

Original article

## Conceptual model of the perceived quality of city hotels

### Modelo conceptual de la calidad percibida de hoteles de ciudad

### Modelo conceitual da qualidade percebida dos hotéis urbanos

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**Received:** 1/02/2022

**Accepted:** 11/04/2022

## ABSTRACT

Perceived quality is a topic widely addressed in the literature; however, no conceptual model has been established to explain the quality of city hotels, even though they are an essential part of the urban tourism offer, contributing to their positioning as a tourist destination. Identity and urban image become determinants in the value perceived by the client, and therefore influence hotel quality. Based on this, the objective of the research was to propose a conceptual model of perceived quality of city hotels. From this, it was possible to define the relationships between the variables involved in the process. An exploratory and descriptive research was developed, for which a qualitative and quantitative methodology was used. The main results were: the bibliographic review and analysis of the main service quality models, the analysis of the variables most addressed in the literature, the proposal of a model of choice of urban hotels and the proposal of a model of perceived quality of city hotels.



**Keywords:** perceived quality; city hotels; city choice model; conceptual model of perceived quality of city hotels.

## RESUMEN

La calidad percibida constituye una temática ampliamente abordada en la literatura; no obstante, no se ha logrado establecer un modelo conceptual que explique la calidad de hoteles de ciudad, aun cuando estos constituyen una parte esencial de la oferta turística urbana, contribuyendo a su posicionamiento como destino turístico. La identidad e imagen urbana se convierten en determinantes en el valor percibido por el cliente, por lo que influyen en la calidad hotelera. En función de esto, el objetivo de la investigación consistió en: proponer un modelo conceptual de calidad percibida de hoteles de ciudad. A partir de ello, fue posible definir las relaciones entre las variables que intervienen en el proceso. Se desarrolló una investigación exploratoria y descriptiva, para lo cual se utilizó una metodología cualitativa y cuantitativa. Los principales resultados fueron: la revisión bibliográfica y análisis de los principales modelos de calidad de servicios, el análisis de las variables más abordadas en la literatura, la propuesta de un modelo de elección de hoteles urbanos y la propuesta de un modelo de calidad percibida de hoteles de ciudad.

**Palabras clave:** calidad percibida; hoteles de ciudad; modelo de elección de ciudad; modelo conceptual de la calidad percibida de hoteles de ciudad.

## RESUMO

A qualidade percebida é um tema amplamente abordado na literatura; no entanto, não foi possível estabelecer um modelo conceitual para explicar a qualidade dos hotéis urbanos, ainda que estes constituam uma parte essencial da oferta turística urbana, contribuindo para seu posicionamento como destino turístico. A identidade e a imagem urbana tornam-se determinantes no valor percebido pelo cliente e, portanto, influenciam a qualidade do hotel. Com base nisso, o objetivo da pesquisa consistia em: propor um modelo conceitual de percepção de qualidade dos hotéis da cidade. A partir disto, foi possível definir as relações entre as variáveis envolvidas no processo. Foi realizada uma pesquisa exploratória e descritiva, para a qual foi utilizada uma metodologia qualitativa e quantitativa. Os principais resultados foram: a revisão bibliográfica e análise dos principais modelos

de qualidade de serviço, a análise das variáveis mais abordadas na literatura, a proposta de um modelo de escolha de hotel urbano e a proposta de um modelo de qualidade percebida dos hotéis urbanos.

**Palavras-chave:** qualidade percebida; hotéis urbanos; modelo de escolha da cidade; modelo conceitual de qualidade percebida dos hotéis urbanos.

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## INTRODUCTION

Perceived quality, as the customer's judgment of a product or service, becomes an important indicator of the satisfaction experienced, which is why it is agreed with Bolton and Drew (1991) when they state that it is a determinant of perceived value.

When the client values quality as positive, it means that there is a congruence between the product received and what he/she considers important, so it is possible to state that the satisfaction of clients' needs is the starting point for the achievement of business objectives and in particular for an adequate hotel and tourism management.

To do this, it is necessary to anticipate demand in such a way that more than a product, a value is offered. However, offering value to service users requires a thorough analysis to understand their main motivations and the benefits they are looking for in the offer and to translate these motivations and benefits into a unique experience.

