

## CASINO SERVICE QUALITY: CONCEPT AND MEASUREMENT

Scientific paper

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – In contemporary service economies, consumers have increasingly demanded better services in the service exchange. Gaming destinations have made great efforts to improve their casino services. The purpose of the study is to identify levels of casino customer expectations, perceptions, satisfaction and loyalty, as well as to determine the nature of socio-demographic variables.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The empirical research was conducted using primary data. Data were collected from customers in three casinos. A total of 142 respondents completed the questionnaire. To achieve the survey's goals, descriptive statistical analysis was performed. The CASERV scale was created primarily in response to the needs of service evaluation in casino settings but could easily be adopted in other hospitality sectors.

**Findings** – Successful casino operations depend on many service factors, such as game service, customer service, physical service environment and food service. A particular area that practitioners use to gauge success is how well each service offered meets the needs of the customers. There is considerable evidence in recent literature that the service environment plays a crucial role in linking customer satisfaction and loyalty in the casino setting. This research has demonstrated that better casino services would lead to higher customer satisfaction.

**Originality of the research** – Casino service measurement is a new field in the recent literature and there are few researches, most of them in Asian countries, that investigate casino service quality. This paper provides insights into the level of customer satisfaction with services provided at Croatian coastal casinos combining the SERVQUAL and CASERV scales.

**Keywords** service quality, customer satisfaction, SERVQUAL, CASERV, statistical analysis

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the past two decades the casino industry has seen phenomenal growth especially in the Asian countries which have become leaders in the casino industry. It is surprising that despite a growing number of studies focusing on the performance analysis of the accommodation industry, research on the casino industry has been limited.<sup>1</sup> That was the main reason for conducting this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Assaf, A. G., Knezevic Cvelbar, Lj., Pahor, M., "Performance drivers in the casino industry: Evidence from Slovenia", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2012, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2012.05.006>

Most research in the casino context is focused on Chinese gambler behaviours.<sup>2</sup> An adjusted SERVQUAL<sup>3</sup> questionnaire with CASERV<sup>4</sup> dimensions was adopted to investigate the difference between customer perceptions and expectations of consumed services at three casinos in Croatian coastal cities of the North Adriatic, as well as the level of customer satisfaction with the dimensions of casino service quality.

As an internationally focused industry, competition in the Croatian casino industry comes mainly from neighbouring countries such as Slovenia and Italy. However, the visitors to Croatian casinos are mostly tourists from those countries, as confirmed by this study. Successful casino operations depend on many service factors, such as game service, customer service, physical service environment, and food service.<sup>5</sup> This study reveals not only the key factors of quality that are important to the customers of the above mentioned casinos, but also the level of satisfaction with service dimensions and therefore the level of loyalty to a particular casino.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first discussion on the topic of service quality in the domain of service operations management was written by Sasser, Olsen and Wyckoffs in the late seventies of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> In the early eighties, more and more authors began to take on this subject and, in this context, different definitions of service quality appeared.

Grönross defines service quality as “general judgement or attitude toward service that results from the comparison of expectations with perceptions of clients about actual service performance”.<sup>7</sup> In his works he observes two types of service quality: technical quality, which involves what the consumer is actually receiving from the service, and functional quality, which involves the manner in which the service is delivered.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Swartz and Brown define service quality through two dimensions: the “how” dimension (service evaluation during the service process) and the “what” dimension (service evaluation after receiving the service).<sup>9</sup> Perceived quality is a form of attitude, indicating the customer's judgement about a firm's overall excellence or superiority.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lam, D., “Slot or table? A Chinese perspective“, UNLV Gaming Research & Review Journal, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2012, 67-72; Tao, V. Y. K., Wu, A. M. S., Cheung, S. F., Tong, K. K., “Development of an indigenous inventory GMAB (gambling motives, attitudes and behaviors) for Chinese gambler: an exploratory study“, Journal of Gambling Studies, Vol. 27, No. 1, 29-42; Vong, F., “The psychology of risk-taking in gambling among Chinese visitors in Macau“, International Gambling Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1, 29-42

<sup>3</sup> Parasuraman, A., “SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality“, Journal of Retailing, Vol. 64, No. 1, 1988, 14-40

<sup>4</sup> Wong, I. A., Fong, V., “Development and validation of the casino service quality scale: CASERV“, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2012, 209-217

