

Reliability and validity of customer satisfaction questionnaires in hotels in Dubrovnik area

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RUNNING HEADER

RIT CROATIA

Reliability and validity of customer satisfaction questionnaires in
hotels in Dubrovnik area

SENIOR PROJECT

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Abstract

The customer satisfaction questionnaire was the most used tool to measure the satisfaction of customers in hotel industry. From the hotel's perspective, it was important to fulfill the needs and wishes of their customers and provide them with great customer experience. This measure was used in order to improve overall service quality. This paper showed what the important elements of good questionnaires are. The analysis of questionnaires of hotels in Dubrovnik area showed lack of usage of the main quality dimensions that are the principal part of constructing the questionnaire itself.

Key words: customer satisfaction questionnaire, service quality, quality dimension, questionnaire elements, customer experience

With the major need to be the best in the field, specifically in the hospitality industry, new ways of competing have been introduced for the past 4 decades. Quality becomes number one word in describing a business, a company, an organization. Being a high-quality company brings a prestige and a higher status within the community (Al-Ababneh, 2017). According to Gržinić (2007), the diverse needs and wants of the customers, as well as higher rate of competition on the market, alongside with the globalization and new technology, resulted in the need for quality in any industry.

Hayes (1992) explained in the book *Measuring Customer Satisfaction*, that there are two types of the quality to start with, quality of the design and quality of the conformance. Quality of the design, when we look at the specific product, possesses an intended feature. For example, if we look at the automobile industry, for some customers, cars with sun rooftops will be perceived as more qualitative than a car with a regular roof. On the other hand, quality of conformance ‘reflects the extent to which product or a service conforms to the intent of the design.’

Since one of the biggest industries is the hospitality industry, this paper will be based on the service quality, not quality in general. According to Bitner and Hubbert (1994) service quality is the overall impression with the service within the organization following positive or negative customer satisfaction rate. One of the fathers of the explaining the service quality is Parasuraman (1985) that defined service quality as ‘a global judgement, or attitude relating to the superiority of a service.’

Gržinić (2007) continued with more in-depth explanation of service quality with two basic approaches, technical and product-oriented quality, and the second approach is customer related.

Technical approach follows set standards and rules and is oriented toward production and consistency. From this standpoint of an approach, managers are trying to train employees to provide strictly standardized service with not much contact with future customers. The final product is what is important. On the other hand, managers who are oriented toward customers, have one wish, which is to satisfy the customers. Managers in this approach need to understand what the wishes of the customer are, and what customers expect from the service.

As already explained, high quality company brings a lot of benefits from the standpoint of having a competitive advantage on the market. Being a high-quality company could also benefit in high customer loyalty and profitability, which is the result of the high customer satisfaction. ‘The service quality is critical to the profitability and survival of service organizations. (Gorji, 2012)

Because of explained benefits, companies are looking for different ways to improve the service quality. According to (Zeithman et al., 1990) service quality is the fulfillment of the customers expectation. In order to improve the service quality, manager has to understand the difference between what customer expects and what employees provides. Customer’s expectations are based on previous actions and visits to the same branch of the business. After using the same service for the several times, expectations for the future visits will be shaped (Gržinić, 2007).

According to Atkinson (2019), service quality management is a ‘lifeblood of all operations. The importance of service quality in hotels can be seen in creating customer loyalty, happier environment and added brand value. Every single customer has his own perception of the quality in the hotel. It is on quality service management to measure the service quality that that hotel provides to its guest in order to provide the best service possible.

Realizing the importance of the service quality appeared big question of how much does that quality cost. Pearson (2014) explains that the cost of quality is measured by failing to produce the quality. It is important to achieve the quality for the first time because if there is a quality failure, then the company has to repeat everything, and it is costly both time and money wise. There is no need to do it twice because the goal is the same, the quality.

There are a lot of factors that affect the poor service quality. Hopmans (2017) explains that in hotel industry there two major failure costs, and those are internal failure cost and external failure cost. For the internal failure cost, it is easier to escape the potential failure. Here comes in handy customer satisfaction questionnaire that hotels provide to its customers. When the hotel sees the results, it can determine the level of service quality it provides, as well as where the failures might happen. On the other hand, it is hard to influence external potential failure points. In that case it is important to be in good relationship with all shareholders, so the failure point is smaller.

Example of internal failure cost is when in hotel a receptionist is rude to customers. The cost here is retraining that receptionist and recovering from the bad comment which potentially creates bad reputation for the hotel. Example for external cost of quality is when near the hotel a mass shooting happens. Hotel cannot influence that, but the cost here is recovering from unsafe location.

After realizing the importance of the service quality and the cost of quality, the interest of achieving it becomes bigger and bigger. The main goal of every company is to make profit and increase productivity. Alongside with profit, for the hotel industry it is important to attract new customers and even more important to keep customers and make them loyal. (Feiz et al. 2015).

Gronoos (1988) said 'Describing a service by customers comes along with some expectations like trust, experiences, security, and feeling which are hard to measure because of high intangibility of the nature of service.' There was a need to find tangible factors of service in order to make it better.

One of the new tools in succeeding in service economy is the changing focus of marketing (Harwood & Garry, 2008). The focus of marketing changed from the product being the most important segment to customer relationship is the primary focus. The final product is not dominant anymore, the service itself is dominant, and everything starts from the quality of service. 'Quality is the key of success in motivating customers to purchase intention' (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007). In other words, if the hotels show that the quality is on a certain level, more customers will come, and more customers will become loyal customers.

