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Quality Of Services – Key Factor for the Image Creation of Tourist Destination

Gina-Ionela Butnaru¹

Abstract: The image of the tourist destination is a topic approached by many researchers. They emphasised the fact that image creation is determined by factors, both cognitive and emotional. In the present article, we insisted on the quality of services, considering that this factor plays an essential role in the image creation of tourist destination. We performed the frequency-based statistical modelling of the key factors for the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination, and we proposed a model emphasising the relationship between the quality of services, and the image of the tourist destination.

Keywords: image of the tourist destination; quality; tourist services

Jel Classification: M19

1. Introduction

The preoccupation for the image has become a dominant nowadays in all the areas of activity of modern society (Jenkins, 1999), starting from the image of a country in its international relationships, to tourist destinations, and to the persons who deal with image promotion etc. Consequently, starting from a theoretical concept, the image has today one of the most important practical dimensions. The success in business, in the relationships with friends, in promoting the tourist products and services, etc. also depends implicitly on image promotion. The researchers in the field of image like Fakeye and Crompton (1991) refer to the image as a project, a concept image, or an idea in the process of realisation. A practical dimension of the image is also added to the theoretical one, by the study of topics like the image as professional route, as premise of the understanding of the world, and as basis for all the programs leading the real processes (Drule, et al., 2015). All these are well studied in connection with cultural development, and depending on the personality of the image creator, hence the difficulty for many people to discern among the diversity of images offered by. According to Stăncioiu, add other authors (2011), all the historical regions of contemporary Romania (Muntenia, Oltenia, Banat, Crișana, Transilvania, Bucovina, Maramureș, Moldova și Dobrogea) areequally considered micro-destinations with a *substantial tourist endowment*, with plenty of natural, artistic, cultural, historical, and gastronomical attractions, conferring to tourists from all over the world unique and unforgettable experiences, which they would enjoy to experience repeatedly. This is how a new profession appeared,

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that of image creator (Bähre, Fergen & Chasovschi, 2013) for a company, institution, person, for any tourist product and service, for a social system, activity, country, etc.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourist Destination – Concepts and Typologies

Taking into account that, when tourists choose a tourist destination, they may consider particularities like natural monuments, climate, infrastructure, art monuments etc., and/or intangible characteristics like the feelings of freedom, safety, relaxation, charging with energy etc., certain aspects of a destination can be positive for a segment of tourists, and negative for another (Fan, 2006, p. 11, quoted by Stăncioiu, add other authors (2011). On a certain level, the concept of tourist destination can be developed in order to represent geographically defined entities, as well as a group of countries, regions, a rural area, a resort or a vast experience created by the advertisement image used by marketers or by image creators for tourism or for tourist destination. The authors Chris, add other authors (1998) define destinations as an accumulation of facilities and services designed to satisfy the customers' needs. Leiper (1995), quoted by Dmitrović (2008), explains: *destinations are places for which people travel and where they choose to stay for a while to experiment an attraction perceived by a certain group of tourists.*

A destination may be considered as a combination or even as a brand of all tourist products and services. It also allows us to establish the impact of tourism on a local, regional, national or international level, as well as the administration of supply and demand with the purpose to maximise the benefits for all the parties involved (Buhalis, 2000).

The success of a tourist destination always refers to a mix of six A packages: *Affordable* packages – the price of a travel package should correspond to the quality of the services included in the price; *Accessibility* – refers to the transport networks that make tourist destinations accessible to the potential tourists from a physical point of view. The road, railway, and air connections facilitating tourists' quick and comfortable access to tourist destinations are thus indispensable. The infrastructure, the elements of transport, but also the governmental regulations affect the duration, the cost, and the comfort of the tourists reaching their destination; *Attractions* – The attractions are the main reason of the appearance of tourist destinations and services, by building tourist accommodation units around the attractions (Țugulea, add other authors, 2013). Tourist attractions can be of several types (Niță, Butnaru, 2010): *natural patrimony*: natural landscapes, rivers, lakes, sea, beaches, parks and natural reservations, climate, generally all the physical and geographical characteristics of the destination and its natural resources; *architectonic patrimony*, both the *historical* and the *modern* one; *cultural patrimony*: theatre, music, folklore, museums, etc.; *industrial patrimony*: factories and elements of industrial architecture which are interesting for the visitors; *social attractions*: the life style of the local population, language, culture, opportunities of social contacts, etc.; *sports attractions*: arenas, skating rinks, ski slopes, etc. *Advantages*, also called superstructures, are in fact the structures built to satisfy the customers. Among them there are banks, postal offices, shops, hospitals, cafés, City/Town Halls. *Activities* – events,

festivals, skiing, skating, swimming, *auxiliary* services – car rental service, travel insurance, transfers.

