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## Service Quality in International Conference Industry; A Case Study of WCES 2015

Naziyet Uzunboylu<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*MBA Marketing, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, 99010, Cyprus*

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### Abstract

This study is conducted to evaluate the service quality in the international conferences. A statistical analysis was provided based on data collected from 105 delegates from the actual industry. A structured self-administered questionnaire was developed by taking into consideration the original SERVQUAL instrument and conducted to the respondents in order to analyze their general expectations on conference services and the actual service performance they perceived with the conference. The study also assessed the impact of respondents past experiences on their expectations. The results show that there is a significant difference between the respondents' expectations and perceptions which lead to low satisfaction level in respondents depending upon the gap in the service quality of the conference. In addition, the analysis has addressed the relationship between the service quality and customer satisfaction in terms of future behaviors of the respondents and word-of-mouth recommendations. The main findings conclude that service quality is a dynamic process which needs every time improvement.

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### 1. Introduction

The conference industry is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing service industry, which is forms a major part of the business events sector (Rogers, 2013). Hence, competition for the conference industry increases day to day as the demands of customers increase. Increased competition and more-demanding customers mean that careful consideration must be taken for the facilities and services provided during conferences (Hinkin & Tracey, 2003).

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\* Naziyet UZUNBOYLU. Tel.: +90-533-844-0505.

*E-mail address:* [nazli.uzunboylu@gmail.com](mailto:nazli.uzunboylu@gmail.com)

Therefore, in terms of ensuring success in market place and competitive advantage, it is critically important to understand the role of ‘quality’ as an element in the effectiveness of service provision (Langer, 1997; Demir, and Demir, 2015).

Service is the only way to meet the expectations of the conference participants since it is a basic tool for the conference operation and negotiation (Lee and Park, 2002). In previous researches, many approaches have been developed to analyze the quality of services. According to Parasuraman et al., p. 42 (1985), service quality can be defined as “*perceptions result(ing) from a comparison of consumer expectations with actual service performance*”. Based on this perspective, in 1985, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry have developed the current measurement of perceived service quality, SERVQUAL, to measure customers’ expectations and perceptions concerning a service encounter. This scale measures service quality by calculating the difference between expectations and perceptions. According to the scale developed by Parasuraman et al., (1985), if the levels of perceptions exceed expectations, it will be regarded as higher levels of quality. Conversely, if the expectations have not been met by the organization, the quality of service will be classed as bad or poor (Fick and Richie, 1991; Yurdakul, 2016).

In this article, the importance of service quality to the conference industry is presented as a measure of how well the service level delivered matches the participant’s expectations and the relationships between customer perception and satisfaction.

## 2. Literature Review

In this research, literature is based around service quality, conference services, attendees’ expectations and satisfaction, and service quality evaluation which will then be used for the primary research which is crucial to meet the objectives. Even though, most of the main resources used for this study is from the 80’s and 90’s, most of the most contemporary theories are based on the findings of Parasuraman and therefore, these theories, especially for the literature review still maintains high validity and authority over contemporary studies. Initially, the term service quality is explained in detail. Then, aspects of service quality that are associated with conferences are outlined. This leads into identifying service quality model, as well as the evaluation of service quality and the measurement techniques that are used to measure the expectations and perceptions of customers. The final area of literature review is on conference industry. Service Quality in International Conferences is examined and how service quality fixed with conferences is outlined.

### 2.1. Service Quality

In contemporary economy, service quality has received a considerable research attention in marketing literature (Teas, 1993). Substantial research has focused on the concepts of service quality associated with customer attitudes and satisfaction, and the measurement techniques of the service quality (Taylor and Cronin, 1992).

Many academic literatures and books address variety of definitions and concepts about service quality and hypothesize a comparison of consumer expectations with performance. Parasuraman, Valarie, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, p.42) defined service quality as “*perceptions resulting from a comparison of consumer expectations with actual service performance*”. In addition, Severt et al. (2006) stated that service quality is a tool for how well the customer expectations are matched by the delivered service level and it is known that if the customer expectations are higher than the perceived performance, then it could affect the customer satisfaction negatively (cited by Parasuraman et al., 1985). In consonance with this, service quality can be seen as a bond that is created between the organization and its customers (Schneider & White, 2004). Even though there are many different definitions for what service quality is, the general consensus in the literature is that it is the discrepancy between the expectations and the perceptions of customers.

### 2.2. Customer Satisfaction

It is a well-known fact that, the focus of the industry is always on the customers because the customers directly take part in the service process. Correspondingly, customer satisfaction has become a key strategic issue where the businesses attempt to maximise profits (Lotfi, Dehaghi, 2014). Cronin, Brady and Hult (2000) defines satisfaction as

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