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Hotel Customer Dis/Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth Intentions:
A Field Survey

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine hotel customers' satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and word-of-mouth intentions in the natural hotel environment. For that purpose, a survey type of study was conducted. The data were gathered from hotel customers at a spa-type hotel in Southwestern Finland. Altogether 321 responses were received.

As a result, it could be inferred that the very and extremely satisfied hotel customers would be very willing to engage in word-of-mouth communication and deliver positive information about the hotel. By using regression analysis, it was predicted, for example that, the extremely satisfied customers would tell, on average, 15 other persons about their hotel experience.

When studying, how customer dis/satisfaction affected customer word-of-mouth intentions, it seemed that satisfactions and dissatisfactions with individual hotel quality components did not seem to directly affect word-of-mouth intentions. However, the customer's overall dis/satisfaction feeling seemed to have a mediating, and a necessary, role in transforming satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components into word-of-mouth intentions.

WOM
Word of mouth
Customer satisfaction
Customer dissatisfaction
Hotel customer

PREFACE

I want to thank the Foundation for Economic Education (Liikesivistysrahasto) for giving financial support for this study. I am also grateful to Professor Helena Mäkinen for her help in applying for the scholarship and Turku School of Economics and Business Administration for providing the facilities for the writing of this article, and Professor Timo Toivonen for commenting the manuscript. I also want to thank the hotel, which provided the opportunity to gather the data for this study.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine hotel customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction and word-of-mouth intentions in a natural hotel environment, and compare the results with an earlier experiment (Kuokkanen, 1998). Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham's model (1995), also known as the Return on Quality model, can be used as a larger framework for both of these studies. In this model, Rust et al. present the effect of service quality and customer satisfaction on word of mouth and company future revenues and market share (see Figure1).

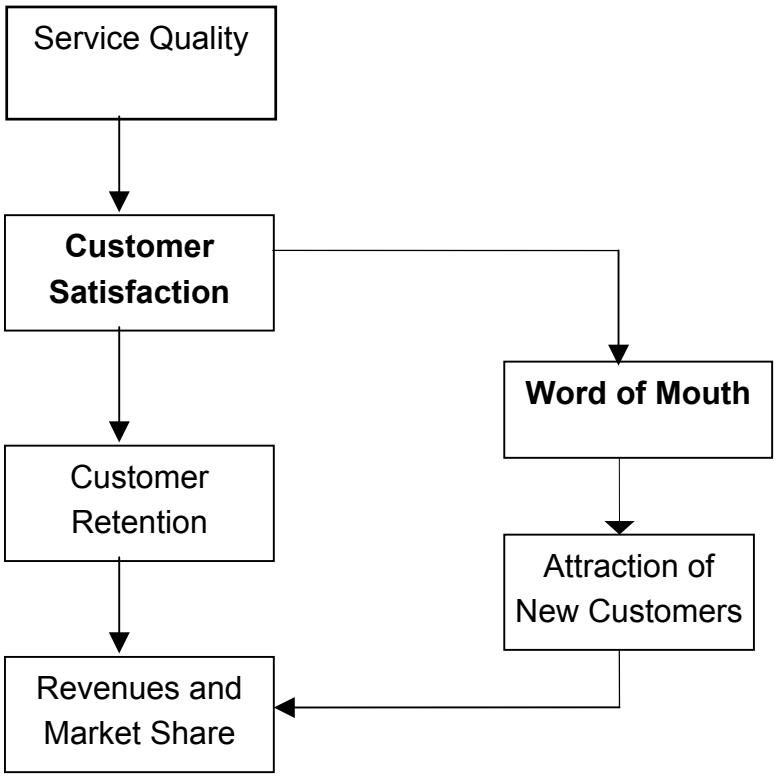

Figure 1: The Framework Presenting the Effect of Service Quality on Company Revenues and Market Share. Source: Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham 1995, 60. For simplicity, only the central part of the model is presented here which is most relevant for this study. For example, possible cost reductions due to quality improvement are excluded from this presentation.

In the framework, improved service quality leads to increased customer satisfaction. Increased customer satisfaction, in turn leads to higher levels of positive word of mouth and also customer retention (loyalty). The company's revenues and market share go up, driven by new customers attracted by positive word of mouth and higher customer retention levels.

In this paper, the main focus is on the model's link between customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth, specifically, the intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, in addition to customer satisfaction, customer dissatisfaction situations are included. The relationship will be studied in the hotel environment (see Figure 2).

