THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF RURAL TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY CRITERIA FOR IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIC MARKETING OPTIONS

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This research as an inductive process of building conceptual understanding about the empirical issues of developing rural tourism according service quality criteria measurement, and arises the focus considering how marketing strategy contributes to the successful execution of proactive business strategy.

The efficiency of quality management covers the implications about the consumers’ perceptions of rural tourism services. Special dimensions in rural tourism service quality measurement become the important match to evaluate the services content and to create originated supply for modern consumers. The implications of strategic marketing options as the object of service quality management serve to implement marketing strategy oriented into target market with variety of consumers’ expectations. The service companies acting in countryside face with the main problem – the implementation of marketing strategy implications for successful integration as business strategy. Service quality management effectiveness covers interdisciplinary perspective with implementation of special resources with their impact complexity to selected region. The main groups of rural tourism service quality measurement criteria are identified by empirical analysis: 1) management of human resources competence; 2) progressive technology implementation into service performance; and 3) administrative culture development for service quality management, - which impact the effectiveness of service quality management.

Strategy implications, functional strategy, strategic marketing options, rural tourism service, service quality management, service quality measurement, consumers’ preferences and expectations.

Introduction

Substantial contribution in this empirical research is focused on rural tourism service quality management with special observation of rural tourism service quality development matches.

The theoretical study is described in this article as basic match under analysis of rural tourism service quality measurement criteria. The criteria for rural tourism service quality measurement as difficulties to measure the rural tourism service quality are connected with service immeasurability (intangibility, heterogeneity and concurrent).

The systematic analysis of relevant scientific researches lets to perform target implications about separate elements of marketing strategy. The identification
of strategic factors as typical opportunities and hazards is oriented to empirical tools as qualitative measure methods.

The research aim is to identify the conceptual issues concerning the rural tourism service quality measurement matches.

The research objectives:
- to determine determinants for rural tourism service system quality.
- to identify possibilities to ground the diversification strategy by implementing marketing modern tools for rural tourism services.
- to define opportunities for greater development rural tourism service system.

The research object is identified issue for development rural tourism service system in changing service quality.

**Research methodology**

This research is based upon empirical analysis results, which were summarized after review of appropriate literature. The empirical analysis was inspired by suggested problems of practitioners in measurement the service quality in rural tourism sector (Rukuižienė, 2006). The necessity to investigate rural tourism service quality appeared in recent years, when the consumers’ preferences and expectations became divergent from service structure provided in rural tourism sector.

The overall research question is “what conceptual issues have to be separated as measurement matches of rural tourism service quality?” The analysts of service quality management actively reveal this central discussion by existing peculiarities in the frame of competitive advantages creation in the similar fields of service business (Slater, 2001). The answer, determining the question about the issues as preconditions of service heterogeneity lets to focus the empirical analysis to performance among competitors and could be suggested as the system of: 1) service completeness; 2) quality of service formation process; 3) possession of valuable, rare and specific resources; and 4) effective organization design directed towards strategy implementation.

This research supports proposition, which is oriented to understanding of strategy implementation as the match between business and functional (marketing) strategy (Bowen, 1990). The research results in this article are presented as selected issues of strategic marketing and strategic management.

More specific questions relating to the central discussion are presented: 1) how the consumers perceive and evaluate the completeness of rural tourism service package; 2) what issues of service quality management is possible to adapt in changing rural tourism service quality; 3) which resources are determining the changes of rural tourism service quality; 4) which level strategy of activity development is impacting rural tourism business effectiveness.
Research results

Cohesion between tourism services and rural tourism services development stipulates the consequences for business diversifications strategies. The problem is arising when the appropriate marketing strategy should have to be applied. There is no systematic approach presented for evaluation rural tourism service quality.