2.2. The Key Factors for Image Creation, Determining the Choice of a Tourist Destination with Role in the Image Creation of Tourist Destination

The factors determining the decision to choose a tourist destination by the customers can be: *previous travels to that destination; standard of living at the destination; price of the travel package; facilities at the destination; cost of transport and time to reach the destination; quality of promotion and publicity; quality of services; existing conflicts in the destination area.* (Anastasiu, 2006; Haller, 2016)

Some of the factors influencing the decision to choose a tourist destination (Tătărușanu & Niță, 2012) are as follows: *personal factors*: needs and motivations, perceptions, attitudes, tourist personality, self-image, life style, cycle of family life; *social factors*: family, social class, opinion leaders; *situational factors*: physical ambience, social ambience, time, state of mind.

According to Buhalis (2000), a tourist destination is perceived by the tourists as a singular entity, but, in reality, it includes several *parties involved*: tourists, economic agents operating in tourism or in the public field, host population, NGOs representatives.

The mutual characteristics of the destinations can be as follows: attractions, access, facilities; they have a cultural value; they are inseparable: the tourists should be physically present at the destination in order to consume the tourist product; they are visited not only by tourists, but also by other groups.

The facilities at the destination are used by residents and by workers the entire year, but in certain periods of the year they are also used by other people – travellers or tourists – who are far away from their residences.

2.3. Image and Image Creation of Tourist Destination

The preoccupation for the creation of the image of a company or organisation, of a product or of a personality, even of the own image led to a new profession, which in our case is the marketer (Ciulu, Drăgan, 2011). From our experience, we know that there are people who care to create our image, but this image does not represent us at all (Murali, and other authors, 2006). The image created by other persons outside our system of activity is uncertain, distorted, unreal, with multiple motivations of subjectivism, and it obviously does not represent us. This is why we need to define a clear status of image creator or marketer, respectively. At present, image creation has become an educational subject with applications in most of the fields of social life. To create somebody's image or a general image constitutes a difficult challenge, involving the marketers' skills and a very serious and responsible preoccupation, hence the need of a clear definition of their status. The creation of a good image leads to success, to benefits, to a good reputation, while a so called *bad* image could lead to failure. Reality shows that the lack of interest for our own image means the lack of the sense of dignity and personal value. Our image, as any other image, can be created, improved, defended, and promoted. Consequently, there is a permanent preoccupation for image in general, especially for the personal image, and also for the world around us (Gherman, 2002).

Kotler (1994) suggests that an image can be defined as a sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions which a person has about a destination. According to this definition, an image is formed when people develop convictions, ideas, perceptions or impressions about a product, place, or person.

The image creation was described by Reynolds (1965) as a development of the mind based on a few impressions chosen from several items of information. In the case of the destination image, this *multitude of information* has sources as follows: promotion, publicity and brochures; finding out from family/friends, tourism agents; mass-media, newspapers, magazines, documentaries; folklore – photographs in motion, literature.

According to the same author, the image creation was described as a mental construction developed by consumers on the basis of the impressions chosen from several items of information, which arose through a creative process in which the selected impressions are elaborated, embellished, and arranged.

The image of a tourist destination should meet the following conditions at the same time, in order to be efficient and to have the expected impact over the tourists (Neacșu, add other authors, 2011): the image should be *real*; the image should be *credible*, the image should be *simple*, the image should be *attractive*, the image should be *distinctive*.

We might define the image by aspects like form, logo, picture or writing, including all types of facilities which are attractive for the tourism of a country or of a region. They can influence the perceptions and the impressions of the target population's mind. In other words, the image is a perspective view attracting tourists and determining them to spend much money at the destination.

Gunn (1988) identifies the following stages in the creation of the tourist image: *accumulation of visual images of the destination; modification of the initial image after more information – induced images; the decision to visit the destination; visiting the destination; returning home, and modification of the image based on experience.*

The development of the image of a tourist destination is based on the consumer's reasoning and emotions (Badita, 2013), as a result of two components or dimensions:

- *Perceptive and cognitive dimensions:* the image of the destination is evaluated by the characteristics of resources and attractions that motivate the tourists to visit the destination;
- *Emotional dimensions:* refer to feelings and emotions induced by tourist destinations. This emotional component is strongly influenced by tourists' motivations.

