

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

SETTING THE STANDARD – ENHANCING GUEST SATISFACTION THROUGH FOOD AND BEVERAGE OFFERINGS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the value of industry standards in the hospitality sector for improving client satisfaction with food and beverage services. The aim of the study is to examine the effects of standardization on customer satisfaction and overall service quality in hotel restaurants. A total of 440 participants staying in 4 and 5* hotels in Serbia responded to an online survey distributed by the HORES association in March 2021; the research lasted until April 2022. To evaluate the impact of hotel standards on portion size and presentation quality, linear regression analysis was among the methods used. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS 26 software. According to the findings, standards had a significant impact on dish presentation but not on portion size, which in turn influenced guest satisfaction. The study concludes that there is no industry-wide standard for managing guest satisfaction in gastronomy. It also highlights that maintaining high levels of guest satisfaction requires continuous improvement in gastronomic quality. These findings have important implications for the hospitality sector in terms of meeting the diverse needs and expectations of guests.*

Keywords: Standard, food and drinks, gastronomy, satisfaction, guests, service, Serbia, hotels.

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INTRODUCTION

With the primary objective of satisfying the needs and demands of the service or product's end user, or guest, standards (norms/rules) in all tourism-related business sectors are crucial for producing high-quality goods and services. The quality of products, service processes, and services is guaranteed to be in accordance with their intended use precisely thanks to the documented standards that are used as rules and/or instructions for determining quality, with clearly defined criteria and/or technical dimensions [1]. In the tourism industry, standardization is crucial to the operations of tourism organizations as well as the provision of goods and services. The standards will continue to be created, updated, and expanded upon as needed. Standardization has been shown to have an impact on the country's economy, society, ecology, and culture. Standardization aids in achieving consistency in service and product quality for travel agencies that work in the service industry [2][3]. The application of routines in the delivery of services is made easier by the standardization strategy. Standardization, according to some writers, poses a threat to the variety of tourist experiences, diminishing it. Standardization, as defined by De Vries [4], is the process of creating and documenting a small number of solutions to real or hypothetical matching problems that are intended to help guests. The goal is to balance guests' needs with the expectation that these solutions will be utilized frequently or continuously over an extended period of time, by a substantial number of guests for whom they are intended. Standardization can also increase the effectiveness of businesses. Additionally, standardization makes it easier for goods and services to be copied and can help to establish a distinct brand for a business and its products [5]. However, standardization is defined by Koval et al. [6] as an organization's attempt to provide a high-quality product through a variety of marketing techniques [7]. Standards, in Svorcan's [8] opinion, are instruments for creating a shared comprehension of sustainability [9][10]. Varotsis [11] states that standards fall into the following categories: internal and external standards.

Internal standards are those that are formed and defined by the businesses themselves and are consistent with the long-term objectives that have been specified, as stated by Tari et al. [12]. The same writers stress that the effectiveness of the organization's overall business operations and the caliber of its services and goods are significantly influenced by the standards set. Internal standards include both personal and technical elements (staff productivity) (organization and systematization of work).

However, in order to correctly establish the required quality of products/services, external standards—such as those prescribed by other institutions like ETS, ISO, CEN, etc.—must be implemented in accordance with the regulations of competent institutions for standardization [13]. Furthermore, according to Popović et al. [14], there exist legally mandated public standards including “organic and geographical indications (GI) standards” and “basic food safety and quality standards” that must be followed. The same authors make note of the existence of private standards as well, which are voluntary and private standards created by businesses, industrial associations, non-governmental organizations, and other commercial or non-commercial private enterprises. The subject of standards in the tourism industry has been covered in numerous articles. Strambach & Surmeier [7] looked into how sustainable standards are set in South African tourism. While Miletic et al. [15] also looked into sustainability concerns through the quality of standardization, [16] study in Iran focused on determining metrics and standards for impacts on tourism in the protected Karaj River. Standards are also seen as an essential component of the tourism offer, acknowledging modern trends that include new standards into the destination's future economic development.

Value is the driver of guest satisfaction. Satisfaction is the guests' perception of the value received. The metaphor of guest satisfaction is older than the metaphor of value for guests. One of the biggest challenges for management is to ensure guest satisfaction, especially in service industries such as tourism and hospitality [17]. Guest satisfaction depends on various factors that are related to the basic and secondary aspects of the tourist destination; guest satisfaction is largely dependent on the marketing of a destination, the image of a tourist destination, prices of products and services, distribution of goods, promotional activities, including demographic elements of guests, i.e., gender, age, main and secondary motives for travel, profession, financial possibilities, origin [18]. The level of satisfaction itself will primarily depend on the quality of the final product and the service provided to guests. Care about the quality of products and services is necessary at all levels of business with the assumption that it is impossible to ensure guest satisfaction or create a loyal guest without a strong management system (including space design) and without its control [19][20].

