

Services Strategy and Hotels Performance: Evidence from Mures County

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Abstract: Tourism is one of the components that has experienced the highest rising both nationally and internationally. Within this field of activity, the hotel industry is one of the most representative and dynamic elements, generated by the relation with environment through the products and services that they supply. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to emphasize and analyze the relation between the dimension of performance indicators and the services strategy of hotels in Mures County (Romania). With this purpose in view, we mention that we have carried-out a quantitative research, through a number of 42 questionnaires managed by hotel managers and data gathering period occurred in June-September 2012. The results emphasize a partial confirmation of the tested hypotheses, complementing the results of research carried-out internationally. The research conclusions are important theoretically and empirically, they complement the professional literature and provide the managers a frame that results in raising economic performances and implicitly increase of competitiveness.

Keywords: hotel industry; Mures County; quantitative research; services strategy

JEL Classification: L80; L83; L10; C10.

1. Introduction

The credible significance provided to the tourism by researchers nowadays, both nationally and internationally, fortified with statistical data supplied by international organizations in the field reveals the significance of the research theme.

In the course of time, tourism services have become the key element of destination attractiveness therefore a distinct attention has been given to the units supplying tourism services and factors that can influence competitiveness of these units. As a matter of fact, the existence of a strong competitive environment brings thorough changes within tourism units and their managers in order to search for the best

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strategies that will enable them to get or to sustain a competitive advantage on the market. (Avci, Madanoglu et al, 2011, p. 147)

Strategy implementation is critical for the success of hotels (Hrebiniak, 2009, p. 12), and strategic orientation relates to the manner in which a firm succeeds to adapt to its external competitive environment (Avci, Madanoglu et al, 2011, p.148, according to Miles & Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1973). As a rule, researchers use strategic orientation in order to investigate the relation between the strategy of a firm and its performance (Avci, Madanoglu et al, 2011, p.148, according to Dess, Newport et al, 1993), as well as the relation between perception of managers concerning importance of competitive strategies and dimension of hotels (Petzer, Steyn et al., 2008).

From these considerations, we would like to mention that the purpose of this research is to provide the hotel managers the opportunity to develop competitive strategies specific to the hotel industry. To this effect, we mention the research goal that consists of analysing the connection between the services strategy of hotels and performance indicators through a quantitative research carried-out in Mures County. We also mention that this study is part of an empirical research that is focused on quality management, customer orientation, human resources management and information technology in the hotels in Mures County.

2. Literature Review

In order to cope with the existing competition on the tourist services market, tourist units have tried to develop and implement strategies. How important is in the life of a firm, and not only, the existence of a strategy, can be quantified through losses occurred and by means of the price paid when it lacks (Sasu & Coita, 2006, p.961).

At present the main trends governing the strategic orientation of hotel units are as follows:

- diversification, with direct influence on increasing economic efficiency (Andrei, Copețchi et al., 2006, p. 19). Diversification assumes "inveigling of new markets, adding new versions to the current line of products, that provides multiple advantages in various fields (technological, strategically, qualitative, marketing etc.)" (Pantelescu, 2009, p. 123). The professional literature has not agreed on the diversification concept applied in tourism services, however, it is admitted that it is associated with innovation but also relates to provide differentiation by creating something novel (Moraru, 2011, p. 128).
- development of new services, that generate the following effects (Menor, Tatikonda et al, 2002, p. 135): improvement of profitability concerning the existing offer, inveigling of new customers, maintaining loyalty of existing customers

(crucial in the hotel industry) and opening of new desirable markets. Griffin and Page (1996) state that, as usual, hotel managers evaluate the efforts assumed by the development of some new services or products, by measuring financial indicators (for instance: income, profit or profit margin) as well as by measuring other quantifiable indicators such sales volume and market share (Menor, Tatikonda et al, 2002, p. 141).

