

The impact of service quality in the attractiveness of a rural tourist destination: case of two rural municipalities in Morocco

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Abstract: Tourism is a source of income par excellence that offers growth opportunities to geographical areas with high tourism potential. The aim of this article was to determine the relationship between the quality of service in tourist accommodation, catering and transport enterprises with customer satisfaction in two rural communes in southern Morocco. Due to the nature of the variables, it is a subjective, non-experimental, cross-sectional study, at a correlational level and due to the way of processing the information, it is quantitative. The instrument used has a coherence and Cronbach's alpha coherence indicator of 0.920 for the part of the questionnaire corresponding to dwellings; 0.902 in restaurants and 0.914 for means of transport. To determine the quality of service, the dimensions of the ServQual model were used and to determine the level of satisfaction, the unidimensional approach was used. The results show that the quality of accommodation services is significantly related (Sig. <0.05) to tourist satisfaction. It is concluded that the services provided by the tourist accommodation are of high quality, while the restaurants present favorable and unfavorable aspects, and that the means of transport provide a deficient service.

Keywords: Quality of service; tourist satisfaction; accommodation; Catering; means of transportation.

Introduction

Over the past decades, Morocco has developed tourism in an accelerated way; increasing tourist visits to places whose attractions have impressed the world, in this case the imperial city of Marrakech. Similarly, the development of the tourist industry is linked to the product and the quality of the tourist service. In this regard, and, according to a study conducted by Nugra, et al. (2021), tourism was considered a key activity for the development of the Tensift region, generating a symbiosis between the productive and service sectors.

For his part, Barry (2008) argues that the competitiveness of tourism companies, on the one hand, encourages destinations to make strategic decisions that allow them to maintain themselves over time and develop in a commercial space where paradigms have evolved, and more particularly with regard to the quality of services. On the other hand, it is essential that competitiveness be framed in the search for sustainability under the three essential aspects; economy, socio-culturality and environment.

Vanhamme (2002), affirms that a service is a compound of actions that try to satisfy the desires of a client, becoming, above all, a procedure and a spontaneous and indirect activity that does not register a physical result, but rather is an agreement between the supplier and the customer. According to Ngobo P.V. (2000), "consists of a set of experiences, which are the result of the contact that exists between the client and the organization, for which one seeks the right way to generate an adequate relationship" (p.85), which leads to stability and success. Similarly, the service is understood as a set of benefits of a quantitative or qualitative nature whose attention is focused on the consumer (Chiriboga, et al., 2018).

Products have various qualities that distinguish them from services, depending on the structure of their production, consumption and valuation. Through this characterization, it is more complex to evaluate services, as well as to know what customers really want (Cronin J. J. Jr. and Taylor, S. A. (1992)).

It should be noted that the increase in national and international tourist demand and the great interest of tourists in discovering the cultural habits and beliefs of a city or a geographical region, has led to the organization of micro-enterprises in the rural areas such as the commune of Ourika and Tafraoute. For this, they must be sufficiently prepared to offer a quality tourist service.

In view of the above, the general objective of this research was to determine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in tourism businesses in the two municipalities. Similarly, find the existing correlation between the tangible elements, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. In such a

way that, from the level of praxis, research aims to systematize data that is complemented by other studies and serves as a basis for making better quality investment decisions. It should be noted that the offer of quality services in the tourism sector is of the utmost importance, since it allows the development of other alternative activities to those that already exist; considering that tourism is a source of employment, a decrease in migration from the countryside to the capital and in foreign exchange earnings for the country.

1. Theoretical foundations

Quality of service

Ishikawa (1988), explains that quality is a term used very consecutively at that time and conceptualizes it as the growth, outline, preparation and sustainability of a profitability of economic condition, usefulness and user satisfaction. Deming (1989) argues that it is the predictable level of consistency and reliability at a reduced value, adapting to requirements and adds that quality is a set of issues that leads to continuous improvement. Parasuraman A., Zeithaml V.A. and Berry L.B. (1988) emphasize that quality is about providing users and colleagues in the work domain with cost-effectiveness and error-free support through immediate availability.

Tourism businesses around the world assume that the customer is at the center of the success of any business, hence their strategies aim to channel the market and mark the distinction of competitiveness through quality (Barry C. (2008)).

