.3
Clean rooms, everyday cleaning, towels and bedclothes changed everyday	12.6	Lack of animations in Polish	4.2
Very nice and spacy rooms, well-equipped, clean, comfortable	12.4	Communications problems with hotel personnel, limited English	4.2
Great animations, memorable experience, great animators, energetic, creative	11.7	Trash on the beach, cigarettes, seaweeds, unclean beach and surrounding area	4.2
Good price/quality relationship, hotel above expectations	6.0	Cold water in the swimming pool	3.7
Beautiful beaches, nice, wide, wonderful, warm sea	4.8	Hotel needs repairs, old equipment, old amenities	3.5
Many attractions: pubs, clubs, discos, cafes, restaurants, gift markets, aquapark	3.0	Not tasty food, bad food	3.0
		Free WI-FI available only in the lobby, limited access to WI-FI	2.4
		Lack of hotel entertainment	2.3
		Not enough umbrellas and deck chairs at the swimming pool	2.3
		Long line to get food in the restaurant, lack of free tables during meal time	1.5
		Lack of Polish channels on TV	0.8

package holidays with the all-inclusive option. In general, Polish visitors appreciate Bulgarian cuisine and praise dishes served in hotels. Very many of the comments included some remarks about the meals as well as the snacks and beverages offered in the buffet. In the majority of cases, the tourists stressed the good quality and taste of served food, however, many visitors complained about a repetitive menu and a limited selection of dishes served at breakfast. Some were dissatisfied with too long lines to get food and lack of free tables during the meal time.

The analysis of all tourists' comments enables the identification of the quality gaps with respect to the most important tourism product attributes (Table 10). As far as the location of

the hotel is concerned there were very many positive comments, however, some guests complained about a limited number of attractions situated nearby and too far distance from the beach. Another quality gap refers to the cleanliness of the surrounding garden and the quality of the garden equipment. Hotel guests noticed such deficiencies as: the limited number of umbrellas and deck chairs, inappropriate maintenance of garden equipment, and inadequate cleaning of the garden and swimming pool area. For some visitors the area surrounding the hotel and the beaches located nearby seemed to be unclean and not well maintained.

According to the tourists' opinions, the amenities provided in the hotels generally meet

Table 10. Quality gap analysis with regard to main tourism product attributes valuable for tourists

Tourism product attribute	Perception	Expectation
Standard of rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of free WI-FI in the rooms • lack of Polish channels on TV, just Bulgarian, English, and German • old equipment, such as furniture, old carpets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free WI-FI available in the rooms • selected Polish channels available on TV • modern and new equipment in the rooms
Location of the hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of the fence surrounding the hotel • not enough umbrellas and deck chairs at the swimming pool • deck chairs and umbrellas broken • swimming pool area and the garden inadequately cleaned • cold water in the swimming pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hotel area and the garden well protected • sufficient number of deck chairs and umbrellas • deck chairs and umbrellas well maintained • swimming pool area and the garden cleaned and maintained daily • warmed up water in the swimming pool
Customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient cleaning of the rooms, towels and bedding changed only twice a week • lack of the personnel's reaction to noisy people at night • personnel do not speak English – problems with communicating • personnel not friendly towards Polish tourists • lack of information in Polish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rooms cleaned thoroughly everyday • towels and bedding changed everyday • polite and emphatic personnel able to resolve problems • personnel able to communicate in English • friendly and culturally sensitive personnel • information in Polish available
Entertainment in hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of an animation program • lack of an animation program in Polish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an animation program organized by hotel • an animation program adjusted to Polish visitors
Meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repetitive menu • long lines to get food • lack of free tables during meal time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diversified menu • faster customer service • sufficient number of tables
Beaches nearby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trash on the beach, cigarettes, seaweeds • unclean way to the beach and area surrounding the hotel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well maintained beaches • well maintained area surrounding the hotel and the way to the beach
Attractions nearby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient number of attractions situated in the vicinity of hotels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more appealing attractions situated in the vicinity of the hotels

their needs; however, lack of free WI-FI in the rooms and lack of Polish channels on the TV were perceived as a disadvantage. Furnishings sometimes made an impression of being old, used and neglected. Another quality gap was related to the inadequate cleaning of rooms and too infrequent changes of bedding and towels. Some visitors also had difficulty communicating with the service personnel and noticed unfriendly attitude towards Polish tourists. In some cases, tourists were disappointed with the lack of personnel's reaction to noisy people at night.

Numerous hotels did not organize entertainment for guests, which was perceived as an disadvantage. Lack of an animation program in Polish and lack of information in Polish were also considered shortcomings. As far as meals served in the hotel restaurants were concerned, the only noticeable quality gap was related to the repetitive menu and limited selection of dishes served at breakfast, however, such comments were frequently articulated by tourists. In some cases hotel guests criticized the limited restaurant capacity during the meal time due to long lines to get food and difficulties with finding free tables.

