

TOURIST SERVICES CONSUMER SATISFACTION (CRUISES)

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ABSTRACT: The study of consumer behavior determines an adequate knowledge of the concepts, of the tourism communication system, the steps necessary for research, information and influencing factors: needs and desires, personality, lifestyle, attitudes and preferences of consumers. This work analyzes the consumer travel behavior in the society Clasic International Cruises by applying a passenger survey. The questionnaire was applied at the end of the stay for 400 passengers of the cruise during 07.03.2013 - 14.04.2013. Responses were interpreted in terms of statistical knowledge and results are rendered on the sources of information about cruise ships traveling, past experience, courtesy and efficiency in solving all passengers desires, daily activities offered on board, animators, schedule and efficiency of the Director of the cruise, the main entertainment options, the diversity of performances, excursions held, services on board, cabin based analysis, the supply of food in the restaurant, bar services, general opinions about and the degree of passengers expectations that were accomplished.

Keywords: consumer, satisfaction, tourism, questionnaire

JEL Codes: M31, M37

Introduction

The performances of an enterprise are conditioned on its ability to meet the needs and demands of consumers and to act upon the opportunities offered by its external environment. In this context, "changes in consumer behavior and values are a critical factor" (Lache, 2008, a) for marketing decision making in the enterprise, requiring a serious accumulation of information on the processes and mechanisms. In investigating consumer behavior, one of the main lines refers to the process of choosing between several competing products and evaluation of alternatives.

In tourism, knowledge and "shaping consumer behavior is achieved through extensive marketing activities by manufacturers and distributors of products and services" (Lache, 2008, b). "Also, by its mass character and complex content, tourism involves a vast material and human potential, with important implications on the development of economy and society, national and international human relations" (Snake, Baron and Neacșu, 2003). This goal requires the adoption of important decisions regarding the choice of media, the implementation of the plan and procedures for monitoring and evaluation of performance and is used by tourism organizations: advertising (Balaure, coordinator, 2002), sales promotion (Kotler, 1997), public relations (Kotler et al, 1998), marketing events (Popescu, 2003), trademarks, forces sales, direct marketing (Vegheș, 2003).

The media which tourism organization can use to disseminate its advertising messages are considering means able to send them to as many customers as possible under the form:

- outdoor advertising campaigns, the benefits of which "refers to high levels of geographical coverage of the market, the opportunities to present attractive, even picturesque objects promoted and reasonable costs of specific campaigns" (Russell and Lane, 2003). The main communication tool used in outdoor advertising are displays, using various types of posters differentiated by the presentation mode (normal posters, transparent posters, pre-printed posters), place of exposure or duration of exposure (Balaure, 2002). Another communication tool increasingly used in these

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campaigns is the banner that allows the exploiting of opportunities for public service infrastructure (transport and public lighting) and extension of the outdoor specialist firms;

- print advertising is one of the most common ways to implement advertising campaigns undertaken by tourism organizations. In essence, this requires the creation and dissemination of printed promotional materials to target audiences identified in order to achieve specific communication objectives of all three levels: cognitive (awareness), affective (attitude) and connotative (purchasing behavior and consumption).

The main types of printed promotional materials used in these campaigns are catalogs, brochures, leaflets, periodicals related publications, maps and travel guides, directories and calendars.

Tools and techniques of sales promotion are seen as ways to stimulate and boost sales of products and services offered to consumers for "enriching" the offer of organizations by adding additional value to the product, price and distribution, for a limited period of time, in line with commercial and marketing objectives pursued in order to obtain a temporary advantage over the competition (Popescu, Șerbănică and Balaure, 1994) and the "provider, and especially the front line staff is important because: they are associated in many cases with the purchased service, they are representing the company to the consumer and they are the ones who sell/promote the service (Cetină, Brandabur and Constantinescu, 2006).