Guest satisfaction has always been in the focus of the hotel industry as a measure of managerial strength, product popularity, service quality, overall image and reputation of the hotel facility [21]. The success of the hotel depends on how well the hotel is able to provide quality service to its guests. The quality of hotel service can be measured by guest satisfaction. Within the tourism industry, the hotel industry is one of the larger and more important sectors that provide accommodation, food and beverage services [22]. By opening hotel facilities, the tourism industry improves and expands, which further develops the economy. Hotels are increasing their investments to improve service quality and perceived value for guests, all with the aim of achieving greater satisfaction and loyalty, resulting in better guest relations [23]. Guest satisfaction is necessary to improve service organizations in order for the hotel to be profitable. For this reason, understanding the measurement of guest satisfaction is an important aspect of improving the quality of services and products [24]. In the hotel industry, guest satisfaction largely depends on the quality of service. A management's focused approach to guest satisfaction can improve their loyalty, thereby improving the hotel's revenue. Satisfaction measures have been incorporated as an important dimension for evaluating hotel operational and financial performance, and as such have been used as a possible tool to improve the overall efficiency of hotel service delivery. Satisfaction is a psychological concept that includes a sense of well-being and satisfaction resulting from receiving what guests hope and expect from an attractive product and/or service [24].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of multiple standards is the primary cause of inconsistent products (e.g., dishes prepared differently by each chef), guest confusion (e.g., guests do not know what to expect from a hotel restaurant), and disgruntled managers and employees. Therefore, standards should be agreed upon and clearly identified. Building guest trust, entering new markets, and developing new goods and markets all rely on standards [25]. Furthermore, York et al. [26] emphasized that the first stage in creating a quality system is to establish and comprehend every product and manufacturing process, as well as the standards that must be followed (such as legal requirements, guest demand, and product specifications).

Standard identification is primarily intended to assist workers in performing tasks correctly the first time and to serve as a communication tool to foster teamwork in the production of consistently high-quality goods. If management believes that employees are not adhering to these standards, they need to be evaluated and updated to make them more appropriate [25]. Ramphal & Nicolaides [27] stress the significance of having precise guidelines that allow workers (bosses, assistant bosses, and cooks) to gauge the quality of the food they produce. To ensure that standards are consistently met by products and production processes, quality control measures need to be clearly defined [28]. The chef or manager who created the meal should decide on remedial steps to be taken in order to eliminate any deficiencies when the necessary criteria are not fulfilled [29]. When introducing changes to standards or creating new ones to fill gaps, it is crucial to review standards at least once a year to ensure their effectiveness and to take into account feedback from staff and guests regarding quality issues. Every modification must be precisely described and recorded in the management system (QMS or quality management system) to guarantee consistency. In order to harmonize food safety and quality laws with the EU, processors and exporters in the Republic of Serbia are making significant efforts [14].

Guidelines are crucial tools that aid management in mitigating risks and ensuring consistent, high-quality food preparation by staff [30]. Nonetheless, even for informal systems [31], succinct and effective documentation (i.e., based on minimum effort for maximum utility, e.g., in detailed recipes and for groups of dishes) will help achieve consistent product quality.

It has long been understood that guest satisfaction is a concept. When the free market was being promoted in the 18th century, Adam Smith began the history of consumer satisfaction. The U.S. study "Index Consumer Satisfaction" was one of the first assessments of customer satisfaction with a scientific foundation. The foundation of marketing may be found in the idea of satisfaction, as marketing is centered around customers, or guests, and their ever-changing requirements. According to Genoe McLaren et al. [32], marketing's primary objective is to attract and retain customers, with the ultimate goal being their long-term satisfaction. Similar views are held by Renko [33], who contends that the happiness of customers should be the primary focus of business operations; exceeding customers' expectations and creating value for them while fostering strong relationships is necessary to guarantee a satisfied user of services or products.

