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**EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION: THE STUDY OF TOUR-GUIDE SERVICES**

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic - in this fast-developing and competing business environment a satisfied customer is a necessary factor for a business to remain competitive in the market. The need for customer satisfaction resides in its opportunity to bring economic prosperity for the company. Customer satisfaction is seen as a requirement for customer trust and loyalty, which naturally helps accomplish economic targets such as competitiveness, profitability, investment returns Surechchandar, G.S., et al. (2002). Most businesses strive to retain existing customers and at the same time attract the new ones, however with such a large supply of goods and services in the market, it is extremely difficult to achieve this and failing to meet customer's expectations can simply make them look for alternatives. Thus, it can be said that customer satisfaction with business is one of the most important components that helps to grow and increase its competitiveness. By keeping their customers satisfied, businesses can develop a long term, commonly useful relationship with them. This leads customer satisfaction as a main driver for company's outlasting success.

Modern trends show that the importance of quality service in business is highly valued and actively discussed topic. Several authors have already emphasized the importance of quality and its effects on customer satisfaction. Service organizations have recognized that one of the major elements that needs to be addressed in order to retain their clients and achieve competitive advantage is enhancing their quality of services. One of the fundamental ways in which a business company can distinguish itself from other businesses is to offer consistently high-quality service Marhamat H. P., et al., (2013). Thus, service quality can be significant differentiator that can affect customer's decision to purchase the service. Therefore, service quality remains a relevant issue as businesses pursue to sustain a competitive advantage over its competitors Kandampully, J. and Duddy, R. (1999). Of course, providing a quality service and satisfying customers is not easy, it requires not only human resources, but also knowledge on how to generate service process. In addition to that, there might be a few external factors that can influence customer satisfaction and a few strategies might be necessary to implement in order to satisfy customer needs while providing a service.

The aim of the study - To identify the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

The objectives:

1. After analyzing the material of foreign and Lithuanian authors, to identify the concept of customer satisfaction and its importance;

2. After the analysis of scientific literature, to identify the aspects and characteristics of service quality;
3. After analyzing scientific literature define the peculiarities of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction;
4. To examine and identify the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction through the results of expert interview research (tour-guide services).

During the writing of this work the methods of scientific research were applied: comparative scientific literature analysis, synthesis, and content analysis. These methods were used to analyze the scientific literature of foreign and Lithuanian authors on the topic of customer satisfaction and service quality. A semi-structured interview approach was also selected, which allowed for the collection of data on the service quality and a deeper insight into the characteristics and its relationship with customer satisfaction.

The bachelor thesis consists of introduction, three main parts, conclusions, list of bibliographical references and appendixes. The first part of the thesis deals with the theoretical concepts of customer satisfaction, reviews its importance and evaluation. As well as the significance and characteristics of service quality. And analysis on the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality is focused. The second part describes methodology used for the study. The interviews of a qualitative study involve experts working in tourism field and experienced, holding guide certificate and business license tour-guides. And finally, the third part focuses on the data analysis and the review of the results. The conclusions define the main thesis statements. Finally, there is a bibliographic list of references and transcribed interviews with the experts.

The theoretical significance of the work is reflected on the fact that understanding the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction is critical because customer satisfaction is a determining factor of the success of a business.

1. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND RELATIONSHIP WITH SERVICE QUALITY

Customer satisfaction is particularly significant as satisfied customer with a service or product will result in loyalty to the company and drive more revenue by repeat purchases (Liao, Y., 2015). It can be argued that quality plays a major role in the overall customer satisfaction with a product or service, as this component can help companies achieve high results and retain a loyal customer base. This part of the thesis aims to identify the peculiarities of service quality and its relationship with customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to analyze the concept of customer satisfaction and the aspects of service quality. This section is subdivided into the following sections: theoretical aspects of customer satisfaction, the features and characteristics of service quality, and finally the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

1.1. Characteristics and elements of customer satisfaction and its evaluation

This section examines the theoretical aspects of customer satisfaction, its importance and evaluation. It is imposed that satisfied customers are key to long-term business success. Companies that have a more satisfied customer base also experience higher economic returns. It is therefore important to define what is customer satisfaction and its significance.

Customer satisfaction

Definition of “customer satisfaction” usually indicates the fulfillment customers derived from purchasing company’s products or using services. In other words, it is how happy the customers are with their transaction, products, and overall experience with the company. According to Angelova B., Jusuf Zekiri (2011), consumer satisfaction has a positive impact on the performance of a company. Satisfied consumers form the core of any successful business, as customer experience contributes to frequent sales, customer loyalty, and a strong positive word of mouth. Therefore, customer satisfaction is significantly important due to the fact, that: satisfied customers tend to buy more and become loyal. Moreover, they can purchase additional products and services, as well as support positive word of mouth. Given the importance of customer satisfaction, it is considered one of the main principles of a business, and a lack of attention to customer satisfaction can lead to the possibility of being outperformed by competitors M. Ranjbar, F. Rezaei m, (2017). Therefore, organizations must adapt and adjust to the changes and versatility to thrive and survive. Thus, within a competitive environment where companies compete for

customers, their satisfaction is seen as a critical differentiator and has become a key element in every business strategy.

A significant number of authors across the globe have already emphasized the importance and the concept of customer satisfaction and what effect it might have on customer fulfillment. According to Anderson et al., (1994), the satisfaction of a customer can be explained as a contrast to the previously detained expectation about perceived product or service performance. Kotler P. and Keller K., (2006) described customer satisfaction as a feeling of delight or disappointment that the customer receives as a result of measuring the expected output or outcome of a good or service against his or her expectations. In addition, customer satisfaction can be defined by factors that are both subjective (e.g. customer wishes, feelings) and objective (e.g. product attributes and features). According to Hansemark O. and Albinson, M. (2004), satisfaction can be described as an overall customer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional response to the contrast between what customers anticipate and what they receive in terms of meeting certain needs and desires. Hill N., Roche G., and Allen R. (2007) argue that customer satisfaction is a lead indicator that predicts future of customer behaviors. According to Faris P., et al (2010), customer satisfaction is an indicator of the number of customers or percentage of total customers that meets the satisfaction goals in terms of the experience reported with a business, its goods or its services (rating). Finally, R. Bolton (2016) described customer satisfaction as a fulfillment response. As explained, customers most often have a predictive expectation, that is what is going to happen and what is fair to have happen. Eventually, when they receive an offering from the firm, that expectation is either confirmed or disconfirmed. Therefore, when it is confirmed – the offering has exceeded expectations or delighted the customer. And in case it is disconfirmed – it can lead to what is called disconfirmation or lousy service, or product. Definitions of customer satisfaction are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Definitions of customer satisfaction (compiled by the author)

Definitions of Customer Satisfaction	Authors
The satisfaction of a customer can be explained as a contrast to the previously detained expectation about perceived product or service performance.	Anderson et al. (1994)
Satisfaction can be described as an overall customer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional response to the contrast between what customers anticipate and what they receive in terms of meeting certain needs or desires.	Hansemark O., and Albinson M. (2004)

A feeling of delight or disappointment that the customer receives as a result of measuring the expected output or outcome of a good or service against his or her expectations.	Kotler P. and Keller K. (2006)
Customer satisfaction is a lead indicator that predicts future of customer behaviors.	Hill N., Roche G., and Allen R. (2007)
Customer satisfaction is an indicator of the number of customers or percentage of total customers that meets the satisfaction goals in terms of the experience reported with a business, its goods or its services (rating).	P. Farris et al. (2010)
Customer satisfaction is a fulfillment response.	R. Bolton, (2016)

Most of the definitions represent the customer satisfaction as a response outcome to the previously held expectation regarding a product or service. To ensure that the customer is satisfied, it is not enough to meet their expectations, but exceed them, create value for customers and build strong relationships with them.

Customer satisfaction evaluation

The main purpose of measuring customer satisfaction is to make decisions on how to improve it. Actionable information on how to make customers more satisfied is therefore a crucial outcome Hill N., Roche G., and Allen R. (2007). The authors have also emphasized the importance of CSM (customer satisfaction management), that is identifying the degree to which company does best what matters most to clients (exceeding, meeting or failing to meet their requirements) and distinguishing the best opportunities for improving that performance. According to Liao, Y. (2015) 96 percent of dissatisfied consumers will not remain in business with the firm; there are around 26 related undeclared complaints for each unique consumer complaint submitted to the firm; successful and rapid resolution of a customer complaint would result in a return customer and a favorable word of mouth from the client to an average of five persons. Therefore, these statistics point out that customer satisfaction and related measurement to retain and improve a customer's satisfaction are the essence of the company's performance and its survival. In a broad sense, customer satisfaction is essential primarily because if a customer is satisfied with a product or service, it can eventually result in a customer's loyalty and generate continuous sales by repeated purchases. Measuring customer satisfaction has evolved into a standard action in many organizations due to a few reasons. According to Söderlund, M. (2011), reasons for measuring customer satisfaction are: firstly, customer satisfaction is closely related to what many marketers feel is a key

marketing motive - meeting the needs of the customer. Secondly, a high degree of economy is given by the descriptive value of a satisfaction score, in the sense that a single score is the carrier of customer-related performance information about the company. Third, several findings have indicated that customer satisfaction is positively linked to many factors of customer behavior that businesses usually find beneficial, for example, repeat purchases, possible cross-selling, and positive word of mouth. Moreover, studies have also suggested that customer satisfaction is favorably related to financial results, such as profitability and consistency of cash flow. Liao, Y. (2015) emphasized that companies measure customer satisfaction for the following reasons:

1. It allows (dis)satisfied consumers to share their views and emotions;
2. It recognizes new business opportunities;
3. It serves as a platform for continual growth concerning implementing new processes, products, and services to fulfill the ever-changing needs of consumers.

