

## **The Customer Satisfaction, A Continuing Priority in Economics**

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### **Abstract:**

*The problem of the customers' satisfaction is very usual in Economics literature, mainly in the Marketing field of analysis. In this paper we used a very common marketing tool: the questionnaire, in order to see and to conclude about the satisfaction of the clients of a tourism location, such as a hotel. We also try to introduce some Philosophical aspects, especially from Immanuel Kant's ideas, regarding the knowledge and the possibilities of understanding the reality, passed through the mind's filter, adding customers' perceptions, a priori beliefs and other subjective traits. On the other hand, the use of the questionnaire is very sensitive, also from the Philosophical point of view, because we don't know exactly how accurate are the answers, or if we questioned a significant sample of customers. At sum, including economic and philosophic aspects, the satisfaction of customers is obviously illustrated in the study.*

**Keywords:** *satisfaction; clients; knowledge questionnaire; empirical objects.*

### **1. The role and importance of customer satisfaction**

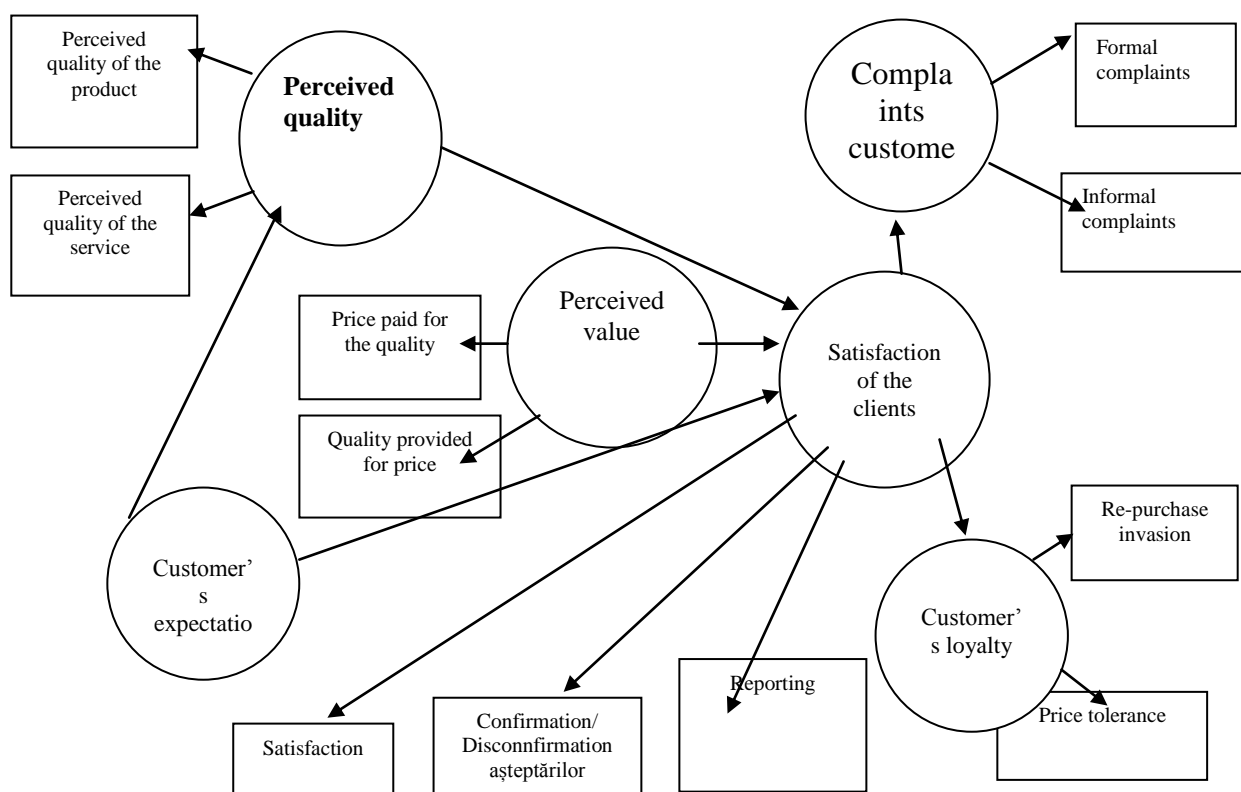
There are many analyzes and studies worldwide, focusing upon the quality dimensions as the main determinants of the customer satisfaction, so we can recall the models derived from SERVQUAL's service quality model of Berry and Zeithaml (1988), a model that tries for the first time to operate the concept of satisfaction in an academic and theoretical context, upon the basis of analyzes and discussions among the customer satisfaction, the perceived quality of products and services and the expectations thereof.