The hotel organization has the best chance of succeeding over an extended period of time only if it can create value for guests. Guest satisfaction can also be defined as a feeling of satisfaction or disappointment resulting from a comparison between expectations and the perceived performance of the delivered product [34]. According to Wang & Hung [35], guests have expectations before purchasing goods and using hotel services. Satisfaction results from the positive confirmation of guests' expectations, while dissatisfaction occurs when there are significant differences between expectations and outcomes [36]. Guest satisfaction is a psychological aspect that includes the fulfillment of wishes and expectations during a stay in a hotel facility, with the products and/or services provided. Additionally, guest satisfaction can be described as the experienced feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction resulting from comparing their expectations and the actual performance of services/products. Pizam et al. [37] believe that satisfaction represents the matching of guests' expectations with the perceived realization of service processes and the products themselves. The quality of service hotel guests receive from friendly and well-trained staff can positively influence their attitudes and satisfaction. When guests are satisfied with the quality of service from well-trained staff, there is a high likelihood that they will be satisfied with the overall hotel services, which later leads to a positive review.

In their study, Sánchez-Franco et al. [38] share similar opinions with the above findings, arguing that staff, room, and location are the attributes most often mentioned in guest recommendations. The assumption is that satisfied guests will recommend the hotel to other customers and usually focus on the intangible attributes of their accommodation, such as staff and service. However, dissatisfied guests are more likely to focus on the tangible dimensions of the hotel (e.g., furniture, price, food and beverage, etc.). Factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not the same. Elements of satisfaction are widespread (e.g., basic hotel services), while elements of dissatisfaction are often related to the behavior of hotel personnel [39]. In addition, the causes of dissatisfaction are generally directed toward issues such as poor internet connection, uncultured and unprofessional staff, facility conditions, lack of parking spaces, bathroom quality, food and beverage quality, noise levels, etc. These food-related complaints represent a major challenge for the hotel business. According to Xu et al. [40], guests who are dissatisfied with the quality of food will not only avoid returning to hotel restaurants but will also convey a negative image of those restaurants to their friends. Dissatisfied guests inform an average of 11.48 people about their negative experience in hotel restaurants, while satisfied guests talk to an average of 1.51 people about their positive experience. The reason for this is that guests may tolerate poor or inconsistent service quality, but they cannot accept poor or inconsistent food and beverage quality, as food quality is a key driver of positive word-of-mouth communication associated with the dining experience. Such situations can negatively affect guests' loyalty to hotel businesses. Hypotheses were established in light of the available material on the primary goal of the study.

H1: The size of the portion and the presentation of prepared meals and drinks by the employees (cooks, waiters, management) in the service facility of the hotel (restaurant, café bar, lounge bar, etc.) depend on the set standards of the hotel facility and affect guest satisfaction.

H2: Guest satisfaction with prepared meals and drinks in 4* and 5* hotel facilities depends on their prices and affects overall guest satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Due to epidemiological measures, state institution regulations, and the fact that the research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, the most appropriate research method was an online survey completed by guests staying in 4* and 5* hotels, with a focus on the quality of food and beverages in the hotel's catering section (restaurant, room service, lounge bar, etc.). A questionnaire was distributed between March 2021 and April 2022 by HORES (Association of Hotels and Restaurateurs of the Republic of Serbia). The G*Power test indicates that a minimum of 166 respondents is required to carry out the research, while the author collected 440 completed questionnaires, which is a valid sample size for the doctoral dissertation. All 440 respondents completed the survey accurately and in full, acknowledging that it was entirely anonymous. The collected data were processed using SPSS version 26. Surveys that were incomplete or filled out erroneously were not included in the study. Data on the respondents' demographic characteristics are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic attributes of the participants

Variable num 1	Variable num 2	Number	Percentage
Gender	Man	268	60.73 %
	Woman	172	39.27 %
Years of age	Between 18-26	34	7.74 %
	Between 27-41	188	42.82 %
	Between 42-55	141	32.12 %
	Between 56-64	58	13.21 %
	65+	18	4.10 %
Education degree	High school	63	14.32 %
	College studies	149	33.86%
	Faculty studies	129	29.32 %
	Master studies	85	19.32 %
	PhD studies	14	3.18 %
Work status	Without work	28	6.36 %
	Still student	2	0.45 %
	Retired	20	4.55 %
	Business owner	76	17.27 %
	Currently employed	314	71.36 %
Salary earnings	50.000 RSD	51	11.59 %
	Between 50.000-100.000 RSD	152	34.55%
	Between 100.000-200.000 RSD	166	37.73 %
	More than 200.000 RSD	71	16.14 %

Source: [41], Author's research, SPSS 26.