A customer satisfaction survey focuses on the most essential requirements of the customer. Therefore, it can provide accurate, actionable information about where the company is incomplete in the eyes of the consumer and where it can achieve the best possible returns from implementing actions or improvements to boost customer satisfaction Hill N. et al., (2007). Thus, the companies that make customer satisfaction surveys can in the long term anticipate their customer satisfaction management process to maintain a positive influence on customer's attitude towards the company. In contrast to some other frequently used evaluation constructs in marketing, customer satisfaction is a post-consumption construct thus requiring an existing customer rather than a potential customer. The typical way of measuring customer satisfaction is to use questionnaire items with a response format comprising several steps on a five-point scale ranging from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied" Söderlund, M. (2011). According to P. Farris et al. (2010), traditional customer satisfaction scales were typically of a single-point type, indicating that only one customer satisfaction question is included in the questionnaire. Although, after a while, multi-item scales that require a few questions about customer satisfaction, became more frequent, Söderlund, M. (2011). Consumer attitudes or ideas can be challenging to measure, particularly with only one question or object. Thus, one of the significant benefits of a multi-item approach is that the trustworthiness of this approach can be measured concerning the answers to each question. Also, the results of customer satisfaction questionnaires measure the relationship between satisfaction, its sources, and outcomes. It can also monitor the progress of satisfaction gradually and consequently study one specific company's customers and compare the performance of various departments of the same company. Juran, J. M.; De Feo, J. A. (2010) stressed that the needs of customers are changing over time, therefore is no "final list of customer

needs” existing yet. Also, when planning, external factors such as competition, new technologies, or some other external shift can lead to new consumer demand or can replace existing ones. Accordingly, in order to respond efficiently to consumer inquiries and needs and to build a long-lasting partnership with them, it is common for businesses to perform continuous market research and customer satisfaction surveys.

Thus, the definition of customer satisfaction can be described as a link between what customers have expected and what they have received, or how pleased they are with their purchase, products and the overall service of the business. Besides, it can be observed that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on the success of a business. Satisfied consumers are at the heart of any successful business, as a positive customer experience leads to repeated sales, customer loyalty, and a positive word of mouth. There are also a few reasons why evaluation customer satisfaction can be beneficial, since it provides a platform for constant improvement in the implementation of new technologies, goods and services to satisfy the ever-changing demands of customers.

1.2 Theoretical aspects service quality and its measurement

This section reviews the characteristics and theoretical aspects of service quality. Nowadays, with this many alternatives available in the market, it is crucial for companies to focus on satisfying and retaining their customers. Therefore, quality can be seen as a primary differentiator in the current marketplace. Hence, it is important to define the peculiarities of service quality.

Service quality

Nowadays, people satisfy their needs and wants with the products that they purchase and the services they use. To analyze the importance and significance of a service quality, it is crucial to define what the actual product or service quality means. Determining what the word quality represents is not that straightforward, since it is formulated differently by different groups of individuals. Parasuraman et al., (1985) defined quality as the "zero error rate" or, in other words, the capacity to produce a faultless product at first attempt. Meanwhile, P. B. Crosby, (1979) described quality as the ability of the producer to meet customer expectations. J. Heizer & B. Render, (2001) summarized definition of quality as the overall general characteristics of a product (service or good) representing and displaying the potential of the product to satisfy the customer's explicit and implicit needs. J. Blythe (2009) described quality as the overall relationship between a product's expected performance and its actual performance, as judged by its consumers. Alternatively, it is the relationship between what is expected by the consumer and what

they receive. In this case, if a consumer is expecting a low-quality product or service, then they are most likely to not feel disappointed in case the products or service exceeds their expectations. Likewise, if a customer expects a high-quality product or service and it does not meet their expectations; they are more believably to respond in a negatively. According to Kotler P., Armstrong G. (2012), quality can be described as a feature of a product and/or service that reflects on its ability to satisfy the specified or implied needs of the customer. Alzaydi, Z.M., et al. (2018) defined quality as the contrast of the customer's expectations from service with the perceptions of what the service provider ultimately delivers. The definitions of quality are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Definitions of quality (compiled by the author)

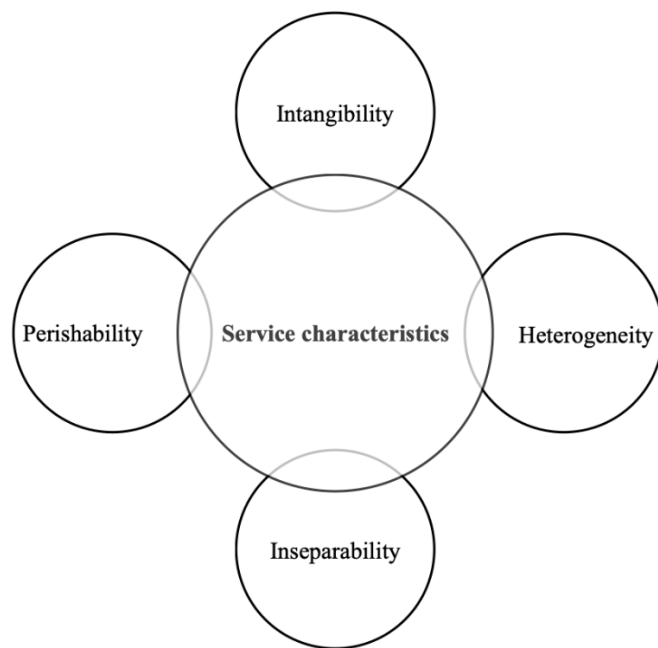
Definitions of quality	Authors
Quality can be described as the ability of the producer to meet customer expectations.	P.B. Crosby (1979)
Quality can be defined as "zero error rate" or, in other words, the capacity to produce a faultless product at first attempt	Parasuraman et al., (1985)
Product's fitness for use.	J. Juran (1989)
Quality as the general characteristics of a product (service or a good) that reflects and shows the product's capability to fulfill explicit and implied needs of a customer.	J. Heizer, B. Render (2001)
Quality is the overall relationship between a product's expected performance and its actual performance, as judged by its consumers.	J. Blythe (2009)
Quality is the characteristic of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied customer needs.	Kotler P. and Amstrong G. (2012)
Quality refers to the contrast of the customer's expectations from service with the perceptions of what the service provider ultimately delivers.	Alzaydi, Z.M., et al. (2018)

According to Dahlgaard-Park, S. (2015), the quality is continuously changing over time. Finally, as it was mentioned by J. M. Juran (1989), one of the well-known quality's guru, quality is an ever-lasting notion. The author formulated a brief definition of quality as: "*Product's fitness for use*". This definition straightforward and a general one. However, it has been accepted globally as a versatile definition of quality.

Service characteristics and aspects

The word quality can describe not only the product but also the service or its delivery process. However, defining service quality is quite difficult because of its features. According to R. Hopenienė, R. A. Ligeikienė (2002) to this date, there is no universally accepted definition of service quality. In order to achieve service quality, the divergence of the concept of quality has to be addressed - the treatment of quality by the consumer and the service provider differs. In addition to that, the rapid growth in the service sector has given rise to different views on quality issues and the importance of service quality. Some service companies do not sell physical goods, thus the interaction between suppliers and consumers in these industries is, therefore, imperative (Alzaydi, Z.M. et al., 2018). Moreover, each service is unique and has its own distinctive characteristics (Vincent C.S. Heung 2008; Polyakova O. et al. 2015) (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Service characteristics



(compiled by the author referring to Vincent C.S. Heung 2008; Polyakova O.; Mirza M., 2015)

Inseparability - of a service is one of the features of the process of providing a service, it can be described as the performance of a service and the simultaneous consumption. This element of consumer involvement, their possible interaction with other consumers may influence each other's idea of service quality (Polyakova O., Mirza M 2015).

Intangibility - can be described as a lack of physical attributes, because service is not material, intangible, or transportable, therefore implies several difficulties related to it as it is difficult for the service provider to determine the service and for the consumer to evaluate its potential advantages and drawbacks (Polyakova O., Mirza M 2015).

Heterogeneity - each time the same service is provided, different obstacles may occur as well as different user characteristics may be encountered, the same services cannot be provided in the same way to different customers. In order to explain the basis of heterogeneity, it is suggested to look from two distinct perspectives. According to the author, the first perspective explains the aspect of the ever-changing nature of the service providers and service processes, and the second one highlights the differences between customers' needs and expectations (Polyakova O., Mirza M 2015).

Perishability - it means the service itself is used/consumed immediately, as it cannot be left, separated, or stored for later use. This reason brings additional accountability to the service provider to make sure the service is performed right at the first time and continuously (Polyakova O., Mirza M 2015).

Thus, service can be defined as an activity that is characterized by these four features. These features make it easier to understand the specifics of the services provided, but at the same time complicate the assessment of quality itself. Since the service cannot be transported, stored, it can be described as consumed instantaneously. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the provision of services can lead to different results that can be greatly influenced by various factors, not only consumer expectations, their desires, but also the characteristics of the service provider (Polyakova O., Mirza M 2015).

According to Surechchandar, G.S., et al. (2002), five service quality aspects are described by the writers as being important from a consumer perspective:

1. **Key service or product service** – that is the primary content of the service;
2. **Human service delivery factors** – including reliability, sensitivity, compassion and recovery of services, which are part of the human aspect of service delivery;
3. **Systematization of the delivery of services** - such as processes, procedures , structures and technologies that make the operation enjoyable;
4. **Tangibles of service** - including facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel and the human-made physical environment surrounding the process;
5. **Social responsibility** – refers to the ethical actions of the service provider.

These five factors encompass a total of 41 elements, from flexible working hours and days to fair treatment for all customers, and from delivering service right first to ensuring successful customer policies and procedures (Surechchandar, G.S., et al. 2002).

Measurement of service quality

As mentioned before, the importance of service quality to the overall customer satisfaction plays a vital role. Compared to the quality of goods, quality of service is much more complex in its ways of measurement (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry 1985). Researches have agreed that service quality can be defined as a mismatch between customer expectations and the performance of the service received. Delivering quality service means complying with the expectations of the customer consistently.

Parasuraman et. al 1985 went on to further fragmentize this mismatch into five gaps between expected and delivered service quality which affects the customer's evaluation of service quality, first of which is the distinction between the expectations of the customer for the service quality, and the perception of those expectations by the company, second of which is the difference between management perceived customer expectation of service quality and the company's specifications of service quality, third of which is the gap between service quality specifications by the company and actual service delivery; fourth misalignment is the gap between actual service delivery and company's external communications regarding the delivery, the last gap being the differentiation between the customer expected service and perceived service. Gap five can be calculated as a function of all previous four gaps to determine the service quality as perceived by consumers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry 1985).

Perceived quality is different from objective quality and can be defined as an attitude. Perceived service quality is evaluated when expectations of service performance are compared against perceptions of actual performance of service received (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Parasuraman was a pioneer in service quality studies, he developed an instrument called SERVQUAL - a scale of 22-items to assess the service quality delivered by a business based on five dimensions. The testing of the SERVQUAL instrument helped form a better understanding of each dimension, and thus definitions for each one was created:

1. **Empathy** - correlates with the caring, individualized attention of the firm to its customers.
2. **Assurance** - defines the knowledge and politeness of employees and their willingness to encourage confidence and trust.
3. **Reliability** - refers to the ability to deliver the promised service reliably and accurately.