Author Philippe Ingold, in his work *Promotion des ventes et action commercial*, synthesized the most important tools and sales promotion techniques that are available to tourism organizations in relation to their suitability for certain targets (Ingold, 1995). From all the instruments and techniques of sales promotion, some are by far noticed by the frequency of use, but also by their effectiveness, including:

- discounts and/or rates are used when the organization seeks boost in sales targets for different products or services or maintain their interest at a reasonable level in the context of the financial results generated;

- group sales - refers to simultaneous or successive sales of two or more products and/or services at a charge interest or a lower global price and/or individual price of each product or services;

- packages of products and/or travel services which offer consumers the opportunity to save time and money by purchasing a set of products and services in accordance with the wishes and expectations;

- promotional contests produce significant results especially in the potential consumers who find the opportunity to win a prize, an extra motivation to try or buy for the first time a tourism product or service;

- advertising at point of sale is considering all signaling techniques to attract, guide and direct the consumer interest to a particular product or service or a specific offer using video or audio means: posters, banners, displays and catalogs, brochures, leaflets and promotional materials in electronic format (DVD - or CD's presentation);

- merchandising refers to a set of sales promotion techniques used in the marketing of products (and less of services) to create a more visible and attractive way to support sales: by distributing offers, promotional materials or promotional objects suggesting a scenic beauty or tourist destinations, or services advertised content;

- promotional gifts refer to facilities that tourism organizations offer buyers of the products and/or services advertised; they are not always in the form of financial benefits that consumers receive through purchase, but are found in the form of products (with or without the consumption or use of products or services purchased) or supplementary services provided free to consumers (eg tourists who purchase a one-week skiing holiday can receive a free pair of ski goggles or gloves or even a complete set of equipment ski and so on).

Personal factors that affect the behavior of the consumer

Personal factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior are grouped in two socio-demographic and psychological characteristics. Socio-demographic characteristics require knowledge of factors such as population age structure, sex structure, family size, education level, socio-professional category, income, residence, relief areas, ethnicities, lifestyles etc. Identification of socio-economic and cultural patterns specific to different geographical areas can be achieved by analyzing several indicators namely occupational structure of the working population, household structure, housing and its characteristics, household equipment with electro-domestic appliances, household equipment with communication ways. Psychological or consumer psychographic profile covers various aspects of his personality and behavior, such as personality traits and concept (image) of self, attitudes toward products and brands classes, activities, interests, opinions, value systems, products and services consumed, patterns of use of mass media.

Scale sales promotion campaign, in terms of diversity and justification of tools and techniques used will depend on the specific added value of the products and/or tourism services promoted. Scale campaign is expected to be even greater as specific added value is higher. In this context, it is advisable for the tourist organization to follow, by choosing and using tools and techniques of sales promotion, the campaign profitability both within budget and promotional marketing budget respectively. There are no made-out solutions of sales promotion that can be applied successfully to achieve a specific objective, an effective communication with a particular market segment or promoting a particular product or tourist service. The organization shall have a varied arsenal of tools and techniques to promote sales of which it will choose the tool or combination of tools and techniques that will ensure the fullest extent of desired result. Their selection criteria refer to characteristics of each instrument and each technique separately, and the experience and results of their implementation by the organization or by competing organizations. At least as important is the creativity of the people that design and manage sales promotion campaign, including the use of unusual or unconventional tools to promote "classical" sales and developing new techniques.

Work method

Short history

Classic International Cruises (CIC) has owned and operated cruise ships in the UK and Europe since 1982. In 2012, over 200,000 guests enjoyed a holiday on a cruise with CIC, on one of the 5 ships traveling around the world. Company's vessels are: Athens, Arion, Princess Danae Princess Daphne (on which was held the second program in the Far East from Singapore to Hong Kong). Fleet CIC is registered in Madeira (Portugal) and sales under the Portuguese flag. CIC offers traditional cruises in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The ship symbol, Athena, was originally built as a transatlantic liner. In 1994 the ship was bought and restored, being transformed into a cruise ship. In 2005 it became the property of CIC. The ship was named after the Greek goddess Athena, goddess of wisdom and protector of seafarers. With a beautiful and traditional profile, Athena can carry 580 passengers, with 16,144 tons and a length of 160 m. Athena offers cozy accommodation, 276 cabins with bathroom, TV (satellite TV), refrigerator, hair dryer. Cabins have twin beds but can have suspended beds for large families. There are also suites, apartments with balcony and Jacuzzi as optional extra. Athena has five beautiful lounges and bars, two restaurants, nightclub, cinema, casino, shops, photo salon, library, internet cafe, fitness center, wellness center with sauna and massage, outdoor swimming pool, a beautiful area of reception, beauty salon, medical center, conference hall of 250 seats, workshops and a chapel.

