



## **Study of the Quality of Public Services in Public Catering Companies: Methodology, Analysis and Assessment**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article substantiates the urgency, importance and necessity of developing a set of theoretical provisions and practical recommendations on the improvement of the quality of public services provided in public catering companies. The authors suggest their own interpretation of the process of services provision in public catering companies. We have studied the genesis of Russian public catering services market, provided the periodization of the historic stages of its emergence and development distinguishing the key factors, which influence the quality of services provision to customers. The article studies the evolution of methodical approaches to the definition of services quality to customers and the ways of its measuring. According to the obtained results the article defines advantages and disadvantages of the main methodical approaches; provides argumentation for the necessity of adding the methods of services quality assessment with the methods of marketing analysis (political, economic, social and technological and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats [SWOT]), which enable to take into consideration the influence of external and internal factors on the quality of public services at public catering companies. The article provides the SWOT matrix of public catering companies' activity on improving the quality of public services; it also gives the algorithm and approbation of the authors' procedure of the services quality assessment at public catering companies, based on the paradigm "confirmation/non-confirmation of expectations," and develops recommendations on its realization. The practical importance of the study is in the fact that the developed methodical and managerial set of tools creates the basis for the development of the efficient system of quality public services at public catering companies and it can be applied by the organizations of different forms of ownership with the view of assessing the quality of services, substantiating and realizing conceptual directions of its improvement.

**Keywords:** Public Catering, Quality of Public Services, Assessment Algorithm

**JEL Classification:** L3

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the course of the whole human history the problem of nourishment has been and still remains one of the most important; while the production, sales of products and accompanying them provision of services to consumers is a traditional type of activity of services sphere companies (Isaenko and Isaenko, 1999).

Public catering is an independent branch of the economy (Kotler et al., 1998), which fulfills the functions of production, sales and organization of consumption of finished and semi-finished culinary products (Zaiko and Dzhum, 2008). In modern

competitive environment of consumer market the content of the public catering companies' activity is expanding thanks to the service component, i.e., the expansion of the nomenclature of services supplied to consumers in the process of their provision.

The problem of services quality is urgent for all companies (Teplov and Bernvald, 2012), which are functioning in modern market system, characterized by instability and mobility of competition. In the said conditions the prospects for the development (Tarasova and Kadatskaya, 2013) of public catering companies are determined by the dominant role of the quality of the provided services and in particular by the quality of attendance.

It is connected with the fact that the majority of public catering companies possess the same level of technological capacities, use analogical technologies in making culinary products, in other words the quality of goods produced by them is perceived by consumers as a basic component of a service. Thus, it is clear that the quality of attendance is becoming the key factor of public catering companies' competitiveness (Tarasova and Timoshenko, 2011).

It is necessary to note that the scientific development of the problem of the attendance quality at public catering companies cannot be regarded as a completed one. The changing conditions require the development of the theory and practice of improving the quality (Deming, 1994) of attendance at public catering companies. The applied methodological approaches to the assessment of the attendance quality and its management at services sphere companies do not completely take into account the peculiarities of public catering provision at public catering companies.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Interpretation and Model of Public Services at Public Catering Companies

In our opinion the process of services provision should be interpreted as the integrity of operations/actions, exercised by the services provider while contacting with a service consumer (guest) in the process of public catering services realization. In accordance with such interpretation the model of the process of public services at public catering companies (Figure 1) represents an interaction of a consumer (with a set of his/her demands) and a supplier of services, united by the provided service and the service is a result of the satisfaction of consumer's needs.

### 2.2. Key Factors Influencing the Quality of Public Services

Putting the emphasis on the fact that Russian catering industry has undergone considerable changes during the whole historic period

(Teplov), we studied the genesis of the public catering services market (Isaenko and Korolev, 2014). According to the study results we have singled out the key factors (lack of traditions of public catering services consumption (Angel et al., 1999), lack of competition (Tarasova and Kadatskaya, 2013), limited food resources, population's low paying capacity (Teplov and Tarasova, 2006), lack of qualified personnel), which influence the quality of public services; and essential characteristics of services quality, specific for the stages of emergence and development of public catering as a branch of the economy (Teplov and Sadovnikova, 2014).

### 2.3. Main Methodological Approaches to Assessment of Public Services Quality in Public Catering

It is traditionally accepted that the assessment of services quality should be carried out with the application of specially developed methodological approaches (Belostotskaya and Kruglov, 2009). According to the results of the study of domestic and foreign literature we have singled out the main methodological approaches (Gronroos) to the identification of public services quality in public catering and stated the advantages and disadvantages peculiar to the said approaches (Table 1).

