

Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) as an Example of Quality Service Scale Used in Traditional Trade

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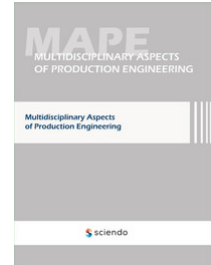
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INTRODUCTION

One activity that has become part of our daily routine is shopping. Purchases may relate to ordinary things, such as food, these are made more often. They may concern other goods such as clothes, cosmetics, furniture, cars, etc. The consumer approach, opening of markets all over the world, and high competition mean that customers have more and more requirements. These requirements apply not only to the products themselves, but also to the purchasing process. It should be emphasized that trade should be treated as a type of service. Shops, that sell different kinds of products to their customers, are very rarely their producers. Most often they act as an intermediary between the producer and the customer, and sometimes other intermediaries (e.g. wholesalers) appear in this chain.

It is important that the customer is as satisfied as possible when shopping. Because his satisfaction may cause him to come back to a given place, and even recommend it to other customers. Then the shop can have loyal customers. Satisfied customers, and to an even greater extent loyal customers, can have a positive impact on the profits achieved by the shop (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996; Stoma, 2012; Klimecka-Tatar and Niciejewska, 2021).

An important factor in customer satisfaction with shopping is the quality of the provision of trade-related services. Quality is a difficult concept to define, in the case of a product it depends on many factors related to, for example, the parameters of the product, the material from which it is made, its reliability and durability (Niciejewska et al., 2021; Karcz and Ślusarczyk, 2021; Knop et al., 2019; Szymanski et al., 2018; Kardas et al., 2017). It can be said that it largely depends on what product it concerns.

However, in case of services, and as mentioned already, the purchasing process is a kind of the service process, for which it is even more difficult to determine its quality. It depends on completely different factors. It is impossible to precisely define the parameters of the service and the accompanying material elements,

but the service itself does not have a material form, so neither can it be said about its reliability or durability. First of all, several dimensions should be taken into account, e.g. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy. These are the most frequently used dimensions that are the basis of the Servqual method (Parasurman et al., 1988; Ulewicz, 2014; Klimecka-Tatar and Ingaldi, 2021; Kowalik, 2020). Importantly, customers who have used the services of a given company should participate in the process of determining the level of service quality. They have certain expectations to the ordered service, they choose the options for this service themselves, take part in the process of its provision, hence the need for their presence also when assessing its quality (Klimecka-Tatar and Ingaldi, 2020; Kadłubek and Grabara, 2015; Pilarz and Kot, 2019, Ulewicz, 2016, Wolniak, 2021). Service providers may provide their services directly in line with the requirements of service users or create services with a level of quality higher than expected by them, which will result in high customer satisfaction (Suriya and Ratana, 2020).

It should also be noted that the trade-related services is very specific. When planning purchases, the customer has his expectations in mind. He knows more or less what he is looking for, he often compares different shops and the products they offer. Entering the shop, he wants it to be properly equipped and to have the appropriate offer. He may also have certain expectations regarding the appearance and behavior of the staff. After entering the shop, the customer looks at the goods, if it is possible (depending on the type of product) he tries it on, checks its operation and decides whether to buy it or not. The shop staff is involved in this process. Depending on the type of shop and customer needs, the customer can use the help of the personnel at any time. Support is always needed to complete the transaction. The exception may be large shops with self-service cash register. From the point of view of the shop, the most important thing is that the customer finishes his visit with the purchased goods and is satisfied. This satisfaction should not be short-term, i.e. while using the purchased goods, the customer should still be satisfied.

The trade-related service, including shops, is assessed in terms of quality just like any other type of service. During such an assessment, survey forms are the most often used, in which the customer selects the most appropriate answers, specifying the level of his satisfaction and indicating the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Various types of methods, which are designed to assess the service quality, are used to analyze the obtained results. However, the most commonly used and described methods of the service quality assessment do not provide the attributes that should be included in the questionnaire form, and which could in the best way describe a trade-related service. The measurement of service quality in retail organization is slightly different from the measurement of service quality in other service enterprises (Nadiri and Turner, 2009). Therefore, scientists began to look for solutions that would help in the selection of such attributes or directly indicate which attributes should be used.