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sasser, W. E., Olsen, R. P., Wyckoff, D. D., *Management of Service Operations: Text and Cases*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1978

<sup>7</sup> Grönross, C., *Strategic Management and Marketing in the Service Sector*, Swedisch School of Economics and Business Administration, Helsingfors, 1982

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Schwartz, T. A., Brown, S. W., “Consumer and provider expectations and experiences evaluating professional service quality“, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1989, 9-34

<sup>10</sup> Zeithaml, V. A., “Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence“, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52, 1988, 2-22

Rust and Oliver<sup>11</sup> added another dimension to the service quality model. This is service environment, which plays a key role in the hospitality industry and is frequently evaluated by many authors. Unlike Grönross, Brady and Cronin suggest three service quality dimensions: interaction quality, physical environment and outcome quality.<sup>12</sup>

According to some authors, perceived service quality has been accepted as an antecedent of customer satisfaction.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, some researchers argue that satisfaction is an antecedent to service quality.<sup>14</sup> There are also some authors who suggest that neither satisfaction nor service quality may be antecedent to the one another.<sup>15</sup> In sum, it is evident that the relationship between these two concepts is complex and that they have a causal ordering.

The most cited definition of service quality is the one given by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) in their model for service quality measurement named SERVQUAL. They define service quality as “the difference, or gap, between service expectations and actual service performance”.<sup>16</sup> It assesses five dimensions of service quality: *assurance*, *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *tangibles* and *empathy*, using a discrepancy measure between the performance perception (P) on each item and the expectation (E) for that item. Thus, the gap paradigm implies that service quality is deemed sufficient when consumer perceptions of service performance are equal to or greater than the expected level of service.

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<sup>11</sup> Rust, R. T., Oliver, R. L., “Service quality: insights and managerial implications from the frontier”, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Brady, M. K., Cronin, J. J., “Some new thoughts on conceptualizing perceived service quality: a hierarchical approach”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 2001, 34-49

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, E. W., Sullivan, M., “The antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction for firms”, *Mark Sci*, December, 1993, 125-143; Anderson, E. W., Fornell, C., Lehmann, D. R., “Customer satisfaction, market share, and profitability: findings from Sweden”, *J. Mark.*, Vol. 85, 1994, 53-66; Cronin, J. J., Taylor, S. A., “Measuring service quality: a reexamination and extension”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 56, August, 1992, 55-68; Gotlieb, J. B., Grewal, D., Brown, S. W., “Consumer satisfaction and perceived quality: complementary or divergent constructs?”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 79, No. 6, 1994, 875-885; Woodside, A. G., Frey, L. L., Daly, R. T., “Linking service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention: from general to applied frameworks of the service encounter”, *Journal of Health Care Marketing*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1989, 5-17; Rust, R. T., Oliver, R. L., “Service quality: insights and managerial implications from the frontier”, 1994; Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., “A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, Fall, 1985, 41-50; Parasuraman, A., “SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 1988, 14-40

<sup>14</sup> Bitner, M. J., “Evaluating service encounters: the effects of physical surroundings and employee responses”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54, 1990, 69-82; Bitner, M. J., Hubbert, A. R., *Encounter satisfaction versus overall service satisfaction versus quality: Services Quality; New directions in theory and practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994, 72-92; Bolton, R. N., Drew, J. H., “A longitudinal analysis of the impact of service changes on customer attitudes”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 1991a, 1-9; Bolton, R. N., Drew, J. H., “A multistage model of customers' assessment of service quality and value”, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1991b, 375-384

<sup>15</sup> Dabholkar, P., “A contingency framework for predicting causality between customer satisfaction and service quality”, *Advances in consumer research*, Vol. 22, 1995, 101-108; McAlexander, J. H., Kaldenberg, D. O., Koenig, H. F., “Service quality measurement”, *Journal of Health Care Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1994, 34-39

<sup>16</sup> Parasuraman, A., “SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 1988, 14-40

During the last few years a variety of service quality studies have been conducted.<sup>17</sup> Service quality was measured in: accounting and audit firms<sup>18</sup>, banking<sup>19</sup>, health spas<sup>20</sup>, higher education<sup>21</sup>, hotels<sup>22</sup>, information systems<sup>23</sup>, library services<sup>24</sup>, public transport<sup>25</sup>, restaurants<sup>26</sup>, travel agencies<sup>27</sup> and Web-sites<sup>28</sup>. Despite its wide usage, the model has been criticized by a number of academics.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ladhari, R., "Alternative measures of service quality: a review", *Managing Service Quality*, Vol. 18, No.1, 2008, 65-86

