Maja Ciric[1], Dragomir Djordjevic[2], Svetlana Ignjatijevic[3]

MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING CUSTOMER ORIENTATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Under the conditions of fierce competition between hotels at the global market, customer orientation can be one of the solutions for hotels' differentiation and competitiveness. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to test whether the Nwankwo's framework, developed for analyzing the level of customer orientation in different organizations, could be applicable for hotels. What is more, we tried to find out how this framework can help hotel managers analyze the level of customer orientation in hotels and identify the main strengths and weaknesses in their organization. This research was conducted using questionnaire as a survey method for the districts of Sumadija and Morava in Serbia. For detailed analysis, correlation measures were used. Findings were discussed and, finally, some suggestions were given for the improvement of hotels` customer orientation.
Keywords: customer orientation, customer satisfaction, hotel management, competitiveness.
JEL classification: M21, M31.

Майя Чиріч, Драгомір Джорджевіч, Светлана Ігнатієвіч
РОЗРОБКА СИСТЕМИ АНАЛІЗУ ОРІЄНТАЦІЇ НА КЛІЄНТІВ У ГОТЕЛЬНІЙ ІНДУСТРІЇ

У статті розглянуто проблеми орієнтації на клієнтів як чинник конкурентоспроможності готелів в умовах складного ринку. Перевірено, чи можна схему Нванкво, розроблену для аналізу рівня орієнтації на клієнтів у різних компаніях, застосовувати до готельного бізнесу, і як така схема може допомогти менеджерам виділити сильні і слабкі сторони компанії. Анкетні дані отримано з опитування, проведеного в районах Шумадія і Морава в Сербії, проведено аналіз кореляцій і на основі висновків запропоновано рекомендації з покращення орієнтації готелів на клієнтів.
Ключові слова: орієнтація на клієнтів, задоволеність клієнтів, готельний менеджмент, конкурентоспроможність.
Табл. 2. Літ. 13.

Майя Чирич, Драгомир Джорджевич, Светлана Игнатиевич
РАЗРАБОТКА СИСТЕМЫ АНАЛИЗА ОРИЕНТАЦИИ НА КЛИЕНТОВ В ГОСТИНИЧНОЙ ИНДУСТРИИ

В статье рассмотрены проблемы ориентации на клиентов как фактор конкурентоспособности гостиниц в условиях сложного рынка. Проверено, можно ли схему Нванкво, разработанную для анализа уровня ориентации на клиентов в разных компаниях, применить к гостиничному бизнесу, и как такая схема может помочь менеджерам выделить сильные и слабые стороны компании. Анкетные данные получены из опроса, проведенного в районах Шумадия и Морава в Сербии, проведен анализ корреляций и на основе выводов предложены рекомендации по улучшению ориентации отелей на клиентов.
Ключевые слова: ориентация на клиентов, удовлетворенность клиентов, гостиничный менеджмент, конкурентоспособность.

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Introduction. Economic, technological and cultural development in the context of globalization give a significant stimulus for mass travels and, together with the development of traffic, contribute to raising the quality and availability of the total tourist offer of one region for its customers. This additionally increases competition between hotels all over the world.

One of the ways hotels can deal with growing competition is by accepting the fact that customer orientation is necessary if they wish to survive at the market and secure further growth and development. Customer orientation has to become an integral part of the general business philosophy of hotels and has to reflect the customer orientation of all hotel employees. This attitude implies considering customer needs and expectations in all aspects of business and taking them as the primary criterion for measuring business performance in the hotel industry.

For a hotel to adopt and start implementing customer orientation, it is important to first understand what this concept implies, how it can affect customer behavior, how to measure the value of service offered to customers and how to secure customer satisfaction and loyalty in the long run.

In the following chapter of this paper, we will try to find out whether it is possible to adapt and implement in the hotels the framework that Nwankwo (1995: 7) developed for analyzing customer orientation. Furthermore, we will also try to draw some kind of a conclusion regarding the benefits that hotel managers can have from the implementation of customer orientation approach.