- outsourcing, representing (Espino-Rodríguez & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2008, p. 213) the solution for many hotels that want to supply the same quality services, but reduce significantly from the budgets dedicated to some segments of activity. Outsourcing is also called "management of facilities", representing a strategy through which hotels provide major functionalities to some external suppliers specialized in certain services (Cojocariu, 2010, p. 78). The research in the field mentions that (Song, 2008, p.80) outsourcing will certainly become the main trend in developing the international hotel industry, being increasingly included in the strategy it adopts (Espino-Rodríguez & Padron-Robaina, 2005). Therefore, a study carried-out in Spain (Canary Island) on a 50-hotel sample (Espino-Rodríguez & Padron-Robaina, 2005) has emphasized that application of the outsourcing strategy is carried-out for those activities that are not effective or do not generate value, in fact those that do not represent the source of getting a competitive advantage;
- loyalty of customers, being at present a highly special element in the hotel industry. Loyalty of customers is not possible without the supply of services at a high level, and much more than that, in order to get and maintain loyal customers, the personnel-customer contact should take place beyond official requirements, that improve the value of supplied service;
- cooperation, that represents (Pantelescu, 2009, p. 115) an effective means to develop and diversify commercial exchanges, and cooperation relations generate stability in relations among tourism operators. The cooperation ways in the hotel industry are multiple (association, integration etc.) and assume cooperation relations with various service suppliers, through which hotels provide unique and customized services and products, without additional costs provided to some go-betweens (external suppliers of tourist services) (Pantelescu, 2009);
- development of the new information technologies, that drives major changes in the structure of world economy. It is also important to mention the fact that the new information technologies (Global Distribution System, Customer Relationship Management etc.) have revolutionized the hotel industry, and have generated the development of some positive and interactive relations with customers, in order to achieve the objectives of hotels (Wu & Lu, 2012, p. 277).

3. Research Hypotheses

Therefore, we consider that these modern orientations considerably contribute to get the competitive advantage and profitability increase. In order to sustain this statement we mention that in the course of time, researchers have emphasized the existence of a strong intensity relation between the services strategy and the economic performances of activity in hotels (Avci, Madanoglu et al, 2011; Petzer, Steyn et al., 2008; Espino-Rodriguez & Padron-Robaina, 2005).

Under these circumstances, we considered important to define the following research hypotheses:

H₁: Dimension of performance indicators of hotels is not associated with managers' perception in relation to the services strategy;

H₂: Dimension of performance indicators of hotels is correlated with managers' perception in relation to the services strategy.

4. Research Methodology

The research method of the data gathering study is the investigation, and the working tool is the questionnaire. The surveyed population consists of 42 hotels located in Mures County, and respondents data have been taken from the report entitled the "List of tourist reception structures with classified accommodation functions" presented by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism in Romania. The surveyed population is small-sized therefore the study has been carried-out by means of full observation. Data gathering period was in June - September 2012.

Data gathering requires the use of a measuring scale, nominal, ordinal scale, interval scale or ratio scale, respectively. Within our research, we have used the ordinal scale and interval scale. Therefore, in order to measure the importance of services strategy, respondents have been asked to describe the importance extent of attributes, using a Likert scale for it, from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). In order to measure the performance of hotels included in the study, respondents have been asked to mention the efficiency indicators, using the interval scale (from very small–below 20%, to very big–over 80%) and to indicate the value of income and expenditures for 2011, also using the interval scale (from Lei 0.5 million, to over Lei 15 million). Indicators shown within the study are general indicators used in the evaluation of performance (Laitinen, 2002), respectively: profit for each category of activity, market share, occupancy rate of accommodation, income value and expenditure value.

Statistical methods used in the analysis and interpretation of data are:

- χ^2 **bivariate association test**, non-parametric significance test;
- **Pearson correlation coefficient**, in order to measure the intensity of a linear relation between two quantitative variables (Novak, 2004, p. 127).

Elements studied within research are the following:

- strategic orientation of hotels by means of the following variables: In the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided; We develop unique and original services that are in line with international standards; Diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling; Supply of services takes place at a higher level compared to competition; We supply exclusive services to the segments of high-income customers; We provide a significant attention to the segments of loyal customers; Improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications; Outsourcing takes place for some services; Cooperation relations are in progress with various partners; New technologies are used in order to provide added value to offer services and New services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones;
- performance of activity concerning hotels included in the study by means of the indicators: Occupancy rate; Profit for accommodation services; Profit for alimentary services; Profit for other services; Market share; Income volume and Expenditure volume.

5. Research Results

In order to test the first hypothesis - *Dimension of performance indicators of hotels is not associated with managers' perception in relation to the services strategy* - we have checked the relation between services strategy and performance indicators of the studied hotels, using the χ^2 test for it. According to table 1, results are the following:

- indicator entitled *Occupancy rate* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables describing the services strategy: *diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling; supply of service takes place at a higher level than competition; we supply exclusive services to the segments of high-income customers; we provide a significant attention to loyal customers; improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications; outsourcing of some services takes place; cooperation relations are in progress with various partners; new technologies are used in order to provide added value to services and new services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones;*

