

# A technique of research of expectations of consumers of services of small and medium business in RK

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## Abstract

In article development of a technique of carrying out high-quality researches of expectations of consumers of Small and Medium Enterprises in service sectors and formation of convincing proofs for heads of SME that it is possible to increase competitiveness of business due to the best understanding of expectations of consumers and giving of a powerful impulse to heads of SME at the level of all Kazakhstan for change of their relation to improvement of quality of services is considered.

*Keywords:* support of business activity, service SMB, business – educations for entrepreneur, increase of competence of entrepreneur

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## 1 Introduction

The development of small and medium enterprises (SME) is a priority in Kazakhstan, including in service sectors of the economy. As it is noted in the message of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2014: "The development of small and medium enterprises is the main tool of the industrial and social modernization of Kazakhstan in the twenty-first century" [1]. According to the experience of the developed countries, in order to survive in the market economy, SME managers need to improve the quality of the services provided. Today in Kazakhstan there is almost no information about how competitive SME in Kazakhstan are. We do not know the consumers' expectations for SME activities. SME managers do not know how to increase the competitiveness of the company and how to get customers' loyalty. It is unknown why SME managers do not consciously seek to increase their customers' loyalty? It is not clear what the customers' expectations in Kazakhstan are. We have not found answers to these questions from the secondary data; no one in Kazakhstan has ever conducted a research to determine the customers' expectations.

## 2 The Main part

Therefore, the purpose of the project is to conduct a qualitative research of the consumers' expectations of SME in service sectors and to form a strong evidence for SME managers that it is possible to increase business competitiveness through a better understanding of consumers' expectations and to give a powerful impulse to SME managers at the level of all Kazakhstan to change their attitude towards the improvement of the services quality.

Project Objectives:

- To conduct a qualitative research of consumers' expectations of SME in seven regions of Kazakhstan, ten service sectors, and to assess the quality of services provided through the modified SERVQUAL model, to identify the

gaps between what consumers get and expect through the "gaps model" [3].

- To collect 70 small business managers from 10 service industries that are willing to participate in this research and to make an interview with them to find out what they think consumers expect and how they evaluate the quality of the services provided.

- To collect 140 SME consumers from 10 service industries that will participate in focus groups and to find out what the consumers' expectations in Kazakhstan are.

- To determine the nature of expectations, how it is formed by the services consumers and to find the gaps in understanding of services quality between SME managers and their customers, as well as to find out whether the consumers' expectations differ in different regions of Kazakhstan.

- To identify ways in which SME managers can manage these expectations, in order to influence in a favorable way the consumers' perception of services and what managers can do to exceed customer expectations.

- To visualize the results of the research and to bring convincing evidence to SME managers from different regions of Kazakhstan, it is necessary to develop online courses for the services quality, to make a video about the research conducting and the practical results for SME managers, to prepare a teaching manual on the research subject.

- To disseminate with the support of partners (RCE) the courses and video in SME community, to present the results of research in the form of journal articles with impact factor and to make presentations at scientific conferences.

- To prepare one doctor and two masters in the research topic.

The expected results:

- Consumers' expectations of SME will be determined in seven regions of Kazakhstan in ten service sectors through the modified SERVQUAL model and the gaps will be identified between what consumers get and expect through

the "gaps model" [3]. The results of the research will be presented and convincing evidence will be provided to SME managers from different regions of Kazakhstan, about how to increase the competitiveness of their business through a better understanding of consumers' expectations and eliminating of the negative gaps.

- With the support of partners the results of the research will be disseminated in Kazakhstan regions, through a series of courses to improve the services quality and production of video with SME managers and its screening.

- The assistance will be provided to the project partners by involving RCE employees to this research and by providing the Problem-resolving Map for the services quality, basing on which, Kazakhstan SME managers will be able to better understand the consumers' expectations.

- The contribution will be made to the development of applied research in Kazakhstan, through participation in scientific conferences on the research topics and through publication of articles in scientific journals with impact factor (at least 3 articles).