When customers are coming to the hotel, they already have formed some expectations about that place based on either Word of Mouth, personal need or previous experience. And here comes the gap between customers' expectations and perceived service. Parasuraman et al. (1985) explained that gap as Service quality gap or SERQUAL. See Illustration 1 for details. In this model, there are 5 gaps that can occur. First gap is the difference between consumers' expectations and management perceptions of the customers' expectations. The second gap is difference between management perceptions of consumers' expectation and service specifications. The third gap is difference between service quality specifications and service provided. The fourth gap is the difference between service provided and external communications to the customers. And finally, the fifth gap is the difference between customers' expectation and customers' perception of the service. This gap depends on previous four.

SERQUAL model shows the importance of assessing the service quality in hotel industry. Since the service quality is that important, a lot of tools for measurements have been made. One of the most used is customer satisfaction questionnaire. Questionnaires are done based on SERQUAL model. There are a lot of reasons why customer satisfaction questionnaire is important to hotel industry. Deeb (2019) said that the proper customer satisfaction questionnaire is valuable because it helps to understand where the hotel needs to improve, it can help enhance successful strategies, glean new ideas, differentiate the brand from others and gain good reputation.

Following the importance of the customer satisfaction questionnaire, there is a whole theoretical study on how to properly make valuable customer satisfaction questionnaire. Hayes (1992) explains general model for development and use of customer satisfaction questionnaire. First step is to determine customers' requirements. In this step, it is important to implement quality dimensions (Kennedy and Young, 1989) that cover service in general. The identifications of those dimensions in the hotel should be done. After the identification of dimensions, it is important to establish specific examples for dimensions. In other words, we need to find key words for specific dimensions. All that with dimensions should be done through observing the service in the hotel. The second step of the general model is development and evaluation of questions based on dimensions. Here the most important part is to find appropriate items that are related to appropriate dimensions. And the final step is to use questionnaire.

Zeithmal et al. (1990) explains ten most important quality dimensions that should go to customer satisfaction questionnaire. Ten quality dimensions are: competence, courtesy, credibility, security, accessibility, communication, understanding the customer, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. Competence, courtesy, credibility and security go into one category, assurance, while access, communication and understanding the customers is part of empathy. Competence

dimensions relates to possession of required skills and knowledge to perform the service. Courtesy is about politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of staff. Credibility is believability, trustworthiness, and honesty. Access is related to approachability and ease of contact. Communication is about keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to customers, while understanding the customers is making the effort to know customer and their needs.

On the other hand, reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness is related to willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. And finally, tangibles are about appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. For better understanding of these dimensions, see Table 1.

Making proper customer satisfaction questionnaire is an art. It is very hard and long process. It is very important to have proper customer satisfaction questionnaire in order to know what part of service should be improved. There is no need of having them in hotel just pro forma if they do not bring any benefit and profit.

Validity and reliability of customer satisfaction questionnaires are the most important challenges for designing questionnaires. It is important to implement all the dimensions under the different categories on the questionnaires. It is important to cover all the departments of the hotel. Diversity of types of questions brings 'life' to the questionnaire. When thinking of validity and reliability of customer satisfaction questionnaires it is important to implement every single detail in the questionnaire. Final step before distributing the questionnaire is to spell checked the questions itself. Customer satisfaction questionnaires would be valid and reliable if as many as possible customers fill out the questionnaires.

With proper customer satisfaction questionnaire, the gap between expectation and perceived service would be smaller, (Parasuruman et al.,1985) and the real picture about the hotel and service quality will be achieved.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants for this research paper were 6 hotels in Dubrovnik area. This sample consists of one 3-star hotel, two 4-star hotels and tree 5-star hotels. The collection of customer satisfaction questionnaires went in two ways. One way of the collection was the personal relationship of the author with employees and the second way was an official e-mail sent to the hotels' operation offices with an informational description of promising that the official name of the hotel would not be used in this paper, rather shown as numbered hotel. The participation was completely voluntarily without any compensation.

Materials

Materials provided to the author for the analysis were sent through e-mail platform in PDF style. The purpose of this paper is to determine if hotels in Dubrovnik area are using valid and reliable customer satisfaction questionnaires based on (Zeithmal, 1990) and its practical theory, questions in questionnaires were examined one by one. Limitation of the data collection was the pandemic happening in 2020, COVID-19, and a lot of hotels did not respond to the sent e-mail. According to the governmental restrictions, a lot of employees were not able to go to work and see the e-mails.

Procedures

After the collection of customer satisfaction questionnaires, in every question the key words were identified. There are 10 quality dimensions that are measured in hotel industry and every key word is related to its quality dimension. When the key words were identified that question in the questionnaire went marked under the specified dimension. When all the questions were analyzed, the results showed how many dimensions were used. The results showed how many of total questions in questionnaires were quality dimension questions and how many of them were generic questions that could not be related to any of 10 quality dimensions. Other than quality dimensions analysis, the author examined types of questions used in the questionnaires as well as the usage of purpose and thank you note to its guests.

RESULTS

The topic of this research paper was the investigation into the reliability and validity of the customer satisfaction questionnaires of the hotels in Dubrovnik area. The measurement to see the validity and reliability of questionnaires is a collection of actual questionnaires from six hotels in the area.

