CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY OF SPA CENTERS IN GREECE

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of service quality on customers' satisfaction in SPA centers in Greece. 207 customers attending ten Spa centers in Greece volunteered to participate in this study. Measurements included the use of the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) to measure perceptions of service quality. Factor Analysis was used to identify the predictive variables of customers' satisfaction. Results indicated from the five dimensions and twenty two items of SERVQUAL model, willingness to help the customer (responsiveness), management support in problem solving situations (assurance), food and beverages (tangibles), feel secure from danger (assurance), employees' commitment to the comfort of their customers (empathy) and honest and empathic treatment of customers (empathy)were the most predictive variables of Spa centers customers' satisfaction. In conclusion, the information provided by this research can be used when designing marketing strategies to improve customers' satisfaction in Spa market and industry in Greece.

Key words: *beauty industry, attractiveness, responsiveness, assurance, empathy.*

Introduction

Physical beauty is an advantage at a social level and has many consequences (Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011). Physical attractiveness and beauty are associated with a number of positive outcomes in the economic and working environment such as: employment benefits, hiring, wages, promotion but also social advantages such as work satisfaction, positive perceptions of others and self-esteem (Kwan & Trautner, 2009). Beauty is associated with economic mobility especially for women (Dipboye, Fromkin, & Wiback, 1975; Jha, 2016). Attractive people have more advantages in social and economic level (Gupta, Etcoff, & Jaeger, 2016). According to Sala, Terraneo, Lucchini & Knies (2013), facial attractiveness does matter both for men and women and secondly its impact is constant over the employment history. Furthermore, attractiveness impacts in psychological well-being, happiness or depression and social connectedness (Plaut, Adams, & Anderson, 2009; Umberson & Hughes, 1987). Wellness and spa industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world (Okech, 2014; Tabacchi, 2010), while Spa tourism is very popular worldwide (Kamata & Misui, 2015). One of the main parts of beauty and spa industry and one of the most important areas of beauty sector are Spa centers. According to International Spa Association and its 2016 U.S. Spa Industry Study (ISPA, 2016), total Spa visits were 2.1% higher in 2015 than 2014, while an average visits per Spa rose 2.9% from 2014 to 2015. Moreover, according to the above survey, Spa industry reached 16.3 billion dollar record with a 5.0 percent increase from 2014 to 2015. Plus, worldwide like Asia and more specific in Malaysia the number of Spas has grown more than 200% since 2002 (Al-alak, 2012). European Spa market has a similar significant increase and

has the largest number of Spas worldwide ('Spa Global Market Analysis', 2016). For example, UK Spa market is estimated to be worthy nearly 2 billion pounds including retail and treatments, while UK customers make an estimated 6 million visits per annum to Spas throughout the United Kingdom (UK Spa Industry Report, 2014). According to Global Wellness Institute (2014), Europe is the world's largest spa market due to its relatively higher average revenues per Spa, followed by Asia and North America. Furthermore, in Europe thermal Spa tourism has been developed in conjunction with the overall social development (Radnic, Gracan, & Fister, 2009). In Europe, Greece as a country and its history has a great tradition in the early forms of wellness tourism such as spa, due to numerous historical spa towns and thermes that exist (Vasileiou & Tsartas, 2009). According to Greek Tourism Minister (June, 2016) a new department of thematic forms of tourism (promoting pilgrimage tourism, spa tourism and medical tourism) is being created in Greece. Spa centers are basically service organizations. The concept of quality plays a critical role in the success of service organizations. Definition and meaning of quality is complicated, due to different meanings to goods and services by individuals (Hoyer & Hoyer, 2001). Some definitions of quality in services have to do with accessibility. However, the most widely used and accepted definition of service quality is that provided by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988). According to them, service quality theory includes five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Customer's satisfaction is one of the most important outcomes of marketing activity. High quality of service can result in high customer's satisfaction and increases customer's loyalty