<sup>18</sup> Ismail, I., "Service quality, client satisfaction and loyalty towards audit firms: Perceptions of Malaysian public listed companies", *Managerial Auditing Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 7, 2006, 738-756

<sup>19</sup> Lam, T. K. P., "Making sense of SERVQUAL's dimensions to the Chinese customers in Macau", *Journal of Market-Focused Management*, Vol. 5, No. 10, 2002, 43-58; Zhou, L., Zhang, Y., Xu, J., A *Critical Assessment of SERVQUAL's Applicability in the Banking Context of China*, *Asia Pacific Advances in Consumer Research*, Association for Consumer Research, Valdosta, GA, Vol. 5, 2002, 14-21

<sup>20</sup> Snoj, B., Mumel, D., "The measurement of perceived differences in service quality: The case of health spas in Slovenia", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2002, 362-379; Marković, S., Horvat, J., Raspor, S., "Service quality measurement in the health tourism sector: An exploratory study", *Ekonomski vjesnik*, Vol. 17, No. ½, 2004, 63-75

<sup>21</sup> Russel, M., "Marketing education: A review of service quality perceptions among international students", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2005, 65-77; Marković, S., "Expected service quality measurement in tourism higher education", *Naše gospodarstvo*, Vol. 52, No. ½, 2006, 86-95

<sup>22</sup> Marković, S., "Measuring service quality in the hospitality industry: An attributive approach", PhD diss., University of Rijeka, 2003; ———. "Measuring service quality in the Croatian hotel industry: A multivariate statistical analysis", *Naše gospodarstvo*, Vol. 50, No. ½, 2004, 27-33; Juwaheer, T. D., "Exploring international tourists' perceptions of hotel operations by using a modified SERVQUAL approach: A case study of Mauritius", *Managing Service Quality*, Vol. 14, No. 5, 2004, 350-364; Akbaba, A., "Measuring service quality in the hotel industry: a study in a business hotel in Turkey", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 25, 2006, 17-192; Wang, M., Wang, J., Zhao, J., "An empirical study of the effect of customer participation on service quality", *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2007, 49-73; Raspor, S., "Statistical analysis of service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry", Ma. Diss., University of Rijeka; Marković, S., Raspor, S., "Measuring perceived service quality using SERVQUAL: A case study of the croatian hotel industry", *Management*, No. 3, Fall, 2010, 195-209

<sup>23</sup> Jiang, J. J., Klein, G., Crampton, S. M., "A note on SERVQUAL reliability and validity in information system service quality measurement", *Decision Sciences*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2000, 725-744

<sup>24</sup> Cook, C., Thompson, B., "Reliability and validity of SERVQUAL scores used to evaluate perceptions of library service quality", *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2000, 248-258

<sup>25</sup> Sanchez Perez, M., Sanchez- Fernandez, R., Marin-Carrillo, G. M., and J. C. Gazquez-Abad, "Effects of service quality dimensions on behavioral purchase intentions: A study on public-sector transport", *Managing Service Quality*, 2007, Vol. 17, No. 2, 134-151

<sup>26</sup> Andaleeb, S. S., Conway, C., "Customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry: An examination of the transaction-specific model", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 3-11; Namkung, Y., Jang, S., "Are highly satisfied restaurant customers really different?", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2008, 142-155

<sup>27</sup> Martinez Caro, L., Martinez Garcia, J. A., "Developing a multidimensional and hierarchical service quality model for travel agency industry", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2008, 706-720

<sup>28</sup> Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., Malhotra, A., "E-S-QUAL: A multiple-item scale for assessing electronic service quality", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2005, 213-233; Nusair, K., Kandampully, J., "The antecedents of customer satisfaction with online travel services: A conceptual model", *European Business Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2008, 4-19

<sup>29</sup> Carman, J. H., "Consumer perceptions of service quality: an assessment of the SERVQUAL dimensions", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 1990, 33-55; Babakus, E., Boller, G. W., "An empirical assessment of the SERVQUAL scale", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 24, May, 1992, 253-268; Brown, T. J., Churchill, G. A., Peter, J. P., "Improving the measurement of service quality", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 69, Spring, 1993, 127-139; Teas, R. K., "Expectations as a comparison standard in measuring service quality: an assessment of a reassessment", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 58, January, 1994, 132-139