From some standpoints, the main purpose of the companies is to sell services or products, i.e. to deliver and produce those services and products that meet the needs and requirements of users or consumers to an extremely high degree. Thus, the importance of customer satisfaction is highlighted by the numerous quality awards that bring together, on the one hand, the criteria for providing a customer satisfaction component, and on the other hand by the large number of countries concerned with the introduction and building of customer satisfaction indices (USA -

ACSI index, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, England, Germany – ECSI index). (Anderson, Formell, 2000, 869 - 882)

Some specialists (Eşi, 2014, 73-83) in the field believe that there are at least five large benefits that an organization can have by measuring the customer satisfaction sentiment can be identified. Among the benefits that the two specialists speak of, there are the following (Buell, 1984) they contribute to reducing the expenditure and costs; they contribute to improving the quality of the services and products offered; they stimulate and increase the morale of the hired staff; they maintain or lift the staff’s morale.

As much as the role of customer satisfaction is concerned, one considers that it can play a number of roles, be it a public or private organization. The customer satisfaction can serve as a “Feed-back”-type regulation, or as system inputs. The importance of the customer satisfaction results from the fact that it links the organization to its customers, highlighting, among other things, the organization's concern for the needs and demands of the consumers or customers.



*Figure no. 1.1. The structural model of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for private organizations*  
 (Source: American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) Methodology, 2005, p. 10)

The customer satisfaction for a public or private organization can be used as (Raboca, 2008, p.101) *a managerial tool* – when managers use customer satisfaction properly, it can be an effective tool for motivating the staff. Many organizations use the customer satisfaction as a basis both for

increasing the managerial accountability and for establishing and substantiating the mission or its goals.

- *a tool to improve the quality of the services or products provided* – considering how quality is defined, it is very clear that any improvement in the quality of the services and products offered must take into account the customers and their satisfaction with the quality provided.
- *Public Relations and Image tool* – a system of satisfaction measurement for many organizations (Eși, 2014), is used to change or enhance the image among customers, the media or citizens, by harnessing and speculating the relationship established between their own customers or consumers and organization.
- *Compensation tool* - Companies use the satisfaction measurement as a feed-back adjusting element to provide incentives to employees.
- *Resource allocation guide* – organizations use the results of measuring the customer satisfaction to allocate or distribute the resources at their disposal.

Starting from the above, we can state that the satisfaction measurement can be used for managerial purposes, as exemplified in the following table.

*Table no. 1.2. The main purposes for which customer satisfaction can be used*

<b>The expected goal of using customer satisfaction measurement</b>	<b>which customer satisfaction measurement can find an answer</b>
<b>Assessment</b>	How well does the public institution work?
<b>Control</b>	How can I make sure my subordinates work properly?
<b>Budget</b>	What should the public institution spend its money on?
<b>Motivation</b>	How should I motivate the subordinates to work on a certain standard of performance and quality?
<b>Promotion</b>	How can I convince the decision-makers - governors, politicians, the media that the institution is performing its tasks properly?
<b>Celebration</b>	What achievements deserve to be included in organizational rituals to celebrate success?
<b>Learning</b>	What are the issues that can be identified as negative and what are the causes and lessons that can be drawn to avoid in the future?
<b>Improvement</b>	What should be done differently to improve performance?

*Source: Raboca Horia și Dodu, Marius, 2007, volume of the international conference "Competitiveness and European Integration", UBB – FSEGA, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Alma Mater, p. 213*

The measurement of the customer satisfaction does not have value or importance in itself; the value and importance arise when someone uses this type of measurement in a certain way meant to achieve objectives and goals proposed.

Jan A. Eklof and Anders Westlung (1998) believe that the importance of satisfaction can be reflected upon three components, as follows:

- *At national level*, both for the analysis of the overall competitiveness of the economy and for the formulation of economic and public policies. The customer satisfaction can be used as a macroeconomic adjustment and quality assessment analysis.
- *At the level of individual organizations* or industrial branches - as a tool for studying the lucrative mode and economic profitability of public sector organizations and firms. The customer satisfaction can play within organizations a role in creating and analyzing sustainable and real job opportunities.
- *At the level of the consumer* as a tool to study clearly the needs and requirements of citizens or consumers, but also as a tool for analyzing their perception of the price, quality and level of utility of the services and products provided.