According to (Zeithmal, 1990) proper construction of customer satisfaction questionnaire is a combination of ten quality dimensions implemented throughout the questions. In order to understand better results of this paper, ten quality dimensions are: competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, understanding the customer, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles dimension.

The analysis of the collected questionnaires consists of the analysis of the questions that used one of ten dimensions and generic questions, questions that have not implemented quality

dimensions, in comparison of total number of questions. Another part of the analysis is to see how many hotels used purpose note and thank you note for the customers, are the questionnaires spelled checked, do they have clear categories of questions (ex. Housekeeping, Reception, Pool, etc.) and what types of questions are used (open ended questions, yes/no questions, Likert scale, etc.)

The combination of six questionnaires consists of 203 questions in total. As illustrated in Figure 1, total number of yes/no questions is 8, open ended questions are used 14 times and questions that used graded scale are used 181 times. In Figure 2 it is visible that 1 hotel did not spell check its questionnaire. Regarding the usage of purpose notes for its customer so they know why they are filling the questionnaire, 3 hotels used them, while 4 hotels have thank you note on their questionnaires.

From the Figure 3, it is visible that 53 questions are determined as questions that used tangibles quality dimension, which is 26.1% of total number of questions while communication quality dimension is not used once in any of six questionnaires. The second most used quality dimension is courtesy with total number of 21, which is 10.3% of all questions. Overall, 9 quality dimensions are used in all 203 questions. It is also visible that the dimension 'understanding the customer' is used only once, which is 0.5% of overall questions. The complete analysis of ten quality dimension can be seen in Figure 3. In Figure 4 is visible the comparison of generic questions versus questions with elements of ten quality dimensions. 43% of overall questions are generic questions, while 115 questions are questions with dimensions used. The analysis of questions regarding dimensions is done by understanding the key words of questions and relating them to proper dimensions.

Furthermore, Figure 5 describes detail analysis of questions of Hotel 1 as well as Figure 6 describes questions of Hotel 2. Figure 7 and Figure 8 explain detailed analysis of questions in

Hotel 3. The analysis of questions of Hotel 4 is visible in Figure 9, while Figures 10 and 11 describe the analysis of Hotel 5, and finally Figure 12 shows the analysis of Hotel 6.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this research paper showed some revealing facts about hotels in Dubrovnik area based on the analysis of the customer satisfaction questionnaires. One of those facts is the (non) usage of two quality dimensions, communications and understanding the customer. The dimension “understanding the customer” is only in 1 question out of 203 while communication is not used once. For the author of this paper, this was an eye-opening fact because it is widely known that hotels like to emphasize the emphatic size of the service while the results showed something completely different. Another interesting fact is that mainly tangibles dimension is used. Hotels in Dubrovnik area put a lot of thinking into appearance of the hotel rather than the actual service.

On the other hand, the result of the analysis showed that overall, 90% of ten quality dimensions are used. Overall picture is great but looking individually there is Hotel 2 that has none of the dimensions, while Hotel 6 has 9 out of 10. Average number of dimensions used is 6 where Hotel 1, Hotel 4, and Hotel 5 used those 6.

The overall idea of this research paper was to see if questionnaires are valid and reliable according to construction of customer satisfaction questionnaire. Results showed us that these 6 hotels are on the right track of having reliable and valid questionnaires. There are somewhere halfway to claim that they have great customer satisfaction questionnaires.

Limitation of this research paper is the worldwide situation with pandemic called COVID-19. Due to this situation, a lot of hotels were closed by the order of the Croatian government. It was hard to collect these 6 customer satisfaction questionnaires let alone 15-20 of them. Some of

the questionnaires are collected through personal relationship and some of them are collected through official correspondence with hotels operations office.

Further research suggestion is to compare customer satisfaction questionnaires of the hotels on the Adriatic coast. It would be interesting to see the difference between chain hotels and privately owned hotels. The first step would be to see how privately owned hotels stand with construction of questionnaires, then to see how chain hotels stand and then to compare. This further research would be based on 4-star hotels and 5-star hotels.

This research paper showed the importance of the proper construction of the customer satisfaction questionnaires as well as that a lot of hotels in Dubrovnik area are not using them correctly. The conclusion is to educate hotels in order to show them how to make a proper customer satisfaction questionnaire that is valid and reliable, so they can improve service quality if needed. Proper customer satisfaction questionnaire can give proper insight in every department. Finally, with proper customer satisfaction, hotel is secure with clear insight of its business.