(Kumar, Kee, & Manshor, 2009). Therefore, customer's satisfaction is the outcome of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Based on this element, many organizations are paying increasing attention to improve service quality (Gupta, McDaniel, &Herath, 2005). Spa market's service must adapt to the criteria, demands, needs, interests and customer's expectations in order to assure their loyalty and create a feeling of satisfaction. According to Zeithaml & Bitner (2003), satisfaction is the customer's evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether the product or service meet customer's needs and expectations. A customer will be satisfied if the product or service will meet his or her expectations. Spa centers' service quality can enhance customers' positive emotions and behavioral intentions (Gonzalez & Brea, 2008; Lo, Wu, & Tsai, 2015). As Alexandris, Dimitriadis & Markata (2002) mentioned, the sustainability of clients considered very important issue for service managers. Spa centers' management due to this impact focus on providing higher service quality among customers (Kimes & Singh, 2009). To know and achieve customer's demands, spa center's management should know which the service expectations of its customers are. According to Al-alak (2012), Spa centers' factors such as attractiveness, cleanliness and reliability influence customer's satisfaction.

Furthermore according to the same author, customer's loyalty intention has been shown to be affected by service setting. In the sector of Spa market, few studies until now have focused in Spa customers' expectations and perceptions about Spa center's service quality (Alen, Fraiz, &Rufin, 2006; Snoj&Mumel, 2002). A study in Sweden showed that customers' perceptions of service quality in Spa could be expressed in the following factors: enjoyment, treatment, practicality, fitness and cost (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). Moreover, a study in beauty parlors in India (Khan & Tabassum, 2012) has showed that factors such as the environment (tangibility) was the most important factor for customer's satisfaction. Responsiveness was found to be the most important determining factor in explaining spa customers' positive emotions in China, followed by reliability, empathy and tangibility (Lo, Wu, & Tsai, 2015).

Similar results were found in a survey in Hong Kong, which showed that the environmental factor influenced hotel spa- goers' overall satisfaction and intention to revisit (Tsai, Suh, & Fong, 2012). Quality dimensions such as empathy and reliability were the most important factors for health Spa tourists in Slovenia (Snoj & Mumel, 2002), while the physical environment had little contribution on their perception. Few Spa centers' studies in Greece have focused in the relationship between customers' satisfaction and Spa centers' service quality. A survey in Greece by Trihas & Konstantarou (2016), showed that factors such as cleanliness-maintenance and spa's service quality influence customers' decision to choose a Spa.

Therefore the purpose of the present study is to investigate the impact of service quality dimensions on customers' satisfaction from Spa centers in Greece.

Methods

Participants
A total of 207 customers, which attended ten (10) Spa centers from the city of Thessaloniki, in Northern Greece, participated in the present study. Demographic characteristics of customers are presented in Table 1. Out of the total 207 customers, 66 of them (31.8%) were males and 141 (68.1%) were females. Mean age of the customers was 31.78 (SD = 7.6 years) for males and 30.02 (SD = 7.6 years) for females.

Procedure
Data were collected from two hundred and seven customers (n=207), which attended ten (10) Spa centers in Thessaloniki city (Northern Greece), during October and November 2016. Participants were selected with the method of simple random sampling. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed and 207 (69%) were returned usable for the analysis and the purpose of the present study. Questionnaire was developed based on the stated hypothesis and also on the SERVQUAL model. Three researchers conducted the survey. All questionnaires were collected through personal interview in which three trained interviewers helped each of the customers answering a written questionnaire. The average time spent for filling out the questionnaire was 15 min.

Data instruments
The main instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Customers completed a questionnaire packet containing two sections: the first section included a demographic form and the second section consisted of five dimensions with 22 questions designed to measure perception of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Service quality was measured by using the variables in SERVQUAL model. Five variables from this model were measured as follows: Tangibles with 4 items (appearance of physical facilities and equipment, location of Spa center, food and beverages, price ranges and terms of payment), Reliability with 5 items (ability to perform the promised service, employees' professionalism, employees' knowledge of Spa's service, availability-clarity and fairness of information, offering services without mistakes), Responsiveness with 4 items (willingness to help the customer, provide promptness service implementation, employees' overload, timeliness of Spa center's staff), Assurance with 5 items (feel secure from danger-risk or doubt, ability of employees to convey trust and confidence, Spa center's image, management support in problem solving situations, friendliness of the employees) and Empathy with 4 items (provision of caring, individualized attention to customer, employees' commitment to the comfort of their customers, honest and empathic treatment

of customers). Those five variables were covered with 22 questions. The twenty-two items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach Alpha was calculated at 0.93.