The image of the destination influences tourists in making decisions concerning the place where they will spend their holiday and their money. The importance of the image of tourist destination for consumers makes one consider any destination from the consumers' perspectives regarding the way they feel, understand, use the place, and how they connect to it (Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2004). The qualities, the characteristics, the functional, psychological elements which are also unique, are creating the image of a destination, and they are also covering the political, economic, tourist, historical and cultural aspects. The image of the destination is also the sum of impressions, beliefs, and mental images that a tourist remembers about that area (Agheorghiesei, Corodeanu & Niță, 2009).

In the phase of the life cycle where it is situated (Jenkins, 1999), the destination can influence the way in which an image communicates itself, which is: for a destination in the phase of being just launched on the market, the most indicated form of promotion would be the advertisement; for a destination situated in the development phase, it is mostly required to promote the main characteristics by all the means available for the destination; for a destination situated in the maturity phase, all the components of promotion policy are beneficial, with a special emphasis on the advertisement, discounts, percentages of the price offered to the distributors, initiation of particular activities, participation in fairs and exhibitions, and any activity that marketing managers consider necessary (Petrescu, Gherman, 2002). There are no solutions or recommendations available, therefore we consider that it is each manager's decision to initiate any promoting measures he/she considers necessary for each specific company or destination.

The destination image is generally accepted as an important aspect in the development of successful tourism. Consequently, the destination marketing is due to the impact of the marketing aspects of supply over the demand. Taking into consideration the numerous works from the literature, a full conceptualisation of the destination image, including complex relations with factors of market supply (Djeri, add other authors, 2014) and demand has not been realised yet (Asli, add other authors, 2013). The destination image, according to MacInnis and Price (1987), should have in view the tourist's expectations and the extension of the pleasant experience in tourism, or mandated consumption.

Some of the factors contributing to the image creation are as follows: the potential tourist's reasoning, the analysis of tourist product – geographical location, nature and category of tourist services. In the complex vision of the author Nedelea (2003), the factors generating the image and the tourist identity are: *unit location*: it has a decisive role in differentiation of the supply and its success; *adequate road signs*: they facilitate a good accessibility for tourists; *name, logo, mark* contribute to the identification of the tourism unit by consumers; *exterior architectural and decorative ensemble, improvements and arrangements at the entrance of the tourist unit*; *interior aspect* (architecture, furniture, accessories); *interior ambience* (illumination, decorations, music); *reception model* (content, forms and rapidity); *manner of providing the service* (aspect of the personnel, manner of treating the customers. These factors can form the destination brand.

The image we send should be distinct and clear (Haller, 2016), not blurry or unconvincing, hence the basic task of the image creator or of the marketer is *to make out of things with no personality and value the image of a marked place, with individuality, with power of attraction and conviction* (Gherman, 2002).

2.4. Quality of Services

The ancient philosophers Aristotle and Cicero advance the idea of quality for the first time. Consequently, quality can be *what is specific, the ego, the individuality, the personality, the style, the character, what makes the difference*. (Rondelli & Cojocariu, 2004). According to ISO standards (International Organisation for Standardization), quality is *the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs*. (Butnaru, 2009)

Therefore, the authors consider that the emphasis is on the characteristics of the product, and not of the producer, characteristics belonging to the goods, no matter if they are regarded objectively or

subjectively by the client. The common element of all definitions of quality is the focus on satisfying the need of the one who uses the product or the service. The Committee of Quality Support within the International Tourism Organisation defines quality as *the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all the legitimate product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer, at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the underlying quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of the tourism activity concerned with its human and natural environment* (The sixth meeting, Varadero, Cuba, 9-10th of May, 2003 – UNTWO, 2011). This conceptual quality delimitation gives a few indications on obtaining and maintaining it. First, the result is equivalent with the consumer's perception of quality. Second, when it comes to the process itself, we actually refer to several factors working together continuously in order to obtain quality, and not to an independent process. Consequently, there cannot be discontinuities, because it is desired to obtain a long term result, and not a temporary one. Truncating an activity only means to lessen the quality, the existence of downtime does not favour the simplification of the process at the same time with the repetition of certain factors. Therefore, the basic needs of the individual are related to the factors generating the quality and evolution from past to future. As a rule, in order to get the customers' faithfulness, both specific and psychological needs should be satisfied. Nowadays, quality became a reflex of service producers and providers. Juran (quoted by Evans and Lindsay, 2005), one of the great "philosophers" of quality, stated that the 20th century is the century of productivity, and the 21st century should be the century of quality. The main aspects that interest both the producers and the providers of services are: *the productivity* (the output and input ratio), *the costs involved* and *the quality*. According to Haller (2011) these assure the profitability. We can easily see that the most important aspect is related to quality, which assures the long term success aimed by organisations.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research aspects