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APPENDIX

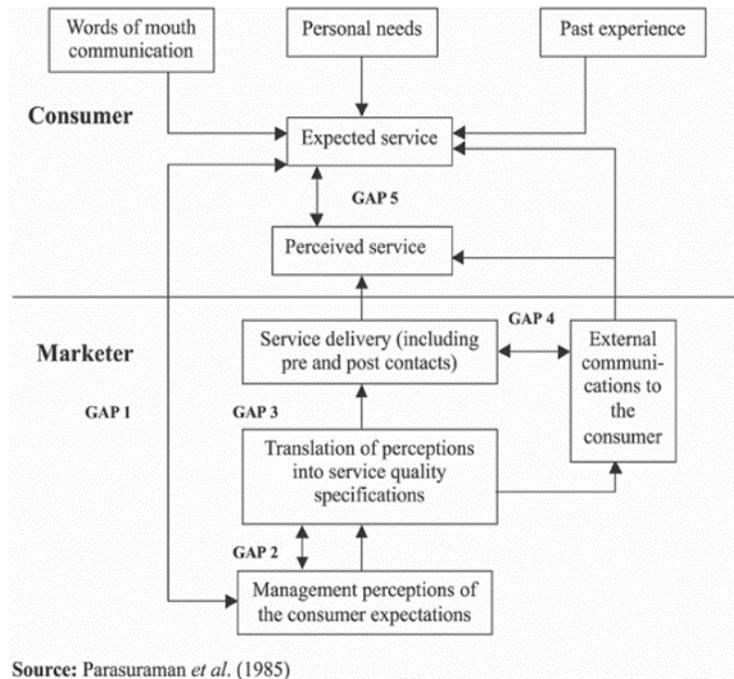


Illustration 1. Service Gap Model

ASSURANCE				EMPHATY			RELIABILITY	RESPONSIVNESS	TANGIBLES
Credibility	Competence	Courtesy	Security	Access	Communication	Understanding the Customer	Reliability	Responsiveness	Tangibles

Table 1. Explanation of 10 service dimensions.

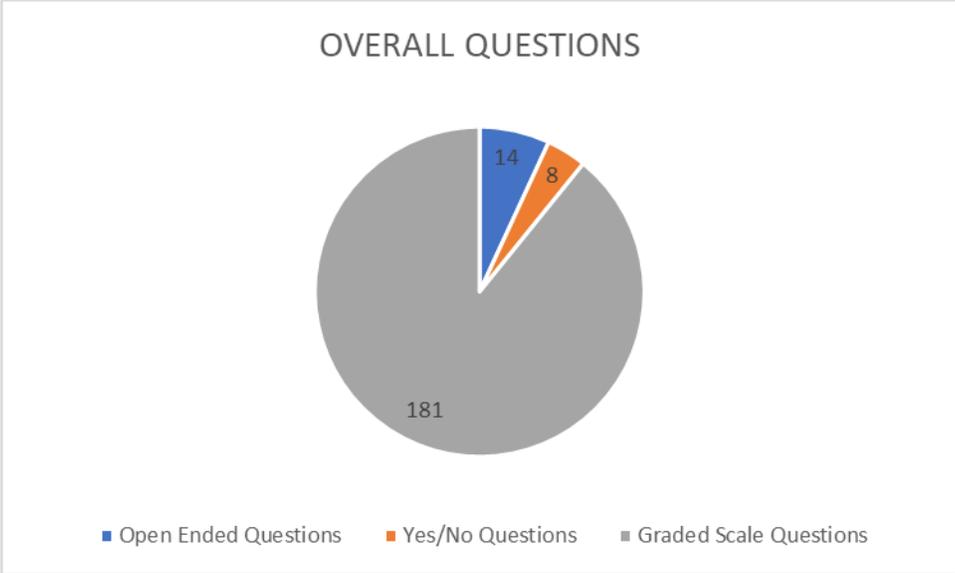


Figure 1. Overall comparison of questions

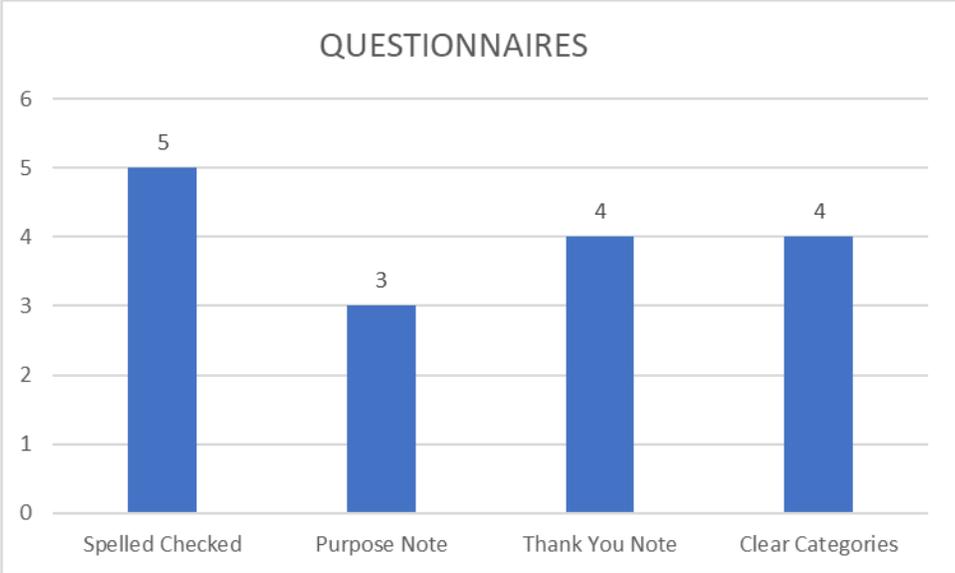


Figure 2. Overall explanations of types of questions in questionnaires.