4. **Responsiveness** - measures the eagerness to support consumers and to provide timely service.
5. **Tangibility** - refers to the physical aspects, facilities, personnel appearance.

Despite being one of the early models of quality service measurement, Parasuraman's SERVQUAL model is one of the most common and well-known research methods that all later-developed instruments are based on (Sureshchandar G.S., et al. 2002). However, according to Kang, G. and James, J. (2004) the focus on namely functional dimension is one of the main criticisms of the SERVQUAL model. According to the author, a perspective based on Parasuraman et al. (1985) argued that service quality evaluations are not made only on the result of the service. However, they also involve the service delivery process evaluation as well. Therefore, even though service quality and service delivery processes are interrelated, the essence for the dichotomy can be seen once the evaluation occurs. For the quality of the process, the evaluation takes place while the service is being performed. In terms of product quality, evaluation takes place after service delivery and focuses on the "what" service is provided. Kang and James (2004) analyzed the Gronroos' perceived service quality model. In their analysis of service quality dimensions. They found that the proposed method was a reasonable instrument for calculating service quality. The model involves only three dimensions that are:

1. **Technical** - the quality of what the customer experiences as a result of their interaction and is crucial for them to determine the quality of the service;
2. **Functional** - how the customer gets the technical result. This is vital to the perceptions of the service they received;
3. **Image** - as a distinct element in the understanding of service quality along with other variables such as word of mouth, pricing.

The result of the study of Kang, G and James, J (2004) based on Gronroos' service quality model, demonstrated the multidimensional essence of the quality of service. The findings showed that functional and technical quality affects the perception of the quality of service provided. The impact of functional and technological quality on overall service quality was similar. However, the findings showed that the impact of the functional quality on the image was more significant than the impact of the technological quality.

Thus, it is not easy to describe and measure the quality of the service due to its features mentioned in the above section. Of course, it is essential to consider that the treatment and perception of quality by the consumer and the service provider also differ. Moreover, specific issues are created by the intangibility of the service. For instance, service cannot be presented to the customer ahead of time. The

problem thus emerges as to how the customer may grasp what is being offered to him. Another concern is that it is difficult to track the quality of the service offered, since the service is not expressed in concrete quantitative parameters.

1.3. The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction

In today's environment of intense rivalry, the secret to sustainable competitive advantage lies in offering a high-quality service, which in effect would contribute to customer satisfaction (Surechchandar, G.S. et al. 2002). Many service providers nowadays offer similar services to their customers. Hence, the quality of the service can become one of the decisive factors that influence customers when choosing a service. The evaluation of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction can be beneficial for businesses trying to figure out the expectations and needs of their customers. Therefore, it is essential to assess and evaluate the relationship between the quality of service provided and customer satisfaction.

Contingency framework

In recent years, the relationship between quality of service and customer satisfaction has gained substantial scholarly attention. In the scientific literature, scholars are persuaded of the close relationship between quality of service and consumer satisfaction and point out that the higher the quality of service, the higher the degree of customer satisfaction (Pakurár M. et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the essence of the exact relationship between quality of service and customer satisfaction is still concealed with uncertainty. Customer satisfaction is an experience of 'post consumption,' which contrasts perceived quality with anticipated quality, whereas service quality refers to a general assessment of the service delivery process (E. Cengiz 2010). A common consensus emerging from the vast body of studies on quality of service and customer satisfaction is that service quality and customer satisfaction are conceptually distinct but closely connected concepts. P. A. Dabholkar, (1995) analyzed the causal sequence between customer satisfaction and service quality and created a contingency framework that consists of:

Zone of indifference - that means if the customer's perception of the service is within a reasonable range called the zone of indifference, it is unlikely that the customer will feel powerful emotions. The causal relation will be from the quality of service to customer satisfaction (P. A. Dabholkar, 1995).

Essential aspects versus service enhancers - All services have some elements that are important to the service, and some that are not necessary but improve the enjoyment of the service. They sometimes are not even noticed when the essential factors are present. These consequences are not seen as they are

anticipated as a matter of course, and consumers are likely to assess the service at a cognitive level while they are present. Nonetheless, if these considerations are missing, the consumer will possibly get upset (P. A. Dabholkar, 1995).

Type of service - Many service conditions may naturally be more stressful than others, such as going to an emergency room in the hospital versus shopping at a grocery store. It may not be possible to group all service experiences into this dichotomy neatly, and thus, form of service should be treated more as a continuum. Having a haircut done does not equate emotional possibilities with the emergency service. However, a poor haircut can be very stressful for the client and can affect future service provider reviews (P. A. Dabholkar, 1995).

Type of customer - Certain clients may be more emotional than others, and they may be more able to assess perceptions at the cognitive level rationally. Individuals that are more emotional appear to magnify their feelings and react more intensely than most. These consumers can feel (dis)satisfaction with the service at an emotional level and then decide based on that feeling regarding the service (P. A. Dabholkar, 1995).

Customer's mood - In the service situation, the mood of the customer is also likely to impact the causal link between customer satisfaction and quality of service. Also, mild moods can significantly influence behavior and judgment. If the customer is in a negative (or right) mood, customers may emotionally judge the service experience, and the causal progression will be from customer satisfaction to quality of service (P. A. Dabholkar, 1995).

Therefore, according to P. A. Dabholkar, (1995), companies should educate their personnel to provide minimum basic service. For example, they can make sure the essential aspects of the service are evident and that the service offered for most clients is well within the indifference zone. Moreover, businesses should inspire workers to work to provide the best quality service. Service delivery at this stage, however, requires additional work and costs, which is not always available. Thus, if the customer is pleased, he/she would possibly become a lifetime client. On the other hand, companies need to prepare workers to prevent the worst-case scenario. If the customer gets upset, he/she will be dissatisfied and will most likely spread the negative word-of-mouth. To prevent problems like these, employees must take care of minor things to keep a negative situation from getting worse and learn to assess these circumstances.

The study of Surechchandar, G.S., et al. (2002) considers customer satisfaction as a multi-dimensional concept, just like service quality. However, claims that customer satisfaction should be

understood through the same criteria on which service quality is validated. In the study the relation between service quality and customer satisfaction was explored based on this approach. The findings showed that the two frameworks are indeed independent but closely connected, suggesting that an increase in one may result in an increase in the other. However, the research into the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has revealed that while there is a clear connection between service quality and customer satisfaction, the two constructs are quite distinct, which means the service providers must interpret the two constructs independently. Service quality is more subjective than customer satisfaction, which is likely to be affected by factors like advertisement, different types of interactions, and the feedback of others (Surechchandar, G.S., et al. 2002).

Moreover, more recent researchers have found that there is a significant link between customer satisfaction and service quality (Amin, M and Isa, Z. 2008; Pakurár, M. et al., 2019). The research of Pakurár, M. et al., (2019) analyzed at the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the Jordanian banking sector, using the adjusted SERVQUAL model and incorporating three dimensions (access, financial component and employee skills) to the basic model. The result showed that the quality of service has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction. Highest quality ensures the highest satisfaction of customer desires. In addition to that, the study of Amin, M and Isa, Z. (2008) indicate that the implementation of higher levels of service quality would lead the customer to a higher degree of satisfaction. The research of Hsin-Hui Hu, Jay Kandampully & Thanika Devi Juwaheer (2009) referred to a conceptual paradigm that recognizes service quality and perceived value as an indicator of customer satisfaction, corporate image, and behavioral intentions of the service firm. The findings of the study showed that high service quality contributes to higher perceived value, customer satisfaction and a positive perception of corporate image. Consequently, these study results show that the quality of service is positively linked to customer satisfaction.

The conclusions of various authors and scholars on the intersection between customer satisfaction and quality of service can be summarized as follows. While service quality is the evaluation of the service delivery process, customer satisfaction can be evaluated after the consumption of a product or service; it is based on the difference between anticipated and perceived quality (E. Cengiz 2010). According to P. A. Dabholkar, (1995) the elements of the contingency framework indicate that different circumstances may affect the causality of the relation between customer satisfaction and quality of service. The first element is the zone of indifference. It means that if the consumer is in an emotionally neutral state regarding the service, their evaluation of the quality of service received will affect their level of satisfaction with the service (Dabholkar, 1995). If some essential aspects of service or some enhancers

which would improve the enjoyment of service are missing, then the customer can become upset, and their dissatisfaction affects their judgment of service quality. Similarly, if the service is one that induces more stress to customers due to its nature, the negative emotions can affect their assessment of service quality. Type of customer and customer's mood are as well significant, based on customer's feelings or mood, they can feel satisfied or dissatisfied with a service, and evaluate the quality of service according to their level of satisfaction. Therefore, we can conclude that while there is a causal relation between service quality and customer satisfaction, it is also worth noting that service quality can affect additional aspects. Moreover, in a climate of intense rivalry in the market, quality of service can become the distinguishing factor among competitors, which captures the attention of new clients and helps to build a loyal clientele.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

After the analysis of the scientific literature of Lithuanian and foreign authors in the theoretical part, the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality were examined in more detail. The empirical research on the relationship between customer satisfaction and tour-guide service quality was further focused.

Relevance of the research- Many tour-guides these days offer similar services to their customers. In the event of a worldwide pandemic and an extraordinary situation in the travel industry this year, tour operators must take special measures in order to stay competitive in the market. According to (European commission press... 2020) *“The Commission's guidance aims to offer people the chance to get some well-needed rest, relaxation and fresh air. As soon as the health situation allows, people should be able to catch up with friends and family, in their own EU country or across borders, with all the safety and precautionary measures needed in place.”* As a result, service providers have to offer and provide exceptionally good quality services to ensure their customers' safety and satisfaction. Service providers must retain every advantage in the ever-increasing competitive, tourism market to stay competitive (Mushtaq A. B. 2012). In fact, service quality research can be very useful for guides trying to figure out customer expectations, needs, and even its impact on customer satisfaction. By not focusing on customer satisfaction, a service provider can face challenges such as losing customers, as well as better seeing competitors and providing services more efficiently, thus expanding their customer base. All these reasons lead to the fact that service providers who focus on customer satisfaction with the quality of their services can not only achieve high results and increase service sales, but also maintain a loyal customer base. Therefore, it is important to reveal and evaluate the relationship between the quality of service provided and customer satisfaction.