Statistical analysis
For the purposes of the present study, the statistic package program IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 version was used. Descriptive statistics were used in order to summarize the mean and standard deviation of variables. Customer's satisfaction was the dependent variable, while five dimensions of SERVQUAL model were used as independent variables. Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis) has been used by taking out 22 variables. All factors with eigenvalue greater than 1 and with factor loadings more than 0.3 were retained.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of participants examined as gender and age. Values are presented as mean ± standard deviation.

Participants	Gender	Age	Total
Males	66	31.78±7.6	66
Females	141	30.02±7.6	141

Table 1 shows the number of participants, examined according to their gender and age. As it shown in most of the Spa centers' customers were females (n=141), with a mean age of 30.02±7.6 years old.

In order to measure the appropriateness of the Factor Analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used. Value of KMO was 0.781 which was an indication of middling sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p< 0.001). Descriptive statistics (mean scores, standard deviation) and reliability analysis for the 22 items are presented in Table 2. As it shown most of the items got above average scores (minimum=1, maximum=5). Cronbach's alphavalues for each factor ranged from 0.76 to 0.80 indicating an acceptable-level internal consistency of the obtained factors (Nunnally, 1978).

According to the Factor Analysis (Table 3), from the five variables (22 items) of SERVQUAL model, there are 6 service quality itemsor 4 variables that create customers' satisfaction. The Eigen Value of Responsiveness (willingness to help customers) was 4.86 which implies that the variance explained by the first factor was 22.15%. Assurance (management support in problem solving situations) explained the 8.81% of the total variance. Tangibles (food and beverages) explained the 8.12% of the total variance. Assurance (feel secure from danger of risk) explained the 6.01 of the total variance. Empathy (employee's commitment to customers' comfort) explained the

5.38% of the total variance, while again Empathy (honest treatment of customers) explained the 5.15% of the total variance. Those 6 items could explain Spa customers' satisfaction at a percentage of 55.61%.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis for the SERVQUAL scale.

Items	Mean	Sd.	Cronbach'
Physical facilities	4.63	.59	.79
Spa center's location	4.72	.49	.80
Food and beverages	4.59	.56	.79
Prices	4.62	.57	.79
Perform promised service	3.49	.83	.77
Employees'	3.44	.83	.76
Employees' knowledge	3.65	.74	.77
Fairness of information	3.49	.74	.77
Offering services without mistakes	3.35	.68	.76
Willingness to Help	2.48	.73	.77
Service's Implementation	2.47	.83	.79
Employees' overload	2.49	.78	.78
Staffs' timeliness	2.29	.71	.78
Secure	1.78	1.01	.79
Spa center's image	1.85	.82	.78
Management's support	1.93	.91	.77
Employees' friendliness	1.72	.70	.78
Provision of caring	4.23	.51	.78
Attention to guest	4.28	.61	.78
Employees' commitment	4.15	.64	.78
Honest treatment	4.20	.68	.79

Table 3. Total variance explained by the Service Quality's factors.

Factors	Item	Eigen Value	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Responsiveness	Willingness help customers	4.86	22.15	22.15
Assurance	Management's support	1.94	8.81	30.93
Tangibles	Food and beverages	1.78	8.12	39.05
Assurance	Feel secure	1.32	6.01	45.06
Empathy	Commitment	1.18	5.38	50.45
Empathy	Honest treatment	1.13	5.15	55.61

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was used in order to determine the minimum number of factors that would account for maximum variance of spa customers' satisfaction in Greece. As it shown in Table 4, only 6 factors had high factor loadings.