Dabholkar et al. (1996) developed a new performance-based measurement scale, which is called the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS). This method is used to study the quality of services provided by a chain of department shops and its impact on consumer behavior. Thus, it is a ready-made solution that can be used to assess the quality of trade-related services. Siu and Tak-Hing Cheung (2001) argue that the influence of physical appearance and politics is significant for the customer on the overall perceived service quality and his future purchasing behavior.

Many scientists have so far used the RSQS method in their research work. Boshoff and Terblanche (1997) found the scale to be very useful in the context of South African department shops, specialt shops and hypermarkets where they conducted their research. Mehta et al. (2000) tested the method's usefulness by conducting research in a supermarket in Singapore. In contrast, Najib and Sosianika (2018) decided to use the RSQS to study the Indonesian traditional market, but based on a literature study they found that it has been tested extensively in many developed and developing countries. So these papers confirm that this method can be useful in assessing the quality of trade-related services in various types of shops. However, there are few studies on the use of the RSQS method in Europe, especially in Poland. It is not popular, and perhaps it can also be treated as a ready-made quality assessment tool on the Polish market.

The RSQS method contains 28 different attributes that were chosen to help in determining the quality level of the trade-related services. In Figure 1 the structure of the RSQS was presented. This method divides all the attributes into 5 dimensions, additionally the first three dimensions are divided into two sub-dimensions. The figure also includes the numbers of the attributes that correspond to the numbers of the same attributes presented in the analysis of the results. Their descriptions in the figure have been omitted so as not to repeat them unnecessarily.

The methodology of the RSQS method is different from the Servqual, Importance Performance Analysis, or Kano methods. Customers only assess the ready-made trade-related services and their feelings towards shopping. Therefore, the survey is shorter than in the case of the aforementioned methods, where, in addition, customers also assess their expectations towards this service. In the questionnaire of the RSQS it can also include assessments related to the importance of individual attribute groups (dimensions), and thus include the importance in the analysis of the results.

The aim of the paper was to assess the quality of operation of a traditional shop using the RSQS methodology. This study was carried out using a paper questionnaire that contained the attributes proposed in the RSQS method. The survey was conducted among customers of a selected traditional shop. The analyzed results made it possible to determine the quality level of commercial services provided by the research shop and to indicate its strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, the possibility of using the ready-made RSQS scale

to assess the quality of commercial services provided in Polish economic realities was confirmed.