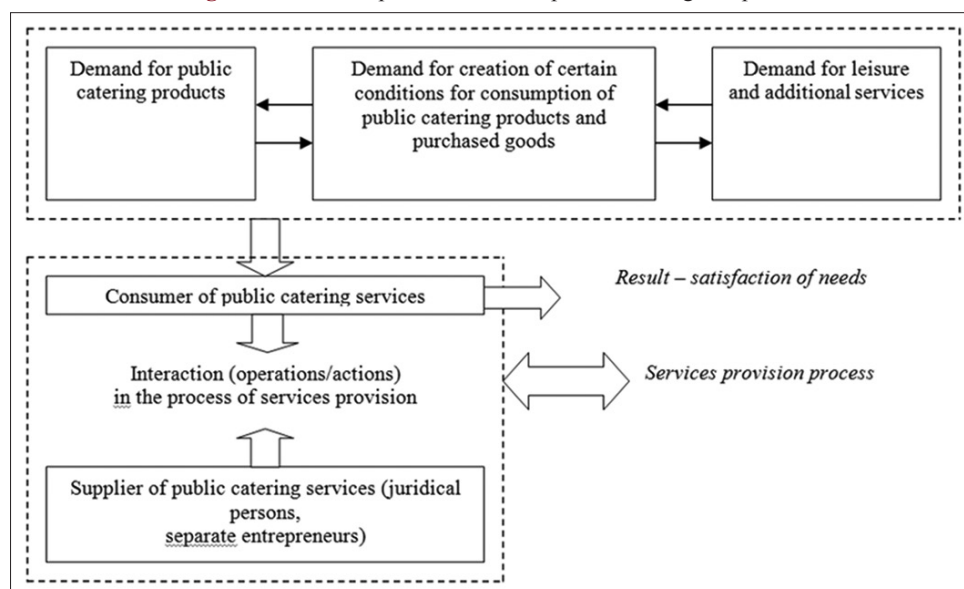
### 2.4. Development and Approbation of the Algorithm, Assessment of Public Services Quality at Public Catering Companies

As practice shows, one of the problems in the assessment of public services quality at public catering companies is a lack of the corresponding algorithm, which enables to guarantee the systemic wholeness of the quality assessment procedure.

Our position when developing the algorithm (Figure 2), corresponding to the solution of the said task is based on the paradigm "confirmation/non-confirmation of expectations," concretized by the following provisions:

- Procedure of the services quality assessment should be based on the priority of its perception by consumers (Isaenko and Pasechko, 2011);

**Figure 1:** Model of public services at public catering companies



**Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of the main methodological approaches to the assessment of public services quality in public catering**