Several researchers have adopted the original or modified SERVQUAL model to measure service quality in the context of casinos.<sup>30</sup>

However, criticism of the SERVQUAL model has forced several authors to create a new model completely adjusted to the casino. Wong and Fong developed a 12-item scale to measure casino service quality (CASERV) on the basis of a unified service quality scale proposed by Rust and Oliver (1994) and Brady and Cronin (2001). CASERV is conceptualised as a second-order construct that assesses four facets of service offerings: employee service delivery, service environment, game service, and food service.<sup>31</sup>

*Game service* represents the technical aspect of a service encounter, which includes the core of actual services consumers receive.<sup>32</sup> Game variety and availability are important quality attributes to game service quality perceptions.<sup>33</sup> According to Mayer et al., chance of winning plays a key role in determining the level of gaming customer satisfaction.<sup>34</sup> When gamblers believe that they have a greater chance of winning, they will be more satisfied and consequently loyal to the particular casino.

*Service environment* defines the tangible attributes of a service encounter.<sup>35</sup> The service environment plays a crucial role in linking customer satisfaction and loyalty in the casino setting. Many authors indicate the relationship between ambience and customer loyalty.<sup>36</sup> Franceour suggested that cleanliness, interior décor, and overall lighting levels are important attributes of a desirable physical environment.<sup>37</sup> Lucas argued that in the casino context, the ambient factors of layout navigation, cleanliness, interior

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<sup>30</sup> McCaina, S. L. C., Jang, S. C., Hu, C., "Service quality gap analysis toward customer loyalty: practical guidelines for casino hotels", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 24, 2005, 465-472; Wannenburg, E., Drotsky, T., De Jager, J., "Gamers' perceptions of the service quality in the gaming areas of selected casinos in South Africa", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 3, No. 7, 2009, 317-324; Prentice, C., "Service quality perceptions and customer loyalty in casinos", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2012, 49-64; ———. "Service quality perceptions and customer loyalty in casinos", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2013a, 49-64; ———. "Who stays, who walks, and why in high-intensity service contexts", *Journal of Business Research*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.02.044>

<sup>31</sup> Wong, I. A., Fong, V., op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Rust, R. T., Oliver, R. L., op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> McCaina, S. L. C., Jang, S. C., Hu, C., "Service quality gap analysis toward customer loyalty: practical guidelines for casino hotels", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 24, 2005, 465-472; Mayer, K. J., Johnson, L., Hu, C., Chen, S., "Gaming customer satisfaction: an exploratory study", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1998, 178-183

<sup>34</sup> Mayer, K. J., Johnson, L., Hu, C., Chen, S., "Gaming customer satisfaction: an exploratory study", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1998, 178-183.

<sup>35</sup> Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., "Refinement and reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 67, No. 1, 1991, 420-450

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, L., Mayer, K. J., Champaner, E., "Casino atmospherics from customer's perspective: a re-examination", *UNLV Gaming Research and Review Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2004, 1-10; Lucas, A. F., "The determinants and effects of slot servicescape satisfaction in a Las Vegas hotel casino", *UNLV Gaming Research and Review Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2003, 1-19; Mayer, K. J., Johnson, L., Hu, C., Chen, S., "Gaming customer satisfaction: an exploratory study", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1998, 178-183

<sup>37</sup> Franceour, L., "Applying the theme of 'luck' to a destination resort with casino", Master thesis, Cornell University, 1992.

décor, and seating comfort are the major components determining satisfaction with the servicescape.<sup>38</sup>

*Service delivery* represents the interactions between the service provider, the front-line employees, and the customers.<sup>39</sup> Service delivery is analogous to the functional quality Grönroos defined. Customers usually evaluate service quality by evaluating employee behaviour and attitudes.

*Food service* represents a key facet of service quality evaluation of hospitality services.<sup>40</sup> Nowadays all casinos offer some sort of catering option because casino operators have long realized customers' needs for food and beverages throughout the entire casino encounter. Food quality not only affects the customer satisfaction but helps reinforce a casino's brand image.

