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Quality of Accommodation Services – the Memetic Approach

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Abstract

The main scientific objective of the article is to demonstrate, on the example of accommodation service, the possibility of applying the netnographic methodology and meme theory in the context of the analysis of the manner of perception of the quality of a service. The cause-and-effect relationship between the service quality and the formation of memetic transfer was defined, which, through the creation of specific consumer expectations, can contribute to the creation of a positive image of the service provider. The obtained results will provide a theoretical basis for an innovative model for the management of the quality of service.

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1. Introduction

Parasuraman et al. [6] define the concept of service quality as the difference between customer expectations and the experience resulting from the consumption of such a service. The systemic approach to this phenomenon refers to three basic components, i.e. the quality of input (i.e. the competence of employees providing a service, the circumstances of the service), process quality (i.e. interactions between the staff providing a service and the recipient), and the quality of output (i.e. changes in the physical and mental state of a recipient, resulting from the consumption of a service), [1–3], based on: [7] as well as [8]. The perception of the quality of services by the customer is conditioned by a number of factors. Morton et al. [9] indicate that depending on age, gender, and the socio-economic status, recipient's exhibit characteristic and diverse attitudes towards the quality of the services offered.

The creation of the quality of the input, the process, and the service may simultaneously be tantamount to the formation of memetic transmission, based on multiple attributes. The means for such a transmission are memes.

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Memes are the carriers of cultural information [5]. They shape attitudes, styles, behaviour, dress codes, and the manner of self-expression. Knobel and Lankshear [10] divide memes into less and more “expansive”. The effects of the first type of memes, manifested in the occurrence of specific behaviours, activities, the use of a specific terminology, etc. are visible among very few representatives of the community. In turn, the effects of the impact of the more expansive memes are visible in a broad spectrum of the community.

Today, in the era of flourishing of social networking, memes are thought of as Internet memes. These are small elements of text and/or graphics, presenting usually funny or intriguing content [11].

The potentially memetic nature of the quality of services is evidenced by its features, identical to the properties of memes [12]:

- object/content of services – understood as a comprehensive set of goods, obtained by the recipient of the service
- form of communication, which may be identical to the method of service realization
- relationship/correlation between the provider and the recipient, i.e. the source and the recipient of the message (i.e. stance).

The subject, form, and relationship are the basic features of memes. At the same time, these elements, combined with the characteristic of the quality of services, which causes changes in the mental and the physical state of clients [7], justify the memetic approach.

The memetic content emphasized in varying intensity during the consumption of a service may be reflected in the perception of the quality of that service. This feature is conditioned by the possibility of the transfer of memes between the members of the community. The transfer of the memetic content is carried out, among others, through the manner of subjective building of perception of reality and manifests itself in the manner of transmission of this content to the environment [13]. The content available within the social networks is, in such a case, a direct expression of the manner of perception of reality – and therefore also the quality of a service – by the network users. The entirety of memes relating to a particular phenomenon would constitute in such a case a meme pool, by analogy to the genetic pool, as a set of genes in a population.

At the same time, memetic content, for example of shared photographs documenting tourist trips, reflects the way in which the ones sharing those photographs would like to be seen. The analysis of the manner of perception of the quality of a service (expressed through the creation of User Generated Content by the recipients in social networks) can significantly contribute to a fuller understanding of customer needs, more complete fulfilment of his needs, and consequently to strengthening the attitudes of loyalty.

Su et al. [14] suggest that customer-company identification – created by building mutual relations – it is one of the variables mediating between the perception of the quality of a product/service and the loyalty to that product or service, as well as the own sense of well-being. Building the high quality of services is, on the way to building customer confidence, one of the components of relationship marketing [15]. Relationship marketing is concerned with the formation of partner relationships between the provider and the recipient, for the realization of individual goals through the exchange of certain values and the meeting of commitments [16].

2. Research problem

Building relationships may be equivalent to the formation of memetic transmission and the transfer of certain memes. The source of memes would in such case be the service provider, and their recipient – the recipient of the service. The memetic content may be subsequently processed and passed on. The social media and their contents (User Generated Content – UGC) created and shared by the users and for the users provide extensive possibilities for scientific research on this issue [17, 18].

The accommodation service is a set of services [19] covering both the accommodation itself, as well as catering services, entertainment, information services, services associated with the organization of short tourist trips. Therefore, the perception of the quality of each of these partial services is one of the elements affecting not only the overall tourist experience [14], but also the image of the area [20].

The direct expression of the perception of the quality of accommodation services includes the comments left by the recipients of those services on the sites comparing tourist offers, and their semantic meaning. The research problem

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