Customer orientation and its importance for hotels. In order to find the best way to identify and measure customer orientation in the hotel industry, we first needed to clearly define the concept itself, knowing that there are various different definitions in literature. For instance, we can see that market orientation and customer orientation are frequently used as synonyms, which is a result of the fact that both types of orientation put customers' needs into their focus (Brady and Cronin, 2005).

(Deshpande, Farley and Webster, 1993: 27) claimed that market orientation and customer orientation are synonymous concepts, defining customer orientation as the "set of beliefs that puts the customer interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders such as owners, managers, and employees in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise". However, despite a lot of similarities, there are certain differences between these concepts, and they cannot be used interchangeably.

On the other hand, Narver and Slater (Narver and Slater, 1990: 21) made a distinction between market orientation and customer orientation, stating that customer orientation is one of the 3 behavioural components of market orientation, while the remaining 2 components are competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. Some other authors (Zheng Zhou, Brown, Dev and Agarwal, 2007: 315) also claimed that there is a difference between market and customer orientation, and, according to some research conducted in the global hotel industry, they pointed to the fact that market and customer orientations even have different effects on hotel business performances under various market conditions.

Orientation towards customers can be analyzed as the central part of a wider definition of market orientation proposed by Kohli and his colleagues (Kohli, Jaworski and Kumar, 1993: 466), who claimed that "market orientation is the organization-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to the current and future needs of

the customers, the dissemination of intelligence horizontally and vertically within the organization, and an organization-wide action or responsiveness to it". According to their research, market-oriented organizations are characterised by stronger organizational commitment on the part of their employees, higher customer satisfaction and business performance (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990: 13).

Bruhn (1995: 393) also pointed to the differences between market orientation and orientation towards customers. According to him, market orientation assumes all organizational activities to be concentrated on market actors and all interest groups at the market, whereas orientation on customers assumes the establishing of bilateral connections between customers and organization. He defined customer orientation as the process of versatile and continuous gathering and analysis of information about customer expectations, as well as their internal and external implementation in organizational services and interactions aiming at establishing stable and profitable connections with customers in the long run. According to this definition, customer orientation can be seen as a task of management and staff in hotels.

Therefore, an active approach in customer orientation can lead to the creation of a knowledge base helping hotel management and staff continuously learn about the perceptions and demands of their new and existing customers. It is important for a hotel to adopt the strategy of continuously offering quality to its customers. In other words, hotel management and staff need to realize that customers are not a temporary or one-time transaction (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann, 1996: 54), but rather that a customer is a partner with whom they need to develop a long-term relationship. What is more, customer orientation and customer relationship management (CRM) strategy are crucial for survival at a market (Ciric, Grandov, Caric, 2012: 481). Only with such attitude it is possible to develop customer relations which make it possible for employees to improve their business performances and bring profit to their hotels. Hennig-Thurau (2004: 460) pointed out that customer orientation of service personnel is often regarded as the main determinant of success for service businesses. Macintosh`s research (2007: 156) clearly emphasized the importance of having customer-oriented front desk employees especially in service businesses, as this creates a positive impact on customer loyalty and typically leads to the positive word-of-mouth. So, they suggested that there should be more research on improving the selection, training, and motivation of customer-oriented employees.

However, the key question now is how hotel management can assess the degree to which customer orientation is implemented in their organization, as well as its strong points, weaknesses and possibilities of improvement.

Theoretical framework for analyzing customer orientation. There are relatively few authors dealing with measurement in literature, despite the great prominence given to the importance of customer orientation, both in theory and practice. Therefore, Nwankwo (1995: 6) proposed a framework for clear identification of the degree of customer orientation, consisting of 4 primary and interconnected determinants: definition, sensitivity, measurement and implementation. Based on these 4 determinants, Nwankwo developed a framework which can show whether an organization has a high or a low level/degree of customer orientation. Based on his framework, we can identify customer orientation in organizations which:

1. Put customers in the focus of their business activities, rather than organizational factors. Customer-oriented organizations have a clear picture about their customers, based on which they choose target markets, design products and services (Definition).