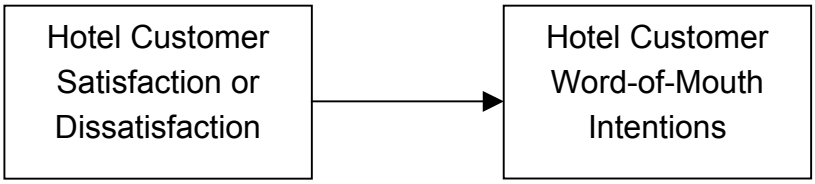

Figure 2: A Link between Hotel Customer Dis/Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth Intentions

Marketing practitioners have argued that the customers, who are dissatisfied, would be more active in postpurchase word-of-mouth communication than those customers who were satisfied (see, for example, Wilson, 1994, 27). Also marketing textbooks have stated similar assumptions (Kotler, 1991, 18). However, scientific findings on this subject are not so consistent.

In the Holmes and Lett study (1977), study the result was that consumers who were *satisfied* with the product were far more likely to initiate word of mouth and reached considerably more people than those who did not like the product. They used a field experiment methodology in studying a new instant coffee sample.

Also in Bone's study (1992), the results was that the customers who were *satisfied* with the product, were more active in discussing it. In Bone's study the product was restaurant food.

However, when Duffy (1994) examined data collected in a national study from new car buyers, her finding was that consumers were more prone to deliver word-of-mouth, when *dissatisfied* than to deliver word-of-mouth when satisfied.

Engel et al. (1969) have studied users of a new automotive diagnostic center by a survey method. They received a result that indicated that the dissatisfied and the satisfied customers were *equally* active in word-of-mouth.

Consistent with Engel et al.'s result, there has also been also Anderson's (1994) findings from large-scale data gathered for the Swedish Customer Satisfaction Barometer. His results indicated that in general, dissatisfied and satisfied consumers reported to have engaged in approximately *equal* amounts of word- of mouth. In another study Anderson (1995) used data both from the Swedish Customer Satisfaction Barometer and from the American Customer Satisfaction Index[1]. In general, similar results were received.

Because of these controversial findings concerning the amount of word-of-mouth communication between satisfied and dissatisfied consumers, a study was conducted (Kuokkanen, 1998). A true experimental research design was employed, in order to give stronger basis for hypothesis testing than was possible by the earlier survey designs.

The experiment was conducted with two samples, students and "professionals". The student sample consisted of 207 undergraduate students from a business school in the Southwestern Finland. (Turku School of Economics and Business Administration). In order to be able to test the generalizability of the results derived from the student sample, the professional sample was used. These subjects were more experienced as hotel customers than the subjects in the student sample were. The professional sample consisted of 250 members of an association for business school graduates in Southern Finland (Lahden Seudun Ekonomit ry).

In the manipulations of the experiment, written scenarios about different hotel visits were used to create dissatisfaction and satisfaction. As a result of the experiment, in neither of the samples the dissatisfied and satisfied customers did seem to differ in their intention to engage in postpurchase word-of mouth communication. The result backed the findings of Engel et al., 1969 and Anderson, 1994 and 1995.

Anyway, it has to be noted that the result of the experiment does not mean that there would not be a difference in postpurchase word-of-mouth intentions between satisfied and dissatisfied consumers. It may be that the difference was

[1] See: American Customer Satisfaction Index, Methodology Report (1994) for the American Customer Satisfaction Index and Claes Fornell's article (1992) for the Swedish Customer Satisfaction Barometer.

too small to be detected and it could be traced with larger sample sizes or by different measures.

The other concern was the external validity of the experiment. The experimental methodology used in the study may have a limiting effect on the generalizability of the results to natural situations. Although the method was suited to control the dissatisfying and satisfying hotel experiences, the hypothetical nature of the hotel visits may limit its ecological validity (see Yale & Gilly, 1995, 235).

Another question is that, when we would like to predict word-of-mouth intentions and behavior, should we use overall customer satisfaction as a predictor, or is it so that customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with individual hotel quality components would be better predictors of word-of-mouth intentions. In that case, measuring and using customer overall satisfaction would be unnecessary in predicting postpurchase word of mouth intentions and behavior.

In Rust et al's model, the effect of service quality perceptions on word of mouth is mediated by overall customer satisfaction i.e. service quality components or attributes do *not* have a direct effect on word of mouth in their model. That view is backed by Oliver and Linda's (1981, 91) study, where the global measures of dis/satisfaction yielded better results than the attribute-based measures in predicting postpurchase behaviors. See also Day (1982, 113).