### **Factors influencing the consumer behavior**

The consumer behavior studies aim to achieve two goals. The first is to identify and describe the **factors** that influence the consumer behavior, and the second is to explain the **stages** of the purchasing/consumption process.

The influence of the tourist's behavior upon the market is influenced by a number of factors: personal (psychological), social, cultural and natural factors which one must be taken into account in order to stimulate the customers in the decision-making process. The behavioral model of the consumer of tourist products can be systematized as follows:

<b>INCENTIVES</b>		<b>BEHAVIOR FACTORS</b>		<b>CONSUMER RESPONSE</b>
Marketing	Environment	Consumer characteristics	Decision-making process	
Product Price/rate Distribution Promotion  Technology	Economic Social-cultural Political/legislative	<b>Personal:</b> Image Attitudes Motivations Perceptions Lifestyle Age Profession	Problem identification Collection and processing of information Decision-making Post-purchase behavior	Choice of product/tourist service according to personal consumption needs. Price analysis. Choosing the travel agency Choosing the time when consumption will take place. Choosing the destination when consumption will take place. Purchased quantity

### **A. Personal factors**

The personal factors derive directly from the consumer's being, from his or her needs and motivations. The most important personal factors are:

- The personality of the tourist/hotel consumer
- The self-image
- The attitude of the tourist
- The motivations
- The perceptions
- The lifestyle
- The age
- The profession

### **2. The transcendental aesthetics, a possible support for the perfection of the consumer**

The sensibility and intellect are two specific faculties of knowledge (Eşi, 2000), called to work together to acquire authentic knowledge that, in fact, represents the synthesis of the data of the experience and the activity of reason.

The authentic knowledge (Eşi, 2015), as in our case, or other cases of consumers' satisfaction, can only be a synthesis of sensitivity and intellect. Kant rejects the unilateralism of rationalism and empiricism which are gnosiological solutions prior to him, which attempted to deduce the authentic knowledge from one principle, either from the intellect or from the sensitivity alone. For example, John Locke's glamorous empiricism states that there are no innate ideas that all ideas originate in experience, which is two-fold: external experience, inner sensation and experience and reflection.

The matter or the content of knowledge is a posteriori, originates in the experience, and the form is a priori as it is the expression of the functions exercised by the subject in knowledge.

The existence or the lack of a pure intuition or of a priori intuition is an essential issue for Kant because it supports the architecture of the "Critique of Pure Reason". The arguments to prove these properties of space and time are four: the first two advocate for primacy, the other two for intuitiveness.

*The four proofs are:*

- a) Space and time are not extracted from experience because the experience involves space and time;
- b) We can have the representation of space and time without the representation of the objects contained in them, but not the other way around;
- c) The space and time representations are not concepts, but intuitions;

d) The space and the transcendental exposure addresses the issue directly, arguing that certain a priori synthetic knowledge is possible only by the supposition of the a priori intuitions of space and time.

This a priori synthetic knowledge is present in mathematics. Without space as an intuition a priori geometry is not possible; for example, the synthesis of the connection between the “right line” and the “shortest path between two points” is only possible based upon the representation of a priori pure space.

If space and time were empirical, the mathematical propositions would not be apodictic. If space and time were concepts, the mathematical propositions would not be synthetic.

If the sentences of mathematics are synthetic and a priori, it means that they are possible provided that space and time are a priori intuitions; time is intuition because we represent it as infinite.

The Kantian concept of space and time is different from the concept of the common sense which perceives them as objective realities in themselves, independent of consciousness, either substances or receptacles of things (Newton), or subjective relationships based upon the nature of things (Leibniz). To Kant, space and time have real value in terms of empirical or sensitive objects.