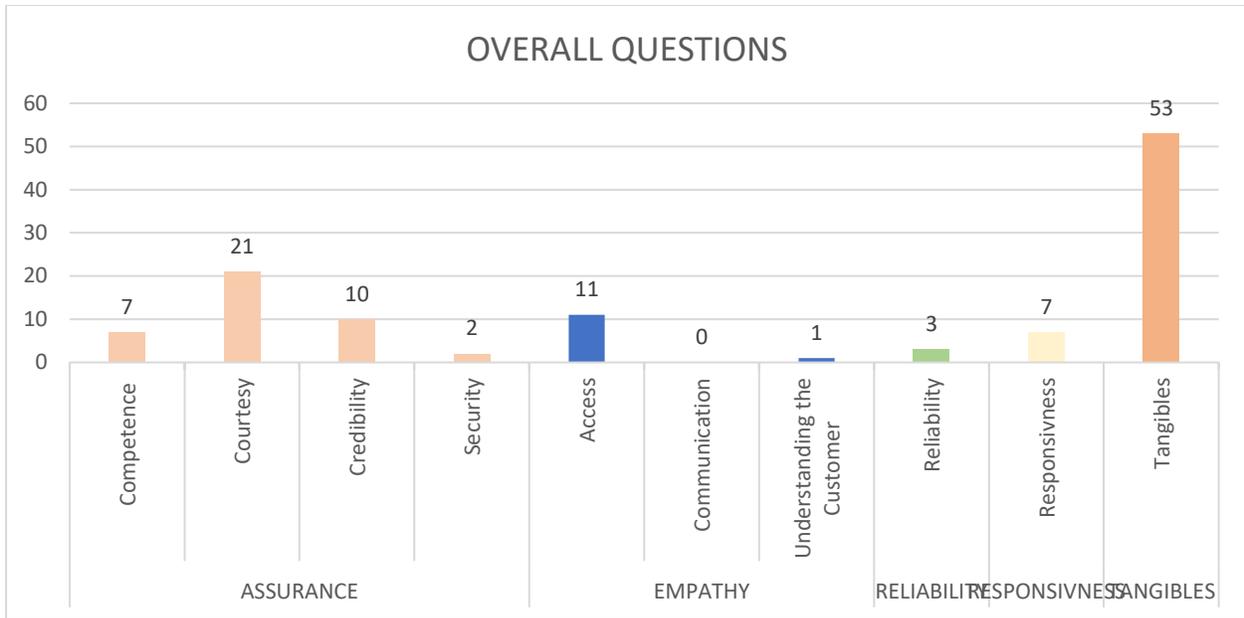


Figure 3. Overall explanation of questions that used quality dimensions

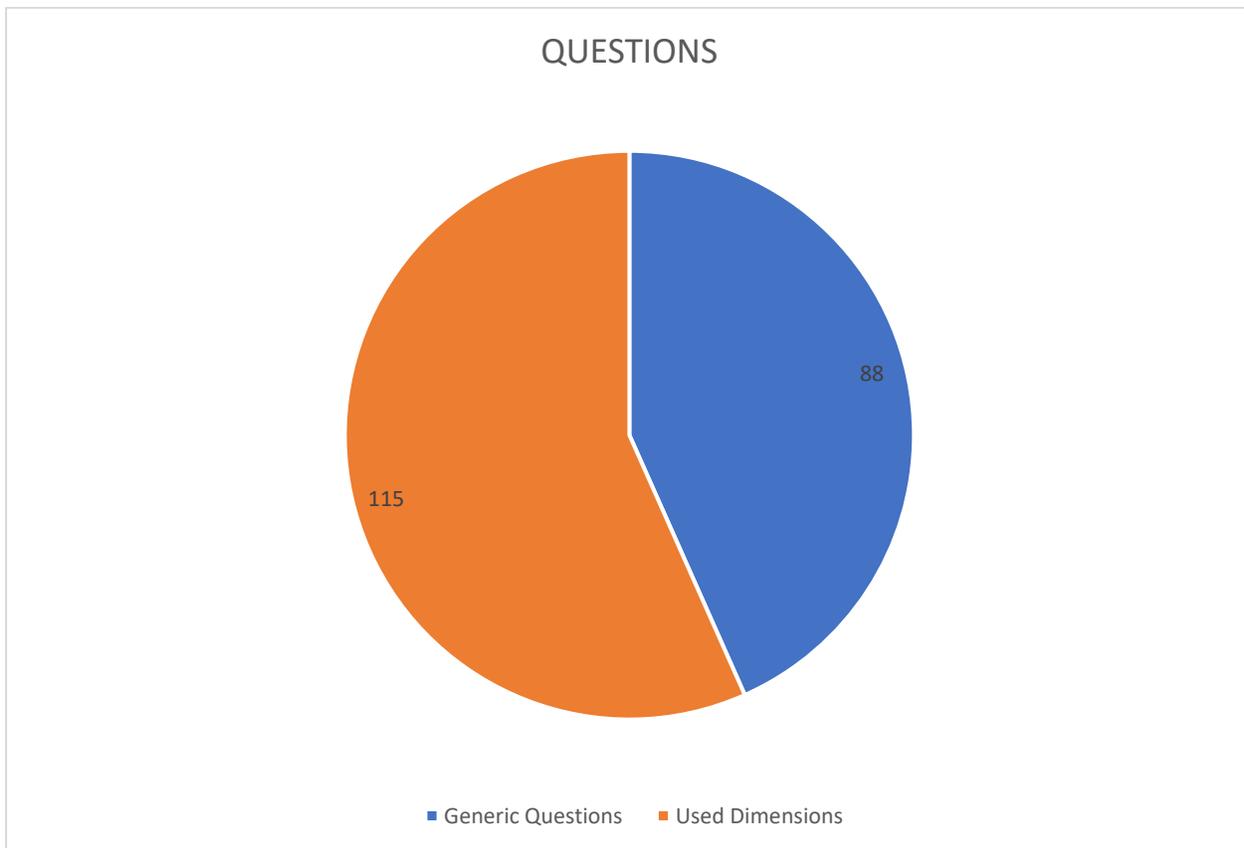


Figure 4. Comparison of generic questions and questions that used dimensions