However, Krishnan and Grønhaug (1979, 89) suggest that a multi-attribute type of measurement of customer dis/satisfaction would be more suitable for studying complex products or services (see also, for example, Hempel & Rosenberg, 1975, 262 and Swan & Combs, 1976, 33).

In order to answer the above questions concerning: 1. The external validity of the results received in the laboratory setting, and 2. The possible direct effect of the customer satisfaction with individual hotel quality components on the customer word of mouth intentions, the following formal research questions were stated for this study.

2 SURVEY

2.1 Statement of the Problem

The first research question (Q1) is: Is it so that, the satisfied and dissatisfied hotel customers are equally active in their intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication? The first research question is derived from the results of the laboratory experiment.

The second research question (Q2) is: Is it so that, the hotel customer's overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction mediates the customer's satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components into word-of-mouth intentions, as indicated in the Rust et al's model? (See Figure 3)

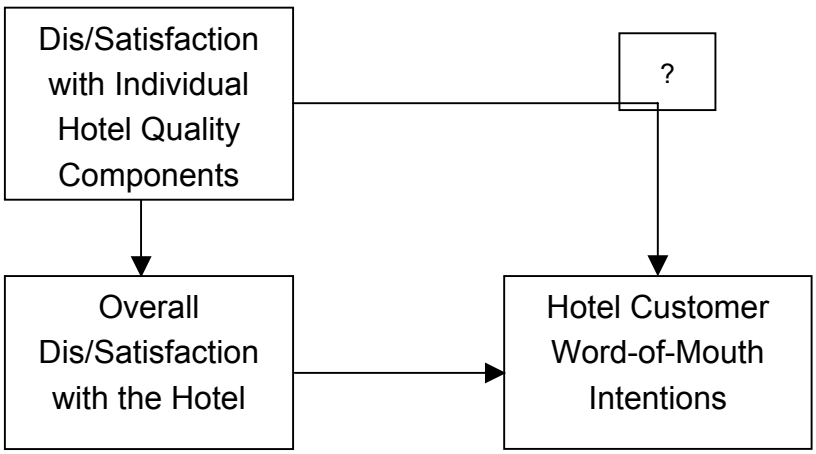

Figure 3: The Second Research Question

Next, we define the key concepts. Overall hotel customer dis/satisfaction is defined here as a hotel customer's overall affective response to the perceived disconfirmation of expectations concerning the whole hotel experience (see, for example, Oliver & Swan, 1989, 373). The distinction between disconfirmation of expectations and dis/satisfaction is that disconfirmation of expectations is a cognition, while dissatisfaction and satisfaction are affective responses to cognition (Oliver, 1989, 1; Blodgett & Granbois, 1992, 94).

Accordingly, customer dis/satisfaction with an individual component of the hotel visit is defined *as a hotel customer's affective response to the perceived disconfirmation of expectations concerning a specific quality component during the hotel visit*

Postpurchase word-of-mouth communication is defined here as the *hotel customer's informal communications directed at other consumers about the hotel visit* (see Westbrook 1987, 261). And postpurchase word-of-mouth intentions respectively, as *hotel customer's intention to engage in informal communications directed at other consumers about the hotel visit*.

2.2 Data gathering

Data was gathered from hotel customers at a spa-type hotel in Southwestern Finland. The hotel personnel at the check-out were advised to give the questionnaires to all Finnish speaking hotel customers, when they were checking-out.

Altogether 1.000 questionnaires were delivered in May, June, and July 2002. The questionnaires were given in the hotel envelopes, containing also an information letter, signed by the hotel manager. The information letter encouraged customers to participate in the study and the confidentiality of all respondents was assured. A postage-paid return envelope was accompanied that was returned to the research agency.

In measuring customer satisfaction**,** a five-point scale was used. Each point was labeled both by a number and a verbal explanation: *5 = Extremely satisfied, 4 = Very satisfied, 3 = Fairly satisfied, 2 = Less satisfied*, a*nd 1 = Dissatisfied*. The scale is unbalanced, so that there are more options on the positive end of the scale. The scale is used in commercial customer satisfaction research to avoid skewness of the evaluations to the positive end, which is a common phenomenon in customer satisfaction studies (GfK, Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung GmbH, Loyalty Plus Research Manual, 1999).

The above scale was used to evaluate overall satisfaction and satisfactions with the individual hotel quality components: making the reservation, checking-in, hotel room, restaurant service, restaurant food, spa, conference facilities, and checking-out. For each component, it was advised to give an evaluation, only if the respondent had used the component.