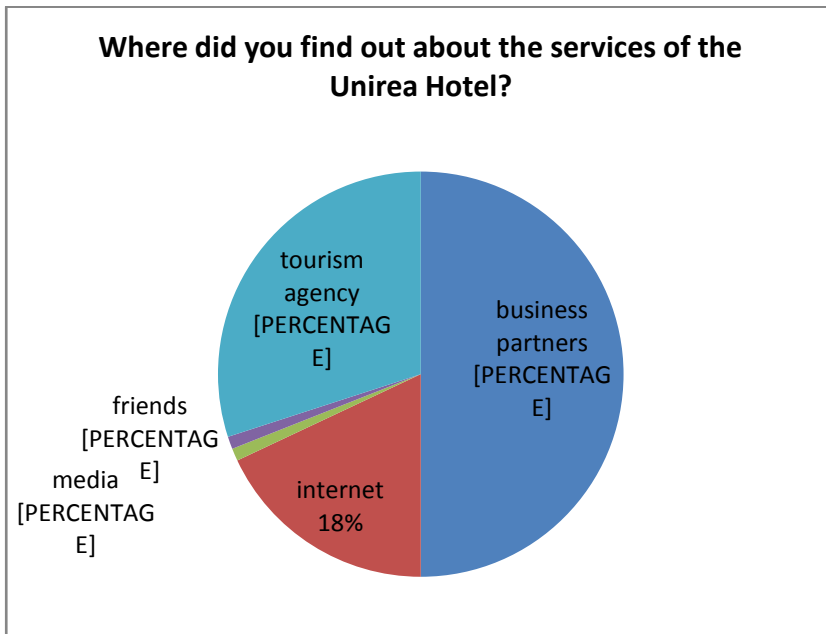
### **3. Case study – the consumers of hotel tourism products**

We applied questionnaires to beneficiary groups of services, tourists arriving in Iași through travel agencies, but also to hotel employees (touristic group - 30 people, business tourists - 30 people, local clients of adjacent services and organized events - 40, hotel-10 employees). It's the case of one of the most important and known hotels: Unirea.

The statistical and qualitative interpretation of the items is as follows:

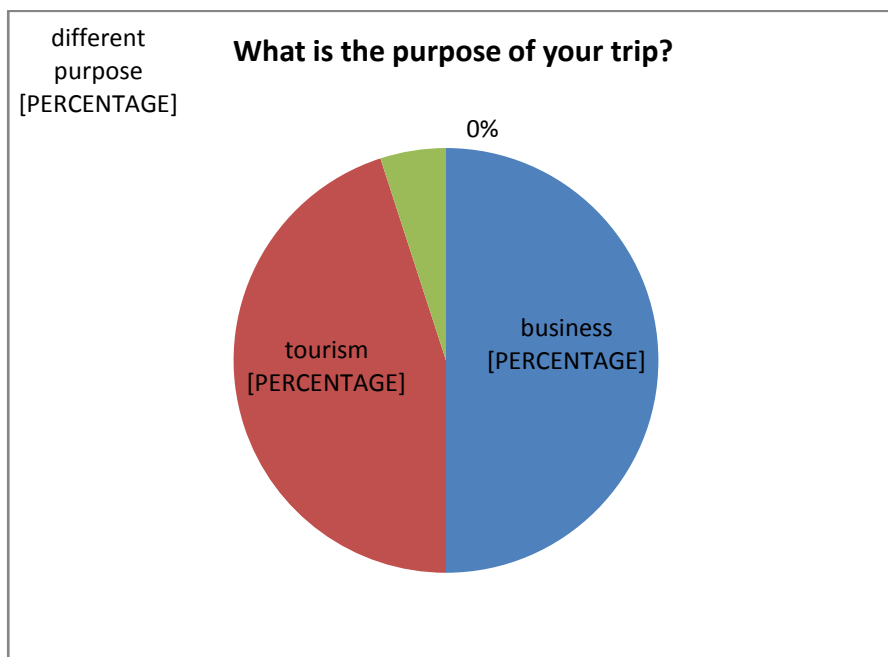
**Questionnaire I** is applied to a group of 100 tourists

At **Item 1** of the Questionnaire „*How did you find out about the services of the Unirea Hotel Complex?*” of the 100 subjects 50 stated they had learned about the hotel from their business partners and 18 subjects – from the Internet. The media and friends were declared as sources of information by 1 respondent and the travel agency by 30 respondents.