- indicator entitled *profit for accommodation services* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables describing the services strategy: *in the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided; supply of services takes place at a higher level compared to competition; we provide a significant attention to segments of loyal customers; outsourcing takes place for some services; cooperation relations are in progress with various partners; new technologies are used in order to provide added value to offer services and new services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones;*
- indicator entitled *profit for alimentary services* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables focused on services strategy: *in the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided; improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications and outsourcing takes place for some services;*
- indicator entitled *profit for other services* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables: *in the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided; we supply exclusive services to the segments of high-income customers; we provide a significant attention to the segments of loyal customers; improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications; outsourcing takes place for some services; cooperation relations are in progress with various partners; new technologies are used in order to provide added value to services and new services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones;*
- indicator entitled *Market share* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables: *in the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided; improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications and outsourcing takes place for some services;*
- indicator entitled *Income* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables related to the services strategy: *we supply exclusive services to the segments of high-income customers; we provide a significant attention to the segments of loyal customers; cooperation relations are in progress with various partners; new technologies are used in order to provide added value to services and new services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones;*
- indicator entitled *Expenditures* significantly distinguishes hotels in the study for the following variables focused on the services strategy: *diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling; we provide a significant attention to the segments of loyal customers; new technologies are used in order to provide added value to services and new services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones.*

In conclusion, except one variable (*We develop unique and original services that are in line with international standards*), all the other variables that mirror the services strategy contribute to economic performance of hotels, reflected by means of indicators taken into consideration. Therefore, the first hypothesis is invalidated.

Table 1. Results of the χ^2 test in order to check the relation between performance indicators of hotels and services strategy

There are no statistically significant differences according to performance indicators of hotels in relation to the services strategy defined by variables:		Occupancy rate	Profit for accommodation services	Profit for alimentary services	Profit for other services	Market share	Income	Expenditure
In the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided	χ^2 calculated	8.333 ^a	13.603 ^a	12.150 ^a	17.784 ^a	13.502 ^a	17.854 ^a	18.783 ^a
	Freedom degrees (Fd)	6	6	6	8	8	14	14
	Significance	.215	.034	.059	.023	.096	.214	.173
	χ^2 theoretical	-	7,84	5,34	9,04	2,73	-	-
	Conclusion	<i>Overruled</i>						
We develop unique and original services that are in line with standards	χ^2 calculated	4.667 ^a	8.240 ^a	8.696 ^a	8.840 ^a	11.219 ^a	9.227 ^a	15.549 ^a
	Fd	6	6	6	8	8	14	14
	Significance	.587	.221	.191	.356	.190	.816	.342
	χ^2 theoretical	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Conclusion	<i>Overruled</i>						
Diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling	χ^2 calculated	13.607 ^a	6.081 ^a	5.894 ^a	5.976 ^a	7.769 ^a	20.328 ^a	25.790 ^a
	Fd	6	6	6	8	8	14	14
	Significance	.034	.414	.435	.650	.456	.120	.028
	χ^2 theoretical	7,84	-	-	-	-	-	17,12
	Conclusion	<i>Overruled</i>						
Supply of services takes place at a higher level compared to competition	χ^2 calculated	14.101 ^a	12.258 ^a	7.678 ^a	9.458 ^a	7.299 ^a	13.111 ^a	15.585 ^a
	Fd	6	6	6	8	8	14	14
	Significance	.029	.056	.263	.305	.505	.518	.339
	χ^2 theoretical	7,84	5,34	-	-	-	-	-
	Conclusion	<i>Overruled</i>						
We supply exclusive services to segments of high-income customers	χ^2 calculated	21.584 ^a	16.881 ^a	11.100 ^a	29.470 ^a	14.501 ^a	42.730 ^a	47.267 ^a
	Fd	12	12	12	16	16	28	28
	Significance	.042	.154	.520	.021	.561	.037	.013
	χ^2 theoretical	11,34	-	-	19,37	-	32,62	37,92
	Conclusion	<i>Overruled</i>			<i>Overruled</i>	<i>Overruled</i>		
We provide a significant attention to	χ^2 calculated	27.074 ^a	24.805 ^a	8.531 ^a	45.287 ^a	12.043 ^a	53.625 ^a	57.375 ^a
	Fd	9	9	9	12	12	21	21