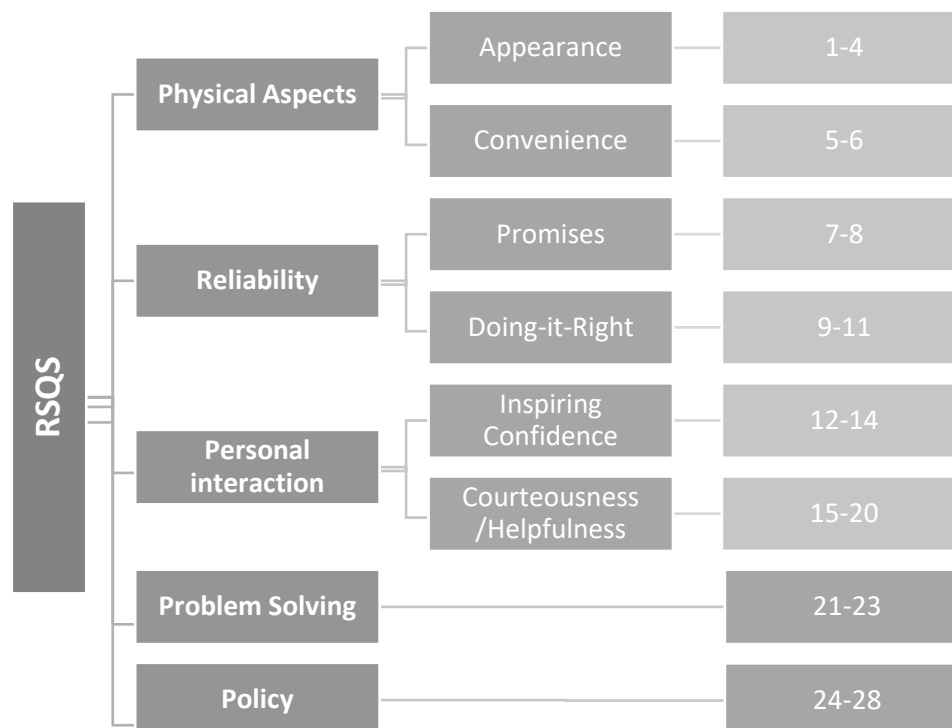


Fig. 1 RSQS structure

Source: own study based on Dabholkar et al, 1996; Farooqi and Banerji, 2013

METHODOLOGY

The study was aimed at the assessing the usefulness of the ready-made Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) for assessing the quality of a selected traditional shop operating in Poland. The shop dealing in luxury cosmetics was selected for the research object. This research will allow to determine whether the used methodology allowed to obtain an appropriate amount of information on the quality of services offered by the chosen shop, but also whether its use was difficult for both the respondents and the persons conducting the study. This methodology is rarely used in the conditions of the European and Polish economy. In addition, the study was conducted during the difficult period of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was associated with many restrictions on the operation of such facilities. It also made it possible to show what the quality of the trade-related services was in that period and what were the strengths and weaknesses of the research shop's operation.

The research was in the form of a paper questionnaire addressed to the customers of the chosen shop. The survey contained 28 attributes divided into 5 dimensions (not equal-numerous). All the attributes and their classification into dimensions are derived from the previously described RSQS method (Dabholkar et al, 1996; Farooqi and Banerji, 2013). The respondents were asked to assess individual attributes on the Likert scale, determining the quality level of purchases they made in the research facility. A seven-point Likert scale was

used, where 1 means "absolutely disagree and 7" absolutely agree). Additionally, they were asked to indicate which of the dimensions is important for them. For this purpose, the respondents were to divide 10 points between individual dimensions, taking into account their importance.

Due to the fact that the survey was in a paper form and temporary trade restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic were introduced and due to the assortment of the research shop, it was assumed that at least 100 customers should complete the survey. The survey was conducted in the period October 2020 February 2021. 159 questionnaires were obtained, of which 143 were further analyzed.

When analyzing the research results, at the beginning the structure of the respondents was analyzed. In the paper, only a general description of the structure of the respondents was included. Then the Cronbach Alpha test was performed for the entire survey, but also for individual dimensions and sub-dimensions to assess the reliability of the obtained responses. Only the division into dimensions was taken into account in the further analysis. Average scores for individual attributes, dimensions and all attributes together (total mean) were calculated. Additionally, the average importance of individual dimensions was checked. The overall mean was calculated twice, the second time taking into account the importance of individual dimensions.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning, the structure of respondents participating in the survey was analyzed. As mentioned earlier, 143 correctly completed questionnaires were analyzed. Most of the respondents were women (67.41%). As far as the age structure is concerned, people aged 41-50 years (32.19%), 31-40 years (25.43%) and 21-30 years (18.13%) prevailed. There were no respondents over 71 years old. When it comes to social status, working people (63.23%) and pupil/university students (15.43%) prevailed. The respondents are people with/higher (48.14%) or secondary (25.80%) education. When it comes to residence, the most frequent participants of the survey were people living in city with over 300k residents (41.27%) and city 201 to 400k residents (15.21%). It should be emphasized that this structure could have been caused by the type of chosen shop (luxury cosmetics). Women of all ages buy more and more products in these types of shops. Due to the fact that the products are luxury cosmetics, i.e. their price is quite high, the majority of respondents are middle-aged people with higher education and a stable social situation.

Then, the reliability of the collected answers was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha test (Table 1). This analysis was carried out for the entire survey, but also for individual dimensions and sub-dimensions. The results of the research were commented, taking into account the interpretative assumptions presented by Hair et al. (2003), according to which the data for which the Cronbach Alpha test was at least 0.7 should be considered reliable. In Table 1 it was shown that the test results in all cases.

Table 1 Results of Cronbach Alpha test

	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha test
All analyzed survey	28	0.759
Physical Aspects	6	0.841
Appearance	4	0.761
Convenience	2	0.864
Reliability	5	0.901
Promises	2	0.931
Doing-it-Right	3	0.847
Personal interaction	9	0.814
Inspiring Confidence	3	0.741
Courteousness/Helpfulness	6	0.828
Problem Solving	3	0.716
Policy	5	0.764

Source: own study

When analyzing the average assessment for individual dimensions for the research shop (Table 2), it was found that according to the respondents following dimensions are the most important: physical aspects (5.607), followed by policy (5.376).

Problem solving was assessed the lowest (3.473). The average assessment of individual attributes should be also commented to see the main factors which have influence on level of the trade-related in the research shop.