As a measure of postpurchase word-of-mouth intentions, the respondents were asked to evaluate how many people ("for example, relatives, acquaintances, colleagues, etc.") they would probably tell about the hotel visit.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The Data

Altogether 321 responses were received (response rate 32.1 %). The means and standard deviations for customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth intentions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Customer Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth Intention

Hotel Quality Components	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Making the reservation	4.50	0.69	245
Checking-in	4.19	0.91	315
Hotel room	3.94	0.84	316
Restaurant service	3.64	0.91	304
Restaurant food	3.64	1.01	303
Spa	4.01	0.83	289
Conference facilities	3.94	0.99	95
Checking-out	4.35	0.70	309
Overall satisfaction	4.02	0.71	318
Amount of intended WOM	14.01	17.25	303

As seen from Table 1, respondents' satisfaction level was lowest in the restaurant related quality components: restaurant service and restaurant food, and highest in the hotel's check-in and check-out operations. Overall satisfaction score was 4.02.

The average amount for the intended word-of-mouth communications was 14.01 persons, ranging from 0 to 153 persons. The distribution of the amount variable was very skewed towards the low end (skewness 4.859) and had several outliers at the high end. To avoid difficulties in the statistical tests, the

variable was recoded by SPSS automatic procedure "Categorize variables"[2] into five categories (Table 2).

Table 2: Recoding the Amount of Word-of-Mouth Variable

Old Values	***New Values***	***n***
0-5 persons	1	63
6-9 persons	2	33
10 persons	3	115
11-19 persons	4	23
20-153 persons	5	66
Total		303

Now, we are ready to examine the first research question.

3.2 Overall Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth Intentions

The first research question Q1 was: Is it so that, the satisfied and dissatisfied hotel customers are equally active in their intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication about the hotel? Statistically, we propose that the satisfied and dissatisfied hotel customers do *not* significantly differ in their intention to engage in word-of-mouth communication. To test it, the means of word-of-mouth intentions were calculated at the different levels of customer overall satisfaction with the hotel. To check the significance of the possible differences, analysis of variance was performed.

Table 3. presents the means of word-of-mouth intention (the recoded variable) by different levels of overall customer satisfaction, and the result of the analysis of variance.

[2] Data is categorized based on percentile groups, with each group containing approximately the same number of cases, if possible (SPSS Base, 9.0, User's Guide, 1999, SPSS Inc.)

Table 3: Analysis of Variance of Postpurchase Word-of-Mouth Intentions (WOMI) by the Hotel Customer Overall Satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel	***WOMI Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied = 1	-	-	0
Less Satisfied = 2	2.20	1.10	5
Fairly Satisfied = 3	2.61	1.37	56
Very Satisfied = 4	2.95	1.33	165
Extremely Satisfied = 5	3.43	1.39	74
F	4.76**		

**$p < .01$

As seen from Table 3, the level of word-of-mouth intentions seems to grow, when satisfaction grows, being highest with extremely satisfied customers (3.43), and lowest with the less satisfied customers (2.20). There were no dissatisfied respondents. The results of the ANOVA indicated that the differences between the means are significant ($p < .01$).

The means of word-of-mouth intention (WOMI) at different levels of overall satisfaction ranging from less satisfied (= 2) to extremely satisfied (= 5) is presented also in Figure 4.

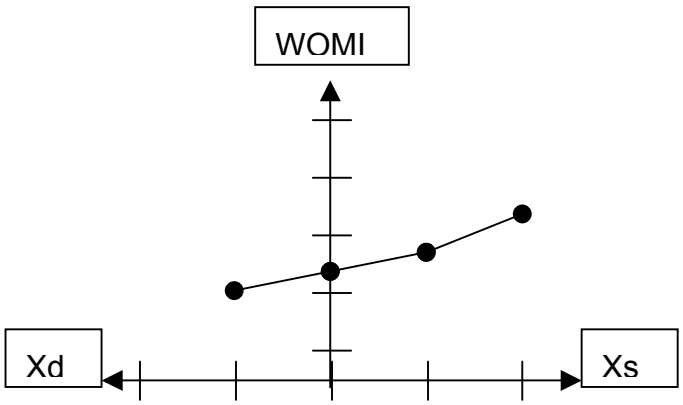

Figure 4: The Means of Word-of-Mouth Intention at Different Levels of Overall Hotel Customer Satisfaction. Xd Denotes Dissatisfaction, Xs Denotes Satisfaction.

It seems that in this survey study, the satisfied hotel customers had higher intentions to word-of-mouth communication than the less satisfied hotel customers.