The choice and the formulation of the research aspects are in connection with the explanation of the way in which the quality of services contributes to the image creation of a tourist destination.

Consequently, we formulated five research questions:

What does the concept of tourist destination mean?;

What are the basic factors for choosing a tourist destination?;

How does the image of a tourist destination form itself?;

Which are the factors forming the image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination?;

What is the relationship between the quality of services and the image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination?.

The gathering, processing and analysis of the data involved both a *qualitative approach*, by the study of the documents, by empirical comparative analysis, and a *quantitative approach*, by the systematisation and interpreting of statistical data in agreement with the methods recommended by the literature.

Purpose of the research

In the present research, we intend to identify the image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination as seen by the tourists/customers who benefited from tourist services in the tourist accommodation units from the area of research under analysis.

Objectives of the research

- O.1.* Identification of the factors contributing to the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination.
- O.2.* Frequency-based modelling of the image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination.
- O.3.* Creation of a model emphasising the relationship between the quality of services and the image of the tourist destination.

Research hypothesis

- H.1.* The image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination is influenced by several factors.
- H.2.* The quality of services is a key factor for the image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination.

Research methods

The research methods we used are as follows: *the documented study; theoretical analysis; observation; quantitative and qualitative analysis of the factors generating the image; practical documentation and collecting the informative material by field research; statistical analysis of data; exploratory study*, which involves obtaining data with the help of the enquiry, using the questionnaire as an instrument for gathering the data, applied to the tourists accommodated in tourist accommodation units from Vatra Dornei; synthesis of the information gathered and processed with SPSS 13.0 and Excel programs. We used two types of data: data reflecting the quality level, and data representing the categories of services. *For the enquiry by questionnaire* we used a ramified questionnaire applied to the tourists accommodated in Vatra Dornei tourist accommodation units. The questionnaire was mostly made of closed questions. The questionnaire was administered by face to face oral enquiry. *The research area* was Vatra Dornei tourist destination. *The designed sample group* was formed of the total number of tourists existing at the reference time in those tourist accommodation units. *The resulted sample group* is made of a target group for Vatra Dornei tourist destination: 109 tourists, representing the total population present during the research in the places analysed on 10th, 17th, and 24th of August, 2013. *We elaborated a questionnaire* whose questions aimed the general objectives of the research. *The image modelling* is a mathematical method used in the elaboration of an optimised model of a few factors generating the image, as close as possible to the ideal model. *The statistical analysis* was realised according to the methods recommended in the foreign and Romanian literature (Albu, 2000, Finn, Elliott-White, Surugiu, C., add other authors, 2011 Walton, 2000, Zait, Spalanzani, 2006).

4. Results of the Research

4.1. Frequency-based statistical modelling of the key factors for the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination

The system we proposed (authors ©) for the modelling of the key factors for the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination is noted with A_{ij} , where:

i – area (lines): A1 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination;

j – the key factor of the image (columns) – it varies according to the number of variants of answers to the questions from the questionnaire. This is noted with B for the variants of answer 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.

Knowing that a tourist product named Vatra Dornei tourist destination is completely integrated, and that it means four categories of tourist services (accommodation, transport, meals, recreation), a certain question was included into the questionnaire applied to the customers, in order to obtain the *qualitative* evaluation of the services that the tourists from tourist accommodation units of the research area benefited from.

In Table 1 we calculated the frequency mean of the answers to this question, and we used the following scoring system: we noted with **A** Vatra Dornei tourist destination for *the quality levels 1...5 (1 – very satisfied, 2 - satisfied, 3 – neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied, 4 - unsatisfied, 5 – very unsatisfied or I do not know, I will not answer)*; we noted with **B** *the levels 1...4 (accommodation, transport, meals and recreation)*.