Overview of Klaipeda County Guides Guild

Klaipeda County Guides Guild (KAGG) was founded in the year 2001. The association currently gathers 105 guides and is a member of the Lithuanian Guides' Union. Tour routes offered by KAGG members (tour-guides) lead to excursions not only to Lithuanian cities, their museums, galleries, churches, national and regional parks but also to foreign countries. The organization members are continuously raising their professional qualifications by engaging in training programs organized by the Republic of Lithuania's Department of Tourism, museums, national and regional directorates of parks, city and district councils,

tourism information centers, and other institutions. The tours are offered in different foreign languages. (Klaipėdos apskrities gidų...)

Research object - service quality and customer satisfaction (tour-guide services).

The goal of the research – to determine the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality (tour-guide services).

Research objectives:

1. To identify the aspects of service quality affecting customer satisfaction that are defined by the experts;
2. To determine external factors that affect quality of the service and customer satisfaction;
3. To identify the relationship between the quality of service and customer satisfaction;
4. To determine strategies defined by experts of service quality improvement according to nowadays tendencies.

Research method - the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews was chosen to implement the research goal, because according to K. Kardelis (2002), ... *qualitative research is much more flexible than quantitative research, because it is focused on interpretation rather than measurements; to the process, not to the conclusion; focuses on the relationship between the situation and the behavior that has the greatest impact on the formation of the experience.* ” An individual semi-structured interview was conducted, interviewing experts in the field of tourism/tour-guides. This method helps to delve deeper into the problem under investigation by allowing interviewer to ask additional questions that are not included in the questionnaire. It also helps to reveal experience, emotional peculiarities on the topic.

Research ethics - Experts were interviewed with warning about the confidentiality of the conversation. They were also informed about the principles and essence of the research.

Selection of subjects - 8 experts working in the tourism sector as well as experienced tour guides holding a guide certificate and business license were interviewed. All the interviewed experts are members of KAGG. Experts were selected using the "Snowball" method, that means it was agreed to conduct an interview with one expert, who suggested other individuals who would be able to give an interview on the topic (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Data of the interviewed experts (compiled by the author)

Expert number	Position	Organization	Work Experience
E1	General Manager	“Balttours” Tour operator	18 years
E2	Manager	“Balttours” Tour operator	30 years
E3	Manager	Klaipeda Tourism Information Center	12 years
E4	Tour-guide	“Balttours” Tour operator	20 years
E5	Tour-guide	Holding a guide certificate and a business license	29 years
E6	Tour-guide	Holding a guide certificate and a business license	14 years
E7	Tour-guide	Holding a guide certificate and a business license	19 years
E8	Tour-guide	Holding a guide certificate and a business license	30 years

Data analysis method - The obtained interview data are analyzed by a qualitative content analysis method, during which all interviews were read and analyzed separately. Each statement of the expert is analyzed separately and compared with the answer of the other experts - a comparison table is chosen for this comparison (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Interview questions overview (compiled by the author)

No.	Question	Author
1	How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (Why?)	Angelova B., Jusuf Zekiri (2011) Liao, Y. (2015) M. Ranjbar, F. Rezaei m, (2017)
2	When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?	Hansemark and Albinson (2004) R. Bolton, (2016)
3	Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?	Surechchandar, G.S., et al. (2002)
4	What qualities, in your opinion, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?	Parasuraman et al., (1988) R. Bolton (2016)

5	What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (Why?)	Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry (1985) R. Bolton (2016)
6	Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service?	Surechchandar, G.S., et al. (2002)
7	Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?	Dabholkar, (1995)
8	Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?	Söderlund, M. (2011) Liao, Y. (2015)
9	Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?	Liao, Y. (2015)
10	What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?	Author of this paper

Organization of the study - All experts were introduced to a prepared questionnaire. During the quarantine, for interviews with experts it was communicated both, in person (keeping safe distance and in compliance with safety requirements) and through the phone call. All experts were informed about the progress of the investigation, its topic, objectives. Due to the confidentiality, names and surnames of the experts are not included in the study. The average duration of the interview with the experts is about 30 minutes. The research was conducted in English language. The interviews were conducted orally with the ability of the interviewer to make notes simultaneously. The interview questionnaire consists of 10 questions that examines customer satisfaction its evaluation and importance, and the service quality, which discuss the relationship and the peculiarities between service quality and customer satisfaction. Throughout the preparation and conduct of the interview, the recommendations of R. Tidikis (2003) are being followed, for instance, that the researcher must be honest, communicative but also pay to silence, must be able to listen and at the same time understand, and it is very important to understand what has been omitted and to interpret that information properly, be attentive and observant throughout the interview.

Duration of the study - A qualitative semi-structured interview was conducted in 2020 on May 04-10.

3. EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: THE STUDY OF TOUR-GUIDE SERVICES

This part of the thesis focuses on the data analysis and review of the results. Data analysis part consists of interview data overview. The statements of each expert interview are analyzed separately and compared with the answer of the other experts - a table is chosen for this comparison. Overall, nine tables were created, according to the answers of each expert, the answers were assigned to categories and consequentially divided into subcategories.

3.1 Data analysis

The importance of customer satisfaction. To begin with, the experts were asked how relevant customer satisfaction is nowadays. All experts agreed that customer satisfaction is important. Experts shared various reasons why in their opinion customer satisfaction is so important and widely spoken topic in the service industry nowadays. Several experts, E2, E3 and E5 have emphasized the fact, that satisfied customer will most likely spread a positive word of mouth (WOM) about the service, thus attracting more new customers. As E3 said: *“In my opinion this is important, because a satisfied customer passes on information to others, thus spreading the message about service provided and attracting more customers.”* Some experts have also made a link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, as E1 said: *“A satisfied customer might become loyal...”*. A few experts have said that customer satisfaction might give a stimulus for self-improvement, as E6 emphasized: *“A satisfied customer will probably come back, encouraging me as a service provider to look for new ideas, to improve my skills.”* Finally, several experts have linked customer satisfaction to the monetary incentive. According to E4, *“A satisfied customer pays generously, so this is also a monetary incentive for the service provider”*. Based on the answers of the experts, the importance of customer satisfaction is very relevant and widely discussed topic. It is explained based on the fact that satisfied customers will spread a positive word of mouth, remain loyal, give stimulus for self-improvement and also provide a monetary incentive (see Table 5 below).

Table 5. The relevance of customer satisfaction

Category	Subcategory	Statements
	Positive WOM	<i>“... Only a satisfied customer will pass positive word of mouth while attracting more customers “(E2) “... a satisfied customer passes on information to others, thus spreading the message about the service</i>

The relevance of customer satisfaction		<i>provided and attracting more customers.” (E3) “A satisfied customer will share their experiences with others... this can attract even more customers.” (E5)</i>
	Customer Loyalty	<i>“A satisfied customer might become loyal...” (E1) “... the customer is going to want to come back.” (E2) “A satisfied customer will probably come back ...” (E6)</i>
	Stimulus for self-improvement	<i>“... encouraging me as a service provider to look for new ideas, to improve my skills.” (E6) “... and that encourages improvement and enjoyment of the work done...” (E7)</i>
	Monetary incentive	<i>“A satisfied customer pays generously, so this is also a monetary incentive for the service provider.” (E4) “... then business has no material problems and therefore encourages business expansion.” (E8)</i>

(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Customer satisfaction with service quality. Experts were asked when, in their opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of service. Experts shared their opinion and based on their answers, all experts agreed, that customers are satisfied with the service quality once their expectations for the service are met or even exceeded. According to E1, *“The customer is satisfied with the service performed, when he feels comfortable during the performance of the service, he enjoys the service when he receives what he expected.”* E4 also added, that *“Often customers have their own vision in advance of what service they will receive. If the customer gets what he wanted, expected or even exceeded his expectations then the customer is satisfied with the quality of the service.”* E5 also emphasized: *“The customer is satisfied when all his desires, expectations come true or when he receives more than expected.”* In addition to that E6 mentioned the importance of the relationship created between customer and service provider: *“The customer is satisfied when the service meets his criteria. He wants to come back again or buy another service from the same provider and thus establish a close relationship with the service provider.”* E7 also added, that: *“The customer expects to receive quality service and is satisfied when the service meets or exceeds expectations.”* Based on the answers of the experts one can conclude that customers are satisfied with the service once it meets or exceeds their expectations as well as when the service meets customer criteria.

Aspects of service quality affecting customer satisfaction. The experts were asked to name service quality aspects that are affecting customer satisfaction. The mentioned aspects can be divided into 3 categories. Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that the main service quality aspects affecting customer satisfaction are service delivery process qualities, service provider qualities and tangible aspects of the service. Most experts said that service provider qualities are an important aspect. E5 implied, that: “... *competence, intelligence, charisma, knowledge of languages, erudition will determine whether customers will be satisfied* “. Another aspect affecting customer satisfaction mentioned by experts was the service delivery process itself. According to E1, “*the most important aspect would be how the service itself is performed, how the information is provided, the communication itself, the original narrative combining theatrical moments, the use of poetry, humor.*” In addition to that, tangible aspect, such as environment can influence overall satisfaction of the customers. E8 emphasized the importance of environment: “... *The neat, attractive environment that surrounds the customers is important. Infrastructure adapted for tourists is also very important: parking, benches, modern lavatories.*” Based on the answers of the experts, these aspects were identified as cornerstones that can influence satisfaction of the customers (see Table 6 below).