This result dos not back the result in the earlier laboratory experiment, where the result was that the dissatisfied customers would have equal intention to word-of-mouth communication as the satisfied customers.

One possible reason for this result might be that in this survey study, there were no respondents who would be totally dissatisfied with the hotel, and only five less satisfied customers. However, in the laboratory experiment, it was possible to create also an extremely dissatisfied condition for the subjects.

Then we still have the question: is it possible that, if in this survey there would have been really dissatisfied customers, they would have been more active in their word-of-mouth intentions. That question we cannot answer based on the survey results. See Figure 5.

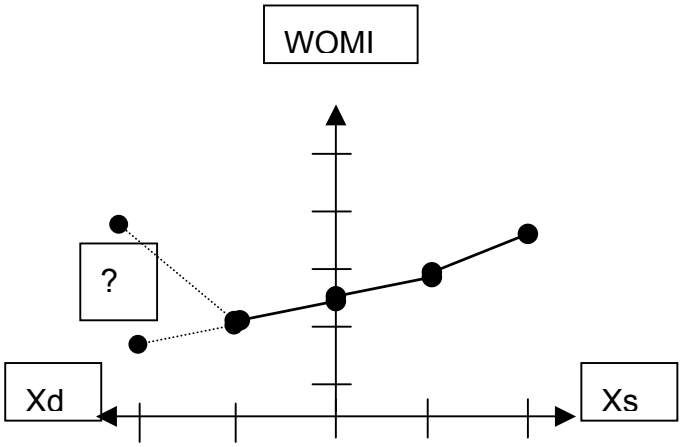

Figure 5: The Means of Word-of-Mouth Intention at Different Levels of Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel. Xd Denotes Dissatisfaction and Xs Denotes Satisfaction.

Next, we examine the second research question concerning the role of individual hotel quality components and their possible role in directly eliciting word-of-mouth intentions.

3.3 Satisfaction with Individual Quality Components and Word-of-Mouth Intentions

The second research question Q2 was: Is it so that, the hotel customer's overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction mediates the customer's satisfactions and

dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components into word-of-mouth intentions, as presented in the Rust et al's ROQ model?

If that would be true, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components should *not* have any significant direct effect on the intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication. To test it, the means of word-of-mouth intentions were calculated at the different levels of customer satisfaction with the individual hotel quality components: making the reservation, checking-in, hotel room, restaurant service, restaurant food, spa, conference facilities, and checking-out.

As the result of the test, there seemed not to be any significant differences in the intention to word-of-mouth communication between the different levels of satisfaction with the individual quality components. Therefore, only the *F* and *p* values for differences between the means are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of Variance of Word-of-Mouth Intentions by the Customer Satisfaction with Individual Hotel Quality Components.

Hotel Quality Components	***F value***	***p value***	***n***
Making the reservation	0.70	0.59 (n.s.)	230
Checking-in	0.74	0.57 (n.s.)	298
Hotel room	0.82	0.51 (n.s.)	298
Restaurant service	0.54	0.71 (n.s.)	286
Restaurant food	0.29	0.88 (n.s.)	285
Spa	1.70	0.15 (n.s.)	275
Conference facilities	0.22	0.93 (n.s.)	89
Checking-out	0.72	0.58 (n.s.)	291

n.s. = not significant

As seen in Table 3, *F* values were very low, and *p* values were not significant. Concerning the second research question, it seems that satisfaction with the individual hotel quality components did *not* have any significant direct effect on the hotel customer's intentions of word-of-mouth communication.

But, we still have to check the relationship between the individual hotel quality components and overall satisfaction. They should be significantly related, if the overall satisfaction should have the expected mediating role. See Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance of Hotel Customer Overall Satisfaction by the Individual Hotel Quality Components

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Making the Reservat.	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	3.00	0	1
Less Satisfied	4.00	0.60	3
Fairly Satisfied	3.77	0.62	13
Very Satisfied	3.95	0.65	84
Extremely Satisfied	4.26	0.65	144
F	5.14**		

**$p < .01$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Checking-in	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	3.43	0.53	7
Less Satisfied	3.57	0.53	7
Fairly Satisfied	3.76	0.65	41
Very Satisfied	3.85	0.65	123
Extremely Satisfied	4.31	0.64	136
F	12.38***		

***$p < .001$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Hotel Room	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	3.33	0.58	3
Less Satisfied	3.92	0.67	12
Fairly Satisfied	3.61	0.63	66
Very Satisfied	4.00	0.65	154
Extremely Satisfied	4.43	0.69	80
F	15.18***		