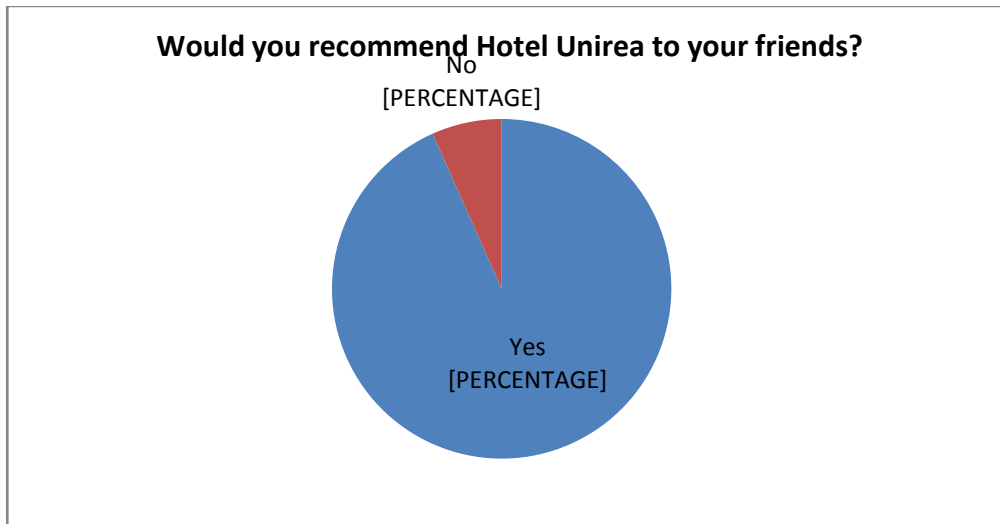
The interpretation of the answers to the sources of information about the hotel complex supports the hypothesis that the beneficiaries of the services provided by the hotel were satisfied with them; the proof is they recommended it to others. This also justifies the hotel's policy of turning its attention to the business sector.

In **Item 2** of the questionnaire „*What is the purpose of your visit?*” 50 subjects stated they were on business trip, 45 were tourists, and for 5 subjects their trip had a different purpose.

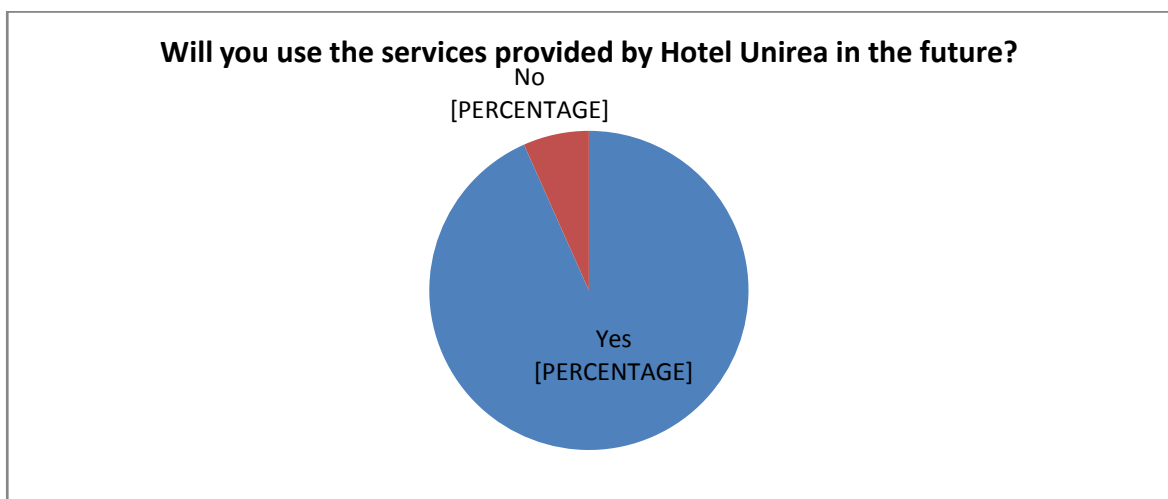


The interpretation of results reflects the hotel's reputation in both the business and the tourist segment.

At **item 3** of the questionnaire „*Would you recommend Hotel Unirea to your friends and acquaintances?*” 93% of the respondents answered affirmatively, which clearly shows the high satisfaction of the clients due to the quality of the services.



At **item 4** „*Will you use the services provided by Hotel Unirea in the future?*” 93 subjects responded affirmatively. This proves the trust that customers have in the quality of the services provided by this hotel, a direct indicator of efficient management.