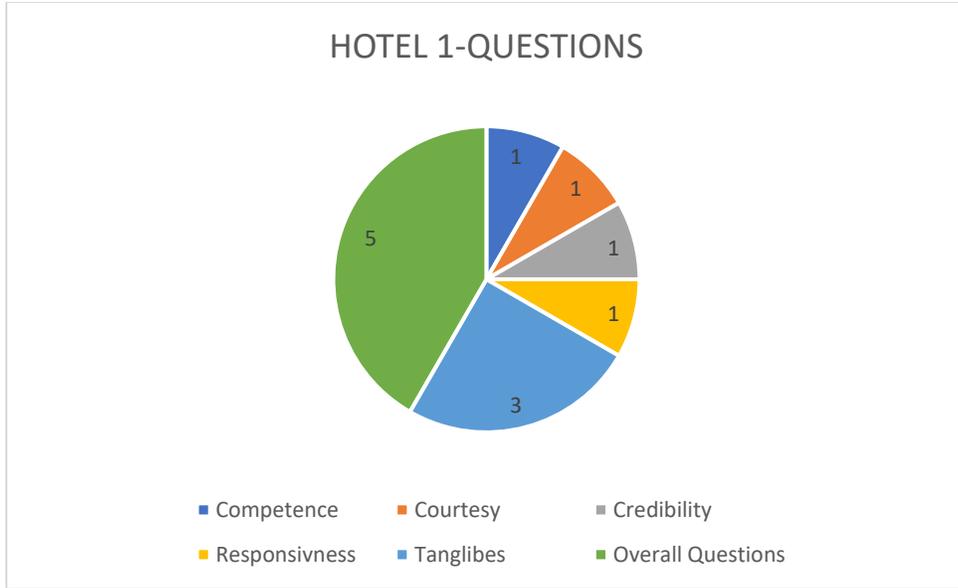


Figure 5. Explanation of questions of Hotel 1

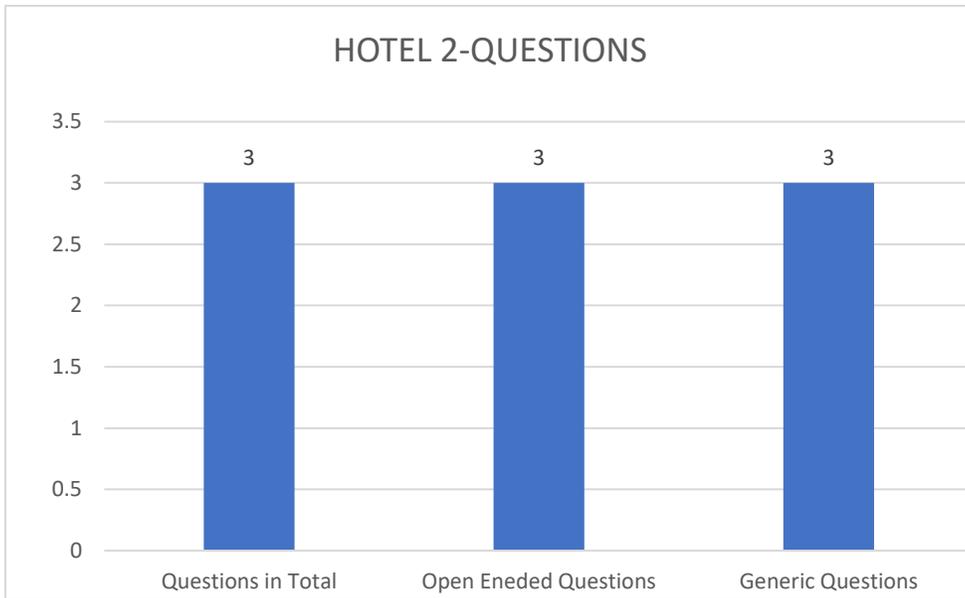


Figure 6. Explanation of questions of Hotel 2

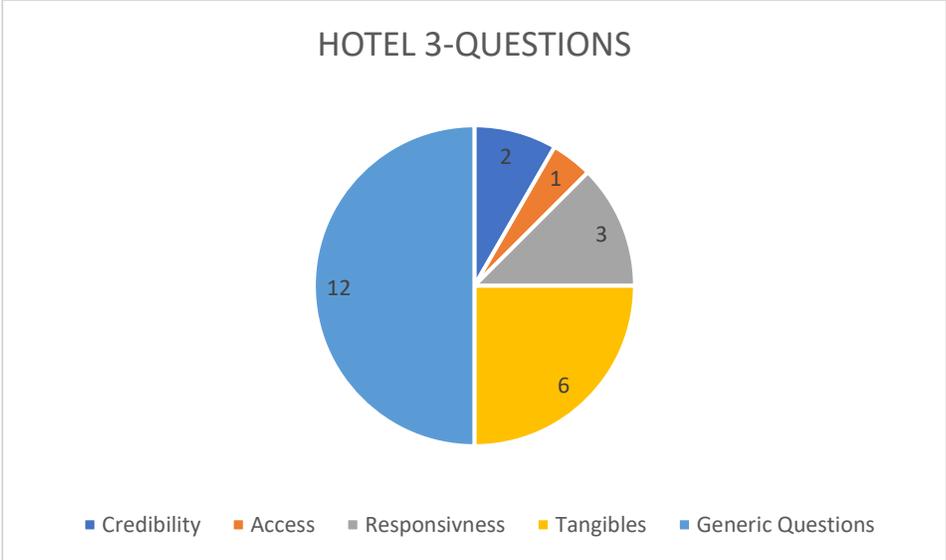