Based on the definition of tourism product, among which Middleton and Clarke (2012) can be cited when expressing that it constitutes a set of components, elements, combinations or tangible and intangible attributes for the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the tourist, as well as the conceptualization of hotel according to Angamarca, Díaz and Martínez (2019), it is possible to propose that the city hotel constitutes a tourism product interrelated with the city product; determined, in turn, by a set of tangible and intangible attributes, which is fundamentally concerned with providing temporary accommodation through the interrelationship between the client and the service employees, the physical support and the internal organizational system, generating additional services that complement it, where the latter can be located in the hotel itself or in its surroundings, and together contribute to offering a unique experience to the client to meet their needs and desires.

The conception of the city hotel as a tourism product contributes to the analysis of the problem of the perceived quality of the client from an integral perspective, without losing sight of its characteristics and relationship with the environment in which it operates. These considerations are, therefore, a key element to consider in order to offer a quality experience that satisfies the client's needs, especially if the role of the city and its attractions as the main motivation for travel is taken into account.

In this regard, Rodríguez, Ramírez and Pérez (2021) recognize that tourism has been closely related to culture since its earliest origins, and consider that heritage is the attraction towards which the tourist's activity is most directed when approaching culture in the urban mode of tourism.

The attractions of the city are configured from its identity and image, hence the need to take into account, when evaluating the perceived quality of city hotels, these elements related to the city that are highly valued by urban tourists and that shape their motivations, in addition to the aspects related to quality, which are specific to the hotel (López Cruz *et al.*, 2020).

In this regard, despite the recurrence of studies on service quality and, in particular, those dealing with hotel quality, no conceptual model has been found in the literature to explain the perceived quality of city hotels.

Internationally, some authors take into consideration the environment and its influence on the perceived quality of hotel services. However, these studies not only focus on the case of rural hotel establishments, but are limited to the generation of scales that take into account some dimension related to the environment, without managing to establish the relationships between the constructs hotel quality-identity-environment image; therefore, conceptual models that take into account this relationship were not found. Consequently, the main objective of this research is to propose a conceptual model of perceived quality of city hotels.

The conception of the relationships between variables, based on a conceptual model, will make it possible to understand the particularities of this type of services and to establish specific procedures based on dimensions and attributes that respond to what the client really values.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The proposal of the conceptual model of the perceived quality of city hotels was based on the premise that there is a hotel quality-identity-city image relationship. An exhaustive bibliographic review was carried out to support the relationships between the different variables, based on the contributions of previous studies on the subject.

First, conceptual models of service quality were consulted and the main relationships addressed by the authors were analyzed. Among the models consulted were those of Grönroos (1988), Nguyen (1991), Bolton and Drew (1991), Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1993), as well as Vidrio Barón, Rebolledo Mendoza and Galindo Salvador (2020).

In a second stage, based on descriptive statistics, an analysis was carried out to determine the variables that structure and determine perceived quality in urban hotels, defining the main scales and dimensions.

Based on the results obtained, a model of city hotel choice was proposed, which served as a background for the proposal of the model of perceived quality of city hotel services, the latter being the main objective of the research.

Therefore, both theoretical and empirical methods were used, as well as SPSS software version 22.0 for frequency analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of the main conceptual models of service quality yielded the following conclusions:

- Grönroos (1988), Nguyen (1991) and Vidrio Barón, Rebolledo Mendoza and Galindo Salvador (2020) assess quality based on perceptions only, while Bolton and Drew (1991) and Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1993) use both expectations and perceptions
- The influence of service image on perceived quality is addressed by Grönroos (1988) and Nguyen (1991), while the impact of service image on expected quality is only addressed by Grönroos (1988)

- Nguyen (1991) contemplates the feedback and bidirectional relationship between each variable with respect to perceived quality, including in his model satisfaction and post-purchase behaviors
- Bolton and Drew (1991) analyze quality as an outcome of satisfaction and include post-purchase behaviors in their model
- The model of Vidrio Barón, Rebolledo Mendoza and Galindo Salvador (2020) addresses hotel service quality in relation to loyalty and purchase intention
- Grönroos (1988) analyzes the impact of communication, image and customer needs on expected quality, while Nguyen (1991) only alludes to the company's image and its influence on quality, and Bolton and Drew (1991) address the impact of word-of-mouth communication, customer needs and past experiences on expectations
- Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1993) provide quality analysis from the perspective of the customer and the service provider

Based on descriptive statistics, an analysis was carried out to determine the most commonly used variables in terms of quality of service. A total of fifty studies related to the subject were consulted, including, in addition to the aforementioned models, Alauddin *et al.* (2020).

Sixty percent of the studies consulted address the quality of services in general, while 18% focus on rural hotels and only 6% refer to city hotels.