Portion size ~ standards

In order to assess the influence of hotel facility standards on portion size, linear regression was used. The predictor variable was the standards of hotel facilities. The criterion variable, portion size, was operationalized using the question: "Satisfaction is influenced by: Portion size?". A preliminary analysis was conducted to determine whether the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were violated. There were no extreme values in the data, as Mahalanobis distances were below the critical value for one independent variable (10.83). The assumption of normality of the residuals was violated ($W(440)=0.86$, $p=0.00$). The results in Table 10 indicate that the model is not significant ($F(1, 438)=2.14$; $p=0.14$). One predictor variable explains 0.5% ($R^2=0.005$) of the variation in the dependent variable – portion size.

Table 2. Contribution of standards to the explanation of portion size

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p.	95% confidence interval for B		Correlation	
	B	S.E.	Beta			Lower limit	Upper limit	Partial	Semipartial
Constant	4.005	.090		44.565	.000	3.828	4.181		
Standards	.175	.119	.070	1.464	.144	-.060	.409	.070	.070

Source: [41], Author's research, SPSS 26.

Food presentation ~ standards

In order to assess the influence of hotel facility standards on food presentation, linear regression was used. The predictor variable was hotel standards, and the criterion variable was meal presentation, operationalized using the question: "Satisfaction is affected by: Arrangement of meals?". A preliminary analysis was conducted to test assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. No extreme values were found, as Mahalanobis distances were below the critical value of 10.83. The normality assumption was violated ($W(440)=0.84$, $p=0.00$). The results in Table 11 indicate that the model is significant ($F(1, 438)=4.59$; $p=0.03$). One predictor variable explains 1% ($R^2=0.010$) of the variance in the dependent variable – food presentation.

Table 3. Contribution of standards to the explanation of food presentation

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p.	95% confidence interval for B		Correlation	
	B	S.E	Beta			Lower limit	Upper limit	Partial	Semipartial
Constant	4.108	.084		49.039	.000	3.943	4.273		
Standards	.238	.111	.102	2.142	.033	.020	.457	.102	.102

*Predictors: food presentation; Criterion: satisfaction

Source: [41], Author's research, SPSS 26.

Hotel standards contribute significantly to the explanation of food presentation ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = 0.03$). An increase in hotel standards by 1 standard deviation (SD = 0.66) corresponds to an increase in meal arrangement by 0.10 SD.

Guest satisfaction ~ portion size + dish presentation

To assess the influence of portion size and dish presentation on overall guest satisfaction, multiple regression analysis was used. The criterion variable was guest satisfaction, while the predictor variables were portion size and dish presentation. A preliminary analysis was conducted to test assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. No multicollinearity was observed among predictors (VIF < 10, Tolerance > 0.10). Four cases with Mahalanobis distances exceeding the critical value (13.82 for two predictors) were removed. The normality of residuals was violated ($W(436)=0.97$, $p=0.00$). Table 12 shows that the model is significant ($F(2, 433)=15.87$; $p=0.00$). The two predictors explain 6.8% ($R^2=0.068$) of the variance in guest satisfaction.

Table 4. Contribution of portion size and presentation of dishes to guest satisfaction

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p	95% confidence interval for B		Correlation		Multicollinearity	
	B	S.E	Beta			Lower limit	Upper limit	Partial	Semipartial	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	2.827	.231		12.227	.000	2.372	3.281				
Dish presentation	.210	.045	.223	4.693	.000	.122	.299	.220	.218	.949	1.054
Portion size	.083	.042	.094	1.975	.049	.000	.166	.094	.092	.949	1.054

Source: [41], Author's research, SPSS 26.

Both predictor variables contribute significantly: dish presentation ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.00$) and portion size ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.05$). A 1 SD increase in food presentation (SD = 0.81) corresponds to a 0.22 SD increase in guest satisfaction, uniquely explaining 4.75% of its variance. A 1 SD increase in portion size (SD = 0.86) corresponds to a 0.09 SD increase in guest satisfaction, uniquely explaining 0.85% of the variance.

Perception of quality and value of food ~ price

To assess the effect of price on the perception of food and beverage quality, linear regression was conducted. The predictor variable was price, and the criterion variable was perceived food and beverage quality. A preliminary analysis confirmed that assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met. No extreme values were present, as Mahalanobis distances remained below the critical threshold (10.83). The normality assumption was violated ($W(440)=0.91$, $p=0.00$). Table 15 indicates that the model is significant ($F(1, 438)=9.13$; $p=0.00$). One predictor explains 2% ($R^2=0.020$) of the variance in perceived quality.