Figure 7. Explanation of Hotel 3 questions

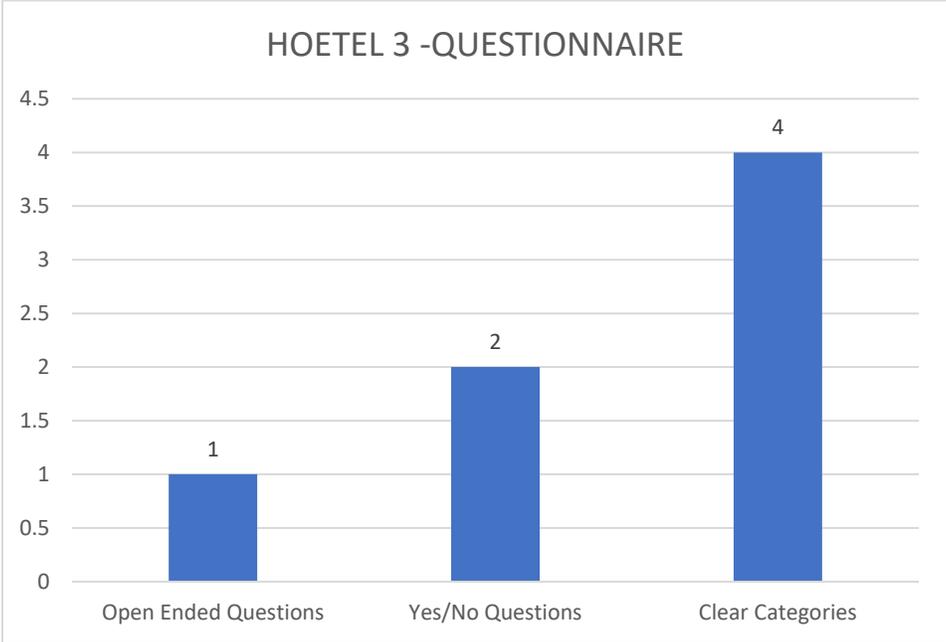


Figure 8. Explanation of Hotel 3 questions

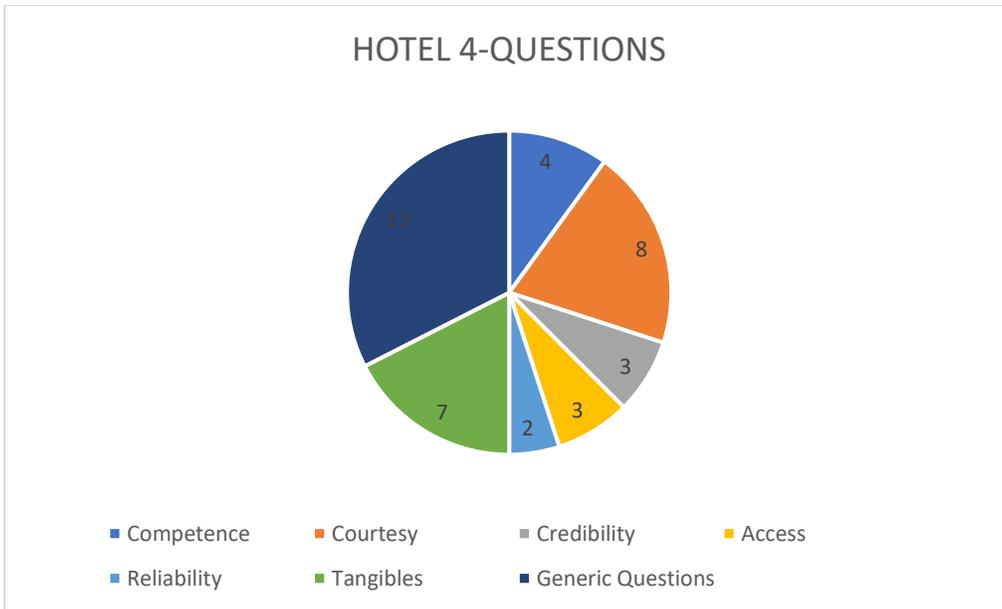


Figure 9. Explanation of Hotel 4 questions

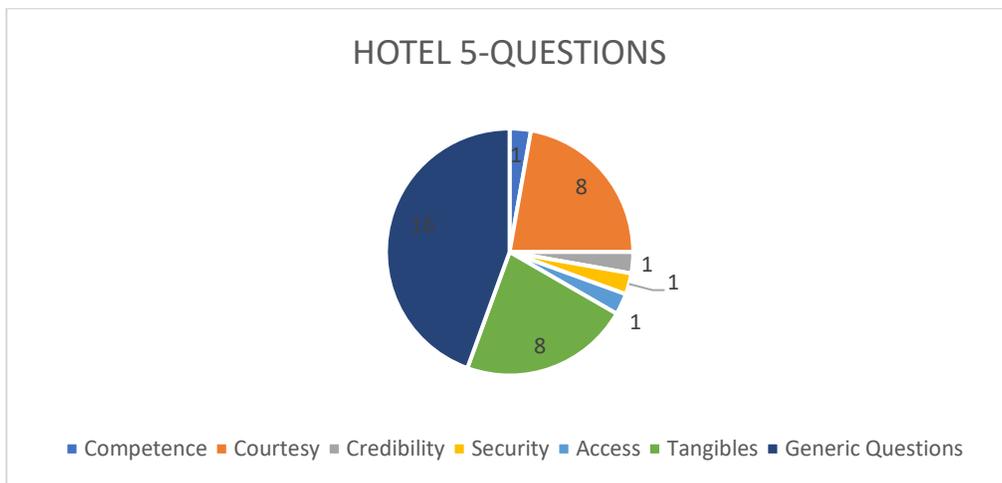