- The research will identify the key success factors (KSF) in ten sectors of the services business and in seven regions based on the consumers' expectations. Project participants will be given the sight with KSF and with approaches of their use to improve the services quality.

- Qualified scientific personnel will be prepared for Kazakhstan on the research subject, one doctoral student and two masters.

### 3 Project scientific novelty and practical implications

The well-known guru in the services quality, author of SERVQUAL model, A. Parasuraman, together with L. Berry, and V. Zeithaml conducted some research on the topic "Understanding of the consumers' expectations" [2]. The focus of this research was to study the direct interaction between consumers and organizations from the perspective of operational management. The research was conducted in the United States. The authors formed focus groups of consumers of different services, in order to highlight differences between the different branches of services, as well as to ensure that their results represented a broad cross-section of services sector. At the stage of qualitative research, the interviews were conducted with sixteen focus groups to explore the nature and structure of the consumers' expectations in the United States. The research authors were guided by three important criteria: 1. Eight of the 16 focus groups were made up of 'pure' services consumers (with minor material components), while the remaining eight were made up of consumers of services, which include significant material components. 2. Each of the eight focus groups consisted of two categories, four focus groups were staffed by representatives of the service-providing organization, and four others were staffed of the final consumers. 3. In its turn, each of the four groups comprised half of "experienced" and half of the "inexperienced" services consumers. The "experience" was determined by the duration of the services use and the number of contacts with the service provider. To take into account the geographic diversity, focus groups were formed in five

cities of the United States: Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle and Rochester. The research sponsors were eight major companies from different service branches of the consumers of which focus groups were formed. Essential research results include:

1. Consumers expect basic services to be provided at a level according to the prices they pay, "consumers expect companies to do what they should do" [2], i.e. the consumers' expectations do not go beyond reasonable. For companies that provide services, the present conclusion represents a significant opportunity to improve the reputation by increasing attention to the basic service.

2. The service process is the key to exceed the customers' expectations. The research authors have divided the consumers' expectations into five categories: reliability, material components, responsiveness, credibility and empathy. Out of the five categories reliability "is connected to the outputs of the service process", and the other four ones "largely depend on the service process itself" [2]. In other words, the accuracy and commitment (category - reliability) are judged by the consumers after receiving services, the other four criteria are judged while consuming services. The results showed that the reliability is paramount for consumers. This means that companies that provide services "... the default should be accurate and committed suppliers of the services they promise to provide" [2]. Exceeding the expectations in this category seems unlikely according to the research authors. As for the four process categories, the service provider is possible to exceed the consumers' expectations.

3. Consumers' expectations are duplex and dynamic. According to the research results, the authors suggest that consumers' expectations have two levels: desired and adequate. The desired level corresponds to the service that the consumer wishes to receive. The adequate level corresponds to the service that the consumer considers acceptable. Between the two levels there is a tolerance zone. According to the authors, the adequate level of service is more dependent on the particular circumstances and, therefore, changes more than the desired level. "The recognition of the duplex and dynamic nature of consumers' expectations and understanding of the factors on which they depend can help managers to reduce the gap between the consumers' expectations and perceptions and even to surpass them".

4. Consumers are interested in long-term relationships. The research authors found that many of the respondents "... want to be regular clients ...". As the research authors noted in their article, "... consumers' expectations for long-term relationships with service providers usually do not occur".

Following the results of their research, Parasuraman with collaborators have developed a conceptual SERVQUAL model of the assessment of services quality. According to this model, consumers, evaluating the quality of services, take into account the ten variables. Later, the same authors proposed a modified SERVQUAL model, which includes five variables that determine the service quality: reliability, credibility, material components, responsiveness and empathy. In addition, following the results of their research, Parasuraman with collaborators

suggested the “gaps model” [3]. Within this model, it is possible to define four categories of gaps, the value of which wholly or partly depend on the employees providing services: delivery gap; design gap; organization gap; communications gap.