segments of loyal customers	Significance	.001	.003	.482	.000	.442	.000	.000
	χ^2 theoretical	21,67	21,67	-	26,22	-	46,80	46,80
	Conclusion	Overruled			Overruled		Overruled	
Improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications	χ^2 calculated	20.341 ^a	13.889 ^a	21.151 ^a	22.944 ^a	22.528 ^a	24.983 ^a	20.460 ^a
	Fd	9	9	9	12	12	21	21
	Significance	.016	.126	.012	.028	.032	.248	.492
	χ^2 theoretical	14,68	-	14,68	14,85	14,85	-	-
	Conclusion	Overruled			Overruled			
Outsourcing takes place for some services	χ^2 calculated	25.010 ^a	31.540 ^a	25.842 ^a	25.622 ^a	26.415 ^a	30.840 ^a	35.204 ^a
	Fd	12	12	12	16	16	28	28
	Significance	.015	.002	.011	.060	.048	.324	.164
	χ^2 theoretical	26,22	26,22	26,22	26,30	15,33	-	-
	Conclusion	Overruled						
Cooperation relations are in progress with various partners	χ^2 calculated	17.992 ^a	16.875 ^a	13.500 ^a	25.035 ^a	9.645 ^a	31.253 ^a	25.217 ^a
	Fd	9	9	9	12	12	21	21
	Significance	.035	.051	.141	.015	.647	.070	.238
	χ^2 theoretical	11,39	8,34	-	26,22	-	29,61	-
New technologies are used in order to provide added value to offer services	Conclusion	Overruled						
	χ^2 calculated	28.641 ^a	26.870 ^a	12.427 ^a	47.949 ^a	12.267 ^a	54.576 ^a	58.917 ^a
	Fd	9	9	9	12	12	21	21
	Significance	.001	.001	.190	.000	.424	.000	.000
	χ^2 theoretical	21,67	21,67	-	26,22	-	46,80	46,80
New services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones	Conclusion	Overruled						
	χ^2 calculated	32.241 ^a	28.107 ^a	6.250 ^a	49.414 ^a	13.183 ^a	59.477 ^a	56.349 ^a
	Fd	12	12	12	16	16	28	28
	Significance	.001	.005	.903	.000	.659	.000	.001
	χ^2 theoretical	26,22	26,22	-	32,00	-	48,28	48,28
Conclusion	Overruled							

In order to test the second hypothesis (using Pearson correlation coefficient) - *Dimension of performance indicators of hotels is correlated with managers' perception in relation to the services strategy* - results related to the correlation analysis between performance indicators of hotels and perception of managers in relation to the services strategy are shown in table 2. To this effect, we emphasize the following aspects:

- With validity $p < 0,01$, the variables showing average intensity correlations with performance indicators are:
 - *Diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling with the indicators: Income (0,439) and Expenditures (0,483);*

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- *Supply of services takes place at a higher level compared to competition* with the indicator entitled *Occupancy rate* (0,482);
 - *We supply exclusive services to the segments of high-income customers* with the indicators entitled *Occupancy rate* (0,525), *Profit for accommodation services* (0,448), *Market share* (0,450), *Income* (0,550) and *Expenditures* (0,530);
 - *Improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications* with the indicators: *Occupancy rate* (0,427), *Profit for accommodation services* (0,427), *Profit for alimentary services* (0,461), *Profit for other services* (0,426) and *Market share* (0,403);
 - *Outsourcing takes place for some services* with indicator entitled *Profit for other services* (0,443);
 - *New technologies are used in order to provide added value to offer services* with the indicator *Occupancy rate* (0,401).
- With validity $p < 0,05$, the variables showing low to average intensity correlations with performance indicators are:
 - *Diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling* with the indicator entitled *Occupancy rate* (0,377);
 - *Supply of services takes place at a higher level compared to competition* with the indicators: *Profit for accommodation services* (0,374), *Profit for alimentary services* (0,321), *Profit for other services* (0,384), *Income* (0,336) and *Expenditures* (0,356);
 - *We supply exclusive services to the segments of high-income customers* with the indicators: *Profit for alimentary services* (0,372) and *Profit for other services* (0,380);
 - *We provide a significant attention to the segments of loyal customers* with the indicators: *Occupancy rate* (0,351) and *Profit for accommodation services* (0,309);
 - *Improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications* with the indicators: *Income* (0,376) and *Expenditures* (0,383);
 - *Outsourcing takes place for some services* with the indicators: *Occupancy rate* (0,311), *Profit for accommodation services* (0,339), *Profit for alimentary services* (0,311), *Market share* (0,376), *Income* (0,312) and *Expenditures* (0,353);
 - *Cooperation relations are in progress with various partners* with the indicators: *Occupancy rate* (0,356) and *Profit for other services* (0,390);
 - *New technologies are used in order to provide added value to offer services* with the indicators: *Profit for accommodation services*

(0,373), Profit for alimentary services (0,316), Profit for other services (0,389) and Income (0,353);

- New services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones with the indicators: Occupancy rate (0,318), Profit for accommodation services (0,318), Profit for other services (0,338), Income (0,372) and Expenditures (0,312).