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Willingness help customer	**,752**					
Services without mistakes	,698					
Fairness of information	,630					
Employees' professionalism	,629	,343			,319	
Perform promised service	,597	,306				
Employees' overload	,557					
Provision of caring	,545				,427	
Provide promptness service	,450	-0,313				
Management's support		**,697**				
Spa center's image		,695				
Employees' friendliness		,632				
Timeliness of Spa's staff	,304	,461				,307
Food and beverages			**,736**			
Spa center's location			,682			,329
Prices			,564			-,380
Physical facilities			,518	,478		
Feel secure				**,636**		
Employees' knowledge	,318	,316		,543		
Employees' trust		,420		,527		
Commitment customers comfort					**,770**	
Attention to customer					,611	
Honest treatment						**,855**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine, which of the dimensions of SERVQUAL model most influence Spa customers' satisfaction in Greece. Service quality has been measured in a variety of social sectors such as: economy-banks (Culiberg & Rojsek, 2010), hotel industry (Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Markata, 2002; Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2009), restaurant business (Wall & Berry, 2007), health-hospitals (Murti, Deshpande, & Srivastava, 2013), education-universities (Saglik,

Gulluce, Kaya, & Ozhan, 2014), sports industry (Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005) and in telecommunications services (Kuo, Wu, & Deng, 2009). One of the most growing sectors worldwide nowadays is Spa market and Spa industry ('Spa Global Market Analysis', 2016). Spa centers are basically service organizations. Today, it is widely accepted that service quality has a direct effect on customer satisfaction (Caruana, 2002; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Spreng & Chiou, 2002). For the majority of service managers, the sustainability of clients is a very important issue (Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Markata, 2002; Baker & Crompton, 2000). Improvement of service quality can lead to customers' satisfaction and financial performance in the majority of the industries (Buttle, 1996).

Thus, many organizations and their management are paying increasing attention to improve service quality (Gupta, McDaniel, & Herath, 2005; Norman, 1984). In the present study Spa's customers were asked, to which extend SERVQUAL variables affect their satisfaction. Our results showed that from the five variables of the SERVQUAL instrument, willingness to help the customer (responsiveness), management support in problem solving situations (assurance), food and beverages (tangibles), feel secure from danger (assurance), employees' commitment to the comfort of their customers (empathy) and honest and empathic treatment of customers (empathy)had the strongest relationship with Spa customers' satisfaction at the percentage of 55.61%. Responsiveness actually refers to the readiness and willingness of employees to help customers by providing promptness service (Milner & Furnham, 2017; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Of the five variables of SERVQUAL instrument, responsiveness (willingness to help the customer) was the factor with the strongest relationship with Spas customers' satisfaction and explained the variance at a percentage of 22.15%.

In Spa market and industry, responsiveness refers to the ability of Spa's staff or management to provide promptness service. A previous survey in resort and hotel Spa customers in China showed that responsiveness was the most important determinant factor in explaining positive emotions (Lo, Wu,& Tsai, 2015). Moreover surveys at Spa centers and hotels in Malaysia (Al-alak, 2012) and Serbia (Blesic et al., 2014) showed responsiveness as a determinant factor for customers' satisfaction. Therefore our results are in agreement with the results of the surveys above. Assurance (management support in problem solving situations) was the second factor contributed to Spa customers' satisfaction at the percentage of 8.81%. Assurance was the fourth factor also (feel secure from danger or risk) and contributed to Spa customers' satisfaction at the percentage of 6.01%. Assurance is related to knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). According to Cronin & Taylor (1992), human variable is one of the most important parameters in the area of service quality.