2. Exhibit proactive approach to customers. In other words, they try to identify their customers' expectations and needs beforehand and build their customer strategy on such information. Customer-oriented organizations do not wait for the problem to appear to start responding to it, but rather possess an understanding for their existing and potential customers prior to any action (Sensitivity).

3. Use formal methods and techniques to measure business performance, including customer-related indicators, such as the level of customer satisfaction and loyalty, beside the expected sales, profit and market share indicators. Customer-oriented organizations do not start from approximate values for market analysis and customer complaints analysis, but rather have formal measurement mechanisms. They utilize formal measurement to get clear indicators whether performed activities had a positive effect on business performance (Measurement).

4. Intensively work on offering the expected value of service to their customers. In customer-oriented organizations, management and employees are all completely involved and motivated to assist their customers in the best possible way, thus securing the maximum level of satisfaction (Implementation).

All 4 determinants (definition, sensitivity, measurement and implementation) are mutually connected and only those organizations which have a high value of all 4 can be described as truly customer-oriented and can benefit from such approach. Considering the previously mentioned framework, we define a set of questions to be used and adjusted to the hotel industry, trying to ascertain how hotel managers can measure the level of customer orientation in their hotels and identify main strengths and weaknesses in the relationships with their customers.

Method. For measuring the level of customer orientation of hotels and testing the proposed Nwankwo`s framework, we conducted our research in the districts of Sumadija and Morava in Serbia. The research sample consisted of 10 hotels. We randomly selected our representative sample from the list of hotels, using the random number tables.

The research was carefully prepared. We clearly and precisely defined the way to deal with respondents. Clear, precise and detailed instructions were prepared for respondents and research assistants. We determined the procedure for data collection and processing.

The research was conducted using a survey. For that purpose we prepared the list of specially phrased questions grouped in 4 categories:
- Definition;
- Sensitivity;
- Measurement;
- Implementation.

There were 7 questions in each group. The respondents were supposed to answer by writing one of the numbers from the given scale (Appendix: Questionnaire).

The respondents were randomly chosen among all hotel employees for the survey.

The survey was anonymous.

Upon completion of the survey, we analyzed the questionnaires through 4 stages.

First we revised the questionnaires, checked the appropriateness of questions and eliminated mistakes in the filled forms. There were no rejected questionnaires.

Then we encoded the questionnaires, or more precisely — the data. As the data were already entered as digits, we only checked everything for regularity. There were no corrections made at this stage.

The third stage included data processing and formatting, drawing up tables for the purpose of more efficient graphic representations of the research results.

Beside this analysis of the level of customer orientation in the selected hotels, we conducted an additional test of the framework proposed by Nwankwo. It was tested whether we can really start from the mentioned 4 determinants in the assessment of customer orientation of hotels and whether there are any existing correlations between them. For the detailed analysis, we used correlation measures. For calculating the degree of correlation between two determinants, we used the correlation coefficient, Pearson coefficient (p), and for the non-parametrical tests we used the Student's t-test.

Results and discussion. The esearch results were expressed as percentages and numbers and represented in tables.