The CASERV scale was created primarily in response to the needs of service evaluation in the casino setting, but could easily be adopted in other hospitality sectors.<sup>41</sup> Not only does it address some major issues in SERVQUAL, but it also provides a more comprehensive measure of service quality from different aspects of the service operation.<sup>42</sup>

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. The study goals

This empirical study reveals customer satisfaction with service quality in casinos. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are to: (a) examine the most important service quality dimensions, (b) measure customer perceptions and expectations, (c) close the gap between perceptions and expectations, (d) examine the degree of customer satisfaction with dimensions of casino service dimensions, and (e) examine the degree of loyalty to the visited casino.

### 2.2. The instrument

Customer expectations and perceptions of casino service quality were measured with a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of a literature review and adopted to suit the specific features of a casino setting. The

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<sup>38</sup> Lucas, A. F., "The determinants and effects of slot servicescape satisfaction in a Las Vegas hotel casino", *UNLV Gaming Research and Review Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2003, 1-19

<sup>39</sup> Brady, M. K., Cronin, J. J., "Some new thoughts on conceptualizing perceived service quality: a hierarchical approach", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 2001, 34-49

<sup>40</sup> Ha, J., Jang, S., "Effects of service quality and food quality: the moderating role of atmospherics in an ethnic restaurant segment", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2010, 520-529; Wilkins, H., Merrilees, B., Herington, C., "Towards an understanding of total service quality in hotels", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2007, 840-853

<sup>41</sup> Wong, I. A., Fong, V., op.cit.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988) with CASERV dimensions (Wong and Fong, 2012) was adopted and reworded to suit the study context.

Table 2.1: **Dimensions and variables review**

<b>Prentice (2012)</b>		<b>This study (2013)</b>	
Customer perception measurement		Expectation and perception measurement	
DIMENSIONS	VARIABLES	DIMENSIONS	VARIABLES
Tangibles	1-4	<i>Tangibles</i>	1-4
Reliability	5-9	<i>Reliability</i>	5-9
Responsiveness	10-13	<i>Responsiveness</i>	10-13
Assurance	14-17	<i>Assurance</i>	14-17
Empathy	18-22	<i>Empathy</i>	18-22
<b>Wong and Fong (2012)</b>			
Customer perception measurement			
Game service	1-3	<i>Game service</i>	Satisfaction with casino service measured by CASERV dimensions
Service environment	4-6	<i>Service environment</i>	
Service delivery	7-9	<i>Service delivery</i>	
Food service	10-12	<i>F&amp;B service</i>	
Overall satisfaction	13	<i>Overall satisfaction</i>	
<b>Tsai, Cheung, Lo (2010)</b>			
Customer-based casino brand equity and firm performance			
Brand loyalty	1-5	<i>Loyalty</i>	1-2
Perceived quality	6-26	Perceived quality	-
Brand image	27-36	Brand image	-
Brand awareness	37-40	Brand awareness	-

Source: authors

The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part measured customer expectations and perceptions of casino attributes using a modified SERVQUAL model. Service quality expectations and perceptions were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree'. The second part measured customer satisfaction with casino service quality using a modified CASERV model adopted from Wong and Fong<sup>43</sup>. Level of satisfaction was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 'very dissatisfied' to 7 'very satisfied' for each CASERV dimension. The third part contained two variables of loyalty adopted from Tsai, Cheung and Lo<sup>44</sup>. The fourth part was designed to capture a socio-demographic profile of respondents: country of residence, sex, age, education level, reasons to gamble, frequency of visiting casinos, duration of stay (hours per day). Frequency of visit was measured by the number of times that customers visited the casino, with the

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Tsai, H., Cheung, C., Lo, A., "An exploratory study of the relationship between customer-based casino brand equity and firm performance", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 29, 2010, 754-757

question: How regularly do you visit this casino? Desire to stay was measured by the number of hours that gaming customers stayed at the casino, with the question: How long did you stay in the casino?

### 2.3. The sample and data collection

The target respondents of the survey were customers visiting casinos and those guests staying in hotels that have their own casino. Data were collected from clients of three casinos in Istria County and Primorsko-goranska County in the period from 29 December 2012 to 15 February 2013. For this research, 450 questionnaires were delivered to the casinos in the towns of Opatija, Poreč and Novigrad, of which 142 were returned, representing a 31.55% response rate. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and to evaluate service quality expectations and perceptions of casino customers, as well as the level of customer satisfaction with casino service and customer loyalty.