The majority of the authors consulted used only perceptions to evaluate quality, representing 54%, while 48% used expectations and perceptions.

As for the scales used, the most frequent is the SERVQUAL with 44%, followed by the SERVPERF with 20%, although others are used to a lesser extent, such as the LODGSERV, the LODGQUAL, the HOTELQUAL and the HOLSERV.

The most frequent dimensions are: tangibility (90%), reliability (66%), responsiveness (56%), security (56%) and empathy (52%). Although other dimensions are also used, representing 54 % of the authors.

Few studies address any dimension related to the environment, occupying 24%, the latter being widely used in studies carried out mainly in rural establishments.

Similarly, the use of an attribute related to the environment appears in 34% of the studies, being widely addressed in the case of rural hotels.

The most studied relationship refers to the influence of the hotel's image on quality, with 22% of the authors agreeing, while the influence of the environment's image on quality is only addressed by 8% of the authors.

The influence of the hotel's image on expectations and of the environment's image on expectations is only addressed by 2% of the authors respectively.

Although the image of the environment and the hotel and its influence on quality is dealt with by some authors, it is considered essential to take these elements into account for the proposal of a quality model for city hotels, based on their particularities.

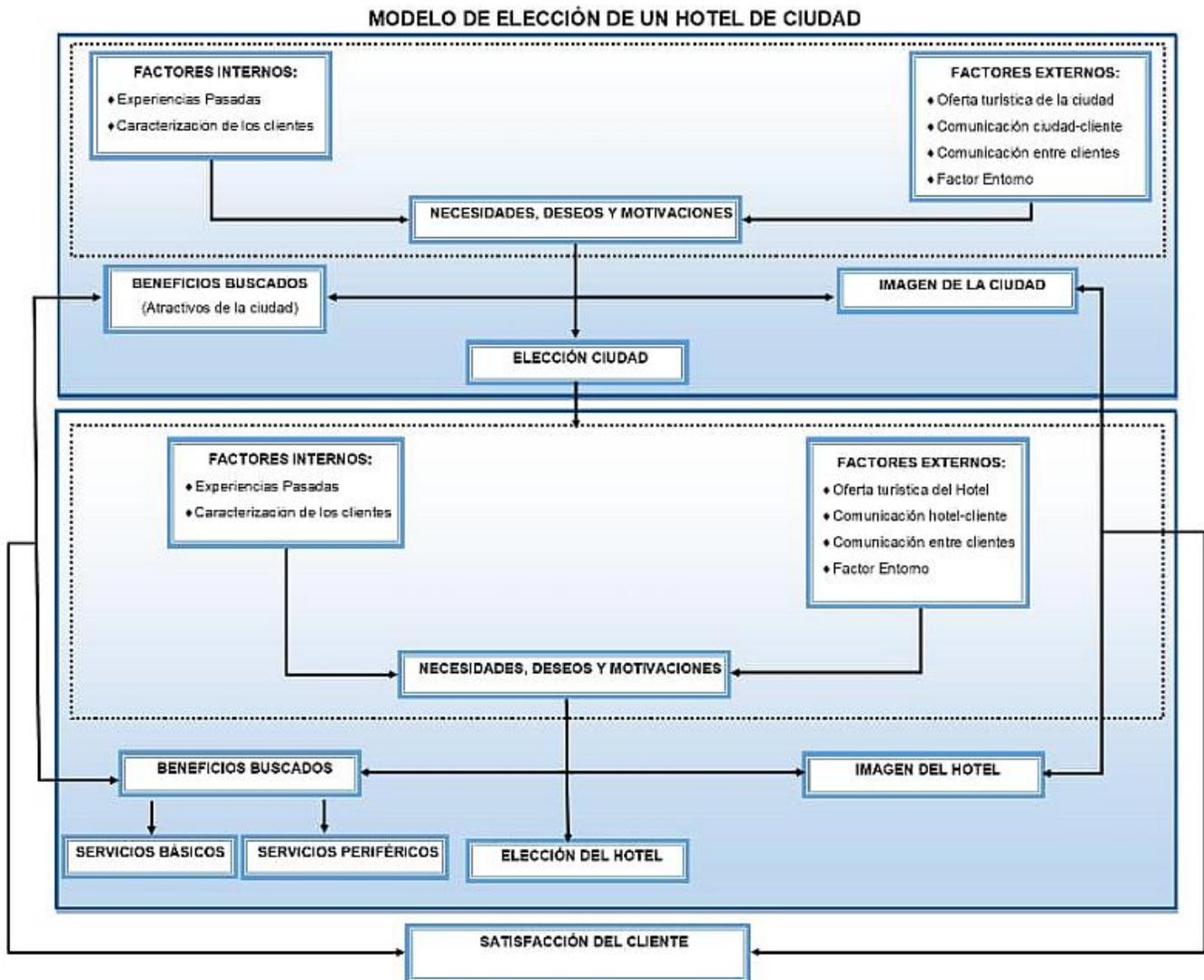
The proposal of the city hotel choice model also takes into account the conceptions of Olguín Negrete and Cuevas Contreras (2019), Castro Analuiza, Palacios Pérez and Plazarte Alomoto (2020), Correia and Kozak (2020), Pike and Kotsi (2020) and Batista, Serrano and Vega (2021), as these authors refer to the factors that influence the choice of the tourist destination, highlighting image as a key concept to understand the tourist selection process and the destination positioning strategy.