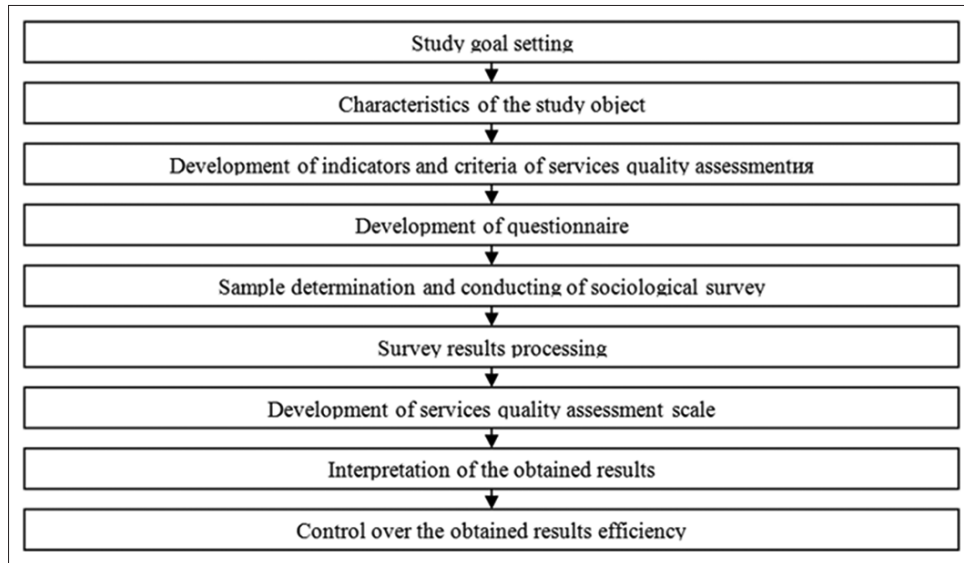
Methodological approaches	Key aspect of the study and methodological set of tools	Advantages	Disadvantages
Assessment of goods or services properties (Golubkov, Golubkova, Sekerin)	Assessment of goods and services properties. Expert survey of consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple enough in practical application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmentation of a service's properties examination, which hampers the shaping of the "critical mass of a product or service"</li> <li>• Only three levels of importance are revealed, which decreases the accuracy of the received results</li> <li>• Doesn't envisage the necessity of consumers' segmentation, which limits the sphere of its application as an expert method</li> </ul>
Expert analysis on the basis of identification of "alternative multi attributes" (Green)	Assessment of the structure of consumer preferences to goods or service. Expert analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility to plan company's goods strategy while retaining the opportunity for modifying current services and developing new ones;</li> <li>• Possibility to split and separately analyze the attributes of goods or service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labor consuming enough method for practical application</li> <li>• There is a possibility to realize only 18 alternative combinations</li> <li>• Only ranked values can be used in the frameworks of the method</li> <li>• Is not able to reflect how one attribute influences the other, its development and the role in consumer choice</li> <li>• Is not able of considering the form of promotion and the realized set of marketing communications</li> </ul>
Consumer perception of services quality (Parasuraman, Berry, Zeitaml)	Quality coefficient calculation (difference between perception and expectation). Questionnaire survey of consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively simple in practical application</li> <li>• Applicable for many branches of services sphere after adjustment;</li> <li>• Enough adjusted for achieving the set goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't envisage the weighing of variables, which possess different importance for consumers</li> <li>• Separate measurements of the technique overlap</li> <li>• The questionnaire uses statements which start with negation</li> <li>• From respondents' point of view the questionnaire contains repeated questions</li> <li>• Not applicable for all services and due to this requires adjustment</li> </ul>
Consumer perception of current services level (Cronin, Taitor)	Measuring current level of services quality. Questionnaire survey of consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective and simple enough procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of close connection between expectations and perception, from which it follows that by one execution it is not possible to judge about expectations and quality of services as a whole</li> </ul>
Services quality assessment (Lambent)	Services quality assessment. Questionnaire survey of consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level of the importance of the concrete attribute of public service is taken into account</li> <li>• Easily adjusted for specific study objects</li> <li>• The model provides specific recommendations while making strategic decisions for further interrelations with consumers</li> <li>• Relative simplicity and visibility of results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labor consuming method, requiring much time enough for processing of questionnaires</li> </ul>

- Each of the types and classes of public catering companies possesses its own criteria for service quality assessment;
- In order to obtain primary information it is necessary to organize and conduct sociological survey (Tarasova and Timoshenko, 2009) of consumers with the help of the interview;
- The list of questions put to respondents should be expanded by personal questions in order to obtain "a portrait" of a target consumer (Tarasova and Matvejeva, 2005);
- It is necessary to build the scale for services quality assessment and control the objectivity of the obtained results (Isaenko and Pasechko, 2010);

- The interpretation of the survey results should be done graphically (building the chart "quality coefficient/importance rating") (Isaenko and Korolev, 2012).

The approbation of public services quality assessment algorithm in the Belgorod Oblast public catering companies was done at one of the public catering companies in Belgorod. In accordance with the type and rank of the company we concretized the list of criteria for services quality assessment (Table 2), developed a special questionnaire, which reflected the expectation of consumers in respect of services and their factual perception of services.

**Figure 2:** Algorithm of services quality assessment to population at public catering companies



**Table 2: Concretized system of criteria of services quality assessment for a top quality bar**

Indicators	Assessment criteria
Safety indicator	Life, health, property safety in the process of services provision
Reliability indicator	Resistance of the system of services to rejection Exactness of order execution Time for provision of services
Trading area material indicator	Original decorative elements, which create style unity of the trading area interior, furniture and table laying Top quality furniture Tableware (porcelain, crystal, ceramic, wooden), wiped to shine, without chips, of the same set Cutlery (from modern alloys), wiped to shine, of the same set Table linen, cloths on the tables (changed after each provision of services) and individual linen napkins Personnel look (corresponding uniforms or overalls and shoes of the same brand) Trading equipment (modern, functioning) Sanitary and epidemiological conditions of rooms and equipment
Service personnel professional level indicator	Possession by the service personnel of professional ethical standards (politeness, tact, kindness, attention and courtesy) Compliance by service personnel with the sanitary and personal hygiene requirements Service personnel freely uses professional terminology Personnel responsibly fulfills its duty instructions
Informativeness indicator	The menu is printed on the computer or in the printing house, the cover of the menu is made of modern materials and with original design Availability of the information in the internet (web site, social networks, blogosphere), with the availability of feedback Accessibility, reliability and visibility of the provided information on the company and provided services
Trading area non-material environment indicator	Air conditioning system, ensuring optimal parameters of temperature and humidity Level of noise, vibration, strange odors Socio-psychological atmosphere

The survey results were processed under the standard approaches to processing of sociological information (Kotler, 1998); the results were assessed according to five-point scale with the calculation of quality coefficients by each criterion, indicator, company as a whole and rating definition (Table 3).