Table 6. Aspects of service quality affecting customer satisfaction

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Aspects of service quality affecting customer satisfaction	Service delivery process qualities	“... <i>how the service itself is performed, how the information is provided, the communication itself, the original narrative combining theatrical moments, the use of poetry, humor.</i> ” (E1) “... <i>the whole service process on its own. It should be an interesting story, communicating with clients by involving them in participating in the tour by asking them questions, dissecting the topic using the methodology correctly.</i> ” (E6)
	Service provider qualities	“ <i>Immediately, when communicating with customers, the attentive guide can see the mood of the customers and strive to keep the customers satisfied.</i> ” (E2) “... <i>the personality of the guide, as he is in direct contact with customers for a long time ... which directly affects whether the customer will be satisfied or not.</i> ” (E4) “ <i>An unfriendly guide will lead to customer dissatisfaction...</i> ” (E7) “... <i>is the human factor in our case would be the guide ... competence, intelligence, charisma, knowledge of languages, erudition will determine whether customers will be satisfied.</i> ” (E5)

	Tangible aspects	<i>“When visiting indoor spaces such as museums, exhibitions, galleries, visitor centers, it is important that the spaces are tidy and attractive to customers... “(E3). “... The neat, attractive environment that surrounds the customers is important. Infrastructure adapted for tourists is also very important: parking, benches, modern lavatories.” (E8)</i>
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(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Qualities of a service provider. Experts were asked what qualities, in their opinion, customers are expecting that the service provider (a tour-guide) must meet. Based on the answers of the experts, the table of overall 5 qualities categories can be made. Most of the experts answered, that qualities such as personality and communication skills play the biggest role. According to E5 *“... a guide with a sense of humor has a great advantage in providing this service. The playful layout of the topic, with interesting examples, gives the client positive emotions (laughter, smiles) and leaves a greater impression than the facts presented “dry”.* In addition to that E8 emphasized: *“Customers expect a charismatic, communicative, responsive response to customer questions and preferences... “.* Another quality mentioned by the experts was related more to the reliability of the service provider, that the service provider must be knowledgeable in his field. E1 said, that *“Knowledge of the topic, historical facts and all questions asked to the service provider must be professionally reflected in the guide’s answers...”* Furthermore, E2 and E7 mentioned language proficiency as an important quality. E7 emphasized, that *“The service provider must have a very good knowledge of foreign languages, as incoming customers expect a quality narration in a language they understand”.* Based on the answers of the experts, service provider qualities such as reliability, communication skills, language proficiency and personality are important for customers (see Table 7 below).

Table 7. Qualities of a service provider

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Qualities of a service provider	Personality	<i>“The guide should be a person who consists of many positive factors: be talkative, interesting, have an outgoing personality...” (E3) “The service provider must be friendly, honest, very talkative.” (E6) “Customers expect a charismatic, communicative, responsive response to customer questions and preferences... “(E8)</i>

	Reliability	<i>“Knowledge of the topic, historical facts and all questions asked to the service provider must be professionally reflected in the guide’s answers...” (E1) “Excellent knowledge of the country’s history, economy and politics is necessary...” (E4)</i>
	Communication skills	<i>“... a guide with a sense of humor has a great advantage in providing this service. The playful layout of the topic, with interesting examples, gives the client positive emotions (laughter, smiles) and leaves a greater impression than the facts presented “dry”. “(E5) “... expressive language skills are very important in providing this service.” (E6) “It is also very important to communicate freely with customers of different age groups, different countries, to adapt to their needs. The guide must be communicative in all cases.” (E8)</i>
	Language proficiency	<i>“Incoming customers expect excellent knowledge of the language spoken by the guide. The topic taught can be with an accent that often gives obstacles to communication” (E2) “The service provider must have a very good knowledge of foreign languages, as incoming customers expect a quality narration in a language they understand.” (E7)</i>

(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Service delivery process quality aspects. Experts were asked what the customers’ expectations for the quality of the service delivery process might be. The answers of the experts were roughly divided into four categories. According to the experts, a quality service process should be creative, informative, educational, and engaging. E4 and E8 emphasized the importance of engaging aspect, E4 said: *“There are always different people in a group, some of them are more active and want to be involved in the process. Provoke the customer with questions, allowing him to express his opinion and thus include in the service process...”* “. In addition to that, E5 and E7 said, that the process should be educational. According to E5: *“Clients are always happy when they are offered to participate in the process themselves, to learn how to make something with their own hands. A souvenir made by yourself will remain good memories of the travel experiences...”* Moreover, aspect such as informative was mentioned. E1 said: *“... It is important in presenting information to use visual material that can be found in the informational display.”* Finally, E2 and E6 mentioned that the service delivery process should be creative. E2 expressed: *“... customers expect something special, not just “dry” facts. The service should*

be interesting, and that requires invention.” Based on the answers of the experts it can be concluded that the diversity in the service process, including not only facts and information, but also creativity and engaging customers are important aspects of service delivery process quality. (see Table 8 below)

Table 8. Service delivery process quality aspects

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Service delivery process quality aspects	Creative	“... customers expect something special, not just “dry” facts . <i>The service should be interesting, and that requires invention.</i> ” (E2) “ <i>The non-standard, sometimes easily shocking presentation of information always makes a special impression...</i> ” (E6)
	Informative	“... It is important in presenting information to use visual material that can be found in the informational display.” (E1) “... providing the right facts , providing customers with detailed information about the objects they visit.” (E3)
	Educational	“Clients are always happy when they are offered to participate in the process themselves, to learn how to make something with their own hands. A souvenir made by yourself will remain good memories of the travel experiences...” (E5) “Information is better absorbed when the customer himself is involved in the action, can touch or try to make something... ” (E7)
	Engaging	“There are always different people in a group, some of them are more active and want to be involved in the process . Provoke the customer with questions, allowing him to express his opinion and thus include in the service process...” (E4) “Some customers hope that there will be an opportunity to express their opinion, share their knowledge and impressions , which will brighten up the service process. Clients are always interested in testing their knowledge and expressing themselves. ” (E8)

(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Tangible service quality aspects. Experts were asked what tangible service aspects, in their opinion, can affect quality of the service. Based on the answers of the experts, three impactful tangible aspects affecting service quality are mentioned. Most of the experts have agreed that equipment, namely transport and audio-video equipment, plays a major role affecting service quality. According to E4: “*The*

quality of services is influenced by the individual means used: bicycles, scooters and other means. Customers are satisfied if they use technically sound means and without any interruption, we can travel smoothly.” Another aspect mentioned by the experts was service environment. As E5 said: “A beautiful place, an aesthetically attractive place, a safe environment near a significant object about which the story is positively posed by customers.” In addition to that, E3 and E7 have mentioned service provider appearance as an important aspect. As E3 emphasized: “... The repulsive appearance of a guide can negatively affect customers, so they do not attract their attention and they no longer want to listen or communicate ...” According to the experts, equipment used during the service process, environment and appearance directly affects quality of the service. (see Table 9 below)

Table 9. Tangible service aspects affecting quality

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Tangible service quality aspects	Equipment	“The quality of service can also be affected by the transport used . If tourist buses or boats are old technically... they make a bad impression for customers.” (E1) “The quality of services is influenced by the individual means used: bicycles, scooters and other means . Customers are satisfied if they use technically sound means and without any interruption, we can travel smoothly.” (E4) “... the use of audio-video equipment also has a significant impact. It is important during the trip that all the equipment works well, is in good technical condition , is modern, and the batteries are charged for individual use...” (E6) “... It is very important that the bus is innovatively equipped, comfortable... During the tour, it is very important that the client feels comfortable .” (E8)
	Environment	“... it is influenced by the objects visited: exhibitions, galleries, museums . Clients in these institutions are interested in modern, interesting, interactive expositions, informative schemes-models... it complements the guide’s narrative...” (E2) “A beautiful place, an aesthetically attractive place, a safe environment near a significant object about which the story is positively posed by customers.” (E5)
	Appearance	“... The repulsive appearance of a guide can negatively affect customers, so they do not attract their attention and they no longer want to listen or communicate ...” (E3) “Customers are well

		<i>served by a neat, well-groomed and representative-looking guide. “(E7)</i>
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(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

External factors that can affect service quality. Experts were asked what other external factors can affect service quality. Based on the answers of the experts, five factor categories can be made: weather conditions, accidents, customer mood, force majeure, and other technical issues. Several experts E3, E6, E8 have mentioned weather condition as the main external factor affecting customer satisfaction and service quality. E8 mentioned: *“For most customers, the mood depends on a good weather, but the message here is that - you will not order good weather. Therefore, it is very important to adapt flexibly to rapidly changing weather conditions.”* A few experts have mentioned that situations like the current pandemic can highly affect the service quality, according to E1: *“... The service quality may be disrupted by unforeseen events such as the current pandemic, changed political situation, international conflicts...”* In addition to these factors, a couple of experts have mentioned unforeseen situation like accidents and technical issues that can disrupt the quality of the service. According to E7: *“... in the event of an accident, such as a client breaking his arm, twisting his leg it is necessary to react promptly and appropriately, e.g. to provide first aid, or to organize transportation so as not to affect other members of the group.”* Moreover, E5 emphasized these issues: *“... During the service, technical issues may occur audio equipment, transport failures.”* According to the answers, external factors can directly affect service quality and customer satisfaction. Customers can influence each other: both positively and negatively. For example, a dissatisfied customer in a group may negatively affect other customers’ satisfaction with the service, and conversely, may shape and enhance other customers’ satisfaction with the service. E2 said: *“... bad mood customers, who are sometimes unreasonably dissatisfied with the quality of service... create a negative microclimate in the group and spoil everyone’s mood. In this case, both the quality of service and customer satisfaction with the service performed suffer.”* Although, there are situations where a service provider can do everything they can to adapt to an adverse situation, but customer can remain dissatisfied, as E3 said: *“... However, there are times when you do everything well but the customer is still dissatisfied due to bad mood or some other reasons.”* (see Table 10 below)

Table 10. External factors affecting service quality

Category	Subcategory	Statements
		<i>“Weather conditions have a significant impact on the quality of service and good customer mood... “(E3) “... strong wind, heat or</i>

External factors affecting service quality	Weather conditions	<i>cold ... All these weather conditions can affect customer satisfaction in assessing the quality of service provided.” (E6) “For most customers, the mood depends on a good weather, but the message here is that - you will not order good weather. Therefore, it is very important to adapt flexibly to rapidly changing weather conditions.” (E8)</i>
	Accidents	<i>“... in the event of an accident, such as a client breaking his arm, twisting his leg it is necessary to react promptly and appropriately, e.g. to provide first aid, or to organize transportation so as not to affect other members of the group” (E7)</i>
	Customer’s mood	<i>“There are some bad mood customers, who are sometimes unreasonably dissatisfied with the quality of service and can spoil the mood of other customers. They create a negative microclimate in the group and spoil everyone’s mood... “(E2)</i>
	Force Majeure	<i>“... The service quality may be disrupted by unforeseen events such as the current pandemic, changed political situation, international conflicts... “(E1) “... For example, unforeseen circumstances; cross-border relations, such as the current outbreak of disease, need to adapt quickly and change the program.” (E4)</i>
	Technical issues	<i>“... During the service, technical issues may occur: audio equipment, transport failures. The planned service may be disrupted by events like errors in documentation to presenting to border guards or delays due to road closures (road repairs or a city event)...” (E5)</i>

(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality. Experts were asked what the outcomes of customer satisfaction with the quality of the service are. Based on the answers received from experts, the outcomes of customer satisfaction with the service provided can be divided based on the following four categories: positive reviews, tips/gifts, re-purchase, and good customer mood. E3 points out that customer satisfaction can be indicated: “... based on the reviews on the Internet. Often service providers receive positive comments on websites also on Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor...” A couple of experts have mentioned outcomes as upbeat customer mood, for example E2 said: “Goodwill communication, laughter, smiles, wishes for success show that the service was done properly, and the

customer remained satisfied.”. Moreover, E4 and E7 said, that satisfied customers occasionally provide gifts and tips. E7 said: “*Many clients from other countries have a provision (unwritten rule) to thank the service provider for a job well done by tipping them.*” According to the experts, a high service quality leads to customer satisfaction and several positive outcomes (see Table 11 below).