Presentation of questionnaire and sample

To maintain the high level of service and quality provided to consumers, at the end of each cruise, the passengers complete a questionnaire consisting of open and closed questions through

which his/her opinion on all areas on board, about hospitality, entertainment and food is offered. This study was conducted between 07.03.2013 - 14.04.2013, the data were centralized, taken from the 400 passengers and are subsequently processed statistically.

The applied questionnaire ascertained the following aspects:

- ways of informing about the cruise and the extent to which tourists will travel on this cruise ship,
- the extent to which customers are satisfied with the services offered by the cruise,
- satisfaction of tourists according to their expectations.

For this reason, the study's hypotheses were:

- tourists mostly inform about cruises on the Internet,
- services offered to tourists on the cruise were rated with "very good",
- the cruise rose to the expectations of tourists.

Obtained results

For the *first hypothesis* "Tourists mostly inform about cruises on the Internet" we have included the following questions in the questionnaire.

Internet is the way in which future passengers of cruise ship Athena learned information at a rate of 47%, and from friends and commercials/advertising accounted for 41% (Fig. no. 1).

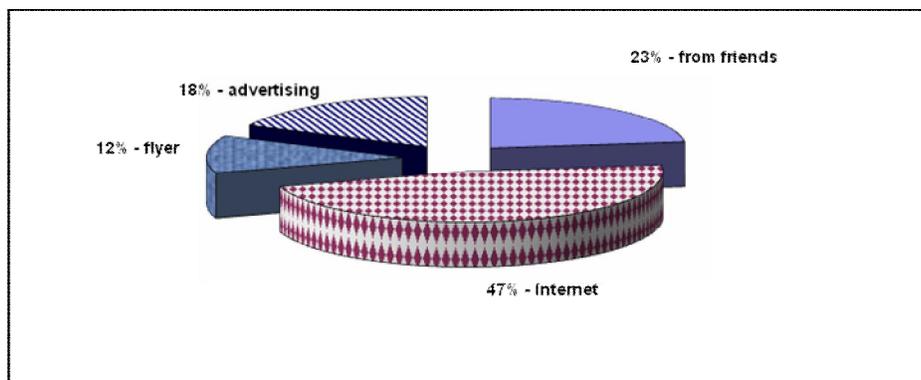


Figure no. 1. - How did you found out about this cruise?

Most of the passengers interviewed said they were for the first time in a cruise on a ship (over 60%) while only about 40% have also made previous trips (Fig. no. 2).

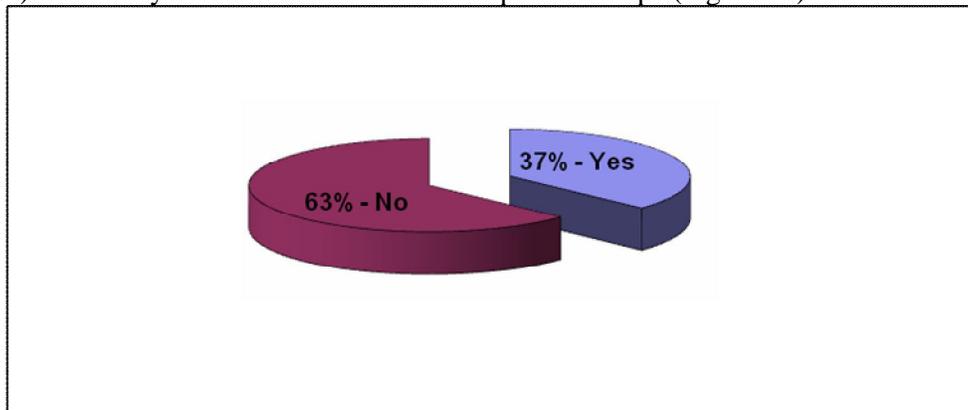


Figure no. 2. - Previous trips on other ships

Of passengers surveyed, 26% were on the first cruise, while 31% travel twice a year, 24% three times a year and 19% of cruise passengers were familiar to cruises because said they were in

more than three cruises. The variety of destinations and kindness offered by Classic International Cruises staff have determined most of the passengers investigated to confirm that in the future they will travel aboard these ships (Fig.no. 3).