***$p < .001$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Restaurant Service	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	3.43	0.98	7
Less Satisfied	3.58	0.78	24
Fairly Satisfied	3.82	0.66	84
Very Satisfied	4.06	0.64	142
Extremely Satisfied	4.59	0.62	46
F	14.39***		

***$p < .001$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Restaurant Food	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	3.22	0.97	9
Less Satisfied	3.60	0.77	30
Fairly Satisfied	3.87	0.63	86
Very Satisfied	4.10	0.65	114
Extremely Satisfied	4.40	0.64	63
F	12.72***		

***$p < .001$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Spa	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	2.67	0.58	3
Less Satisfied	3.18	0.60	11
Fairly Satisfied	3.60	0.71	47
Very Satisfied	4.01	0.57	146
Extremely Satisfied	4.50	0.57	82
F	24.47***		

***$p < .001$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Conference Facilities	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	2.50	0.71	2
Less Satisfied	2.71	0.49	7
Fairly Satisfied	3.56	0.63	16
Very Satisfied	3.85	0.55	40
Extremely Satisfied	4.41	0.87	29
F	12.90***		

***$p < .001$

	Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel		
Checking-out	***Mean***	***Std.dev.***	***n***
Dissatisfied	4.00	-	1
Less Satisfied	3.00	0	2
Fairly Satisfied	3.62	0.62	29
Very Satisfied	3.85	0.65	132
Extremely Satisfied	4.28	0.69	144
F	11.76***		

***$p < .001$

As a whole, the means of overall satisfaction with the hotel seem to be consistently higher, when satisfaction with individual quality components increases. The *F* and *p* values of the analyses of variance indicate that the means are also significantly different[3].

As the answer to the second research question, it seems that satisfaction perceptions of individual hotel quality components did *not* seem to have a significant direct effect on the customer's intentions of word-of-mouth communication. And, it seems that satisfaction perceptions of the individual hotel quality components had a significant effect on the overall satisfaction evaluation of the hotel.

On the whole, this survey backs Rust et al's formulation, so that overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction feeling has a mediating and necessary role in transforming satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components into word-of-mouth intentions.

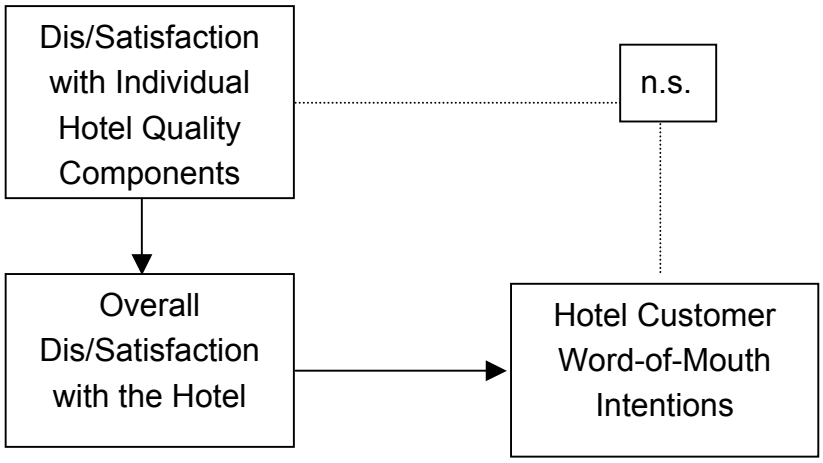

Figure 6: The Mediating Role of Overall Satisfaction

So, it seems that the overall satisfaction concept and its measurement are necessary in predicting postpurchase word-of-mouth intentions and behavior. Postpurchase word-of-mouth intentions or behaviors could not be predicted from the attribute-based satisfaction and dissatisfaction evaluations. The effect seems to be mediated by the customer's overall feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction to be transformed into intentions and behaviors.

[3] Correlations between the Individual Hotel Quality Components is presented in the Appendix

The *summary of the results* is presented in Rust et al.'s framework. The concepts and the relationships studied in this study are presented in bold (Figure 7).