Among the highest evaluated attributes, attribute 26 (This store has operating hours convenient to all their customers) deserves special attention. The average assessment was 6.11. This is an important attribute because it depends on the opening hours whether the customer will be able to enter the shop and make purchases. The next two attributes, i.e. 1 (The store has modern-looking equipment and fixtures) and 14 (Customers feel safe in their transactions with this store), were assessed on average just below 6. Due to the appropriate appearance of equipment and fixture and safe transactions, customers feel satisfied, and this increases the likelihood of their return to the research shop. These three attributes should be treated as strengths of the research object.

Attributed 23 (Employees of this store are able to handle customer complaints directly and immediately) and 21 (This store willingly handles returns and exchanges) got the lowest assessments. These are the attributes belonging to one dimension, i.e. problem solving. This is the lowest-assessed dimension on average. Customers have problems with complaints and returns, and these are part of the rights of customers. This means that, in general, in this area, the shop is assessed the lowest by respondents, and the attributes belonging to this dimension should be treated as weaknesses and result in not very high customer satisfaction. Additionally, attribute 19 (Employees in this store are consistently courteous with customers) got low assessment, however, the research should not accept such the situation. It depends on the behavior of the

staff whether the customer will make a purchase or return to the shop. This attribute should also be treated as a weakness of the examined store.

Table 2 Average assessments of attributes and dimensions for the research shop

No	Attribute	Mean
Physical Aspects		5.607
1	The store has modern-looking equipment and fixtures.	5.97
2	The store and its physical facilities (trial rooms and restrooms) are visually attractive.	5.86
3	Materials associated with this store's service (such as shopping bags, loyalty cards and catalogs) are visually appealing.	5.64
4	The store has clean, attractive and convenient physical facilities (restrooms, fitting rooms).	4.98
5	The store layout at this store makes it easier for customers to find what they need.	5.78
6	The store layout at this store makes it easier for customers to move around in the store.	5.41
Reliability		4.392
7	When this store promises to do something (such as repairs, alterations) by a certain time, it will do so.	3.98
8	This store provides its services at the time it promises to do so.	3.65
9	This store performs the service right the first time.	5.48
10	This store has merchandise available when the customers want it.	4.62
11	This store insists on error-free sales transactions and records.	4.23
Personal interaction		4.389
12	Employees in the store have the knowledge to answer customers' questions.	5.14
13	The behaviour of employees in this store instills confidence in customers.	4.17
14	Customers feel safe in their transactions with this store.	5.94
15	The employees in this store give prompt service to customers.	4.03
16	Employees in this store tell customers exactly when services will be performed.	5.14
17	Employees in this store are never too busy to respond to customer's requests.	3.76
18	This store gives customers individual attention.	3.69
19	Employees in this store are consistently courteous with customers.	3.47
20	Employees in this store treat customers courteously on the telephone.	4.16
Problem Solving		3.473
21	This store willingly handles returns and exchanges.	3.48
22	When a customer has a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it.	3.65
23	Employees of this store are able to handle customer complaints directly and immediately.	3.29
Policy		5.376
24	This store offers high quality merchandise.	4.87
25	This store provides plenty of convenient parking for customers.	5.19
26	This store has operating hours convenient to all their customers.	6.11
27	This store accepts all major credit cards.	5.74
28	The store has its own credit card.	4.97

Source: own study

Then, the importance of individual dimensions for the respondents was analyzed (Fig. 2). The respondents indicated the physical aspects of the shop as the most important group of attributes, which means that they pay special attention to the material side of the trade-related services. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these are the first elements of the shop, the first attributes they deal with. If they enter a shop, especially one that sells luxury goods, it is important that its

appearance, equipment, cleanliness and organization are at the appropriate level.