The purpose was to identify the key factors for the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination and their order of importance.

Table 1. Key factors for image creation

Aij factor	Accommodation	Transport	Meals	Recreation	Frequency mean
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	27.60	26.70	38.80	30.10	30.80
A12	61.40	41.20	46.90	49.30	49.70
A13	11.00	30.40	10.90	18.70	17.75
A14	0.00	1.70	0.00	0.00	0.43
A15	0.00	0.00	3.40	1.90	1.33

Significance:

A11 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant 1;

A12 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant 2, etc.

In a first stage, by processing in EXCEL the values from Table 2, we obtained a graph with the modelling of the frequency mean of the answers to question number 15 of the questionnaire, referring to the qualitative evaluation of the key factors for the image creation. The points on the graph represent the values selected from the table. On axis OX of the coordinate system XOY are represented the variants of answer to the questions from the questionnaire for which we decided to use the notations 1, 2, 3, 4,

5, etc. On the axis OY of the coordinate system XOY are represented the frequency means (shares) for each of the “n” variants of answers to the questions from the questionnaire.

The values from Table 1 are represented graphically in Figure 1:

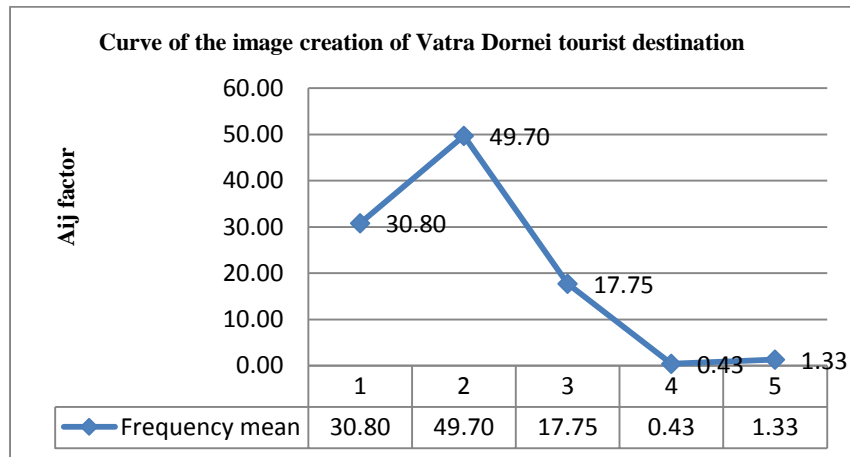


Figure 1. Modelling of the frequency mean of the key factors for the image creation

Calculating the frequency mean, it results that 49.7% of the 109 tourists were satisfied with the tourist products and services provided by the tourist accommodation units located in Vatra Dornei tourist destination, result which determines us to evaluate that Vatra Dornei has a good image.

On a chain of calculation at different sublevels (*exterior aspect, location, name and reputation, ambience, services provided, diversity and quality of the menu, prices, other improvements and endowments*), we also calculated the mean of the answers for the same sublevel, and we reached the base level step by step (from level 3 to level 1). The values obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Key factors for the tourists' reasons for choosing the accommodation units

Aij factor	Exterior aspect	Location	Name and reputation	Ambience	Services provided	Diversity and quality of the menu	Prices	Other improvements and endowments	Frequency mean
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A11	19.50	24.60	19.50	31.30	44.10	44.30	48.40	12.10	30.48
A12	25.40	18.30	26.60	32.00	43.10	21.80	17.70	26.40	26.41
A13	38.80	49.60	25.50	32.90	12.80	31.10	33.90	51.30	34.49
A14	16.30	5.70	17.50	0.00	0.00	2.80	0.00	10.20	6.56
A15	0.00	1.80	10.90	3.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.06

Significance:

A11 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant 1;

A12 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant 2, etc.