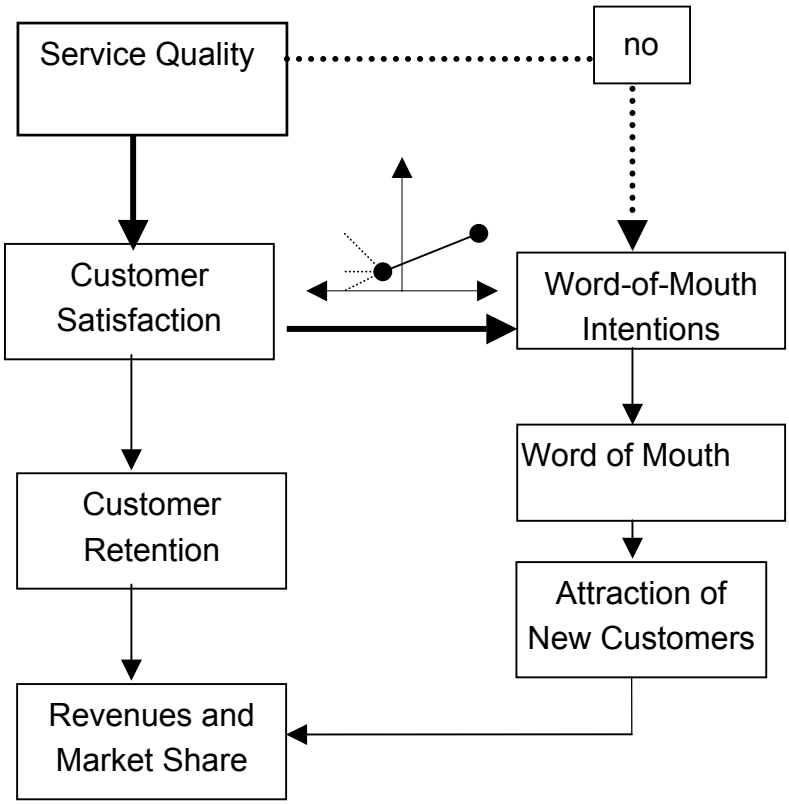

Figure 7: The Results in the Rust et al.'s Framework (1995)

4 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Predicting Word of Mouth

When studying the first research question: Is it so that, the satisfied and dissatisfied hotel customers are equally active in their intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication about the hotel, as indicated in the laboratory experiment, we were not able to answer the question by this survey. The reason was that by this method, we did not capture customers, who would have been totally dissatisfied with the hotel. That is a happy situation for the hotel, but not desirable when studying a research question concerning dissatisfied customers.

However, as in the laboratory experiment, in this study we could see that the very and extremely satisfied hotel customers are very willing to engage in word-of-mouth communication and deliver positive information about the hotel to other people. That gives an opportunity for the hotel management to employ this phenomenon in order to boost positive word-of-mouth about the hotel in attracting new customers to the hotel, as Rust et al. model presents.

To calculate this potential for hotel mangers, a regression analysis was performed. The purpose was to try to predict the amount of persons reached by the hotel customers' word-of-mouth communication.

The relationship seemed to be linear so that, the more satisfied the customers were, the more willing they seemed to be to engage in word-of-mouth communication. Accordingly, linear regression model could be structured to predict the amount of word-of-mouth communication.

$$WOMI_i = b_o + b_1 OverallCS_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where the subscript i refers to customer i, b_o is the constant term, b_1 is the linear coefficient of the overall customer satisfaction "OverallCS", and ε is a random error term reflecting other factors affecting word-of-mouth intentions.

For the regression analysis, two "outliers" from the high end were deleted from the amount variable. The result of the regression analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Word-of-Mouth Intentions on Hotel Customer Overall Satisfaction

	Coefficient	***t value***	***p***
b_o	1.138	0.259	0.796
b_1	2.987	2.786	0.006

As seen from Table 5, the constant term b_o was insignificant (p = .796). The linear coefficient b_1 was significant (p = .006). Placing the significant coefficient b_1 (2.987) into the regression equation, the following formula for predicting word-of-mouth intentions could be obtained:

$$WOMI_i = 2.987 * OverallCS_i$$

When the alternative scores (1-5) of the overall customer satisfaction (OverallCS) are placed into the equation, the following predictions will be obtained for the amount of persons.

Table 6: Predicting Word-of-Mouth Intentions with Different Levels of Hotel Customer Overall Satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction with the Hotel	***Predicted Amount of Persons***	***95 % Confidence Intervals***
1 = Dissatisfied	?	?
2 = Less Satisfied	5.974 ≈ 6 persons	1.754 – 10.196
3 = Fairly Satisfied	8.961 ≈ 9 persons	2.631 – 15.294
4 = Very Satisfied	11.948 ≈ 12 persons	3.508 – 20.392
5 = Extremely Satisfied	14.935 ≈ 15 persons	4.385 – 25.490

In these projections, the predicted amounts of people were:

- In the “Less satisfied” situation, 6 persons (5.974) ranging from 2 to 10 (1.754 – 10.196) and
- In the “Fairly satisfied” situation, 9 (8.961) ranging from 3 to 15 (2.631 – 15.294), and
- In the “Very satisfied” situation, 12 (11.948) ranging from 4 to 20 (3.508 – 20.392), and
- In the “Extremely satisfaction” condition, 15 (14.935) from 4 to 25 (4.385 – 25.490).