Table 11. Outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Outcomes of customer satisfaction with the service quality	Positive reviews	“... based on the reviews on the Internet. Often service providers receive positive comments on websites also on Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor and etc.” (E3) “... after the service is completed, you can receive an e-mail, letters of thanks, photos, footage with fun memories of a good time together. It also happens that customer calls and thanks directly. ” (E8)
	Tips/gifts from customers	“It is possible to decide on customer satisfaction with the quality of service after receiving a generous tip ... an invitation to dinner would mean gratitude for a good, quality job.” (E4) “Many clients from other countries have a provision (unwritten rule) to thank the service provider for a job well done by tipping them.” (E7)
	Re-purchase	“The returning customer shows a positive sign to the service provider... when a customer buys another service or orders the same . It happens that the client comes back and brings friends.” (E1) “... the return of the customer when purchasing another service from the same service provider. This means that the customer was satisfied with the quality of the service provided.” (E6)
	Customer’s mood	“ Goodwill communication, laughter, smiles, wishes for success show that the service was done properly, and the customer remained satisfied.” (E2) “... Wide smiles "shine" on their faces, sincerely thank you for a good time, remember the most interesting moments.” (E5)

(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality. Experts were also asked what the outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with the quality of the service are. Based on the expert answers, the outcomes

can be divided into the following 4 categories: Non-payment or partial payment; negative customer mood, customer complaints and negative reviews. Most experts have indicated negative reviews on the social media, according to E3: *“There are negative reviews on websites, Facebook, TripAdvisor and other. This is how customers express dissatisfaction, express their opinion ... ”*. In addition to that, E6 have mentioned that there are occasions when customer might express their dissatisfaction through a complaint: *“... there are some cases where dissatisfied customers. express their dissatisfaction through complaints. An oral complaint is made directly to the service provider and a written complaint is made to the organizations concerned.”* Moreover, there are some cases that customers refuse to pay due to dissatisfaction, E7 emphasized, that: *“A non-payment may occur when, for some reason, an agreed program is not completed, he is dissatisfied. Therefore, the customer refuses to pay in part or demands a discount.”* Accordingly, based on the answers of the experts, customer dissatisfaction with service quality provided leads to several negative outcomes (see Table 12 below).

Table 12. Outcomes of customer dissatisfaction

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with the service quality	Non-payment or partial payment	<i>“... there are times when the customer refuses to pay after the service is performed, thus showing that he is not satisfied with the quality of the service performed.” (E4) “A non-payment may occur when, for some reason, an agreed program is not completed, he is dissatisfied. Therefore, the customer refuses to pay in part or demands a discount.” (E7)</i>
	Customer’s mood	<i>“Customer dissatisfaction is usually reflected in the bad mood of the customers, which they do not hide, speak rudely or does not want to communicate at all.”(E2) “According to the clients negative mood, it can be judged that he is dissatisfied with the service. His rude language, often uncontrollable and makes reasonable and unsubstantiated claims.” (E5)</i>
	Customer complaints	<i>“... there are some cases where dissatisfied customers. express their dissatisfaction through complaints. An oral complaint is made directly to the service provider and a written complaint is made to the organizations concerned.” (E6)</i>
	Negative reviews	<i>“If a customer is dissatisfied, he usually writes a bad review in a public space. By expressing negative emotions experienced during the performance of the service.” (E1) “There are negative reviews on websites, Facebook, TripAdvisor and</i>

		<i>other. This is how customers express dissatisfaction, express their opinion ... “(E3) “... customers usually express their dissatisfaction on the social media or websites. They usually express their opinion on the Internet, say why they did not like the service, the quality of the service.” (E8)</i>
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(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Quality improvement strategies according to nowadays tendencies. Experts were asked what their strategy is to improve the quality of the service and at the same time meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies. With the changing circumstances in the tourism sector this year, all experts drew attention to the changes that need to be made in response to the new safety requirements. E1 and E8 have emphasized the importance of reorganizing customer catering. According to E8 it is very important that the customer feel safe, for instance: “... *to offer meals outside restaurants or cafes. Day trips can include more picnics ... give the customer a sense of security (in nature, without crowding)*”. Also, E6 brought up a point of acquiring more innovative equipment, such as: “... *purchasing new audio equipment with disposable headphones (to keep the recommended safe distance)*.” It is very important as this equipment would allow the guide to reach wide audience while at the same time maintaining the safe distance requirements. Another point made by E5 and E7 was that new itinerary should be considered, mainly the change of the inside visits into more outside visits, avoiding crowding, as E7 said: “... *turning visits to museums, exhibitions (inside) into events and expositions in open spaces*”. In addition to that, E3 and E4 drew attention to changing the means of transportation, offer clients different routes. As E3 emphasized: “... *we should offer more cycling routes, scooters, etc.*” (see Table 13 below).

Table 13. Quality improvement strategies according to nowadays tendencies

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Quality improvement strategies according to nowadays tendencies	Catering	<i>“... to organize the catering of customers more conveniently. Offer cafes, restaurants with open terraces, in more remote places, where there would be no crowds.” (E1) “... to offer meals outside restaurants or cafes. Day trips can include more picnics ... give the customer a sense of security (in nature, without crowding).” (E8)</i>
	Transportation	<i>“... we should offer more cycling routes, scooters, etc.” (E3) “... not only be the provision of disinfectants but should be</i>

		<i>considered for buses without a roof (if possible), tourist boats to choose with an open space for the whole group.” (E4)</i>
	Innovative equipment	<i>“... considering purchasing new audio equipment with disposable headphones (to keep the recommended safe distance).” (E6)</i>
	Accommodation	<i>“... offer customers safer accommodation, for example in campsites, holiday cottages (for one family), or group accommodation in one villa without strangers.” (E2)</i>
	New itinerary	<i>“... considering new routes ... include more routes in the open space in the programs: national and regional parks, the most interesting natural objects.” (E5) “... considering turning visits to museums, exhibitions (inside) into events and expositions in open spaces.” (E7)</i>

(compiled by the author based on the answers provided by the interviewed experts)

Summarizing data analysis, it can be concluded that service quality and customer satisfaction are two closely related concepts. According to the experts, several service quality aspects were revealed that are affecting customer satisfaction. In addition to that, external factors, affecting customer satisfaction and service quality were identified. Experts have also emphasized, that customers are satisfied with the quality of the service once it meets or exceeds the expectations customers had before the service. Moreover, positive, and negative outcomes of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with service quality were identified by the experts. Finally, experts have identified several quality improvement strategies, based on current pandemic situation to assure quality of the service, and meet all the necessary safety requirements.

3.2 Review of the results

A total of 8 experts participated in the study. The study surveyed employees working in the tourism sector and experienced tour guides. The qualitative research method of semi-structured interview was chosen to implement the research goal.

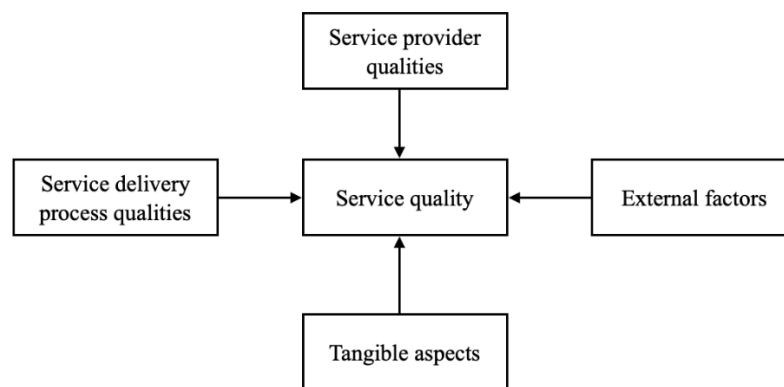
The investigation revealed that nowadays, customer satisfaction is a very relevant and widely discussed topic. The experts explain the importance of customer satisfaction based on the fact that satisfied customers are likely spread a positive word of mouth, remain loyal, give stimulus for self-

improvement and also increase profit. Based on the results of the findings, customers are satisfied with the service once it meets or exceeds their expectations.

The study revealed service quality aspects, that are affecting customer satisfaction: service delivery process qualities, service provider qualities and tangible aspects (see Figure 2. Below). The study was able to identify the characteristics of the service process delivery that are important for customer satisfaction. Experts described what a quality service delivery process should be: educational, engaging, informative, and creative. In addition to that, the research was able to find out which features of the service provider are important for customer satisfaction. Experts expressed the following features: personality, reliability, communication skills, language proficiency. Thus, the service provider must be a good psychologist, an expert in customer behavior, and a good storyteller. The study also showed what are the tangible aspects of the service that affect service quality and customer satisfaction. Tangible aspects include equipment such as transportation or other related audio-visual equipment, environment surrounding the service process and appearance of the service provider.

The study also revealed what external factors affect service quality. Based on the answers provided by the experts, external factors influencing service quality are weather conditions, accidents, force majeure, customer's mood, and other related technical issues. All of which can happen out of control of the service provider, thus affecting directly service quality and customer satisfaction.

Figure 2. Factors influencing service quality



(compiled by the author referring to the answers of interviewed experts)

The client himself is actively involved in the provision of the service in terms of involvement. He watches, listens, takes photos, asks questions, discusses, comments, moves physically with the service provider. He is involved in the provision of the service from start to finish and for the most part

contributes directly to the outcome of the service. There are some risks and opportunities, such as customers can influence each other both positively and negatively. For example, a dissatisfied customer in a group may negatively affect other customers' satisfaction with the service, and conversely, may shape and enhance other customers' satisfaction with the service.