## 3. RESULTS

To achieve the study's goals, descriptive statistical analysis was performed. The results are presented as follows. First, respondents' socio-demographic and gambling characteristics are provided. Next, the results of descriptive analysis of customers' expectations and perceptions, as well as the gap between them, are presented. Third, the results of descriptive analysis of customers' satisfaction with casino service and the level of loyalty are presented. The socio-demographic and gambling characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Respondents' profile (N=142)

Variables	Frequencies			Variables	Frequencies		
		Absolute	Relative			Absolute	Relative
<b>Sex</b>	Male	100	70.4	<b>Country of residence</b>	Croatia	59	41.5
	Female	42	29.6		Italy	44	31.0
<b>Age</b>	20 – 25	41	28.9		Other	39	27.5
	26 – 35	32	22.5	<b>Education</b>	Primary	9	6.3
	36 – 45	30	21.1		Secondary	69	48.6
	46 – 55	18	12.7		Higher education	31	21.8
	56 – 65	17	12.0		University and above	33	23.2
	66 and above	4	2.8				
<b>Frequency of visit (monthly)</b>	< 1 ×	61	43.0	<b>Duration of staying at casino</b>	< 1 hour	49	34.5
	1 ×	23	16.2		1 – 3 hours	51	35.9
	2 – 5 ×	40	28.2		3 – 5 hours	27	19.0
	>5 ×	18	12.7		>5 hours	15	10.6
<b>Motivation – reasons to gamble</b>	Entertainment	80	56.3	Reputation	4	2.8	
	Earning	40	28.2	Relaxation	46	32.4	
	Hanging out	33	23.2	Other	0	0.00	

Source: authors

The sample included domestic (41.5%) and international customers (58.5%) mostly from Italy. There were evidently more males (70.4%) than females (29.6%), and most of the respondents (72.5%) were younger than 46 years of age. The most common customers had a secondary education (48.6%), but there were also many with higher and high education (45%). Most of the respondents indicated that the main reason to gamble was entertainment (56.3%), but also relaxation (32.4%) and the possibility to earn money (28.2%). Most of respondents visited a casino less than once a month (43%) but there are a lot of domestic customers who regularly visit a casino more than twice a month (30.9%), especially Casino 1. Regarding hours spent in a casino, most of respondents stay for three hours or less (70.4%).

The results of descriptive statistical analysis of customers' expectations and perceptions in the casinos are shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Results of descriptive statistical analysis (SERVQUAL items and dimensions)**

<i>Dimensions and variables</i>	<i>Average scores</i>		<i>SERVQUAL gap (P – E)</i>
	<i>Expectations scale</i>	<i>Perceptions scale</i>	
<b>TANGIBLES</b>			
1. Modern-looking equipment	6.63	4.73	-1.90
2. Visually appealing physical facilities	6.63	4.54	-2.09
3. Neat appearing staff	6.56	5.17	-1.39
4. Visually appealing promotive materials	6.19	4.37	-1.82
<i>Dimension average</i>	<b>6.50</b>	<b>4.70</b>	<b>-1.80</b>
<b>RELIABILITY</b>			
5. Promises carried out on time	6.50	4.92	-1.58
6. Complaint-solving	6.33	4.89	-1.44
7. Services performed right the first time	6.37	4.64	-1.73
8. Services without delays	6.42	4.64	-1.78
9. Error-free service	6.49	4.92	-1.57
<i>Dimension average</i>	<b>6.42</b>	<b>4.80</b>	<b>-1.62</b>
<b>RESPONSIVENESS</b>			
10. Exact time of performing services	6.42	4.73	-1.69
11. Prompt service	6.51	4.68	-1.83
12. Employees willing to help	6.54	4.85	-1.69
13. Employees never too busy to answer	6.36	4.84	-1.52
<i>Dimension average</i>	<b>6.46</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>-1.68</b>
<b>ASSURANCE</b>			
14. Confident staff	6.42	4.76	-1.66
15. Safe transactions	6.79	5.10	-1.69
16. Courteous staff	6.52	5.02	-1.50
17. Employees have knowledge to answer the questions	6.44	4.73	-1.71
<i>Dimension average</i>	<b>6.54</b>	<b>4.90</b>	<b>-1.64</b>
<b>EMPATHY</b>			
18. Individual attention	5.96	4.58	-1.38
19. Convenient opening hours	6.15	4.99	-1.16
20. Personal attention	5.77	4.52	-1.25
21. Casino has best interest for guests	5.94	4.70	-1.24