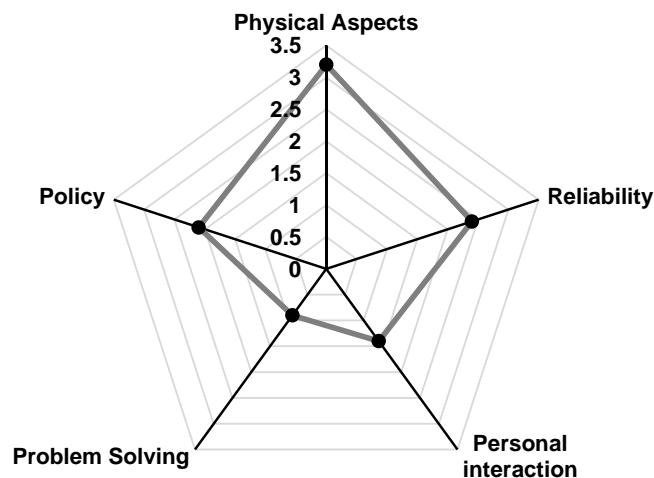


Fig. 2 Importance of each dimensions

Source: own study

The least important dimension was problem solving. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these are attributes related to the after-sales service rather than the purchase itself. However, it should be remembered that the attributes of this dimension were assessed fairly low, which means that these attributes resulted in the least customer satisfaction.

The average assessment of the quality of the research shop was:

$$\text{Mean} = 4.647 \quad (1)$$

And after taking into account the importance of individual dimensions, this average was:

$$\text{Mean}_w = 4.904 \quad (2)$$

This means low level of the customer satisfaction. One should look closer at the lowest assessed attributes to propose and implement corrective actions that could help to improve customer satisfaction.

An important conclusion from the presented research is the fact that the used RSQS scale may be the basis for conducting research on traditional shops in Polish reality. Its use did not cause major problems during the research. It is worth saying that this methodology can be recommended to other traditional shops to assess the quality of the trade-related services they offer.

Due to the use of the RSQS method, it was possible to assess the quality of the trade-related services of the research facility. Moreover, the respondents had no problem filling in the questionnaires and were quite willing to take part in the survey. However, it should be taken into account that the respondents' approach to the survey could have been caused by the specificity of the shop, and thus the structure of customers and respondents. These are educated, working people from larger cities who better understand the need to conduct similar research.

CONCLUSION

The conducted research was aimed at assessing the quality of operation of a traditional shop. To achieve this goal, the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS), available in the literature, but rarely used in Poland, was used. Due to the surveys in which the customers of the research shop took part, it was possible to determine the quality of services at a level that is moderately satisfactory for customers. The attributes that were assessed the highest by customers and those assessed the lowest were indicated, which means that due to the conducted research, it is possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen shop's operation.

As the result of the conducted research, it was possible to show that the RSQS method can also be used in the conditions of the European or Polish economy. This means that it can be used as a ready-made research instrument to assess the quality of shop operations.

The paper and conducted research are not free from limitations. Due to the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and related trade restrictions, during the construction of the research method, the minimum research sample was defined as 100, and at the end 159 respondents participated in it, of which 143 were subjected to further analysis. This means that the research sample was quite small. However, it should be remembered that the surveyed entity is a shop dealing in luxury cosmetics. The prices of such cosmetics are quite high, which results in a few customers. All these reasons contributed to a small number of analyzed responses. Due to not too many responses, it was decided not to propose corrective actions.

However, it is planned to continue the research to get further opinions and expand the research results. Perhaps this will allow to more accurately determine the quality of the services of the research shop and to better indicate its strengths and weaknesses, and then to determine the corrective research for the attributes that received the lowest assessment in order to influence the customer satisfaction.

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Abstract: We make purchases almost every day. We buy some products very often (e.g. food), others less often (e.g. furniture, car). Shops, selling products to customers, are not their producers, but rather provide them with services (commercial service). It is important that the customer, after making the purchase, is satisfied not only with the product, but also with the purchasing process itself. In order to determine what are the reasons for customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, it is necessary to assess the quality of services, i.e. the process of making purchases by customers. In the available literature, there are many methods that are used to assess the service quality. However, their use is associated with the need to identify attributes that could well describe the service provision process, but also be a source of knowledge about customer satisfaction. The Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) developed by Dabholkar and his colleagues is applicable to assess the quality of services provided by shops, so it can be a ready-made tool that does not require the researchers to define attributes, as would be the case when using traditional methods. The aim of the paper was to assess the quality of operation of a traditional shop using the RSQS methodology. This study was carried out using a paper questionnaire that contained the attributes proposed in the RSQS. The survey was conducted among customers of a selected shop. The analyzed results made it possible to determine the quality level of commercial services provided by the research shop and to indicate its strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, the possibility of using the ready-made RSQS scale to assess the quality of commercial services provided in Polish economic realities was confirmed.

Keywords: RSQS, service quality, trade-related service, traditional trade