The study also revealed that customer satisfaction with the quality of service is identified through the following outcomes: positive reviews, receiving generous tips or gifts from the customers, positive customer mood and re-purchasing service or even cross-buying. While the outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with the quality of the service are customer complaints, non-payment or partial payment, negative customer mood and bad reviews. Therefore, the positive results indicate what to aim for and what to focus on in the future, while the negative results indicate what needs to be corrected, improved, avoided.

The research also identified strategies for improving the quality of service in line with current epidemiological situation in the tourism sector. With the changing circumstances, all experts drew attention to the changes that need to be made in response to the new safety requirements. According to experts, several quality improvements such as reorganizing customer catering in a safe, open space environment, also acquiring more innovative equipment, such as audio-equipment to keep the recommended safe distance and effectively reach the audience, choosing different means of transportation and as well as choosing new itinerary, mainly the change of the inside visits into more outside visits, avoiding crowding, having more space for keeping the recommended safe distance.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After analyzing the concept of customer satisfaction in the research works of this field, as well as the aspects of service quality, the following conclusions are formed:

- The significance of customer satisfaction is based on the fact that satisfied customers with a service or product quality will ultimately result in loyalty to the company and drive more revenue by repeat purchases, as well as support positive word of mouth.
- There is no general concept of customer satisfaction in the scientific literature. Some authors explain customer satisfaction as a contrast to the previously held expectations about perceived product or service performance, while the others emphasize emotional customer response. The different concept of customer satisfaction allows for a broader interpretation of this concept.
- Summarizing what is described in the scientific literature, each service is unique and has its own distinctive characteristics: inseparability, intangibility, heterogeneity, and perishability.
- Overall, five service quality aspects are described as being important from a consumer perspective: key service (the content), human service delivery factors (human aspects of service delivery), systematization of the delivery of services (processes, procedures, technologies), tangibles of service (facilities, equipment, appearance and environment) and social responsibility (ethical actions of the service provider).
- In theoretical literature service contingency framework consists of zone of indifference, essential aspects versus service enhancers, type of service, type of customer, customer's mood.
- Service quality and customer satisfaction are the two frameworks are indeed independent but closely connected, suggesting that an increase in one may result in an increase in the other.

Based on the results of the analysis of the data of the performed empirical study, the following conclusions were reached:

- The relevance of customer satisfaction is explained based on the fact, that satisfied customers will spread a positive word of mouth, remain loyal, give stimulus for self-improvement, and provide a monetary incentive.

- The research of this work has shown that customers are satisfied with the service quality once it meets or exceeds their expectations.
- Service quality aspects described by the experts, that are influencing customer satisfaction are service delivery process qualities, service provider qualities and tangible aspects of service.
- External factors affecting customer satisfaction and service quality described by the experts were: weather conditions, customer's mood, accidents, force majeure, and other technical issues.
- Strategies for improving the quality of service in line with current epidemiological situation in the tourism sector were identified by the experts as follows: reorganizing customer catering, acquiring more innovative equipment, use modern transportation and implementing a new itinerary.

The results of the study obtained after the research confirm the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The customer is satisfied with the quality of service once it meets or exceeds his/her expectations. The two concepts closely related based on the fact, that service quality affects customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction with the service provided leads to the positive outcomes.

Suggestions for tour guides and tour operators:

- Based on the results of the study, other external factors affect service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore, tour operators and tour-guides should pay attention and considered these factors when organizing and providing the service. For instance, if it is possible to move the tour to another day in case of a bad weather, also flexibly adjust the program. In addition to that, ensure that the equipment is contemporary and fault-free to ensure customers feel comfortable and safe during the service delivery process.
- Based on the results of the research it is important for clients that the guide is a competent, reliable expert in their field. Therefore, service providers should focus on improving skills and knowledge, for instance, constantly attend seminars and training programs to improve their abilities and qualities.

Suggestions for further research:

- The conducted research has shown that customers are satisfied with the service quality once their expectations for the service are met or even exceeded. Therefore, to analyze specific customer's expectations, a questionnaire prior and after the service delivery could be used. The results would then be compared, and conclusions drawn about how the fulfillment of customer expectations affects customer satisfaction.
- Research findings identified several external factors affecting service quality and customer satisfaction. Thus, these factors could be analyzed in more detail, specifically to investigate its effects on service quality and customer satisfaction, thus finding possible solutions to adapt to adverse situations as such. A case study could be conducted where an external factor is created artificially (for example a technical issue) in a simulation of a service delivery process. As a result of the investigation the recommendations for action plan that could help the service provider to avoid the negative consequences of the situation could be provided.

SUMMARY

INGA OSNAČ

EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: THE STUDY OF TOUR-GUIDE SERVICES

Bachelor thesis

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Nowadays, service quality is becoming an increasingly important and discussed factor affecting customer satisfaction. This phenomenon increases the need for a research about the effect of certain service quality aspects on customers satisfaction. Understanding this gives a great superiority to businesses, in this specific case, tour guides and tourism companies as they can learn what customers pay the most attention to about the tour guide service, and then they can use this to improve service quality and increase their customer satisfaction.

Based on the analysis of the scientific literature and empirical research, this bachelor's thesis reveals the service quality aspects affecting customer satisfaction by conducting a semi-structured interview analysis. The findings show that service quality aspects such as service provider qualities, service delivery process qualities and technical aspects, as well as other external factors are influencing customer satisfaction. This further encourages tour guides to improve service quality and keep a high service level. Moreover, it helps to understand to which aspects they must pay attention to and use the right strategies to improve the quality of their services.

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APPENDIXES

1 Appendix

Interview conversation with Expert 1. General Manager at “Balttours” Tour operator

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

I would say, that customer satisfaction is very important, because a satisfied customer might become loyal, while encouraging the service provider to achieve higher results.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer is satisfied with the service performed, when he feels comfortable during the performance of the service, he enjoys the service when he receives what he expected.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

In my opinion, the most important aspect would be how the service itself is performed, how the information is provided, the communication itself, the original narrative combining theatrical moments, the use of poetry, humor. For the customer to remain satisfied, he needs to be interested in the process.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour guide)?

I believe that the service provider must be a highly qualified professional. Knowledge of the topic, historical facts and all questions asked to the service provider must be professionally reflected in the guide's answers. Competence is one of the deciding factors that ultimately affects customer satisfaction.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

Customers expect quality service, to learn something new. When providing the service, it is important that the information provided by the service provider is linked to the objects of interest. It is important in presenting information to use visual material that can be found in the informational display.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

The quality of service can also be affected by the transport used. If tourist buses or boats are old technically dirty, they make a bad impression for customers.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

The quality of the service may be affected by unplanned factors independent of the service provider. The service quality may be disrupted by unforeseen events such as the current pandemic, changed political situation, international conflicts. In these cases, it becomes impossible to meet your obligations, but the quality of the service is directly affected

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

The returning customer shows a positive sign to the service provider. It's always nice when a customer buys another service or orders the same one. It happens that the client comes back and brings friends, family members.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

If a customer is dissatisfied, he usually writes a bad review in a public space. By expressing negative emotions experienced during the performance of the service.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

The onset of the pandemic has led to many additional safety requirements. Therefore, it is necessary to think about how to organize the catering of customers more conveniently. Offer cafes, restaurants with open terraces, in more remote places, where there would be no crowds.

Interview conversation with Expert 2. Manager at “Balttours” Tour operator

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

When providing a service, one should always strive for customer satisfaction. It is important that the customer is going to want to come back. Only a satisfied customer will pass positive word of mouth while attracting more customers.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer usually knows or imagines what kind of service he will receive and is satisfied when the service met his wishes.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

For the customer to be satisfied with the service provided, I would name the guide itself as one of the main factors. If there are any problems with customer service, the guide can promptly eliminate them, thus reducing customer dissatisfaction with external factors. Immediately, when communicating with customers, the attentive guide can see the mood of the customers and strive to keep the customers satisfied.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

Incoming customers expect excellent knowledge of the language spoken by incoming customers from the guide. The topic taught can be with an accent that often gives alkali to communication. Communication through an interpreter should be avoided.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

Customers want quality service and they expect something special, not just "dry" facts. The service should be interesting, and that requires invention.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

I would say it is influenced by the objects visited: exhibitions, galleries, museums. Clients in these institutions are very interested in modern, interesting, interactive expositions, informative schemes-models. Because it complements the guide's narrative and makes the customer more satisfied.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

There are some bad mood customers, who are sometimes unreasonably dissatisfied with the quality of service and can spoil the mood of other customers. They create a negative microclimate in the group and spoil everyone's mood. In this case, both the quality of service and customer satisfaction with the service performed suffer.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

After the service is performed, it is possible to decide from the customer's mood whether he is satisfied. Goodwill communication, laughter, smiles, wishes for success show that the service was done properly, and the customer remained satisfied.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

Customer dissatisfaction is usually reflected in the bad mood of the customers, which they do not hide, speak rudely or does not want to communicate at all.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

Coronavirus changes people's habits, so we also need to change, adapt to new circumstances. It is important to offer customers safer accommodation, for example in campsites, holiday cottages (for one family), or group accommodation in one villa without strangers. Also, assure that the service is compliant with all the necessary safety requirements.

Interview conversation with Expert 3. Manager at Klaipeda Tourism Information Center

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

In my opinion, this is important because a satisfied customer passes on information to others, thus spreading the message about the service provided and attracting more customers.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer is determined in advance to receive quality service. He already has his desires, so the customer is always satisfied when what he expected from that service comes true.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

I would say environment is a very important aspect. For example, when visiting indoor spaces such as museums, exhibitions, galleries, visitor centers, it is important that the spaces are tidy and attractive to customers and it can impact customer satisfaction.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

The customer must be interested in the service provider himself. The guide should be a person who consists of many positive factors: be talkative, interesting, have an outgoing personality.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

It is very important for customers to receive a quality service process. This means providing the right facts, providing customers with detailed information about the objects they visit.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

I would say an important factor is the appearance of the guide. The repulsive appearance of a guide can negatively affect customers, so they do not attract their attention and they no longer want to listen or communicate. This affects the quality of service.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

Weather conditions have a significant impact on the quality of service and good customer mood. In the event of heavy rain or sunlight, customers should stay in the open air for as long as possible. Find the right place for the necessary stops to protect customers from unpleasant conditions. Ultimately, it will depend on how you evaluate the quality of the service. However, there are times when you do everything well but the customer is still dissatisfied due to bad mood or some other reasons.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

Whether the customer is satisfied with the quality of services can be seen based on the reviews on the Internet. Often service providers receive positive comments on websites also on Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor etc. This is how customers express gratitude for a job well done. Based on this, it can be concluded that the service was performed in a quality manner.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

Also, that the customer was left dissatisfied with the quality of service can be seen in the online space. There are negative reviews on websites, Facebook, TripAdvisor and other. This is how customers express dissatisfaction, express their opinion. Based on this, it can be concluded that the service was performed in poor quality.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

With the pandemic in the world, normal life has changed. There are many restrictions in place. I think we should offer more cycling routes, scooters, etc. This could be effective to keep the safe distance more easily, also give the service a sense of entertainment.