<i>Dimensions and variables</i>	<i>Average scores</i>		<i>SERVQUAL gap (P – E)</i>
	<i>Expectations scale</i>	<i>Perceptions scale</i>	
22. Understand specific needs	5.65	4.40	-1.25
<i>Dimension average</i>	<b>5.89</b>	<b>4.64</b>	<b>-1.25</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.36</b>	<b>4.76</b>	<b>-1.60</b>

Source: authors

The range of service quality expectations and perceptions items was from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high). The mean scores of customers' expectations ranged from 5.65 to 6.79. The lowest expectation item was 'understanding specific needs', which indicates that customers do not expect the employees to fulfil all of their specific needs. On the other hand, the highest expectation item was 'safe transactions' which indicates that customers are willing to feel safe in their transactions with casino. Besides, customers had high expectations for the following casino attributes: 'modern-looking equipment', 'visually appealing physical facilities' and 'neat appearing staff'. These indicate that casino customers are sensitive to *tangibility* which is present as an ambience where the service is provided. The importance of service environment has been discussed across several researchers.<sup>45</sup>

The mean scores of customers' perceptions ranged from 4.37 to 5.17. The lowest perception item was 'visually appealing promotive materials', which indicates that casinos do not provide enough attractive promotional activities that could enhance casino attendance. On the contrary, casino customers' highest perceptions were regarding 'staff appearance'. Furthermore, customers highly assessed the following casino attributes: 'safe transactions', 'courteous staff' and 'convenient opening hours', as well as 'promises carried out on time' and 'error-free service'. These indicate that a casino's staff plays a crucial role in performing high service quality. The overall mean score for service quality perceptions items was 4.76. This score indicates medium, but not sufficiently high, perceptions of casino customers regarding service quality.

The gap between customers' perceptions and expectations ranged from -2.09 to -1.16. The widest gap appeared in the item 'visually appealing physical facilities', whilst the narrowest appeared in the item 'convenient opening hours'. Besides, other wide gaps appeared in the following items: 'modern-looking equipment', 'prompt service' and 'visually appealing promotive materials'. These indicate that *tangibility* has the widest gap between perceptions and expectations (-1.80). On the other hand, the narrowest gaps also appeared in the following items: 'casino has best interest for guests', 'personal attention' and 'understanding specific needs'. These indicate that *empathy* has the narrowest gap between perceptions and expectations (-1.25).

According to the results of the descriptive statistical analysis of casino service quality measured by the gap between customers' perceptions and expectations, it is evident that the casinos' tangible aspect received the most negative score (from -2.09 to -1.39),

<sup>45</sup> Lam, L. W., Chan, K. W., Fong D., Lo, F., "Does the look matter? The impact of casino servicescape on gaming customer satisfaction, intention to revisit, and desire to stay", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 30, 2011, 558-567

unlike empathy that received the least negative score (from -1.38 to -1.16). This indicates that casino managers should focus their efforts on creating a pleasant and comfortable environment to satisfy customers' expectations, as well as on undertaking promotional actions.

The results of descriptive statistical analysis of customers' level of satisfaction with casino service dimensions are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: **Results of descriptive statistical analysis (CASERV dimensions)**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Casino 1 Opatija</b>	<b>Casino 2 Poreč</b>	<b>Casino 3 Novigrad</b>	<b>Total average</b>
Game service	5.08	4.98	3.62	4.56
F&B service	4.96	4.72	2.49	4.06
Service environment	5.27	4.79	3.49	4.52
Service delivery	6.06	4.68	3.68	4.81
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	<b>5.49</b>	<b>4.87</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>4.65</b>

Source: authors

Game service is evaluated differently at each casino. Customers of Casino 1 are the most satisfied (5.08) with game service, while customers of Casino 3 are the most dissatisfied (3.62). Food and beverage is the core element of the casino offering, and therefore it is very important to offer a high quality of food service. Results of statistical analysis show that this dimension of casino service is at the lowest level (4.06). Service environment also affects customer satisfaction. Customers of Casino 1 are satisfied with the service environment (5.27), less satisfied at Casino 2 (4.79), and dissatisfied at Casino 3 (3.49). Customers of Casino 1 are satisfied with service delivery (6.06), while those of Casino 3 are dissatisfied (3.68). Overall satisfaction with the casino service is at a high level at Casino 1 (5.49), unlike at Casino 3, which has the lowest score (3.57).