On the other hand, Gale (1994) asserts that customer-oriented quality is a construct that responds to the transformational demands of users, and as such it is not absolutely defined; There will always be different levels of quality depending on customer needs. This conceptualization of the term is linked to intangible attributes and its objectification is certainly difficult, without a doubt, it is an essential step towards the excellence of a product or service. Similarly, Parasuraman A., Zeithaml V.A. and Berry L.B. (1988), argue that quality is not exclusive to luxury, but rather focuses on meeting customer expectations within the service offered.

Similarly, Duque and Chaparro (2012) argue that service is conceptualized as any essential element to generate user satisfaction. Thus, in order to offer a quality service, it is necessary to know the point of view of the customers, in order to diversify the products offered and establish improvements.

Client satisfaction

For Bouchet and Lebrun (2004), satisfaction is the first result sought in a transaction; if not found, the customer searches for another offer. To achieve customer satisfaction, it is necessary to focus on quality. Commitment to quality is part of a company's positioning strategy and translates into demand for its product (Bouchet P. and Lebrun A.M. (2004)).

Cronin J. J. Jr. and Taylor, S. A. (1992) maintain that at present, obtaining the full satisfaction of users becomes an a priori clause to position oneself in their thinking. For this reason, the goal of keeping the customer happy has grown beyond the horizons of marketing to become one of the essential goals of all functional areas (people talent, supply, finance, investment and production).

Llosa S. (1997), conceptualize user satisfaction as the evaluation made of the service offered on what they expect to receive, that is to say whether the expectations are met or exceeded. On the other hand, Kotler and Armstrong (2013) define it as the emotional level of a human being, which results from the comparison of what is perceived from a service with the generation of expectations.

For Arenal (2016), the degree of satisfaction of a user is a dimension that allows access to the level of loyalty towards a company or a brand, for example: A user who is not satisfied will take the measures to stop to consume the product, and the effect of which will be to change distributors immediately. On the other hand, a well-groomed user will somehow maintain business ties with the company; but only until you find a better deal that exceeds your expectations (conditional relationship).

In the complexity of service conceptualization, a variety of commonalities are evident. Over time, intangible elements predominate in the field of tourism; tourism-oriented organizations provide their users with an intangible service that is part of their primary performance. This immateriality gives a high risk index for customers and makes it impossible for the company to establish specific elements that contribute to the standardization of its quality (Gotlieb J.B., Grewal D. and Brown S.W. 1994). This is how, despite the shortcomings presented in tourism businesses, strategies must be implemented to diversify the service and delimit the difference and innovation, in order to provide the customer with the expected attention that satisfies all their needs (physical and emotional).

2. Tourist sites, subject of study

The Municipality of Ourika

Located about sixty kilometers south of Marrakech, the valley of Ourika, by the splendor of its landscapes and its sites, is a space of change of scenery and vacation for visitors in search of freshness and tranquility.

The craze for this natural jewel in the province of Al Haouz, does not date from today but comes from the distant habits of the Marrakchis and certain visitors to the other city, among nature lovers and all that which is genuine. Intense efforts are being made within the framework of the existing synergy between the local authorities and a very active civil society to make this valley a model of sustainable development.

The will to make Ourika one of the most attractive natural tourist sites in the region, was translated very early on by the launch, for years already, of promising projects and salutary actions, in particular operations of reforestation, the opening up of several douars through the construction of rural roads, the electrification and supply of drinking water to remote areas, liquid and solid sanitation and the establishment of a warning system in the Ourika watershed thanks to cooperation with Japan

In terms of tourism, the valley is a veritable reservoir of natural sites, in particular with the rock engravings of Oukaïmeden, the valley of StiFadma, and the botanical gardens of Ourika, especially since the region conceals an important heritage. culture capable of contributing to the diversity of tourist products. (hiking, tourist hunting, mountain climbing etc.)

For the enhancement of this heritage, the local authorities in partnership with the supervisory department and local associations have established partnerships, including two conventions, the first aims to create the Pays d'Accueil Touristique (PAT) of the Western High Atlas then that the second was designed for the promotion of niche tourism (paragliding).

Municipality of Tafraoute

The municipality of Tafraoute in particular, propels itself according to the statistics relating to visa applications, to the rank of the most popular. It is located in the Sous-Massa-Drâa Region, and specifically in the province of Tiznit, 180 km from the city of Agadir.

It presents itself as a tourist site located in the center of a valley, that of the Almmenes, straddling an arena of pink granite rocks, whose colors tame those who pass through this part of the Anti Atlas. Its population, which amounts to approximately 4924 inhabitants, is distinguished by its legendary hospitality.