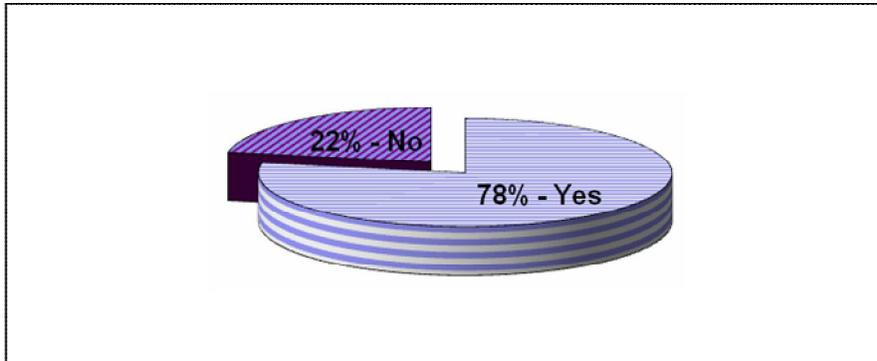


Figure no. 3. - Will you travel with Classic International Cruises in the future?

Proof of kindness and efficiency in solving all passengers wishes are reflected in the assessment "very good" and "good" in 85%, while the share of dissatisfied or without a definite opinion is quite small, a 9%.

Regarding *the second hypothesis* "The services to tourists on the cruise were rated with "very good"", the questions in the questionnaire were.

Continually improving the services offered, the daily activities on board, animators, schedule and cruise director effectiveness were analyzed. The daily schedule of the vessel is brought into the passenger cabin every night, events of the following day being highlighted. Assessments "very good" and "good" for the Cruise Director's efficiency have combined, accounted for 87%, for the animator's work and daily schedule the proportion was 91% and for the daily activities the share was 94%. Through the main entertainment possibilities, 84% respondents feel good and very good on music and dance programs, only 2% of them are dissatisfied with the music offered, and 14% are indifferent. Regarding shows, 96% of passengers were thrilled of the welcome show. In general, all programs offered on the ship were rated as very good and appropriate moments (Fig.no. 4).

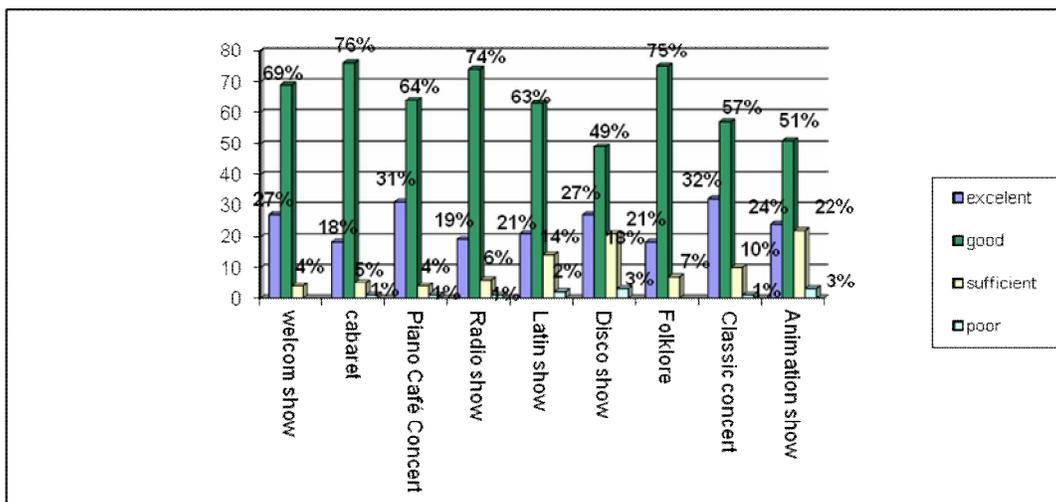


Figure no. 4 - Diversity of shows

The cruise tours were analyzed according to the itinerary, the effectiveness and the efficiency of staff on landing. Investigated 81% of passengers feel good and very good about chosen destinations as well as the quality of the explanations offered by guides - 94%. Only 6% of passengers were dissatisfied with the speed at which the excursions were held (Fig.no. 5).

