

Petra Gyurácz-Németh: Service Delivery Standardisation and Customisation in the Hungarian Hotels

Opponent review of the PhD thesis

I was a reviewer of the previous version of the thesis. Thus, I write my review taking into account my remarks, recommendations, and the changes that happened with the thesis since then.

The thesis discusses an actual issue. Since tourism is an important sector of the Hungarian economy, and hotels take a significant part of it, thus evaluating their approach to operations can add real value to the scientific community, to practitioners, and to customers, as well.

The thesis focuses on the relationship of standardisation and customisation and their impact on performance indicators in Hungarian hotels. It first creates a basis for discussion by defining terms and expressions and showing their position in the literature, and their relationship to each other. The candidate goes through the terms of services, standardisation, customisation, the performance indicators used in the hotel industry and she introduces the Hungarian hotel sector, as well. Next, the hypotheses are set and the empirical research is carried out. Finally the results are summarized.

Literature review

The candidate devotes a lot of space to introduce the meaning and history of *service management*. She gives some useful summarizing tables, and analyses in detail the development made by various authors. She built in the articles and books I recommended in my previous review and also provided a more sophisticated picture about the development phases of services. Furthermore, she changed her definition for services, although I am still not persuaded that the definition stems from the many sources listed before.

A general comment to the whole literature review (including succeeding parts, as well) that she should try to develop her own story line instead of summarizing paragraph by paragraph the articles she read. For example, knowing her final definition developed for services, she could devote a paragraph (or more) to the issue of labour productivity. How is it handled by various authors? Grouping the literature along her own logic would lead the reader exactly to her own definition provided later on. Nevertheless, the literature review now contains all the relevant literature.

The candidate found a lot of phrasing of *standardisation and customisation*. According to my suggestion she devoted much more space analysing the literature on mass customisation. She also brought here the new model of standardisation and customisation from chapter 3 where it was before.

The chapter on *customer satisfaction and performance measures* is well written and especially in case of performance measures takes the reader closer to the hotel industry.

Finally, as part of the literature review we get a detailed summary of the situation and problems of the *Hungarian hotel service* sector.

What we do not get at the end of the literature review is some synthesising statements of the literature which identifies the gaps and lead to the research questions, even if I suggested it in my previous review. It could have been also done at the research objectives chapter, but it did not take place there, either.

Research objectives

I could not identify significant changes in this chapter, aside from the more detailed investigation of Q1. Although the research questions are well explained and visualized, I still consider as a weak point of this part is that the hypotheses build only partially on the literature review. Some specific literature related to hotels would have given more credibility to the hypotheses. For example, we could not read anything about the practice of hotel chains vs. independent hotels. So why does the candidate think that the level of standardisation would be different? Nevertheless, there are some logical arguments to support the hypotheses.

Empirical results

The methodology seems to be appropriate, the results are correctly analysed and explained. The candidate shortened the analysis of Q3, as I suggested before putting some tables into the appendix. She also tried to synthesise the results of the many performance measures to some extent. I still think that creating a single meta indicator could have provided additional value.

Discussion of the results

A serious shortcoming of the thesis is that the discussion only summarizes the results of the empirical analysis, even if I called the attention of the candidate for this problem. Therefore, it is not clear how the results relate to previous findings of other researches. Without writing this part I think the thesis – or any part of it – is not publishable. I also missed the so called managerial implications part. Although a PhD thesis usually prefers theoretical implications, but the candidate emphasizes that she wants to contribute to practice. So such a session could have formulated the recommendations for hotels based on the thesis.

Formal elements

The thesis is transparent, well structured. It is relatively easy to read, although its English could be improved. The tables and figures are mainly obvious (exception: p. 49, Figure 4, the scales are not clear). References are correct.

Summary remarks

In summary, the thesis is thorough. It relies on numerous sources, makes a detailed literature review, sets testable hypotheses, uses adequate methodology and explains the results. I recommend to the candidate to follow more strictly the suggestions provided by reviewers or give adequate reasons why not doing that in case she plans to publish in the future. Although the thesis has some shortcomings, but altogether it witnesses that the candidate is competent to do research. It is also proved by the numerous publications written and presented by the candidate in the topic of the thesis.

December 15, 2014



Krisztina Demeter