The values from Table 2 are presented graphically in Figure 2:

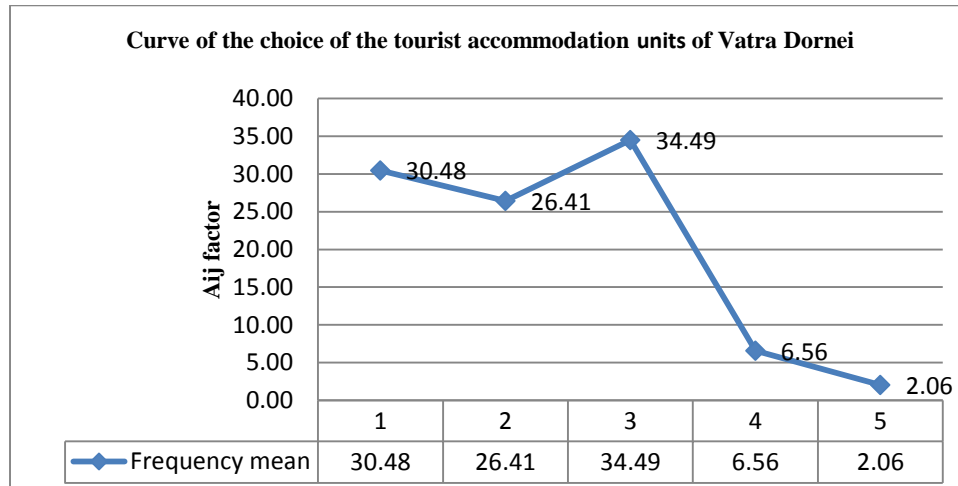


Figure 2. Modelling of the frequency mean for the choice of the tourist accommodation units

The graphical representation of the frequency mean of the answers received shows that for the eight key characteristics for image creation the following results were obtained: 34.49% of the 109 customers, declared that these characteristics were important for the image creation of this tourist destination, 30.48% declared that they were extremely important, and 26.41% declared that they were very important. Doing a comparative analysis of the results obtained, we can state that the tourists' preferences concerning the choice of the tourist accommodation units are mainly the same, they have a good image, confirming that the people are not indifferent to the aspects related to the quality of tourist products and services provided by Vatra Dornei tourist destination.

In Table 3 we calculated the frequency mean of the answers on four quality sublevels (*spatial quality, quality of the choice, quality itself, and relational quality*). Quality can be considered as a key factor in the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination. For each sublevel we calculated the mean of the evaluation values in the order of growing importance and with the purpose to correctly evaluate the basic criterion.

Table 3. Key factors for the quality of the products and services provided by the tourist accommodation units

Aij factor	Spatial quality	Quality of the choice	Quality itself	Relational quality	Frequency mean
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	20.72	21.95	34.57	23.7	25.24
A12	45.05	32.15	41.45	34.1	38.19
A13	25.83	25.55	21.7	22.85	23.98
A14	7.8	17.5	2.28	16.6	11.05
A15	0.6	2.85	0	2.75	1.55

Significance:

A11 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant 1;

A12 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant 2, etc.

The values from Table 3 are represented graphically in Figure 3:

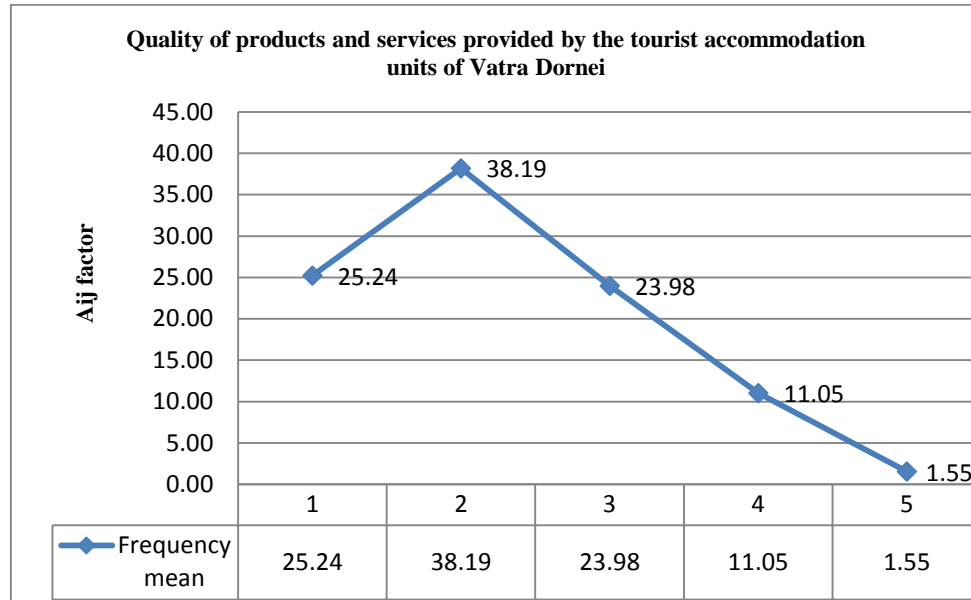


Figure 3. Modelling of the *frequency mean* for the quality of products and services provided by the tourist accommodation units