Table 5. Contribution of price to the explanation of food and beverage quality

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p	95% confidence interval for B		Correlation	
	B	S.E	Beta			Lower limit	Upper limit	Partial	Semipartial
Constant	.537	.053		10.075	.000	.432	.642		
Price	.039	.013	.143	3.021	.003	.014	.064	.143	.143

Source: [41], Author's research, SPSS 26.

The price of food and beverages contributes significantly to the model ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.00$). A 1 SD increase in price (SD = 1.01) corresponds to a 0.14 SD increase in perceived quality of food and beverages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The provided data offers insights into various demographic and socioeconomic aspects of the surveyed population. Here are some key points for discussion: **Gender Distribution:** The majority of respondents (60.73%) identified as male, while 39.27% identified as female. This indicates a slightly higher representation of males in the surveyed sample. **Age Distribution:** The largest age group represented in the survey falls between 27 and 41 years old (42.82%), followed by the age group between 42 and 55 years old (32.12%). This suggests that the survey captured a significant portion of the middle-aged population. **Education Level:** A considerable portion of respondents have completed college studies (33.86%) or faculty studies (29.32%), indicating a relatively well-educated sample. However, it is noteworthy that there is also a significant representation from those with only a high school education (14.32%). **Work Status:** The majority of respondents are currently employed (71.36%), while a smaller percentage are business owners (17.27%). This suggests that the surveyed population is predominantly comprised of working individuals. **Salary Earnings:** The data reveals a varied distribution of monthly salary earnings among the respondents. A significant portion falls within the range of 100,000–200,000 RSD (37.73%), followed by those earning between 50,000–100,000 RSD (34.55%). This indicates a diverse range of income levels within the surveyed population. Overall, the provided data offers valuable insights into the demographic, educational, and socioeconomic characteristics of the surveyed population, providing a foundation for further analysis and interpretation.

Hypothesis H1: “The size of the portion and the presentation of prepared meals and drinks by employees (cooks, waiters and management) in the hospitality facility of the hotel (restaurant, cafe bar, lounge bar, etc.) depends on the set standards of the hotel facility and affects satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction of the guests” was confirmed. The standards of hotel facilities do not statistically significantly affect the portion size, but they do statistically significantly affect the presentation of the dish. The size of the portion and the presentation of the dish have a statistically significant effect on the satisfaction of the guests.

Hypothesis H2: “The perception of the quality and value of food and beverages depends on their prices and affects the overall satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction of guests” was confirmed. The price of food and drinks has a statistically significant effect on the perception of food quality and value.

CONCLUSION

The reason for visiting or staying in a hotel restaurant is often the meals that can be consumed. Hotel restaurants must design their gastronomic offer as well as focus on their target group of guests. The development and improvement of quality in the gastronomic sector leads to the development and improvement of other hotel activities that are directly or indirectly interconnected. Today, many famous hotels around the world build their image through a history of exceptional food, i.e., in order to improve the overall quality of service, be it national cuisine or international specialties. Certainly, agricultural goods, vegetables, fruits, and beverages (e.g., wine, spirits, etc.) must meet certain quality criteria, as well as the modern tourist demand for nutritious cuisine. It should be kept in mind that the continuous improvement of gastronomic quality is a preventive and not a corrective approach to its improvement. On the other hand, it is necessary to mention the standards, which help hotel companies to successfully maintain and establish business in all aspects of hotel operations.

Standards represent the form, content, and manner in which the service is provided, and are key to the issue of quality. A standard is a document approved by a recognized entity that enables the common and repeated application of a specific set of rules, conditions, or criteria. If the standard is not recorded, catering companies will not be able to comply with it because their understanding may differ and therefore be in conflict with the purpose. There are different types of standards, some of which are voluntary or mandatory, while others are set with the consent of all interested parties.

Also, while the study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations and consider avenues for future research to enhance the depth and breadth of understanding within the field. Extending the research period and including hotels of lower categories are two potential strategies for addressing these limitations and advancing the study's contributions to the field of hospitality research. The research period could be a bit longer in order to obtain more data. A recommendation for future

research could be to include hotels of lower category in order to get a clearer picture of the opinions and attitudes of guests regarding the established hypotheses. Also, this survey was conducted online, so the results obtained could have been different if other methods of data collection had been used (e.g., live fieldwork, interviews, etc.).

In accordance with the above, it can be concluded that there are no universal standards in gastronomy for managing guest satisfaction. Standards and quality mean different things to different guests, and this is supported by the confirmation of the set hypotheses.

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