According M. E. Porter the structure of successful business strategy could be defined by some implications: 1) management of human resources; 2) progressive technological means; 3) administrative competences (Porter, 1985). M. E. Porter emerged two dominant frameworks of functional (marketing) strategy: first, the strategic alternatives for development the company’s products or activity development possibilities; second, the appropriate structure and processes for achievement of successful entrepreneurial problems solution. Typical strategy building implications have the direct impact in managing the service (product) quality, because exists the conjoint between the implications of strategy formation process and service quality management criteria (Chase, 1981). Existing types of competitors in the market could be identified as developers of appropriate business by using typical issues for exploiting the new products (services) and new market opportunities (Slater, 2001). The interfering enterprises are important as the users of different market development opportunities. The extreme positions in seeking of new market segments are actual activity for any service producer. The combination of competitors in the market creates the additional strengths actually protecting the entrepreneurs and customers. M. E. Porter proposed that entrepreneurial problem should be viewed as a product of how the companies create the value as differentiation or low cost, or how it defines its scope of market coverage as focused or market wide. Value creation model is obviously relevant for understanding the implications, which help to build the effective service quality management process (Porter, 1985). The higher complexity of service value added chain, more rural tourism service quality criteria are needed, and this fact covers the complexity of service providence structure and processes (fig. 1).

![Figure 1. Criteria system for evaluation rural tourism service quality in value creation model (Porter, 1985)](image-url)
The peculiarities of services in offering process are performed as different products for consumers. The main constructive elements of rural tourism service are based by their quality and quality measurement (Bateson, 1999). Rural tourism service quality could be defined as the apprehension utility by service user, which is creating by service producer implementing various communication and promotion means. The traditional quality approach can’t be applied for service producers, because outcome of rural tourism service specifications are not clear (Johnson, 1992). To establish such an approach requires three things: 1) appropriate quality logic; 2) measurement system; 3) quality building culture. The service quality cycle must to include a step that establishes consumer commitments. The service provision process is built firstly, on the reaction of consumer when services production takes place in real time and in the presence of consumer; and secondly, on the producer’s efforts to be engaged in service recovery. These aspects are included to the service quality cycle by Gary K. Johnson and Roland A. Dumas (Bateson, 1999, P. 346).

Observation of rural tourism service system as a special quality and scope is leading to the quality measurement system. Most of entrepreneurs are acting independently in tourism sector, and their efforts to create high quality services for tourists have to be conducted with local authority’s strategic decisions or the policy of regional development. Marketing concept is becoming a tool to produce relevant marketing strategy and to identify the strategic options for each attractive district in developing rural tourism and appropriate rural tourism service system. Nowadays, important factor for developing tourism in far distant regions is diversified tourism service system. Diversification of rural tourism service system is available under globalisation of tourism products (special services and regional products), service market in developing regions with specific regional attractiveness and hospitality. Service management effectiveness covers the implications of activities’ diversification in unfavourable rural areas when low effective agricultural productivity can’t warrant appropriate income for rural residents (Rukuižienė, 2006).

Rural tourism serves for elimination of vulnerability in developing regions with higher efficiency of services. The development of rural tourism sector is more service-oriented, and the changes in rural tourism sector are matched to the focus of a service quality orientation. Conceptualisation of services bridges the adverse determinants as service quality and service success. Service quality closely connected with output in service sector, and service success – with service scale and quality. There is the difficulty to define the implication of rural tourism service sector development, but this sector at the moment helps to change positively the development of service business at rural areas, and service sector is functioning as dominant utilizing local resources with high capacity of power to infuse external sources of modern resources such as IT, communication nets, information search systems (terminals), consulting, and etc.

Rural tourism sector development closely depends upon the service delivering quality at rural areas. The quality of services for tourists depends upon some
determinants: 1) human resources issues for service; 2) service quality issues, communication skills; and 3) training.

Human resources issues as high-contact service are strongly related to consumers’ evaluations, when service receive become real intensions to use it repeatedly. The interaction between attendants and consumers underscores the fact that consumers become close to service attendants during the service performance period. This fact helps to understand this interaction as a tool to influence the consumers. Researchers are noted that the hosts of homesteads could be involved in “three-way” interactions: 1) between themselves (as partners or competitors); 2) with consumers (as their service users); and 3) production process or technology (for providence service effectively) (Tansik, 1990) (fig. 2).

![Figure 2. The types of interactions in tourism service system according A. Tansik (Tansik, 1990)](image)

In developing regional economies at rural areas these interactions are more primitive, and are constructed of two levels – service providers and service technology. This fact shows, that rural tourism service quality can be evaluated by technological level, but not highly equipped according the consumers needs and want awareness. The system of rural tourism services needs highly developed quality of provided service, and this dimension is leading to higher productivity and income.