Figure 10. Explanation of Hotel 5 questions

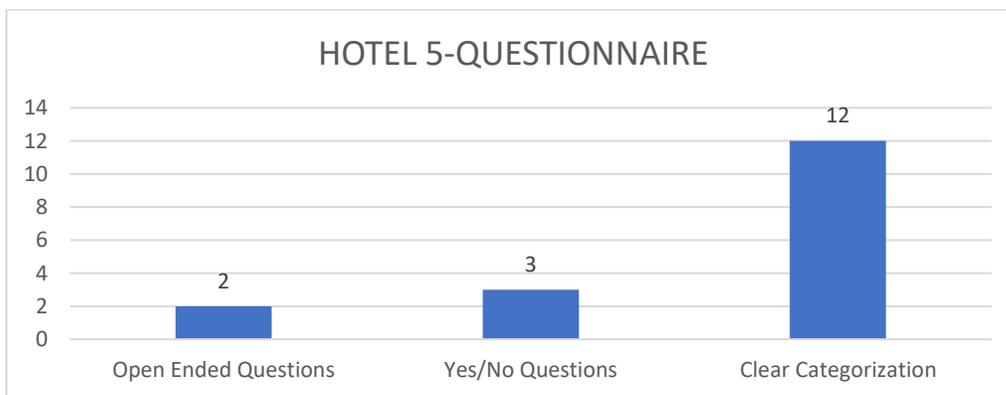


Figure 11. Explanation of Hotel 5 questions

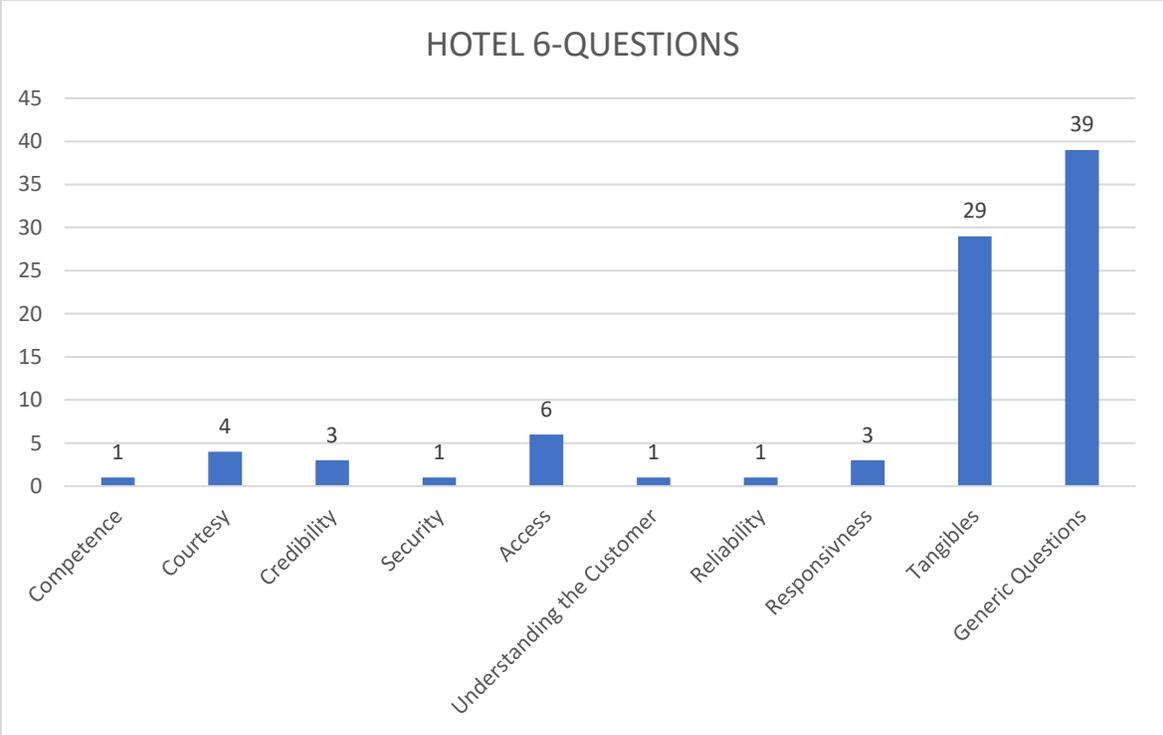


Figure 12. Explanation of Hotel 6 questions