Table 1. **Research results for the degree of customer orientation in different hotels given as percentages and points**

Name of the hotel	No. of employees	No. of employees who took the survey	Definition		Sensitivity		Measurement		Implementation	
			%	Points	%	Points	%	Points	%	Points
Hotel "Sumarice", Kragujevac	36	1	80	28	77	27	85	30	91	32
		2	82	29	62	22	77	27	91	32
		3	68	24	54	19	60	21	54	19
		4	88	31	80	28	80	28	88	31
		5	77	27	68	24	80	28	80	28
Hotel "Zelengora", Kragujevac	28	1	91	32	85	30	85	30	94	33
		2	85	30	82	29	91	32	100	35
		3	88	31	85	30	88	31	88	31
		4	91	32	85	30	88	31	91	32
		5	97	34	85	30	91	32	88	31
Hotel "Kragujevac", Kragujevac	31	1	80	28	68	24	85	30	91	32
		2	71	25	77	27	85	30	82	29
		3	74	26	74	26	85	30	80	28
		4	80	28	74	26	74	26	88	31
		5	74	26	77	27	80	280	88	31
Hotel "Stari grad", Kragujevac	18	1	82	29	82	29	80	28	80	28
		2	94	33	65	23	74	26	80	28
		3	71	25	68	24	68	24	71	25
		4	77	27	77	27	85	30	82	29
		5	88	31	77	27	80	28	85	30
Hotel "Euro Gaj", Ravni Gaj	18	1	74	26	57	20	48	17	62	22
		2	85	30	68	24	71	25	85	30
		3	74	26	68	24	62	22	80	28
		4	62	22	62	22	71	25	71	25
		5	80	28	62	22	57	20	71	25

The end of *Table 1*

Name of the hotel	No. of employees	No. of employees who took the survey	Definition		Sensitivity		Measurement		Implementation	
			%	Points	%	Points	%	Points	%	Points
Hotel "Neda", Rudnik	24	1	77	27	65	23	74	26	68	24
		2	71	25	71	25	68	24	62	22
		3	54	19	57	20	65	23	60	21
		4	80	28	74	26	77	27	68	24
		5	65	23	60	21	60	21	57	20
Hotel "Oplenac", Topola	28	1	77	27	66	23	63	22	68	24
		2	80	28	57	20	63	22	68	24
		3	91	32	71	25	68	24	82	29
		4	68	24	60	21	68	24	71	25
		5	68	24	51	18	60	21	57	20
Hotel "Plana", Velika Plana	27	1	88	31	77	27	94	33	91	32
		2	77	27	60	21	80	28	77	27
		3	91	32	77	27	77	27	85	30
		4	77	27	82	29	91	32	94	33
		5	77	27	88	31	80	28	88	31
Hotel "Beograd", Cacak	34	1	84	32	77	27	80	28	82	29
		2	82	29	68	24	65	23	74	26
		3	68	24	71	25	54	19	65	23
		4	82	29	71	25	80	28	80	28
		5	74	26	71	25	71	25	68	24
Hotel "Aleksandar", Orasac Arandelovac	29	1	88	31	83	29	80	28	77	27
		2	86	30	86	30	88	31	86	30
		3	85	30	82	29	77	27	80	28
		4	77	27	71	25	77	27	74	26
		5	80	28	68	24	77	27	85	30

Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 2. **Research results for the degree of customer orientation in different hotels,** *average %*

Hotel	Definition	Sensitivity	Measurement	Implementation
Hotel "Sumarice", Kragujevac	79	68.2	76.4	80.8
Hotel "Zelengora", Kragujevac	90.4	84.4	88.6	92.2
Hotel "Kragujevac", Kragujevac	75.8	74	81.8	85.8
Hotel "Stari grad", Kragujevac	82.4	73.8	77.4	79.6
Hotel "Euro Gaj", Ravni Gaj	75	63.4	61.8	73.8
Hotel "Neda", Rudnik	69.4	65.4	68.8	63
Hotel "Oplenac", Topola	76.8	61	64.4	69.2
Hotel "Plana", Velika Plana	82	76.8	84.4	87
Hotel "Beograd", Cacak	78	71.6	70	73.8
Hotel "Aleksandar", Orasac	83.2	78	79.8	80.4
Average value	79.2	71.66	75.34	78.56

Source: Authors' calculation.