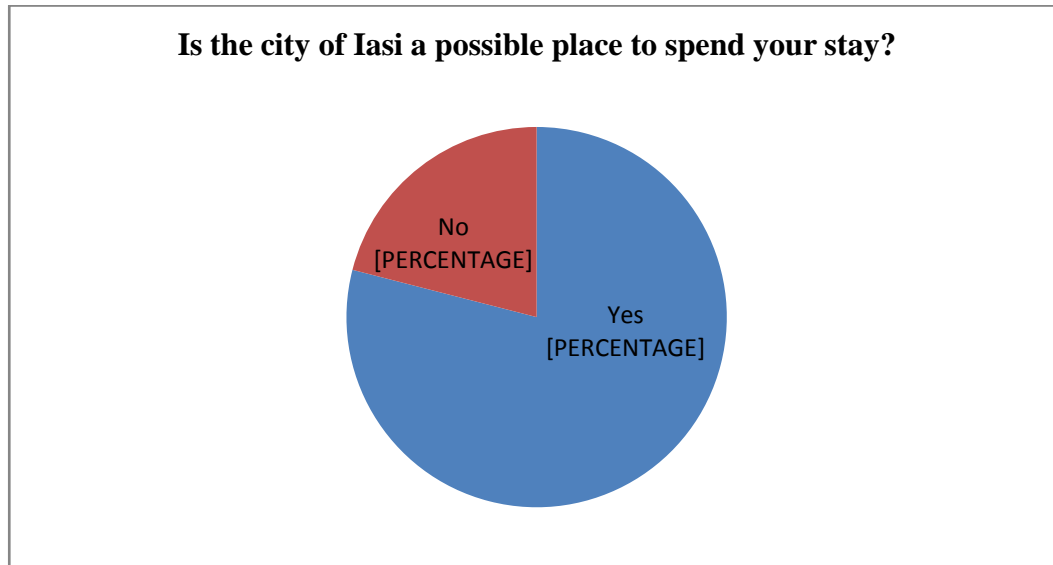


**Questionnaire II** for consumer opinion testing in connection with the diversification of the service offer at Hotel Unirea

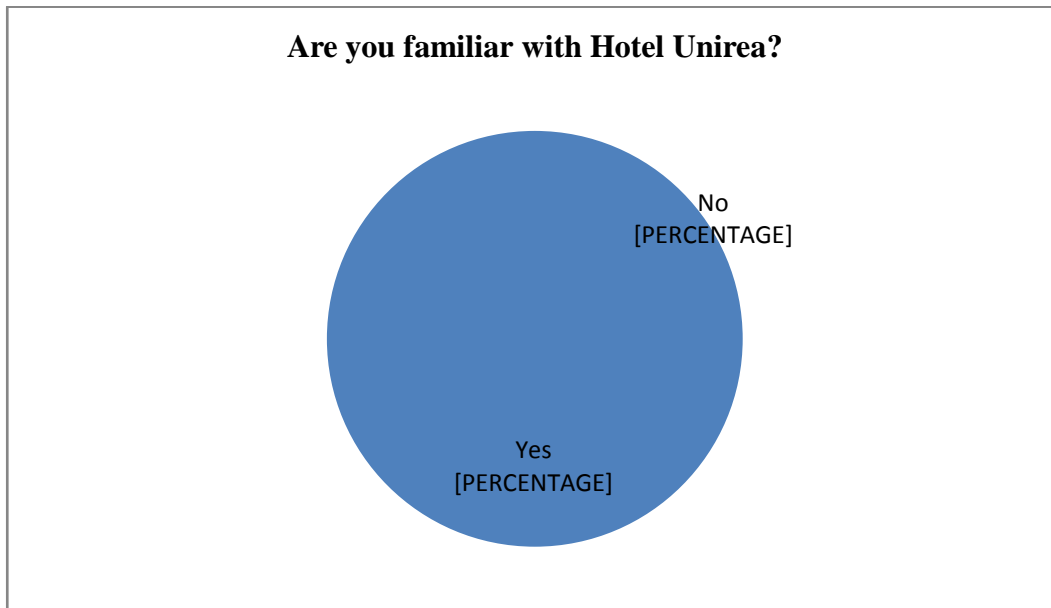


In **item I** „*Is the city of Iași is a possible place to spend your stay?*” 79% said they had documented the city of Iași and seen it as a possible place to spend their stay.