For Vatra Dornei tourist destination *the quality* referring to the material parameter (for which we had in view five norms - material norms, usage norms, maintenance norms, cleaning norms, and security norms), and to the availability of the personnel is considered “*very important*”. 45.05% of the tourists answered in favour of this type of quality, while the quality of the choice was on the last position with 32.15%;

In Table 4 we calculated the mean of the evaluation values on five quality sublevels (*quality of reception, quality of porters’ behaviour, quality of room maids’ behaviour, quality of the bar and quality of the restaurant*) for the basic level of *general quality of tourist products and services*. The results obtained have the purpose to identify the key factors in the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination.

Table 4. Competence, solicitude, politeness and promptitude showed by the personnel from:

Aij factor	Front desk	Porters	Room maids	Bar	Restaurant	Frequency mean
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A11	34.73	21.80	12.80	12.90	35.70	23.58
A12	33.57	21.30	38.70	24.80	33.47	30.37
A13	18.41	25.10	17.50	24.70	24.91	22.12
A14	11.28	22.24	21.10	21.20	2.82	15.72
A15	2.01	9.56	1.70	7.20	3.10	4.63
A16	0.00	0.00	8.20	9.20	0.00	3.58

Significance:

A11 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant “1”;

A12 – Vatra Dornei tourist destination, answer variant “2”, etc.

The values from Table 4 were represented graphically in Figure 4:

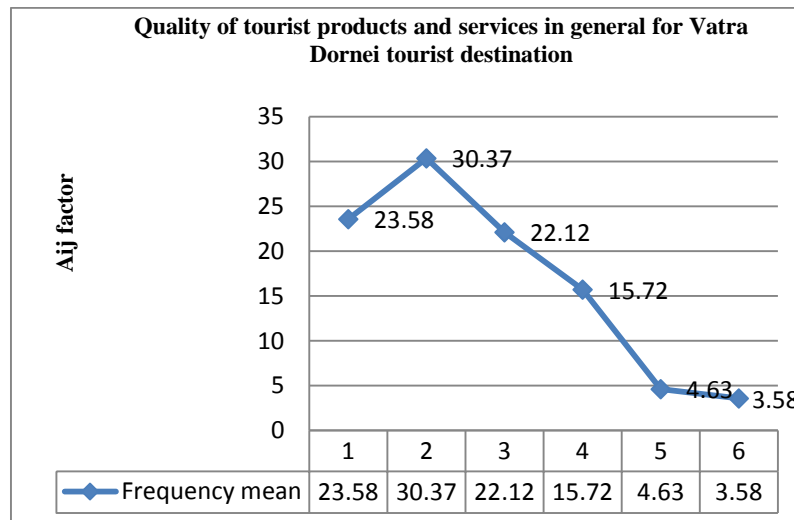


Figure 4. Modelling of the *frequency mean* for the quality of tourist products and services in general, provided by the tourist accommodation units

For Vatra Dornei tourist destination, 34.73% of the tourists accommodated in the tourist accommodation units consider that *politeness, competence, solicitude and promptitude showed by the reception personnel are very important*, while 7.2% consider that the intimacy and the design offered by the bar are not as important for the increase of the quality level of tourist services provided.

4.2. Proposing a Model Emphasising the Relationship Between the Quality of Tourist Services and the Image of Tourist Destination

From the analysis of the answers to the 31 questions from the questionnaire applied to the 109 tourists accommodated in the tourist accommodation units from the research area, we identified the key factors for the image creation of tourist destination. These factors could be considered in the elaboration of a possible model for the image creation of the tourist destination (Figure 5).

In the first stage, the tourists are forming an image of the tourist destination by an activity of informing themselves. The tourists' motivation is determining the choice of the tourist destination. After the choice of the tourist destination, and in the consumption phase, respectively, the tourists will or will not appreciate the quality of tourist services as the first factor determined by accommodation quality, food quality, transport quality, recreation quality. The accommodation quality is determined by *spatial quality, quality of the choice, quality itself and relational quality*. These forms of quality have the role to consolidate the image creation of the tourist destination.