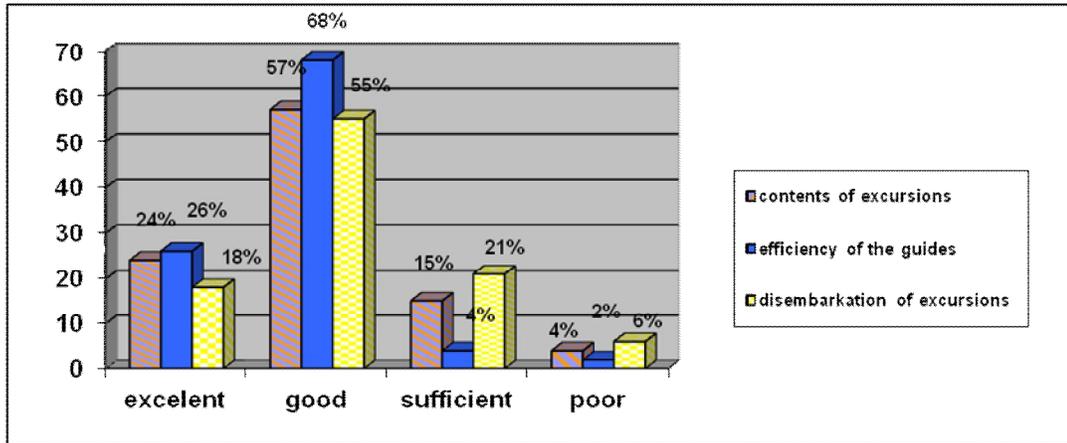


Figure no. 5. - Excursions held

To provide impeccable services, the politeness and efficiency were analyzed in the ship's staff: reception, shops, beauty salon, salon photo and casino. In most the opinion about services on board (up 71%) was "good", while "very good" did not exceed 23% (Figure no. 6).

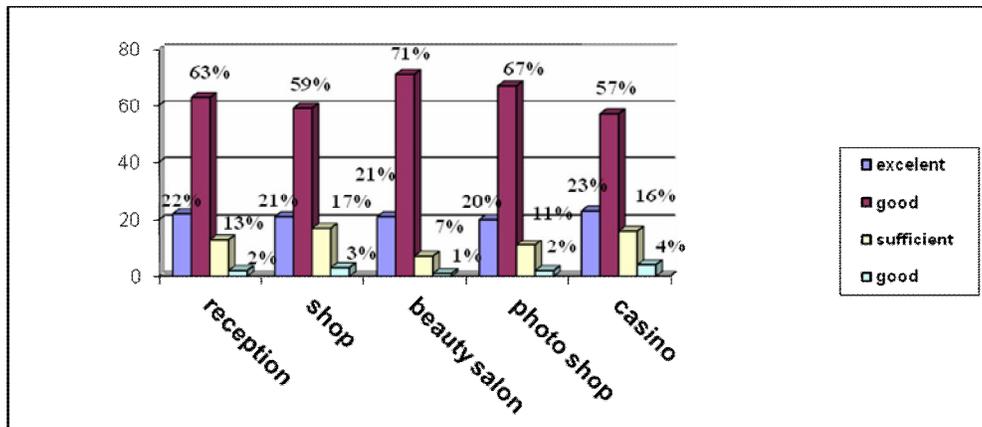


Figure no. 6. - Services offered on board of the ship (politeness and efficiency)

The cabins were analyzed on several criteria: comfort, cleanliness and services provided by the administrator of the Chamber; there were recorded opinions of "very good" and "good" with weights ranging from 72% - 84% (Figure no.7).

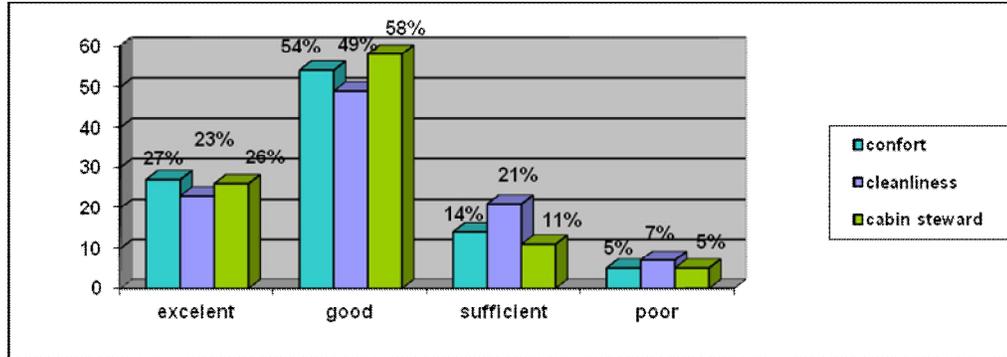


Figure no. 7. - The analyze of cabins on criteria

Regarding food, there were analyzed the following: food quality, quantity, variety of food, presentation and service and beverage service. Opinion "good" about the characteristics mentioned above was between 61% and 83%, while appreciation "very good" held 15% and 29% for service presentation, beverage/bartender (Figure no. 8).