Casino 1 has received a high score for each dimension (from 4.96 to 6.06), unlike Casino 3 that has been evaluated negatively (from 2.49 to 3.68). Casino 2 has an average score of 4.81 indicating medium satisfaction with casino service quality.

Overall satisfaction with the casino offering in the Northern Adriatic is at the higher medium level (4.65). Huge differences between casinos imply separate conclusions and recommendations for the casino managers of each casino.

Loyalty was measured by two items adopted from Tsai, Cheung and Lo (2010) on a 7-point type Likert scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' and 7 'strongly agree': "I will recommend this casino to my friends" and "I will return to this casino again".<sup>46</sup> The first item represents the power of word-of-mouth and the second one represents intention to revisit. The originally developed items for intention to revisit are as

<sup>46</sup> Tsai, H., Cheung, C., Lo, A., op.cit.

following: “I will gamble at this casino in the future” and “I will continue gambling in this casino”.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the respondents would recommend the visited casino to their friends. Of the three casinos, the most respondents would recommend Casino 2 to their friends (76.5%), 75.6% of respondents would recommend Casino 1, while only 34.1% would recommend Casino 3. On the other hand, the most respondents would revisit Casino 1 (87.7%), 74.5% of respondents would revisit Casino 2 and the least respondents would revisit casino 3 (34%). That was expected since the best scores were given to Casino 1, and the worst to Casino 3.

A huge difference is evident between casinos regarding the level of satisfaction and perceived quality which demands a causal investigation to improve casino service quality. Casino managers should take these results in consideration and make an effort to create a pleasant service environment to satisfy or even exceed the needs of their customers.

## CONCLUSION

The present study investigates the level of customer perceptions and expectations with regard to the casino service quality of three casinos in the Northern Adriatic, as well as customer satisfaction with service dimensions and the intention of customers to revisit and spread a positive word-of-mouth. The findings of this investigation have implications for the service quality literature as well as for casino managers.

Perceptions of casino service quality are the degree to which casino customers find various casino attributes important in enhancing their satisfaction with the casino visit. In the present study, it was revealed that customers find 'assurance' and 'tangibles' the most important dimensions on the expectation scale. Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that among five dimensions, 'assurance' has emerged as the most important dimension of perceived service quality. On the other hand, 'empathy' has received the lowest ranking score on the expectation as well as on the perception scale.

However, casino service quality was evaluated differently at each casino. Casino 1 received the highest perception score and Casino 3, the worst score. Casino 1 scored the highest for 'empathy' and Casino 2, scored the lowest. On the other hand, 'tangibles' received the highest score in Casino 3, while Casino 1 received the lowest score. Besides, 'reliability' was given the highest score in Casino 2 and the lowest score in Casino 3. Scores of the CASERV dimensions indicate low satisfaction in Casino 3, medium satisfaction in Casino 2, and higher satisfaction in Casino 1. Both SERVQUAL and CASERV dimensions indicate the best scores for Casino 1, and the worst for Casino 3.

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<sup>47</sup> Seiders, K., Voss, G. B., Grewal, D., Godfrey, A. L., “Do satisfied customers buy more? Examining moderating influences in a retailing context”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 69, October, 2005, 26-43

A detailed analysis of expectation, perception and gap mean scores, as well as the level of customer satisfaction with specific casino dimensions and their level of loyalty, could help casino managers in detecting the weak points of services and designing services to meet or exceed customers' expectations.

In designing this study, efforts were made to minimize its limitations, but some still need to be addressed. First, the study has measured expectations and perceptions of respondents at the same time. According to Carman, expectation and perception measures cannot both be administered at the same time.<sup>48</sup> Second, the length of the questionnaire has a negative impact on respondents who do not carefully read the statements they have to rank. Third, the current study was only conducted within three casinos across one region. Since this research was conducted in January and February, future studies should be undertaken during the summer season and include a larger sample of casinos to generalise the findings.

Future studies should try to utilize a two-phase approach to collect data from the customers, administering the expectation section in advance of their visit and then the perception section following their visit. It is recommended to use service quality instruments for specific casino needs, such as a multi-dimensional and hierarchical approach<sup>49</sup> which surpasses the weaknesses of SERVQUAL and CASERV model, allowing more precise service quality evaluation in the context of casinos.

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