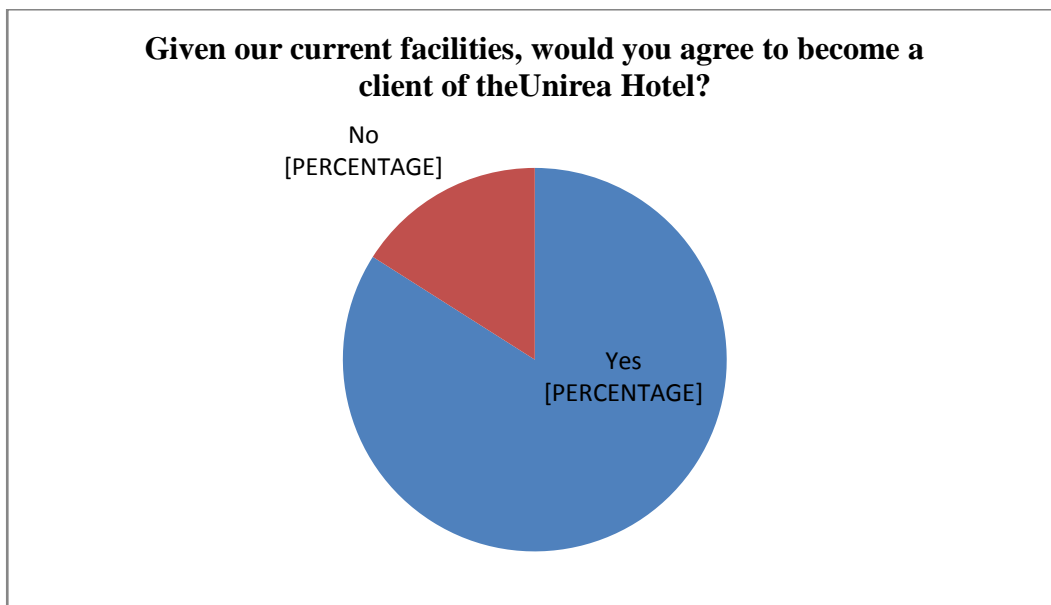
The tourists' opinions entitle the hotel management to focus their attention on providing quality services to customers who already know the city of Iași and would like to visit it even if this was not their first visit but also attract potential clients through various marketing strategies.



At **item II**, „*Are you familiar with Hotel Unirea?*” all 100 subjects said they knew the hotel. The management of the hotel should turn its attention to ways to make this bidder known on the tourist product market. In order to maintain one’s position on a diversified and changing market, one must always come up with something new to meet the requirements of the customers and to single out compared to other bidders.

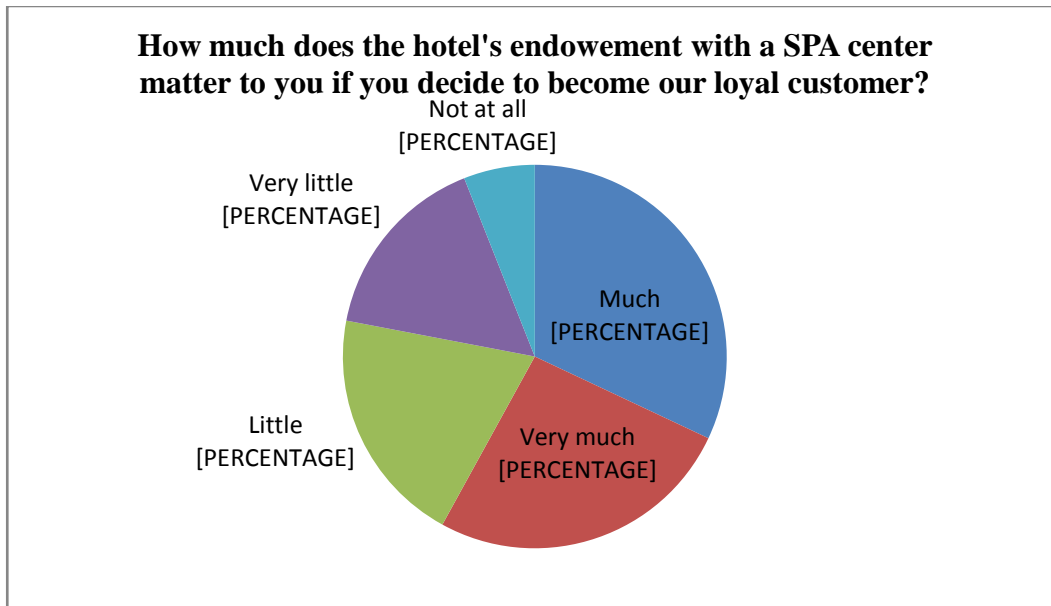


At item III „*Given our current facilities would you agree to become a client of Hotel Unirea?*” out of the 100 subjects 84 would come back to visit as they are convinced and attracted by the quality of the services, the attitude of the staff; these choices confirm the hypothesis according to which the satisfaction of the clients, the attitude they have towards the service provider are directly proportional to the interest shown by the hotel's management team to the customer loyalty through specific methods.