From the above-mentioned it follows that the research was being conducted in five cities of the United States and financed by large service companies from different sectors of economy. The data obtained are applicable for all companies of service industries. However, the results of this research can not be transformed into Kazakhstan. Firstly, the purposes of the research conducted by Parasuraman’s group differ from the objectives planned in this project. One of the key objectives of Parasuraman’s research with a group is to study the expectations nature and to develop a model that determines the services quality. In this project, the main purpose is to apply the models developed by Parasuraman and his group in 10 SME service sectors and to provide an impulse for SME managers in understanding the importance of the consumers’ expectations research. Secondly, the research subjects differ. If the research subjects in Parasuraman’s group are large companies, in this case it’s small and medium enterprise. Thirdly, it is difficult to convince SME managers from Kazakhstan, basing on the research results of the group led by Parasuraman that is necessary to study the consumers’ expectations, because the data were obtained in the United States, whose economy is significantly different from the economy of Kazakhstan.

In connection with the foregoing, the scientific novelty of the project is the following: it will be the first time in Kazakhstan when extensive primary research of consumers' expectations of SME will be conducted in ten service sectors of seven regions, and a mechanism to change SME managers’ attitude towards the services quality will be represented.

Project implications lie in the fact that the research and its results can become a driving force in the movement of Kazakhstan SME towards understanding the consumers’ expectations. When the managers of 70 SME of 10 service sectors from different regions are directly involved in the project, when they hear themselves firsthand (focus groups) what their consumers want and make sure that consumers’ expectation is a powerful mechanism using which they can significantly improve the competitiveness of their business, it will give an impulse through the whole Kazakhstan. With the support of the partners (RCE), it will be possible to change the consciousness of SME managers, that without the knowledge of consumers' expectations it is almost impossible to survive in the face of increasing competition. Project implications world-wide consist in reporting the research results to the global scientific community. The research results will be published in three journals with impact factor, the participation in 3-5 conferences on the subject is expected, as well as the development of courses (workshops), the production of the video (90 min.) and the creation of teaching manual on the services quality. These steps will help to introduce the research results to different parties concerned not only nation-wide, but also world-wide.

Most SME managers in Kazakhstan are interested in improving the competitiveness of their own business.

However, they do not know how to improve this competitiveness, in particular by improving the services quality, there is a social demand for research aimed at improving the services quality. This is also evidenced by the experience of the project supervisor, who had opportunities to meet Kazakhstan SME managers and to find out their needs within his experience in teaching (for 20 years) and in consulting services (14 projects). There is a demand for such research from the Regional Chambers of Entrepreneurs. In order to promote the SME development in Kazakhstan, the Government of Kazakhstan in autumn 2013 established the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, and on October 8, 2013 in 14 regional centers of the country and in the cities of Astana, Almaty (16 in total) Regional Chamber of Entrepreneurs (RCE) was established. One of the key objectives of RCE is the growth and development of the business sector in each region of the country. In the action plan of RCE we can mark the following aspects related to the research topic:

- Development and launch of the project aimed at the business development and support "Strong business is strong Kazakhstan";
- Development of the Entrepreneurs Problems Map;
- Register of problematic issues of the entrepreneurs and the Map of their resolution.

The RCE’s interest in this project and its results clearly confirms the acceptance of the majority of RCE to participate in this project as a business partner. Through the prism of the RCE activities the Government of Kazakhstan is also interested in such research. In addition, Kazakhstan young scientists studying at doctor and master's programs in management are interested in this research, because due to this project, they can acquire the skills in conducting research at the level of Western countries and to publish their results in journals with impact factor. Thus, the demand for this research is obvious, both from SME managers, RCE managers and employees, and young scientists.