According to Nwankwo's framework (1995: 7), which we adopted and implemented for analyzing customer orientation of the hotels, we can say that the hotels have a high degree of customer orientation if their results are above 75% for each individual determinant: definition, sensitivity, measurement and implementation. Based on the above table, we can conclude that only 3 hotels have for all the determinants percentages above the previously mentioned level. This means that only 3 hotels, or

30% of the sample, have a high degree of customer orientation. However, even the remaining hotels in the sample have very good results, considering that the lowest value is 61% for the category of sensitivity, which is a sign of an average degree of customer orientation. What is also worth noticing is that in 8 out of 10 tested hotels the category of sensitivity is the weakest determinant, i.e. the determinant with the lowest value. Furthermore, when we analyze average values of the 4 determinants, we can see that sensitivity is the weakest determinant, with the average value of 71.66%, while definition is best rated with 79. 2%. Average values for measurement and implementation are above 75% (75.34% and 78.56%). The gained values point to the fact that the employees are well acquainted with the concept of customer orientation, but they need to show a higher degree of sensitivity. In other words, they need to assume a proactive approach to their customers. This is in accordance with Beech and Chadwick (2006: 107) who state that employee training is a critical factor for successful business performance at strategic, operational and individual levels. Training can also lead to an increase in the motivation of employees and their loyalty to the organization for which they work, which positively influences customers' perception of the service quality. It is also in accordance with Hennig-Thurau (2004: 460), who indicate that customer orientation of service personnel is often regarded as the main determinant of success in service business.

Beside this analysis of the level of customer orientation in the sample of hotels, we conducted an additional test on the framework proposed by Nwankwo. Based on the calculations of the appropriate values, we found that:

- The result of testing correlation between definition and sensitivity shows a strong correlation (value in the range 0.8−0.9 means that the correlation is strong) with a high degree of matching. This was determined using the covariance method. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.88, while the significance of correlation coefficient, using the Student's *t*-test is 5.192.

- The result of testing correlation between definition and measurement shows that the degree of correlation is significant and there is a correlation between them with a moderate degree of matching. This was determined using the covariance method. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.78, while the significance of correlation coefficient, using the Student's *t*-test is 3.56.

- The result of testing correlation between definition and implementation shows that the degree of correlation is significant and there is a strong correlation between them (value in the range 0.8−0.9 means that the correlation is strong) and a high degree of matching. This was determined using the covariance method. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.81, while the significance of correlation coefficient, using the Student's *t*-test is 3.95.

- The result of testing correlation between sensitivity and measurement shows that the degree of correlation is significant and there is an extremely strong correlation and a very high degree of matching between them (value in the range 0.9−1 means that the correlation is extremely strong). This was determined using the covariance method. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.94, while the significance of correlation coefficient, using the Student's *t*-test is 7.60.

- The result of testing correlation between sensitivity and implementation shows a strong correlation between them (value in the range 0.8−0.9 means that the corre-

lation is strong) and a very high degree of matching. This was determined using the covariance method. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.80, while the significance of correlation coefficient, using the Student's *t*-test is 5.70.

- The result of testing correlation between measurement and implementation shows that correlation between them is significant and there is an extremely strong correlation and a high degree of matching between them (value in the range 0.9−1 means that the correlation is extremely strong). This was determined using the covariance method. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.94, while the significance of correlation coefficient, using the Student's *t*-test is 8.06.

On the basis of the gained results, we found that between all the determinants within the proposed framework there is a high degree of correlation, which means that the used method can be considered as appropriate for the analysis of customer orientation in hotels.

Conclusion and recommendation. Basing on the research conducted, we conclude that Nwankwo`s framework for analyzing customer orientation can be applicable for hotels since there is a high degree of correlation between all the determinants within the proposed framework. Besides, we have proven it is not enough for hotel management and staff only to be acquainted with the notion of customer orientation but rather to become proactive, use formal measurement mechanisms, as well as to be effective, efficient and motivated when delivering quality service to customers.