J. Hogan, R. Hogan and C. M. Busch in 1984 developed special measure and called the service orientation scale (Tansik, 1990), which can measure the qualitative elements of behaviour in communication process between service provider and consumer as predisposition to help, consideration, and cooperation. This scale can’t measure technical competence, and is based on personal features as good adjustment, likeability, social skills and willingness to follow rules. Service quality issues as a cohesion between service providers and consumers could influence the productivity of service organization (Tansik, 1990).

The productivity of tourism services could be measured by hospitality of services providers, and by generated greater trust of consumers. As consequence the individual features and hospitality of services providers creates the additional attitude for service consumers. A. Tansik presented the basic orientation to service quality issues (fig. 3) and explained concepts about how a service organization provides a service help explain, and why defining service quality is so complex and difficult as management task.
The measurement of service quality has to have the focus on a systematic research program undertaken by A. Parasuraman, Leonard A. Berry and Valerie A. Zeithaml (Parasuraman, 1985). This measurement system is focused on postulate that quality also is a result of a comparison of expectations and perceptions. They developed the generic service instrument SERVQUAL of two sections: first section compounds 22 items where consumers fix their expectations of excellent firms in the specific service industry, and second section with 22 items measure consumers perception of particular company in that service industry. After comparison of “22 and 22” items gap score for each five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) in seven score scale. The result depends on “gap score”: the smaller gap, the higher service quality expectations.

P. Thompson, P. DeSouza and B. T. Gale analysed various services of different organizations and made the consequence about the service quality: “in only 15 percent of the markets is service irrelevant in the consumer perception of quality” (Colier, 1990). They conclude, “service quality is a key to profitability and growth …”. High-contact interactions can create high quality of service, as the system “technology-service provider-consumer” covers interrelations with great hospitality, good emotions and pleasure for consumers.

High contact interaction is a complex (mix) of services performance and attitude, which strongly influence customers’ perceptions even when the services provider has vexing issue to lower service quality.
Some determinants as contact interaction and individual features or communication quality of service provider are the current dimensions for evaluation tourism service system at rural areas. The peculiarities of tourism service system are versatile upon market determinants. If tourism service market is stable, the evaluation of service system efficiency is totally complicated. Then, the services quality is compounded of ten facets of service provision determinants for broad range of services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985) (see in table).

In otherwise, when the services market is developing the consumer’s attention is concentrated only to some determinants of service provision.

Table. Service quality evaluation system (Bateson, 1999, p. 347–350)

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<th>Determinants of service</th>
<th>Definitions of service</th>
<th>Delivery and service performance standards</th>
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| Reliability            | Consistency of performance and dependability | • Excellent means  
|                        |                        | • Customers’ identity  
|                        |                        | • Service provision type as complementary, peripheral, supporting  
| Responsiveness         | The willingness or readiness of employees to provide service | • Quality as tangible or intangible  
| Competence             | Possession of required skills and knowledge to perform the service | • Levels of services for measurement service quantity and quality  
| Access                 | Approachability and easy of contacts | • Consistent means for service performance as low or no variability  
| Courtesy               | Politeness, respectability, friendly communication | • Service package as a set of services with (in) tangible attributes  
| Communication          | Prime information to customer about language skills and communication quality to customers | • Specified means by service management  
| Credibility            | Honesty                | • External standards of service performance focused on marketing criteria  
| Security               | Freedom from dangers, risks, doubts | |  
| Understanding the customer | Making efforts to understand customers | |  
| Tangibles              | Physical evidence of service | |  

The identification of determinants for rural tourism service quality is compounded of service delivery and service performance standards according the tourism service content. The rural tourism service quality depends on the hosts of homesteads involvement into “three-way” interactions: 1) between themselves (as partners or competitors); 2) with consumers (as service users); and 3) production process or technology (for providence service effectively). The communication level and quality impacts the rural tourism service quality directly, when the consumers can directly percept the three level tourism service qualities content. The technological issues create the positive attitudes at first reflection with communication issues in creation additional value, and competition intensions create the aggregate increase of demand with originated perceptions of customers.
Modern marketing tools of rural tourism services are oriented to create the originated demand by the help of regional products. The tourism service system possesses tangible and intangible attributes. Then, quality of tourism services depends on regional products, which have potentiality by the help of non-typical products brands to create additional value. Then customers evaluate complementary, peripheral and supporting services at once. Service quality helps to gain a competitive advantage for service provider. The tourism service system with different service package performs different profitability for service providers. This fact means that the diversification of service package could become the basement for greater changes in developing rural tourism.