Based on the above analysis, it is possible to establish a model of city choice, which is presented in figure 1.

Needs, desires and motivations are the starting point when making the decision to travel. In the case of the urban tourist, these depend on internal factors such as past experiences and customer characteristics, among which are: cultural, social, personal and psychological.

Similarly, they depend on external factors such as the city's tourism offer, which is given by: ancillary goods and services; tourism resources; infrastructure and facilities; management; brand image and price; communication of the city to customers; communication between customers (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993) and environmental factors such as economic, technological, socio-cultural, etcetera.

This set of factors affects the benefits sought and the shaping of the city's image, where the latter is perceived by the client in the form of attributes.



**Fig. 1** - Proposed model of choice for a city hotel

Source: Own elaboration

To the extent that the client's perceptions of the city's image correspond to the expected benefits, the city will be more competitive and likely to be selected. In this sense, the incremental product associated with the added value offered by the city, given by its degree of differentiation, acquires importance for the choice of the city, which may be provided by a quality offer that reflects the urban identity, where this incremental product is valued in terms of price.

Therefore, it is possible to synthesize that the choice of the city destination is made on the basis of an evaluation made by the client on the attributes he/she perceives in the city and its capacity to provide satisfaction according to the expected benefits, which are conditioned by his/her needs, desires and motivations. This is why the interaction of internal and external variables is corroborated in this process.

In addition, it is possible to say that, to the extent that the perceived overall image of the city satisfies the benefits sought by the client, the greater the possibility of choosing it, so that the image is a determinant in the selection of the city.

The choice of a city hotel is a complex process. This decision is not only conditioned by the variables related to the fact of choosing the city, repeating the same process, where needs, desires and motivations intervene, which result from the interaction of internal factors (past experiences and personal factors) and external factors (associated with the environment, communication and hotel offer). These elements together influence the benefits expected by the client and the image of the hotel.

The choice of a city hotel is predetermined by the decision to visit the city in question and, therefore, by the urban image. Hence, the image of city hotels, as well as that of other tourism businesses, will be affected by the image of the destination in which they are located, while the image of the tourist destination will be affected, to a large extent, by the image of the city hotels and the different businesses that provide services there.

Therefore, in correspondence with the characteristics of the tourism product, the client who visits the city hotel expects to receive a set of services: basic and peripheral (associated and complementary) services that allow access to the city's attractions, both internally (based on attributes that make up the symbolic value of the hotel, such as its heritage or architectural value, availability of recreational offerings that reflect the city's identity) and externally (based on attributes that provide access to the city's offerings, such as the availability of excursion offerings, a availability of information on the city's activities). This set of services offered by the hotel make up its image, appreciated by the client in a set of attributes that he is ready to value according to his perception, taking into account the expected benefits.

To the extent that the city hotel manages to project a positive idea that is related to the image of the city and this coincides with the client's perception during his/her stay, the greater his/her

satisfaction will be. Therefore, the quality of a city hotel will be more positive to the extent that the client perceives the desired attributes of the city during the travel experience as positive, as well as to the extent that the hotel is integrated into the city, so that it manages to reflect the urban identity and image, as well as providing access and opportunity to enjoy the resources and attractions of the city in which it is located.

### **Proposal for a conceptual model of the perceived quality of city hotels**

The client is the recipient of the city hotel's services; therefore, it is vital to know what his/her expectations are, which are configured on the basis of the benefits sought in interaction with the image he has of the city hotel. Expectations are, in turn, a clear reflection of the client's preferences, which lie in the attributes of the offer to which they attach greater importance. Of course, all this is a process in which internal and external factors interact and influence customer behavior, as explained above.