As it was said above, in Kazakhstan there are not almost any applied research conducted in the field of management and marketing, particularly in the field of evidential management. At the same time, every year the number of graduates from master's and doctor’s programs grows, including management and marketing program. It turns to be a gap, on the one hand, there are more researchers (scientists), but on the other hand, the number of publications in journals with impact factor has not significantly increased. In addition, not all young scientists have the skills on the methodology in applied research. Publications concerning the research results will allow other young Kazakhstan scientists to join such researches. Thus, this project meets research (applied) and technological (research methodology) needs of Kazakhstan. Social and economic effects will be that with the help of the partners, the research results will be disseminated among other SME managers of Kazakhstan regions.

#### 4 Research methods

In the project we will use the methodology of conducting

qualitative research, which was used by the group led by Parasuraman, with minor changes, with the respect of the objectives of this project. The study is scheduled in 7 regions of Kazakhstan, will cover 10 service sectors of small and medium enterprises: car workshops; educational centers; advertising agencies; travel agencies; beauty salons; coffee houses; online shops or IT-services; hotel business; shopping boutiques; consulting services. In each region 10 firms will be selected, one from each service branch, 10 interviews will be held with managers of these firms, and 20 focus groups will be formed with the consumers of these firms (two focus groups per one firm). This coverage of regions and service industries will allow summarizing data for the whole Kazakhstan. Selecting companies from 10 service industries, we will take into account the duration of the company and whether it belongs to SME. The criteria for selection will be the following: the work period of the firm (at least 5 years on the market) and the desire of the SME manager to participate in the project. Selecting the consumers to participate in focus groups, we plan to collect 8-10 people in each group, and the groups will be homogeneous, for example, in one group there will be only women, consumers of the beauty salon, and in another one there will be only men, the consumers of the same salon. When conducting interviews and focus groups, we will strictly observe the methodology, in particular we will prepare the questions beforehand, focus groups will be held in specially prepared rooms (oval table, video and audio recording of the process). Questions for interviews and focus groups will be prepared in advance, basing on the modified SERVQUAL model and the "gaps model" [2-5]. This approach will allow to attach the obtained results of the questionnaire to these models and to make analysis. The preparatory work will be carried out before holding interviews with SME managers, we will analyze their activities by preliminary talks and by visiting their business is possible, and then, together with them we will represent in the form of a scheme their operational activities (if there are several activities, we choose the main one). This scheme of operational activities will be necessary during the interviews and focus groups, as well as for data processing.

As critical points we can note some of the steps: coverage of 7 regions of Kazakhstan (about a half, 7 out of 16 regions), the partners (RCE) of some regions may refuse to participate. Actions: attraction of other regions, moreover, all 16 regions showed great interest in this research. Search and selection of companies from small and medium enterprise from 7 regions, managers of which will agree to participate in the project. Perhaps in some regions it will be difficult to find managers appropriate for the project from 10 service industries. Action: more time for this stage and

asking the partner (RCE) for help. With regard to other risks.

Risk of failure to hold interviews with SME managers according to a plan, interviews will be held by the research supervisor of the project and a doctoral student, so there is the replaceability.

Risk of failure to hold focus groups with consumers according to a plan, 4 people will act as moderators: research supervisor, doctoral student and two masters. But since in each region focus groups will be held consistently, two of the moderators will be involved, and the other two will be for replacement.

Risk of financial operations, including the lack of funding to complete the research due to cost overruns or improper planning. The project supervisor has the experience in implementing projects, besides, one of the masters with the work experience in the financial sector, will monitor the funds.

Risks associated with the video production there are two people involved in the project who have experience in shooting and editing movies, so there is the replace ability in this matter, i.e. no additional investments and funds required. Concerning the alternative ways of implementing the project, we have not found them.

The project is based on the ideas belonging to the project supervisor. The ethical management procedures will be respected, in particular, the maintenance of high standards of intellectual honesty and avoidance of scientific data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, false joint authorship, the use of the collective research data and conclusions of the research by individual members, without the consent of the other members.