If the image formed by tourists who chose Vatra Dornei as a tourist destination is at least at the same level of quality as expected, we may consider that the image created is a good one. We may also consider that the tourists will go back to Vatra Dornei, and that they will recommend the tourist destination for

its offer of quality services. On the other hand, the image formed may be over the expected quality level, which determines the tourists who chose Vatra Dornei tourist destination to evaluate unfavourably the choice they made, and the tourist destination might have a less enjoyable image. Concerning the model proposed, we consider that other factors are analysed in the literature in the image creation of a tourist destination, which leads to the idea that the factors analysed in the present research optimally reflect the role of the quality of tourist services in the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination.

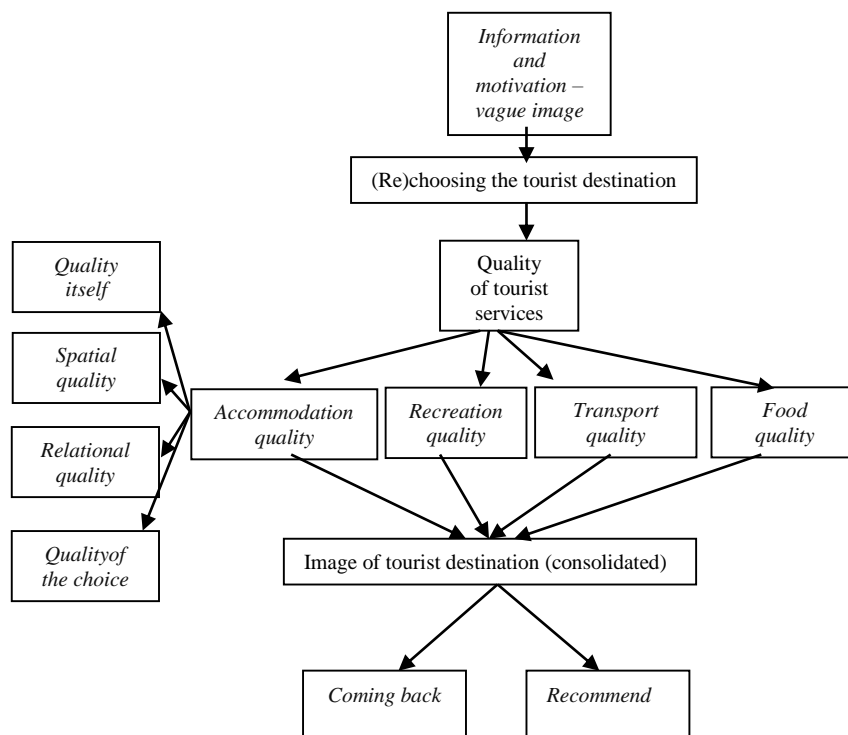


Figure 5. Model of the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination based on the quality of tourist products and services(© authors)

5. Conclusions

The development of the quality of services should be one of the major objectives of all tourism operators, because it has a decisive role in customers' satisfaction and choices.

The high percentage of tourists who did not come for the first time to Vatra Dornei and who want to return, as well as of those who intend to recommend it, allows us to state that this tourist destination has a good image, considering the quality levels introduced in the analysis. The results obtained led us to the conclusion that, according to the tourists, the factor contributing the most to the image creation of Vatra Dornei tourist destination is represented by food quality, since the tourists appreciated the quality and the diversity of the menu, as well as the quality-price ratio. Vatra Dornei as a tourist destination preferred especially for winter sports, but also for recreation, recovery and maintenance of the human

body health, gained an increased reputation mostly by the festivals inherited by the generations of young people who love the gastronomy and the Romanian traditional cuisine. Also, the geographical position of this tourist destination makes Vatra Dornei to be chosen by tourists for the quality of entertainment services. The recreational activities, mountain hiking, sledding in winter or enjoying the landscape are just a few of the tourist activities specific to the area, which determined Vatra Dornei to be included in the top of tourists' preferences.

Regarding the quality of accommodation, the factor with the highest impact over the image of Vatra Dornei tourist destination is quality itself. This refers to the material parameter (norms of: material, use, maintenance, cleanliness, security), and also to the personnel. The relational quality is also very important, because the tourists' future attitude of trust or rejection depends on the quality of customers' reception, and on the quality of the personnel's behaviour, respectively.

The model proposed highlights how the quality of tourist service can lead through its dimensions to the image creation of a tourist destination. Therefore, Vatra Dornei is one of the many tourist destinations whose image can be associated only with the quality of the services offered.

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