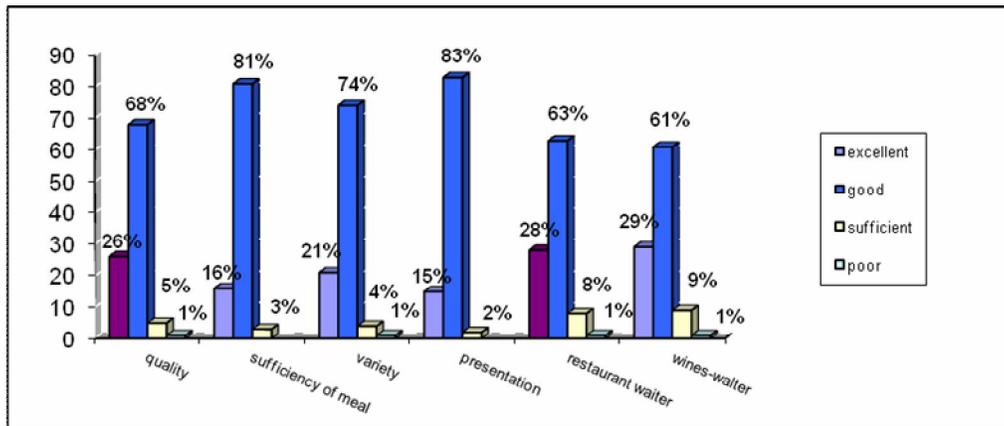


Figure no. 8. - Food in restaurant – characteristics

Same opinion of "good" was found on services offered by the bar, which were analyzed according to their quality and variety of beverages, 77% and 83% respectively (Fig.no. 9).

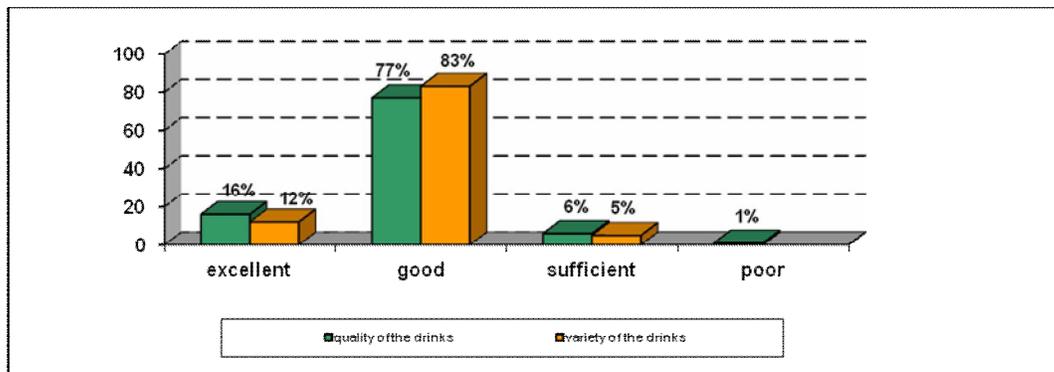


Figure no. 9. - Services offered by the bar

The *third hypothesis* "The cruise rose to the expectations of tourists" includes the following.

General opinions about cruise trend remained on the appreciation "good" 59% -63% of the atmosphere on board and courtesy of employees and opinion "very good" maintained a share of 34% (Fig.no. 10).