The intellectual property rights will belong to the project authors, based on the agreement between them. The authors of intellectual property created in the course of the project, will be those participants of the project, who have made the intellectual contribution.

**5 Group of project realization and control**

The project manager, the director "The Kazakhstan institute of marketing and management", the expert in the field of management, Cand.Tech.Sci., associate professor Ekonomiki Vysshey of the Certifying Commission of RK, the doctor of science of Latvia. In the project will be engaged in the general management and researches, bears responsibility for timely implementation of the project.

The expert from Latvia, the rector of ISMA (Information Systems Management Institute), the author of a row article and reports at conference on a project subject.

Suggested level of Expertise: PhD (one person), MA (two persons), Expert (one person)

TABLE 1 Schedule of the Research

№	Names of tasks, event concerning their implementation	Duration (in months)	Commencement of work execution (dd/mm/yy)	Years of project implementation		
				1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
1	Project group meeting and project plan approval	1	05.01.2015			
2	Coordination of work with partners and preparation for research	1	01.02.2015			
3	Pursuance of research in Almaty city and data processing	2	01.03.2015			

4	Pursuance of research in Astana city and data processing	2	01.05.2015	
5	Preparation and writing of two master's thesis	18	01.05.2015	
6	Preparation and writing of one doctor's thesis	32	01.05.2015	
7	Preparation of material for writing of articles	13	01.07.2015	
8	Pursuance of research in Aktobe city and data processing	2	01.07.2015	
9	Pursuance of research in Pavlodar city and data processing	2	01.09.2015	
10	Pursuance of research in Taldykorgan city and data processing	2	01.11.2015	
11	Pursuance of research in Taraz city and data processing	2	01.01.2016	
12	Pursuance of research in Uralsk city and data processing	2	01.03.2016	
13	Preparation of the preliminary report on all regions	2	01.05.2016	
14	Foreign scientific training in the USA	2	01.05.2016	
15	Writing of articles and their publication	19	01.05.2016	
16	Development of course-seminars on quality of services	15	01.07.2016	
17	Participation in conferences	within the year	01.03.2016	
18	Video film production based on the project results and demonstration in 7 regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan	12	10.01.2017	
19	Production of video tutorials: 10 items from 10 service industries for participants of SME	12	10.01.2017	
20	Preparation of the report and project completion	2,5	15.10.2017	

**6 Research environments**

For project execution it is necessary to have sophisticated equipment or laboratories. This project requires more advanced laptops and software for data processing.

- Using local and foreign research infrastructure (laboratories), with explanations; for project execution it is not planned to use local and foreign infrastructures.
- Key local and international relations, participation in the project of scholars abroad; Participation in conferences based on the subject of research will make it possible for participants of the project to establish partnerships with scholars from Kazakhstan and other countries. That will further help them to participate in other projects, including foreign.
- Participation in the project of young scientists, postdoctoral students. The number of project participants includes one postdoctoral student and two master's students.
- Mobility substantiation - For the Project implementation there provided conduction of researches in seven regions of Kazakhstan using resources of business partners (seven RCE), with which contracts are concluded, i.e. mobility is guaranteed.

During the process of project implementation it is planned to perform two business trips to each of seven regions of Kazakhstan for conduction of interviews and focus groups. The first business trips will help to collect primary data for analysis, others – will help to present results of the research to SME supervisors and partners – RCE. During the process of the project implementation research scientists will take part in international conferences based on the research, where they will be able to present the research results and find research partners. Postdoctoral

student and master's student will have training in one of the universities of the USA, where they will obtain new knowledge and skills. The received knowledge and skills will be useful for successful implementation of this project.

The project supervisor is a director, sole founder of LLP «Kazakhstan Institute of Marketing and Management» (KIMM), founder and director of FE HABITAT and mostly deals with: management, teaching, consulting and research activity. Work schedule in this project is completely compatible with its current activity, as there are no consulting projects planned during the period of execution of the project, and teaching activity will be reduced. Work of postdoctoral student and master's students in this project will be prioritized, since it will make it possible for them to collect data for their research papers. Other project participants have chances to take part in the project, as they are employees of KIMM. During the project implementation executives will be working within the whole period of its execution being occupied for 50% and 70% of working time.