The obtained value of public services quality coefficient (-0.32) shows to what extent consumer expectations were justified or not justified in comparison with factual perception. If the differences between consumers' expectations are minimal or exceed them this testifies to a good or excellent public services quality (Mill, 2009).

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Analysis of Results, Methodological Approach to Quality Identification

The authors suggested the interpretation of the process of public services provision at public catering companies. The conducted analysis of the Russian catering industry testifies to the fact that the level of the quality of public services in time is not a static parameter, but it undergoes changes depending on the level of the public catering branch development in some or other historic period.

It was found that each methodical approach to the quality definition contains procedural elements of the services quality assessment, but different key aspects of its study condition the difference in criteria and the techniques of quality measurement, which are often unacceptable in practice due to their high labor consumption to obtain the primary information on the perception of quality by consumers and the complexity of the calculation of its measuring units.

### 3.2. Results of Marketing Analysis of External and Internal Environment at Public Catering Companies

We have substantiated the necessity of adding the methods of consumer services quality study with the methods of marketing analysis, in particular (Khlebovich, 2007), political, economic, social and technological (PEST) and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis (Lisenko, 2010), which enable to consider the influence of socio-cultural, demographic, political and legal, technological, economic (external), as well as material and technological, organizational, human (internal) factors on the development of services quality and its assessment by the consumers of services of public catering companies.

**Table 3: Assessment coefficients of public services quality in the context of quality indicators and their rating**

Indicators of services quality	Rating (rank) of importance	Quality coefficient
Safety	1	-0.18
Reliability	2	-0.90
Material environment	4	-0.43
Service personnel professional level	3	-0.54
Informativeness	6	0.27
Non-material environment	5	-0.12
Services quality coefficient by the company		-0.32

The analysis of the external environment factors (Opolchenov, 2008) was made on the basis of the results of expert assessment (according to five-point scale) in two stages. At the first stage we identified the level of external factors' influence on the activity of the Belgorod Oblast public catering companies through the calculation of the weight coefficients of each factor (Table 4).

At the second stage experts were offered to determine the probability of the selected external factors influence on services quality to the population in the Belgorod Oblast public catering companies. The processing of the results of experts' survey made it possible to build a final matrix of SWOT analysis of public catering companies' activity on improving the quality of services to consumers (Table 5).

### 3.3. Results of the Approbation of Services Quality Assessment to the Population at Public Catering Companies

On the basis of the obtained results of the assessment coefficients of public services quality (Table 3) we have developed a criterion scale of public service quality assessment (Table 6).

According to the assessment results the company's management, first of all, were recommended to increase managerial influence (Kirilova et al., 2008) on the quality of public services by the indicators with ratings 2, 3 and 1 correspondingly, "reliability," "service personnel professional level" and "safety."

In general, the approbation of the suggested algorithm of services quality assessment at public catering companies showed that it can be used in the quality of a methodological tool, which creates

**Table 4: Assessment of the level of external factors influence on the Belgorod Oblast public catering companies' activity**

Factors	Experts					Average point	Weight coefficient
	1	2	3	4	5		
Political and legal factors							
Country's political situation	3	4	1	4	3	3.0	0.05
State regulation of public catering	3	4	4	5	4	4.0	0.07
Control over public catering companies' activity	4	5	4	4	4	4.2	0.07
Aggregate political and legal factors						3.73	0.06
Economic factors							
Consumer prices index	4	4	5	4	5	4.4	0.08
Gross regional product	3	4	2	3	2	2.8	0.05
Investments level in fixed capital	3	5	3	4	5	4.0	0.07
Level and dynamics of supply development	4	5	5	3	4	4.2	0.07
Size of population's money income	5	4	5	4	4	4.4	0.08
Aggregate economic factors						3.96	0.07
Socio-cultural factors							
General level of society's culture	4	3	2	5	4	3.6	0.06
Society's value system	4	1	2	4	3	2.6	0.04
Consumption culture of public catering services	3	3	4	4	5	3.8	0.07
Population's education level	4	2	3	3	4	3.2	0.05
Demographic factors	3	2	3	3	2	2.6	0.04
Aggregate socio-cultural factors						3.16	0.05
Technological factors							
Information technologies development level	3	4	4	5	4	4.0	0.07
Energy saving technologies development level	2	3	3	4	5	3.4	0.06
Technological innovations level	3	3	4	5	4	3.8	0.07
Aggregate technological factors						3.73	0.06
Total						58	1