Interview conversation with Expert 4. Tour-guide at “Balttours” Tour operator

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

I think it is mostly important because a satisfied customer tells their friends and family and can pass on information about the service, their emotions their experience. Also, a satisfied customer pays generously, so this is a monetary incentive for the service provider.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

Often customers have their own vision in advance of what service they will receive. If the customer gets what he wanted, expected or even exceeded his expectations then the customer is satisfied with the quality of the service.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

In my opinion, one of the decisive factors is the personality of the guide, as he is in direct contact with customers for a long time. Spends a lot of time with customers, which directly affects whether the customer will be satisfied or not.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

It is important for the guide to be competent because the client expects the service provider to be a professional in their job. Excellent knowledge of the country's history, economy and politics is necessary.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

It is important for the customer to provide quality service and to be interested in it. There are always different people in a group, some of them are more active and want to be involved in the process. Provoke the customer with questions, allowing him to express his opinion and thus include in the service process. Customers are willing to take part in the tour, so it's important to give them that opportunity.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

The quality of services is influenced by the individual means used: bicycles, scooters and other means. Customers are satisfied if they use technically sound means and without any interruption, we can travel smoothly.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

There are factors that are independent of the service provider but affect the quality of the service. For example, unforeseen circumstances; cross-border relations, such as the current outbreak of disease, need to adapt quickly and change the program. This will ultimately affect the quality of the service provided.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

It is possible to decide on customer satisfaction with the quality of service after receiving a generous tip. Also, an invitation to dinner would mean gratitude for a good, quality job.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

Very rarely, but there are times when the customer refuses to pay after the service is performed, thus showing that he is not satisfied with the quality of the service performed.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

The coronavirus has dramatically changed our life habits. There are many additional requirements introduced for customer safety. We need to think about how to ensure the safety of customers in transport. This would not only be the provision of disinfectants but should be considered for buses without a roof (if possible), tourist boats to choose with an open space for the whole group.

Interview conversation with Expert 5. Tour-guide

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

Of course it's very important. A satisfied customer will share their experiences with others. And this is free advertising for the service provider. This can attract new clients.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer is satisfied when all his desires, expectations come true or when he receives more than expected.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

One of the key aspects that will determine customer satisfaction is the human factor in our case would be the guide. His competence, intelligence, charisma, knowledge of languages, erudition will determine whether customers will be satisfied.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

Customers expect good emotions, so a guide with a sense of humor has a great advantage in providing this service. The playful layout of the topic, with interesting examples, gives the client positive emotions (laughter, smiles) and leaves a greater impression than the facts presented dry. Customer smiles and good mood are the best indicator of customer satisfaction.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

Clients are always happy when they are offered to participate in the process themselves, to learn how to make something with their own hands. A souvenir made by yourself will remain good memories of the travel experiences.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

A beautiful place, an aesthetically attractive place, a safe environment near a significant object about which the story is positively posed by customers.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

There are independent factors that affect the quality of service. During the service, technical issues may occur: audio equipment, transport failures. The planned service may be disrupted by events like errors in documentation to presenting to border guards or delays due to road closures (road repairs or a city event). Unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the service provider have a very significant impact on the quality of the service.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

The customers' assessment of the quality of the service provided can be decided by saying goodbye to them. Wide smiles "shine" on their faces, sincerely thank you for a good time, remember the most interesting moments.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

According to the clients negative mood, it can be judged that he is dissatisfied with the service. His rude language, often uncontrollable and makes reasonable and unsubstantiated claims.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

Covid-19 has disrupted a well-established life. To survive, you need to think about what can be offered to the customer. I am considering new routes. I am thinking of proposing to include more routes in the open space in the programs: national and regional parks, the most interesting natural objects.

Interview conversation with Expert 6. Tour-guide

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

I would say customer satisfaction is very important. A satisfied customer will probably come back, encouraging me as a service provider to look for new ideas, to improve my skills. And the salary also depends on how many customers there will be.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer is satisfied when the service meets his criteria. He wants to come back again, or buy another service from the same provider and thus establish a close relationship with the service provider.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

I would say the most important aspect is the whole service process on its own. It should be an interesting story, communicating with clients by involving them in participating in the tour by asking them questions, dissecting the topic using the methodology correctly.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

The service provider must be friendly, honest, very talkative. Be able to quickly resolve any problems. Also, expressive language skills are very important in providing this service.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

It is important for customers to receive quality service. They expect not only information but also interesting presentation. The non-standard, sometimes easily shocking presentation of information always makes a special impression. In this way, the customer's attention remains until the end of the service process, waiting for even more interesting events.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

When traveling by bus or other means of transport, the use of audio-video equipment also has a significant impact. It is important during the trip that all the equipment works well, is in good technical

condition, is modern, and the batteries are charged for individual use. Well-functioning equipment ensures good quality of service.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

Weather conditions are a very important factor in the provision of services. The service provider cannot change them but may try to do so in such a way that customers are protected and less exposed to the natural conditions: strong wind, heat or cold. Try to look for shelter, shade, less to be in the fresh air. All these weather conditions can affect customer satisfaction in assessing the quality of service provided.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

The best service quality assessment is the return of the customer when purchasing another service from the same service provider. This means that the customer was satisfied with the quality of the service provided.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

It is very unfortunate, but there are some cases where dissatisfied customers express their dissatisfaction through complaints. An oral complaint is made directly to the service provider and a written complaint is made to the organizations concerned.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

With the changing circumstances in the tourism market this year, we need to think about how to survive. Radical and urgent decisions are needed. After introducing safety distance requirements, I am considering purchasing new audio equipment with disposable headphones (to keep the recommended safe distance).

Interview conversation with Expert 7. Tour-guide

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

Customer satisfaction is very important, not only because a satisfied customer disseminates information, thereby attracting other customers, but also can become loyal. And that encourages improvement and enjoyment of the work done.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer expects to receive quality service and is satisfied when the service meets or exceeds expectations.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

Choosing a guide to perform a service is an essential and most important factor influencing customer satisfaction. An unfriendly guide will lead to customer dissatisfaction. And this must be avoided because the main goal of providing a service is to make the customer satisfied.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

The service provider must have a very good knowledge of foreign languages, as incoming customers expect a quality narration in a language they understand.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

The client needs to be interested by offering to participate in the service process itself. Information is better absorbed when the customer himself is involved in the action, can touch or try to make something. As a rule, customers remain satisfied with such offers.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

Answering this question, I could name the looks of the guide. Customers are well served by a neat, well-groomed, representative-looking guide. It is a natural indicator of communication between people.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

For example, in the event of an accident, such as a client breaking his arm, twisting his leg it is necessary to react promptly and appropriately, e.g. to provide first aid, or to organize transportation so as not to affect other members of the group.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

Many clients from other countries have a provision (unwritten rule) to thank the service provider for a job well done by tipping them. Based on the tips received, it is possible to decide on the evaluation of the quality of the performed service.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

A non-payment may occur when, for some reason, an agreed program is not completed, he is dissatisfied. Therefore, the customer refuses to pay in part or demands a discount.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

Indeed, the announced quarantine has changed people's lives. The tourism business has been particularly affected. Therefore, it is necessary to change something. I am considering turning visits to museums, exhibitions (inside) into events and expositions in open spaces.

Interview conversation with Expert 8. Tour-guide

1. How important is customer satisfaction nowadays? If so, what is the main reason? (why?)

Well, I consider customer satisfaction to be the most important of all factors. If the customer is satisfied, loyal then attracts new customers, then business has no material problems and therefore encourages business expansion.

2. When, in your opinion, customers are satisfied with the quality of the service?

The customer is satisfied when things go the way he wanted, as planned in advance, even more exciting than expected.

3. Could you name service quality aspects (if any) that are affecting customer satisfaction?

The neat, attractive environment that surrounds the customers is important. Infrastructure adapted for tourists is also very important: parking, benches, modern lavatories.

4. What qualities, do you think, customers are expecting from the service provider (a tour-guide)?

Customers expect a charismatic, communicative, responsive response to customer questions and preferences. It is also very important to communicate freely with customers of different age groups, different countries, to adapt to their needs. The guide must be communicative in all cases.

5. What do you think are the customer expectations for the quality of the service delivery process? (why?)

Customers want good, quality service. It is not only the information, but also the communication itself, the presentation. Some customers hope that there will be an opportunity to express their opinion, share their knowledge and impressions, which will brighten up the service process. Clients are always interested in testing their knowledge and expressing themselves.

6. Could you name tangible aspects of service (if any) that can affect the quality of service? (why?)

One such aspect is vehicles. It is very important that the bus is innovatively equipped, comfortable, clean and meets hygienic requirements. During the tour, it is very important that the client feels comfortable.

7. Could you name other external factors that can affect service quality?

A factor that is beyond my control but has a significant impact is weather conditions. For most customers, the mood depends on a good weather, but the message here is that - you will not order good weather. Therefore, it is very important to adapt flexibly to rapidly changing weather conditions. In coordination with the group, adjust the order of the route and try not to compromise the quality of the planned service.

8. Could you name any outcomes of customer satisfaction with service quality?

Sometimes after the service is completed, you can receive an e-mail, letters of thanks, photos, footage with fun memories of a good time together. It also happens that customer calls and thanks directly. Based on this, it can be concluded that the customer is satisfied, and the service was performed with quality.

9. Could you name any outcomes of customer dissatisfaction with service quality?

Nowadays, customers usually express their dissatisfaction on the social media or websites. They usually express their opinion on the Internet, say why they did not like the service, the quality of the service.

10. What is your strategy to improve the quality of your service and meet customer expectations according to nowadays tendencies?

In order to make the customer feel safe, it is possible to offer meals outside restaurants or cafes. Day trips can include more picnics. This would not only enliven the service itself, but also give the customer a sense of security (in nature, without crowding).