**Conclusion**

Expected Results:

- Results of scientific researches conducted within the project are planned to be published in journals with impact factors. Based on results of researches it is planned to write a Study guide «Management of service supply (in terms of SME of Kazakhstan)», length 40-60 p.;
- Expected scientific impact will be both in research itself and in its results. The research itself is the first large scale management research in Kazakhstan. Research results are interesting for Academe, as it is interesting for them to find out expectations of consumers of 10 service sectors of

Kazakhstan economics. Socioeconomic impact will lie in the project scale (in seven regions of Kazakhstan there will be researches conducted), and actuality of results – a big amount of companies of small and medium business from all regions of Kazakhstan will be able to use the results to improve qualities of their services, namely by means of video films and video tutorials.

- Video film concept based on project results.

One video film, running time: 30-35 minutes. Purpose: The purpose of this film – to present a wide audience an idea of the project, its aims and results. A documentary will show in which way the project was executed, will introduce audience with its participants: directors of companies who were the basis for research, research scientists, who were conducting the project, RCE, service consumers. Each of the interest groups will share its impressions and results that were obtained after work. This film will be a clear illustration of the way researches of consumers' expectations are performed in Kazakhstan, why they are important for SME development and the way the influence on improvement of the level of service and competition in the branch.

The target audience: participants of SME's service sector, undergraduates and postgraduate students with a specialization in Marketing and Management, Hotel industry. Genre: documentary video film. Form: The film will contain journalistic stories from 7 regions of Kazakhstan, where researches had taken place. There will be shown interviews of service consumers, and also opinions of owners of the companies. The supervisor and participants of the project will tell what kind of results they received, and there also will be demonstration of how these results were put into action by the company managers, and how did it influence on their business.

Concept of video tutorials (10 videos).

Running time: 10 minutes each. Purpose: Creation of video tutorials for each from 10 service industries for SME participants. These videos will show the Key success factors (KSF) from consumers' point of view that are important in each industry to reach success and prosperity, expectations of consumers, and also a real condition of companies in this industry in 7 regions of Kazakhstan and ways to solve existing problems. These videos will be used by SME participants to improve indexes of business. The target

audience: participants of SME service sector. Structure: Each video will contain the following parts:

1. Introduction: Short description of the industry, statistics based on this industry in Kazakhstan.
2. Key success factors in this industry according to expectations of consumers.
3. Key success factors according to business owner's opinion.
4. Opinion and recommendation of an expert regarding KSF improvement and reduction of difference between expectation of consumers and business owners.

Form: Video will contain graphic images of showings, interviews, production moments and documentary shootings.

SME participants taking part in the research (70 people), will be able to improve quality of services based on the results of focus groups and determination of expectations of their consumers. Seven regional RCE will get instruments (video film, videos and a study guide «Service supply management»), which will make it possible for them to help supervisors of acting SME and newly established ones in the sphere of improvement of qualities of services;

RCE and SME supervisors in all regions of Kazakhstan;

Conduction of applied researches of such scale will be breakthrough for Kazakhstan, since there were no such researches before. Research results will help to develop applied management researches, that will stimulate young scholars to conduct similar researches based on other management aspects;

According to results of the research there will be organized 7 seminars, one seminar on service qualities in each region. All materials will be transferred to RCE for distribution among SME supervisors and seminar conduction. Results of the research will be published in journals with impact factor, project participants will appear at scientific conferences, and due to these actions results will be available to the community of scholars. To spread the results there will be organized meetings with SME supervisors in 7 regions of Kazakhstan, where researches had taken place, also there will be shown a video film and videos, there will be invited local mass media and TV. Due to these events general public in the regions of Kazakhstan will be informed about results of the research.

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