Conclusions

Bulgaria is an attractive destination for Polish tourists. Beautiful weather, sandy beaches, delicious cuisine, homely atmosphere and many tourist attractions offered at reasonable prices attract more and more visitors from Poland. Due to huge investment in tourism, Bulgaria presently offers modern infrastructure and equipment as well as good services for tourists, which further contribute to the increasing interest in visiting this country. Polish tourists usually spend their holidays in one of summer resorts located either in Sunny Beach or Golden Sands area, choosing in the majority of cases three- and four-star hotels.

The analysis of Polish tourists' perceptions of their holiday experience in Bulgarian hotels enables us to draw conclusions with regard to the most valuable tourism product attributes and identify the quality gaps and areas of discontent. The highest-ranked qualities of the surveyed hotels distinguished on the basis of tourists' assessments include respectively: the

standard of rooms, the location of the hotel, the customer service, price/quality relationship, and the beaches located nearby. Moreover, tourists consider entertainment offered in the hotels as well as the served meals as important benefits enhancing their holiday experience in Bulgaria. The tourist attractions located in the vicinity of the hotel was the lowest-rank attribute. The large number of indications of price/quality relationship is worth noting, since it shows the attractiveness of the value proposition offered by Bulgarian hotels.

The highest-rank three-star hotel attributes included: beaches located nearby, the standard of rooms, and the price/quality relationship, whereas the highest-rank four-star hotels attributes included: location of the hotel, customer service, and the standard of rooms. The meals and entertainment were among the lowest-rank attributes in three-star hotels while the attractions situated nearby and the beaches situated in the vicinity of the hotel received lowest rates in four-star hotels. It is important to notice that 5 out of 14 surveyed hotels did not offer any entertainment activities for tourists. Thus, they were not taken into consideration while assessing tourists' opinions with regard to this attribute.

According to the results of the t-test there is a statistically significant difference in the mean assessments between three- and four-star hotels with regard to meals, entertainment activities, location of the hotel, beaches and attractions situated nearby. However, there is no statistically significant difference between two groups of hotels in terms of the mean tourists' assessments of the standard of room, customer service and price/quality relationship. Given the observed differences, it can be concluded that the quality of served meals as well as the attractiveness of animation programs organized in three-star hotels deserve more managers' attention, whereas four-star hotels should be surrounded by more appealing tourist attractions and well maintained beaches. Moreover, they should offer high quality and diversified menu.

The analysis of the correlations among the observed variables enabled the identification of the most correlated hotel attributes. The first

group of highly correlated attributes includes: the standard of rooms, meals, customer service, entertainment, and the price/quality relationship. All of those attributes are within the responsibilities of hotel managers. The second group of highly correlated hotel attributes comprises of: the location of the hotel, beaches nearby, and attractions nearby. The correlation between those attributes and a price/quality relationship is not high, however, it is noticeable, thus it should be taken into consideration. Concluding, all the distinguished attributes making up the holiday experience are markedly correlated with the tourists' perception of the price/quality relationship.

The quality gaps identified on the basis of the analysis of all the tourists' comments refer to the valuable tourism product attributes. Frequently repeated remarks were connected with insufficient cleaning, including hotel rooms as well as the garden and the swimming pool area. Some remarks were made concerning inadequate customer service in terms of difficulties with communicating, unfriendly attitude towards Polish tourists and indifference towards spontaneously arising problems. Lack of hotel entertainment was stressed as a disadvantage in many comments, as well as limited access to free WI-FI, lack of Polish channels on the TV and animations in Polish. Some tourists perceived room furnishing as used and neglected. The only noticeable remark with regard to meals served in hotels was related to the repetitive menu, however, the critical comments on meals were repeatedly articulated by tourists.

The results of the analysis allow to formulate recommendations for hotel owners, managers, as well as local authorities. As insufficient cleaning was one of the most stressed remarks, more rigorous hotel cleaning procedures should be introduced along with hotel maintenance and repair management. The implementation of quality management systems would improve the quality of all services delivered in hotels. Service personnel need to have good communications skills as well as a good command of English. Customer service training should include instructions for dealing with foreign visitors especially with regard to cultural differences. Since the lack of

entertainment was perceived as a disadvantage, organization of animation and evening programs would significantly enhance customer experience as well as serving more diversified meals. Beautiful beaches and the seaside are considered Bulgarian precious resources, therefore, they should be cleaned and maintained daily. Moreover, it is necessary to develop programs aimed at protection of the environment.

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