All the tourists who come to the city of Tafraoute, qualified as a mystery city, are unanimous as to the extent of its richness in natural areas of discovery. Its landscapes are simply grandiose and absolutely fabulous.

The many mountains made of pink granite surround the city, giving it a simply stunning visual aspect, and which we can afford to consider without risk of being mistaken, as unparalleled on the planet.

Mother nature participates in this extraordinary concert, serving the senses, a symphony of valleys, those of the anti Atlas in general, and more specifically the Almmenes valley which is located south of DjebelElkest. It is here that lovers of hiking come to beach themselves to indulge in the passion of life.

A few places away, an oasis arises in the locality of Ait Mansour, which meanders the necklines shaped by the waters of the wadi, which itself draws its aquatic content at the foot of the mountains and extends to Afllalghir, serving tourists with conditions for an exceptional walk.

The city of Tafraoute has a large network of hotels and restaurants whose low prices highlight the concern for respecting the quality-price ratio, to allow all passing tourists to experience moments of pure happiness.

3. Methodology

According to Yin, RK (eds) 1989), in research from the point of view of approach or paradigm, the quantitative method was applied because it used instruments capable of measuring and statistical methods to test hypotheses. Likewise, it is of the descriptive-correlational type, since it describes, analyzes and interprets each of the variables, in order to then link them. Likewise, it is cross-sectional, as the data collection of the study variables was carried out over a certain period of time Anderson E.W. and Sullivan M.W. (1993)

The population analyzed is made up of tourists who visit the two municipalities. Being a population with recurrent and/or non-recurrent customers (tourists), to determine the number of tourists included, simple random sampling was applied, with the sample size formula for infinite populations, obtaining a total of 196 tourists. A 66-item questionnaire was used, adapted to each item investigated: accommodation, catering and means of transport; 05 satisfaction questions have been added, one for each service dimension. The analysis of the data collected was carried out using the statistical program SPSS Version 20 (Yin, RK (eds) 1994).

4. Quality of service and customer satisfaction in tourist businesses at the two sites of Ourika and Tafraoute.

According to the obvious results from Table 1, customer satisfaction is significantly related to the quality of accommodation services ($r=0.349$, $Sig.=0.000$) and transportation means ($r=0.269$, $Sig.=0.269$), although that in the latter case the correlation is too weak ($r<0.3$), which has no practical implication. The results also indicate that customer satisfaction with the restaurant offer does not show a significant relationship with the quality of restaurant services ($r=0.114$, $sig.=0.110$).

Table 1 Correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction

Dimensions	Spearman	Tourist satisfaction		
		accommodation	Catering	transport
Service quality	R	0.349(**)	.114	269(**)
	Sig	0.000	.110	.000
	N	196	196	196

Regarding the perception of tourists, at the level of the dimensions of the quality of service offered by accommodation in general, a quality service was highlighted in all its aspects at an average close to 4 points. Regarding catering services, the favorable aspects are the material elements of the service, the level of responsiveness and assurance; while the unfavorable aspects relate to service reliability and empathy (see Table 2).

Perception of tourists, by the dimensions of the quality of service of tourism companies

Dimensions	Accommodation		Catering		Means of transport	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
tangibility	3.7	0.63	3.5	0.66	3.2	0.67
reliability	3.6	0.64	3.4	0.63	3.2	0.67
reactivity	3.6	0.64	3.6	0.66	3	0.68
assurance	3.7	0.65	3.6	0.66	3.3	0.73
empathy	3.7	0.64	3.4	0.78	3.2	0.74

Source: Own production, 2021.

In the case of transport companies, none of the dimensions obtains a favorable evaluation; that is to say, tourists consider that these companies do not have tangible elements of quality, their service is not reliable, there is no responsiveness, no security or empathy from their staff. In summary, accommodation and food services generally receive a favorable rating, while transportation services leave much to be desired.

In the relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction in tourism enterprises, it has been shown that there is a significant correlation ($Sig. <0.05$) between the reliability of accommodation services, means of transport and satisfaction with them; however, there is no evidence of a significant correlation ($Sig.>0.05$) between the reliability of transport services and satisfaction with them. However, the correlations considered significant are too weak ($r<0.3$) to be of practical importance.

Likewise, in the relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction in tourism businesses, it was noted that the responsiveness of accommodation services is significantly related ($Sig.<0.05$) to customer satisfaction; this aspect of the service is also significantly linked ($Sig.<0.05$) to satisfaction with the means of transport, although this is very low ($r<0.3$) and without practical implications. There is no evidence of a relationship between responsiveness and satisfaction with catering services ($Sig. >0.05$).