In this sense, a customer's expectations are formed from elements inherent to the customer and external elements. The customer's past experiences with the service, the image of the service, the customer's own characteristics when evaluating these expectations and the customer's needs, desires and motivations are considered to be the internal elements that influence the customer's expectations. The communications that take place between customers, those made by the enterprise to the outside, the service offers by different enterprises and their alternatives of choice, as well as the factors of the environment, are elements external to the customer but that influence him/her at the time of evaluating his/her expectations. All these elements are considered as conditioning and key factors that could shape customer expectations and also influence the evaluation of both customer perceptions and customer behaviors after receiving the service.

The expectations that the client creates about the offer are indispensable when conceptualizing the quality of the service; they must therefore be taken into account, in one way or another, in any service quality model. It is considered necessary to take them into account when formulating the attributes to be evaluated, so as to take into account those that customers value as important and that are, therefore, indispensable for their satisfaction.

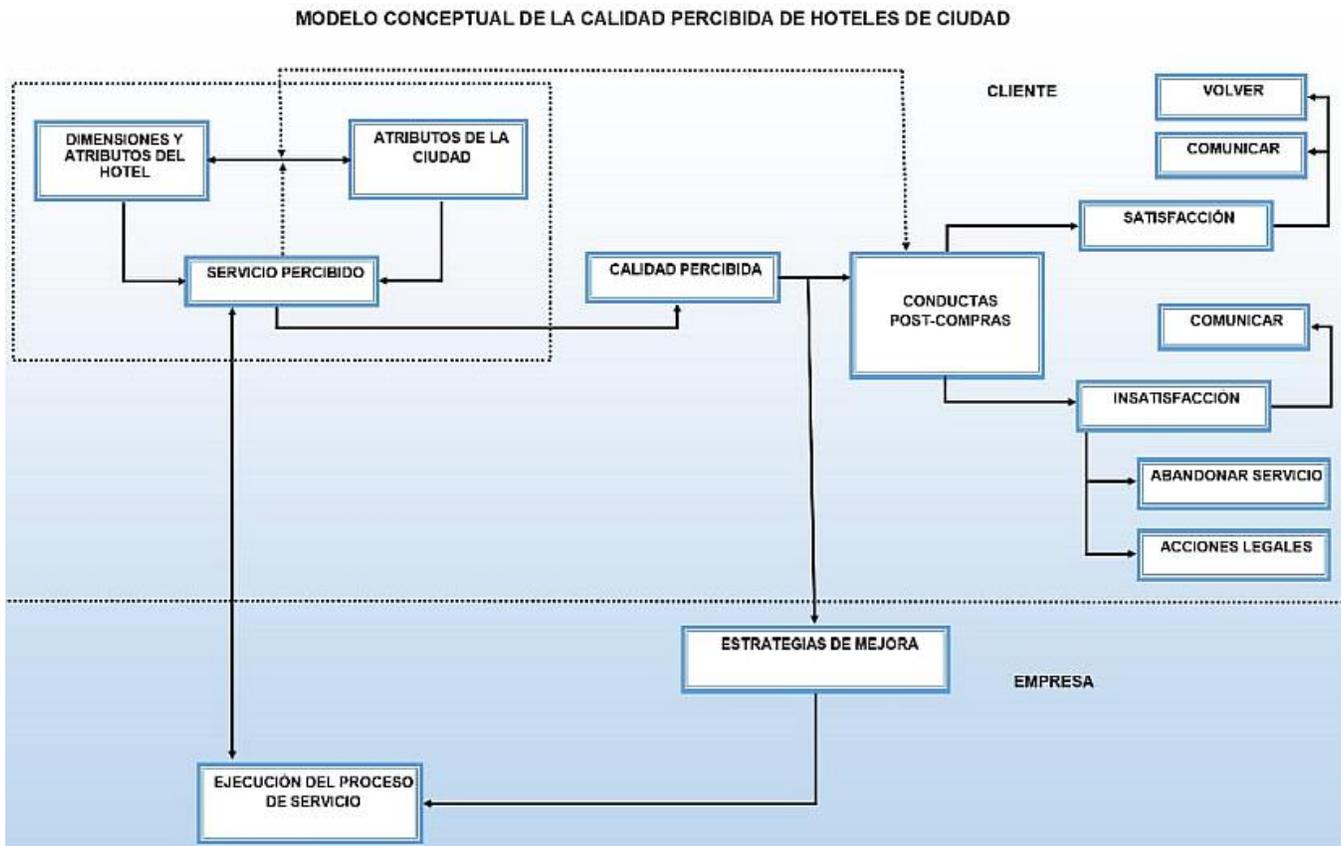
It is considered that perceptions are the most important contributors to the evaluation of the quality of service in a city hotel where, when evaluating this type of service, the client does so based on his/her perception, to which is inherent the evaluation with respect to his expectations.