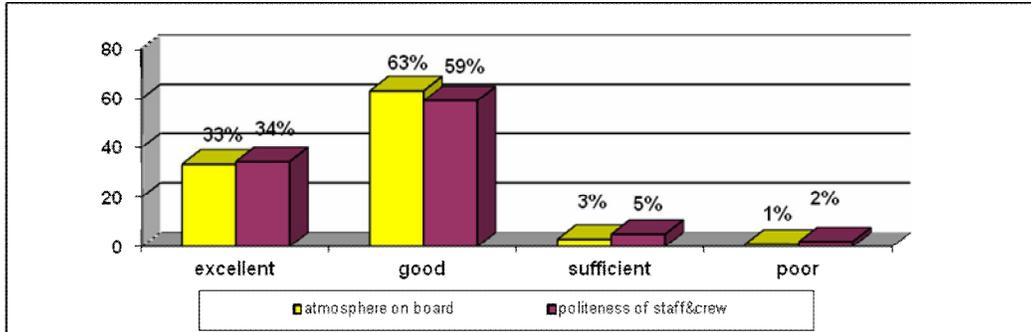


Figure no. 10 General opinions about cruise

The extent of passenger expectations were according, taking into account the proportion of 86% for the response "Yes", which is correlated with general opinions about the cruise (Fig.no. 11).

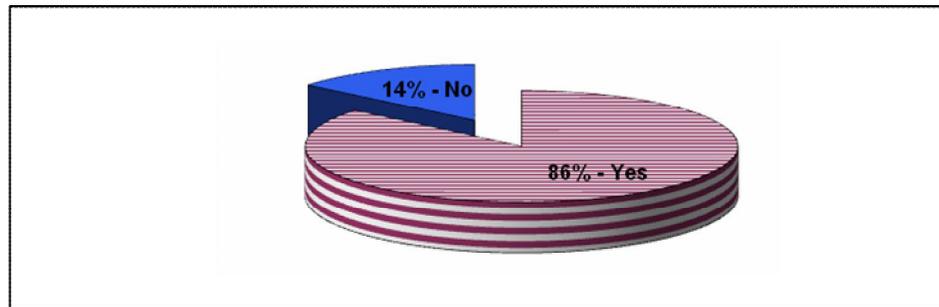


Figure no. 11. - The extent of passenger expectations

Facilities offers, the daily ship schedule (such as outdoor activities, crafts sessions or dance lessons), staff courtesy and efficiency, quality of service and entertainment programs, confirm the ship symbol name - Athena, which make tourists come back.

Conclusions

The set of communication tools and techniques used by the tourism organization in activities to promote and sell products, services and brands, their application to suitable objectives, targets, communication media and messages used by resorting to techniques specific to communication tools: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, events marketing, trademarks, sales forces, direct marketing, etc.. The consumer behavior in tourism has specific characteristics, many tourism organizations applying a series of questionnaires in order to provide the best possible quality of hospitality, entertainment and food provided.

The first and third hypothesis was confirmed from the results of processing the questionnaires, whereas the second hypothesis was partially confirmed because the marks obtained in respect with the services provided by the cruise have been predominantly "good" versus "very good".

The results obtained from the investigation of the 400 passengers on the ship Athena have revealed how the passengers know about the cruise, the Internet being the "path of information" most frequently used. Also, passengers were asked about previous trips to other vessels, of which over 60% were for the first time in a trip on a ship. Courtesy and efficiency in solving all passengers' wishes were assessed with grades "very good" and "good" by analyzing daily

activities offered on the ship and animators, cruise director, daily schedule and efficiency. Appreciable opinions were made about music and dance programs, entertainment programs; the majority opinion is favorable for all programs offered on the ship.

Excursions organization was another opinion expressed that the passengers were happy about, including the destinations chosen and the quality of explanations given by guides. Improvements can be made for "staff courtesy and efficiency" in the key points of the ship (reception, shops, beauty salon, salon photo and casino) because the largest share of passengers had a "good" opinion and less than 23% have granted "very good". For this, there should be made thorough analysis of politeness and efficiency of services personnel, especially the diversity of services offered; the growing number of consumers has diversified situations so different from one period to another, from one group of passengers to another. The opinion "good" was found in the analysis of booths, food in restaurant features or services offered by the bar, there for the is to be made some improvements to the service category.

General opinions about the cruise remained in the appreciation "good", the rate of aprox. 63%, but also the opinion "very good" maintained a share of 34%, which confirms the degree of expectation of passengers who responded affirmatively was satisfied with regard to their expectations by making that cruise. All the elements combined together and opinions of concern for consumers represent a real interest in tourism businesses who want a steady and constructive improvement of services offered to potential consumers.

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