In the case of the relationship between security and customer satisfaction in tourism enterprises, a significant correlation was found ($Sig. <0.05$) between the security of accommodation services and the means of transport; however, said correlations are too weak and have no practical implications. The study also indicates that there is no significant correlation ($Sig. >0.05$) between security and catering services.

In this sense, according to the results of the research, the quality of the hosting service is significantly and directly linked to customer satisfaction; In the case of catering and transport services, the data does not provide enough evidence to admit that the quality of these services is linked to customer satisfaction. These results clearly show that in two of the services studied: Restaurants and means of transport, the quality of service does not fulfill its fundamental objective which, according to the theory, is to provide customer satisfaction.

In this regard, Filser M. (2002); found empirical evidence of the relationship between service quality and user satisfaction. These differences can be explained by contingency factors, such as industry, since the study by Bodet G. (2009) was carried out in a company that distributes equipment, plumbing and pipes; that by Debenedetti S. (2003), was developed in a transport company; Brian W. (1994), carried it out in a hospital environment; and Alén and Fraiz (2006), carried it out in thermal establishments.

Another contingency factor may be the cultural aspect, since the first study was carried out by Debenedetti S. (2003); Although the municipalities have an identical culture, it is also necessary to recognize the differences between them. Similarly, another contingency factor may be the size of the organization, since samples vary; highlighting in the first study by Bodet G. (2009), a sample size of 99 customers, Debenedetti S. (2003) of 196, OMT (2002) 159, and the last of Alén and Fraiz (2006), was 270 customers.

Concerning the quality of the service, we can say that it is currently an essential strategic tool in the companies, since it makes it possible to evaluate the degree of conformity of the service; also allowing to determine if the offer made by an organization meets the expectations of users or consumers. It is a multidimensional notion that has aroused the interest of many scientists, who have proposed various models, of which the model of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) has been considered, which proposes that the quality of a service can be calculated using five scales (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, security and empathy).

In the study, it was found that only accommodation and food services provide quality service, unlike transportation services, which have regular to deficient service. This result partially agrees with those found by Poubanne Y, Clerfeuille F. and Chandon J.L. (2003), concerning the first two services; the author found that the organization provides a quality service deemed good.

Regarding transport services, the results coincide with those found by Debenedetti S. (2003), who showed that the quality of services provided by interprovincial bus transport is deficient, due to the lack of order in the waiting turns, the non-existence of a ticket office, customer insecurity, bus infrastructure in a septic state, among others.

Regarding the customer satisfaction variable, we can consider that it is an emotional response to the service received, which can be satisfactory or unsatisfactory; To the extent that the service meets the customer's expectations, the customer will be satisfied, and it can be concluded that the service is of good quality. In the study, it is still housing services, the only ones that generate customer satisfaction; the other two services, catering and transport, offer unsatisfactory services. These results partly coincide with those found by Cronin J. J. and Taylor, S. A. (1992), who identified that the companies studied offer satisfactory services.

Conclusion

Tourists who visit the two municipalities consider that the services provided by tourist accommodation are of high quality, with an approximate score of 4 points in the five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy; Regarding restaurants, tourists consider that the services they provide have favorable and unfavorable aspects with weightings of 3 and 4 points; and regarding the means of transport, they consider that these companies do not provide a quality service, most of the weights are evaluated with an average of 2 and 3 points, respectively.

Regarding the tangibility dimension, tourists who visit the municipality of Ourika perceive accommodation and restaurants with favorable aspects, in terms of means of transport, there is an unfavorable perception because they lack hygiene, the seats are not very comfortable.

As for the reliability dimension, it obtains a favorable perception by tourists only in accommodation, with an approximate average of 4 points, but not in restaurants and means of transport. While on the responsiveness dimension, in accommodations the results show averages close to 4 points, reflecting that accommodation staff communicate to customers exactly when services are performed and provide them promptly.

With regard to the dimensions of insurance and empathy, in accommodation and restaurants, a favorable evaluation is evident with regard to insurance, but the same is not true for means of transport, such as it is observed in the averages close to 3 points. In the case of empathy, a favorable assessment is obtained in accommodation and restaurants with an average close to 4 points, however, regarding means of transport according to tourists, employees are not willing or concerned to listen to suggestions and complaints of the passenger, nor for their interests. Consequently, the results of this study will make it possible to take the necessary measures to improve the unfavorable aspects, in particular those related to the means of transport.

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