This model slightly underestimates the amount of intended word-of-mouth communication, because two extreme values were deleted from the word-of-mouth variable. For the dissatisfied customers our model is unable to predict the amount of word-of-mouth contact.

However, for the hotel manager the analysis would state that, if the customer is extremely satisfied with the hotel, he or she would tell about 15 other persons. If there were, for example, ten similar, extremely satisfied customers each day leaving the hotel and delivering positive word-of-mouth about the hotel, that would generate 150 (10 * 15) word-of-mouth contacts each day, and respectively 1.050 each week, 4.500 each month, and totally 54.750 positive contacts each year!

Lastly, some limitations of this conducted study have to be discussed in order to be able to avoid problems in future studies.

4.2 Limitations

The major limitation in this study was that there were not totally dissatisfied customers. It was not possible to compare the intentions of dissatisfied customers to the satisfied counter partners. It seems that by this kind of survey methodology, it is difficult to find reasonable amounts of customers, who would be totally dissatisfied with the target company.

This problem we don't have in laboratory settings, but there we face the problem of external validity of the received results. Another way to overcome this problem, may be to use the critical incidents technique (CIT), developed by Herzberg (1967) for job satisfaction and studies. See, for example, Swan & Combs (1976) or Johnston (1995) using the critical incidents technique in customer satisfaction research. In CIT, the respondents are asked to recall exceptionally good and exceptionally bad consumption experiences. By this methodology, an adequate amount of dissatisfying consumption situations may be traced. Then, also post consumption intentions and behaviors after dissatisfying consumption experiences may be followed.

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4.3 Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine hotel customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction and word-of-mouth intentions in the natural hotel environment, and compare the results with the earlier experiment. The first research question was: Is it so that, the satisfied and dissatisfied hotel customers are equally active in their intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication, as derived from the results of the experiment.

The second research question was: Is it so that, hotel customers' overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction mediates the satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components into word-of-mouth intentions, as indicated in the Rust et al's ROQ model.

To answer these questions, a survey study was conducted. The data were gathered from hotel customers at a spa-type hotel in Southwestern Finland. Altogether 321 responses were received.

As a result, we were not able to answer the first research question. The reason was that by the survey method, we did not capture customers, who would have been totally dissatisfied with the hotel. Anyway, we could see that the very and extremely satisfied hotel customers seemed to be very willing to engage in word-of-mouth communication and deliver positive information to other people about the hotel. By using regression analysis, it could be predicted that, for example, each extremely satisfied customer would tell on average 15 other persons about the hotel. This knowledge gives an opportunity for hotel managers to boost positive word-of-mouth about the hotel in attracting new customers to the hotel, as the Rust et al. model presents.

Concerning the second research question, it seemed that satisfaction perceptions of individual hotel quality components did not seem to have a direct effect on the customers' intentions of word-of-mouth communication. So, this survey backed Rust et al's formulation, so that overall satisfaction feeling has a mediating, and a necessary role in transforming satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the individual hotel quality components into word-of-mouth intentions.

This study may be useful for academics and also for practitioners in filling in some of the lack of knowledge concerning the link between customer dis/satisfaction and postpurchase word-of-mouth intentions. Further research conducted, for example, by the critical incidents technique, would be necessary. By that methodology, an adequate amount of dissatisfying consumption situations may also be traced. Then also post-consumption behaviors after dissatisfying consumption experiences may be followed.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Spearman Correlations of the Individual Hotel Quality Components

	Making res.	***Check -in***	***Hotel room***	***Rest. serv.***	***Rest. food***	***Spa***	***Conf. facil.***
Check-in	.458**						
Hotel room	.140*	.228**					
Rest. serv.	.160	.221**	.420**				
Rest. food	.086	.170**	.255**	.559**			
Spa	.168*	.247**	.221**	.241**	.278**		
Conf. facil.	.270	.305**	.302**	.387**	.396**	.591**	
Check-out	.338**	.567**	.313**	.267**	.215**	.260**	453**

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$·

Note: In the cells concerning Conference facilities, *n* was lower, ranging from 44 to 96, in other cells ranging from 231 to 316.