A survey in the Republic of Serbia showed that assurance was the first factor explained Spa hotels customers' satisfaction (Blesic et al., 2014). Therefore our results are in agreement with the results of this survey. However, a survey at Spa centers in Malaysia (Al-alak, 2012) showed that assurance did not contributed to customers' satisfaction. Thus, our results are in disagreement with the results of this survey. In the present study, tangibles (food and beverages) was the third significant factor contributed to Spa's customers' satisfaction at the percentage of 8.12%. Tangibles actually refer to Spa's physical environment of the service (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, appearance of the employees, towels-decoration-tools, spa location). This finding is in agreement with the results of Khan & Tabassum (2012), which stated that in beauty centers customers' satisfaction is mainly predicted by tangibles. Also, a survey in Spa center in Malaysia (Al-alak, 2012), showed that tangibles was the factor with the strongest influence on customers' satisfaction. Moreover, same findings were found in a survey in Spa centers in the Republic of Serbia, where tangibles was the second factor explained the total variance of hotel spas customers' satisfaction (Blesic et al., 2014) and also the most important factor for the female participants of their survey. For the Hong Kong Spa's goers the environment factor was the common factor that significantly influenced their overall satisfaction (Tsai, Suh, & Fong, 2012). Moreover, some authors suggest that attractiveness of the physical environment, influence customers' physical and psychological comfort during service encounter (Aubert-Gamet, 1997; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). A survey in Greece, showed that factors such as cleanliness of Spa, influence customers' intention choosing a Spa (Trihas & Konstantarou, 2016). Therefore, results of our study indicate the significance of tangibles factor on customers'

satisfaction. Empathy was the fourth factor with two items (employees' commitment to the comfort of their customers, honest treatment of customers), contributed to Spa customers' satisfaction at the percentage of 10.53%. In the Spa industry empathy refers to the provision of caring and individualized attention to Spa's customers. Previous studies showed empathy as a significant factor for Spa customer's satisfaction (Al-alak, 2012; Lo, Wu, & Tsai, 2015). According to the results of the present study, it seems that Spa centers' customers are mainly satisfied from service quality factors such as human and environmental. Willingness to help the customer (responsiveness), management support in problem solving situations (assurance), food and beverages (tangibles), feel secure from danger (assurance), employees' commitment to the comfort of their customers (empathy) and honest and empathic treatment of customers (empathy) were the most predictive variables of Spa centers customers' satisfaction at a percentage of 55.61%. Therefore Spa centers' management is encouraged to focus its service on those service quality dimensions.

Conclusion

A complex mix model of service quality factors influences customers' satisfaction at Spa centers in Greece. From the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model, variables such as responsiveness, assurance, tangibles and empathy had significant contribution in customers' satisfaction. It seems that human and environmental factors are important to customers' satisfaction from the service quality provided by Spa centers in Greece. Customers are the driving forces for increasing revenue and market share, therefore satisfying customers through high quality services is the way to achieve competition advantages and keep those advantages sustainable.

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ZADOVOLJSTVO KUPACA I KVALITETA USLUGA SPA SREDIŠTA U GRČKOJ

Sažetak

Svrha ove studije bila je ispitati utjecaj kvalitete usluge na zadovoljstvo kupaca u SPA središtima u Grčkoj. Ukupno 207 klijenata u deset SPA centara u Grčkoj dragovoljno je sudjelovalo u ovoj studiji. Mjerenja su uključivala upotrebu SERVQUAL instrumenta (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) za mjerenje percepcije kvalitete usluge. Faktorska analiza korištena je za identifikaciju prediktivnih varijabli zadovoljstva kupaca. Rezultati pet dimenzija i dvadeset dvije stavke SERVQUAL modela, pokazuju spremnost da pomogne se gostu (reakcija), podršku menadžmentu u situacijama rješavanja problema (sigurnost), hranu i piće (tangibles), i osjećaj sigurnosti od opasnosti (osiguranje). Predanost komforu gostiju (empatija) i pošten i suosjećajni tretman (empatija) bili su najpredvidljivije varijable zadovoljstva kupaca u SPA centrima. Zaključno, informacije dobivene ovim istraživanjem mogu se koristiti pri izradi marketinških strategija za poboljšanje zadovoljstva kupaca na tržištu SPA industrije u Grčkoj.

Ključne riječi: industrija ljepote, atraktivnost, odgovornost, sigurnost, empatija.