After using this framework, it has been shown that hotel managers can identify the strongest and weakest points in customer orientation of their hotels and thus use these results to work on hotel improvement. For all of the selected hotels in our research, depending on their degree of customer orientation, we could get different implications and recommendations. For the tested sample of Serbian hotels, we determined that the strongest point/determinant is "Definition", or in other words, the familiarity of employees with the philosophy of customer orientation. On the other hand, the weakest point or determinant is "Sensitivity", i.e. an insufficiently proactive approach to customer relations. Hence, a recommendation for hotel management in Serbia is to pay greater attention to factors from their immediate environment, such as customers' expectations and potential wishes, when defining strategies and making decisions. Managers need to build competitive advantages based on the gathered information and knowledge base about their customers, trying to anticipate what can bring satisfaction to their customers and so meet their customers' wishes and expectations better than their competitors can. Another important observation is that not even the best and most detailed planning and implementation of customer orientation is possible without the help and active involvement of all employees. We can conclude this paper by saying that employees play an extremely important role, helping companies differentiate themselves from their competitors, achieve competitive advantages and offer quality to their customers. Obviously, the process of implementing customer orientation largely depends on company staff.

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APPENDIX
Questionnaire

For each statement, please indicate the degree to which you believe that a statement is true of the hotel where you are employed, using the following scale:

1 = Absolutely not true
2 = True to a small degree
3 = True to some extent
4 = Mostly true
5 = Absolutely true

Definition:

1. The hotel in which I work has clear ideas of its customers and their needs.
2. The hotel in which I work defined its services from the customer point of view.
3. In the hotel where I work we have our own specific goals which are oriented towards customers.
4. We actively search for and listen to feedback from our customers.
5. Managers of the hotel in which I work spend time with the customers.
6. Meeting our customers' needs is a priority compared to meeting our own internal needs.
7. Market research is a very important activity in the hotel where I work.
Points _____
Percentage of points   _____

Sensitivity:

1. We encourage our customers to get involved in the process of defining service targets and standards in the hotel where I work.
2. We know exactly what aspects and characteristics of our service our customers value the most.
3. We surpass our customers' expectations as regards the things which are most important for them.
4. Customer strategies in the hotel where I work are based more on the analysis of marketplace than on the ambitions of the hotel management.
5. When defining customer strategies we try to avoid predicting the future, using the past trends to make conclusions about the future.
6. The hotel in which I work realizes that the satisfaction of its employees is very important.
7. The employees of the hotel in which I work are well- trained, supported by adequate resources and encouraged to offer satisfactory customer service.
Points _____
Percentage of points   _____

Measurement:

1. The hotel in which I work explicitly conveys a message to its customers that we are absolutely and completely at their service.

2. Customers are encouraged to give us feedback about our business performance.

3. We regularly measure the standards of our service and business performance.

4. We regularly analyze customer complaints and the information we get is then used in the process of strategy development.

5. The results of measuring business performances are readily available to everyone, transparent and regularly updated.

6. We implement well-known methods for measuring business performances and do not rely on the "rule of thumb".

7. The front desk staff in the hotel where I work is continuously informed of the appropriate way to do their jobs.

Points _____

Percentage of points   _____

Implementation:

1. The chief executive officer in the hotel where I work is a true champion in customer relations.

2. In taking customer initiatives, we try to establish working rules which are flexible and sustainable.

3. In the hotel where I work, there is high motivation among the employees and we would do anything to meet our customers' needs

4. Teams of employees from different departments work actively together to achieve mutual goals.

5. In the hotel where I work, there is a mutual consensus regarding what needs to be done if we want to be successful.

6. In the hotel where I work, we respond quickly to our customers' comments and complaints.

7. In the hotel where I work, everyone is responsible for solving our customers' problems.

Points _____

Percentage of points   _____

<div align="right">Стаття надійшла до редакції 2.08.2012.</div>