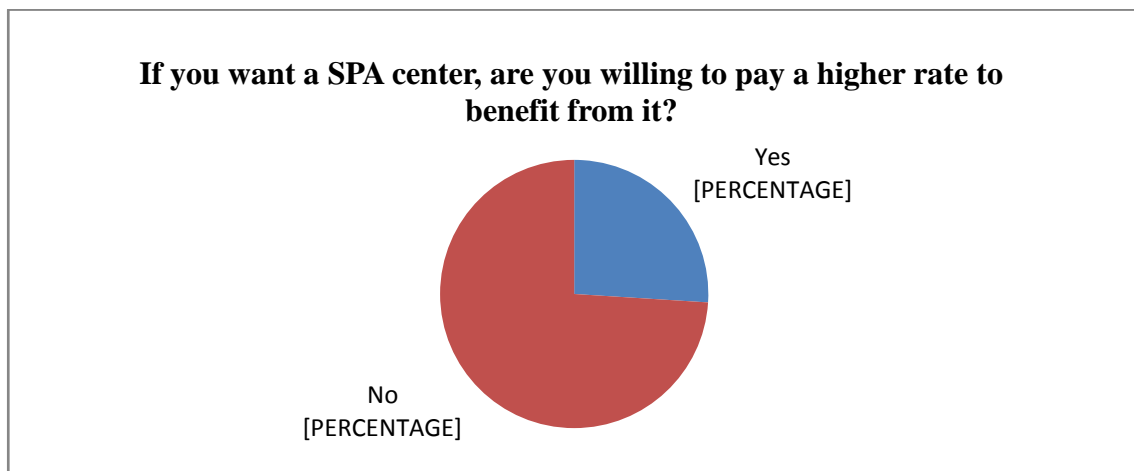


At item IV of the questionnaire, „*How much does the hotel's endowment with a SPA center matter to you if you decide to become our loyal customer?*” 52 subjects considered that the endowment with a SPA center would count very much in choosing of Hotel Unirea as a possible accommodation facility. The attention of the marketing team will be directed to both the segment

that appreciates this endowment and the local clientele who can use these services without benefitting of any other tourist services.



In **Item V** of the questionnaire „*Are you willing to pay a higher rate to benefit from the services of the SPA?*” of the 100 subjects, only 26 agreed to pay a higher price to benefit from this extra endowment. The attention of the marketing team must be directed to them, who will become more demanding upon these services once they pay more for them, but also to consider that in most tourist complexes abroad the tourists benefit free of charge from these complementary services, and to look for loyalty methods to provide to local customers for these services, through different techniques.



The evaluation of the questionnaire will be performed by the marketing team; they will assess the consumers' answers concerning the tourist product proposed by the Unirea Hotel Complex; the purpose is to win new clients and the loyalty of the existing ones. The conclusions will be the basis for developing strategies for differentiating the products offered and communication strategies.

### **Conclusions**

The constant satisfaction of customer requirements through an integrated strategy system is the result of the managerial team's performance management. The quality of the services provided by Unirea Hotel is carefully monitored.

The success of a firm upon the tourism market is directly related to the extent to which the behavior of its actual and potential clients is known and taken into account in the substantiation of marketing strategies.

The tourist market is in expansion and the tourists have become more demanding, are paying more attention to money, they are better informed and the unprecedented expansion of the Internet makes it possible to make comparisons for the criteria of select-quality-price services. From this standpoint, the Unirea hotel complex is competitive, compared to the tourist accommodations with the same classification both in Iasi and Moldova.

The modern marketing designates not only making a good product, but also involves the setting of a fair price for it, which, even if it does not make it accessible to all the consumers, it must leave the impression that it deserves the money.

Companies must communicate with both their current clients and their potential customers.

The Unirea Hotel carries out both information and communication activities through its Internet site, the local and national media, through travel agencies and through the direct marketing: the communication of promotions through phone texts, Facebook, Booking.com, accounts and e-mails. The promotion actions aim at attracting new customers as well as maintaining and loyalty of the existing ones, as they address punctually to categories well identified by target customers.

Experience is an attempt in spending leisure time in resorts or tourism locations. And this experience of each of us is continuing related to something concrete and permanently linked to our human personality.

The identification of a high level of satisfaction amongst the consumers of the tourist products provided by Hotel Unirea is proof of ensuring the quality of tourist services.

The making of opinion polls is a commonly used method for assessing customer satisfaction.

The objectives that the Unirea Hotel has to achieve in its evolution are based upon the thorough research of the company's domestic and external environment. The loyalty strategies implemented have ensured that the expenses were covered and that a profitable activity for both the company and the client was achieved, ensuring satisfaction and motivating the client to return to this welcome tourism location.

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