**Table 5: Final matrix of SWOT analysis of the Belgorod Oblast public catering companies' activity on the improvement of public services quality**

Strong sides	Weak sides
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient attention and allocation of considerable means in the esthetic decoration of room's interior for consumers</li> <li>• Sufficient level of material and technological capacities of companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient level of service personnel professional training</li> <li>• Insufficient level of the service personnel ethical behavior</li> <li>• Administrators' (head waiters') inability to manage personnel</li> <li>• Ignoring modern forms of services to consumers</li> <li>• Blunders in service personnel labor organization</li> <li>• Insufficient material and lack of moral motivation of the service personnel labor</li> <li>• Underestimation the role of marketing</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable political situation in the country</li> <li>• Moderate and balanced regional inflation</li> <li>• Stable level of the GRP</li> <li>• Growth of population's money income</li> <li>• Wide opportunity for applying information technologies</li> <li>• Wide opportunity for applying energy saving technologies</li> <li>• High level of technological innovations</li> <li>• Stable demographic situation in the region</li> <li>• Possibility to orient at cultural shifts in the society while forming an offer</li> <li>• Possibility to take a decent place in the society's value system</li> <li>• Sustainable level and dynamics of the development of the offer of public catering services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide opportunities for state regulation of public catering</li> <li>• A large number of bodies controlling the activity of public catering companies</li> <li>• Regional public catering is not attractive enough for investors</li> <li>• Culture of public catering services consumption is only developing</li> </ul>

SWOT: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

**Table 6: Scale of public services quality assessment**

Interval of services quality coefficient	Services quality characteristics	Services quality indicators
Exceeding 0	Excellent	Informativeness
0 – (–0.25)	Good	Non-material environment
(–0.26) – (–0.50)	Satisfactory	Safety
(–0.51) – (–1.0)	Unsatisfactory	Material environment
		Professional level of service personnel
		Reliability
Less (–1.0)	Extremely unsatisfactory	–

information basis for the development of the services quality management system (Evans, 2007; Gronroos, 1994).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The said interpretation process of public services at public catering companies differs from the existing ones by a large extent of variability of public services elements, and it enables to consider the possibility of indirect communications between suppliers and consumers of services.

The existing methodical approaches are based on the methods (Gronroos, 1990; Harrington, 1990), which do not allow taking into account the influence of the external and internal environment of the public catering company's activity on the consumer assessment of services quality.

Threats for the services quality are the following factors of external environment of the public (Haxever et al., 2002) catering companies: Broad opportunities of state regulation of public

catering; a large number of bodies, controlling public catering companies' activity; lack of sufficient attractiveness of public catering companies for investors; culture of public catering services consumption is only developing.

In general, the approbation of the suggested algorithm of services quality assessment at public catering companies showed that it can be used in a methodological tool, which creates information basis for the development of the services quality management system (Evans, 2007; Gronroos, 1994).

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

This article develops certain provisions of the service theory regarding specificity of public catering companies; in particular, it suggests the authors' interpretation of the process of services provision in public catering. We have studied the evolution of methodical approaches to the definition of public services quality and methods of its measurement, by the results of which we have identified the advantages and disadvantages of the main methodological approaches (assessment of goods or services quality, assessment of service quality, expert analysis on the basis of the singling out of "alternative multi-attributes," consumer perception of service quality, consumer perception of the current level of service quality). We have provided argumentation for the necessity of adding the methods of services quality assessment with the methods of marketing analysis (PEST and SWOT analysis), which enable to consider the influence of external (socio-cultural, demographic, political and legal, technological, economic and internal factors (material and technological, organizational, human resources) on the quality of public services of public catering companies. We have studied the genesis of Russian public catering services market

and singled out the key factors, which influence the quality of public services.

We have provided the analytical assessment of the external and internal environment factors' influence on public services quality at the Belgorod Oblast public catering companies with the application of the methods of PEST and SWOT analysis, on the basis of which we have built the matrix of SWOT analysis of the activity of public catering companies on the improvement of public services.

We developed the algorithm and approbated the procedure of public services quality assessment at public catering companies, based on the paradigm "confirmation/non-confirmation of expectations" and worked out the methodical recommendations for its realization.

Further prospects of the study on the suggested topic are connected with the development of methodological provisions on the formation of the system of public services quality management at public catering companies.

In our opinion, the obtained results of the study make a certain contribution in the development of theoretical provisions, managerial and methodological set of tools for improving the quality of public services at public catering companies.

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