In conclusion, some variables have not registered statistically significant correlations with performance indicators (for instance, the variables: *in the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided; we develop unique and original services that are in line with international standards*), and the other variables defining services strategy have only registered average values of correlation coefficients, but statistically significant for the study. Therefore, the second hypothesis is partly validated.

Table 2. Results of Pearson correlation analysis between performance indicators of hotels and services strategy

VARIABLES		Occupancy rate	Profit for accommodation services	Profit for alimentary services	Profit for other services	Market share	Income	Expenditures
In the periods when occupancy is lower, some tips and incentives are provided	Correlation coefficient	-.136	-.182	-.182	-.051	-.120	-.279	-.300
	Significance	.391	.249	.249	.750	.449	.073	.053
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
We develop unique and original services that are in line with international standards	Correlation coefficient	.242	.189	-.021	.145	.137	.159	.166
	Significance	.123	.230	.894	.360	.386	.313	.294
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Diversification of services is compulsory for customer inveigling	Correlation coefficient	.377*	.229	.180	.204	.232	.439**	.483**
	Significance	.014	.145	.255	.196	.140	.004	.001
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42

Supply of services takes place at a higher level compared to competition	Correlation coefficient	.482**	.374*	.321*	.384*	.280	.336*	.356*
	Significance	.001	.015	.038	.012	.072	.030	.021
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
We supply exclusive services to segments of high-income customers	Correlation coefficient	.525**	.448**	.372*	.380*	.450**	.550**	.530**
	Significance	.000	.003	.015	.013	.003	.000	.000
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
We provide a significant attention to the segments of loyal customers	Correlation coefficient	.351*	.309*	.183	.267	.220	.276	.252
	Significance	.023	.046	.247	.087	.161	.077	.108
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Improvement of services takes place considering customer specifications	Correlation coefficient	.427**	.427**	.461**	.426**	.403**	.376*	.383*
	Significance	.005	.005	.002	.005	.008	.014	.012
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Outsourcing takes place for some services	Correlation coefficient	.311*	.339*	.311*	.443**	.376*	.312*	.353*
	Significance	.045	.028	.045	.003	.014	.044	.022
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Cooperation relations are in progress with various partners	Correlation coefficient	.356*	.265	.265	.390*	.226	.171	.128
	Significance	.021	.090	.090	.011	.149	.278	.417
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
New technologies are used in order to provide added value to offer services	Correlation coefficient	.401**	.373*	.316*	.389*	.280	.353*	.302
	Significance	.008	.015	.041	.011	.072	.022	.052
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
New services are permanently introduced compared to the existing ones	Correlation coefficient	.318*	.318*	.120	.338*	.197	.372*	.312*
	Significance	.040	.040	.450	.028	.212	.015	.044
	N	42	42	42	42	42	42	42

** Significant correlation at 0,01level

* Significant correlation at 0,05level

6. Conclusions

The results of analysis carried-out have emphasized average and low intensity relations between the variables that comprised the services strategy and performance indicators of activity concerning hotels included in the study, as well as statistically significant associations among most variables included in the study. From these considerations, we consider it is important to enunciate the following proposals focused on strengthening the services strategy in hotels in order to increase economic performance:

- development of unique and original services that are in line with international standards;
- significant attention provided to customers so that they become loyal;
- diversification of offer for customer inveigling;
- implementation of outsourcing.

These elements will contribute to the creation of a valuable picture, for customer inveigling and acquiring recognition in the hotel industry. In order to sustain this side, we would like to mention that empirical studies in this field (Avci, Madanoglu et al., 2011; Petzer, Steyn et al., 2008; Espino-Rodriguez & Padron-Robaina, 2005) have proved strong intensity relations between the implementation of a suitable strategy in hotels and performance.

Under these circumstances, we also have to mention the study limits that are oriented to the following directions:

- Taking into account the dynamic framework of the research field, the study can be improved. Therefore, we consider there are also other elements focused on the strategic orientation of hotels;
- Although the study is an exploratory one, through full observation, the surveyed population is small sized (42 hotels) therefore its representativeness and generalization within a geographical region or nationally, should be considered and analyzed carefully.

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