The development of rural tourism services stipulates the consequences for business diversifications strategies. When the problem is arising about marketing tools implementation into appropriate marketing strategy, then special implications have to be identified. There is no systematic approach presented for evaluation rural tourism service quality. To establish such an approach requires three things: 1) appropriate quality logic; 2) measurement system; 3) quality building culture.

Conclusions

Rural tourism sector is service-oriented and requires service quality variety in space. By the help of specific marketing issues tourists can identify specialties of rural tourism services in the frame of consumers’ perceptions and expectations. In different countries rural areas and service quality option after experienced considerations are oriented to service variety (Rukuižienė, 2006). Local economic development surely requires well-considered actions from local producers and consumers. Only after effective use of resources of the regional infrastructure, the cooperation and coordination between rural tourism entities could be used effectively.

The orientation of empiric analysis helped to define strategic marketing means as issues for improvement the measurement of rural tourism service quality. Current issues were determined as actual: 1) management peculiarities of human resources; 2) progressive technology of service provision; and 3) administration culture of service quality management. The service system in rural tourism sector successfully creates the appropriate demand upon services quality and scale. In turn, the high income from rural tourism service system depends on diversified services or rural tourism service quality management. Unfortunately, the research according defined questions is not adequate to formulate service quality measurement criteria.

Consequently, this empiric analysis serves for finding the answer to the question – “what conceptual issues could be applied as selecting and appropriate of rural tourism service quality?”

There is possibility to inject conceptual issues as appropriate for formation high demanded rural tourism service and criteria for service quality measurement:

- rural tourism service quality measurement criteria impact the issues relevance for implementation the means of service quality management.
• rural tourism service quality depends upon the structure of service package.
• possibilities of transformation of functional strategy have to be predicted in rural tourism service quality measurement.

The rural tourism service quality management determinants have to be implemented as contributions to marketing strategy. Empiric service quality evaluation determinants and measurement criteria are important as opportunities to develop rapidly rural tourism. Therefore, rural tourism service quality management and measurement often is producing by the initiative, competence and efforts of service producers.

The principle service quality measurement determinants in rural tourism are based upon diversified business strategy. As mentioned in studies of different researchers the scale can’t measure technical competence, and is based on individual features as good adjustment, likeability, social skills and willingness to follow rules in making the efficient communication with consumers according their perceptions and expectations.

Otherwise, the quality measurement of rural tourism services could be analysed as synergic process when the mix of implications contribute higher effect for consumers.

References

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama kaimo turizmo paslaugų kokybės vertinimo problema. Mokslineje literatūroje menkai nagrinėjama kaimo turizmo paslaugų kokybės vertinimo problema. Dėl šios priežasties iškilo būtinybė nustatyti, kokie kaimo turizmo paslaugų kokybės vertinimo kriterijai būtini siekiant priimti strateginės rinkodaros sprendimus.


Empirinė analizės pagalba nustatyti kaimo turizmo paslaugų kokybės vertinimui tinkamos kriterijų grupės: 1) žmogiškųjų išteklių kompetencijos valdymo; 2) pažangios technologijos diegimas paslaugų teikimo procese; ir 3) administravimo kultūros tobulinimas paslaugų kokybės valdyme, – kurios lemia paslaugų kokybės valdymo efektyvumą.

Strategijos reikšmė, funkcinė strategija, strateginės rinkodaros atvejai, kaimo turizmo paslaugų sistema, kaimo turizmo paslaugų kokybės valdymas, paslaugų kokybės matavimas, vartotojų suvokimas ir lūkesčiai.