In this sense, it can be argued that the product that a customer consumes during his stay in a city hotel is highly complex. This is a customer who does not consume the product instantly and leaves, but rather the consumption becomes an iterative process that takes place throughout the customer's stay. In other words, the customer creates expectations before arriving at the hotel; however, as he/she gets into the trip as a product, which includes the hotel and the hotel itself, he/she creates new expectations during the stay. Even as he/she accesses the services provided by the place, he/she creates new expectations about the rest of the services. Therefore, when evaluating the perceived quality of a city hotel, it is considered more appropriate to consider the operationalization of the variable based on the client's perceptions, based on the particularities of this type of service.

Based on the above-mentioned fundamentals of city hotel choice, it is possible to form a conceptual model of the evaluation of the perceived quality of city hotels. Figure 2 shows the conceptual model for the evaluation of the perceived quality of city hotels, where, following the criteria of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1993), any conceptual model on perceived service quality proposed should consider the two parties in the production of a service: the client and the enterprise, so the proposal takes these elements into account, considering that both have an influence on the provision of a quality service.

The quality perceived by the urban tourist when visiting a city hotel is given by perceptions about the service based on dimensions and attributes of the city and the hotel in their interrelation, which reflects the systemic and integral approach when addressing the perceived quality of a tourism product (López Cruz *et al.*, 2020). It is important to take into account the bidirectional relationship that exists between the attributes that make up the city product and those that make up the hotel product, where the hotel should not only reflect a product integrated with the city, but the city and the perception that customers have of it, of its attributes, affect their perceptions of the quality of the hotel. Perceived quality is, therefore, a complex process that must be addressed as a system to achieve greater customer satisfaction (López Cruz *et al.*, 2020).

The sum of the customer's experiences in a city hotel shapes the overall quality of the service. Consequently, depending on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced, post-purchase behaviors are generated on the customer's side.



**Fig. 2** - Proposed conceptual model of perceived quality in city hotels

Source: Own elaboration

The model takes into account the post-purchase behaviors established by Díaz and Pons (2009), where the authors state that: if the consumer is satisfied with the overall service received, he/she could carry out a series of favorable actions with respect to the hotel, such as returning to the hotel to receive the services and/or communicating positive aspects of the hotel to other people, so that in one way or another he/she would be recommending that they receive the services. However, if the customer feels to some extent dissatisfied, they could take five very important actions: tell the hotel how dissatisfied they are, tell other institutions, take legal action to seek compensation and, in the worst case, abandon the service provider and/or tell others of their dissatisfaction.

As mentioned above, service quality is a process in which not only the client participates, but also, from the production perspective, the hotel is in charge of its execution. The city hotel provides a set of basic and complementary services that constitute a group of tangible attributes (such as

infrastructure and personnel), as well as a set of intangible attributes (such as the services themselves and the hotel's image). Within these intangible attributes, image is strongly linked to the concept of symbolic value, as well as to the image of the city, which was the main reason for the trip. When visiting a city hotel, the client expects, therefore, to access the city's attractions in one way or another. It is therefore important for the hotel to offer a product that is integrated with the city, which is possible through the configuration of the different services to be provided.

Based on the quality perceived by the client, it is possible to outline strategies for improving hotel and city services, according to their assessments and preferences. In this way, it is possible to contribute to customer satisfaction and/or alleviate, in some way, their dissatisfaction, by influencing the execution of the service, thus providing feedback. In turn, improvement strategies should include a set of actions for the hotel's response to possible post-purchase customer behavior, since it is important that a response is always offered, regardless of the positive or negative impact of the customer's behavior.

The conceptual model manages to address the perceived quality of city hotels, taking into account the particularities of this tourism product, which make it highly complex. This, in turn, has an impact on the client's evaluation of quality. This is a problem that must be addressed with a systems approach.

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#### **Conflict of interest:**

Authors declare not to have any conflict of interest.

#### **Authors' contribution:**

All authors reviewed the writing of the manuscript and approve the version finally submitted.



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