

Remigijus Kinderis

Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija / Higher Education Institution, Klaipėda, Lithuania (corresponding author)
E-mail: r.kinderis@kvk.lt

Jūratė Danielienė

Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija / Higher Education Institution, Klaipėda, Lithuania
E-mail: j.danieliene@kvk.lt

Eglė Jonuškienė

Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija / Higher Education Institution, Klaipėda, Lithuania

Assessment of Customer Service Quality of the Gas Station Network in Lithuania

Abstract

The gas station business enterprises are constantly trying to find ways to influence customers through a variety of services and improve the level of these services, which will ultimately lead to customer satisfaction. Assessing the quality of customer service becomes a prerequisite for this gas station business. This research paper is a theoretical and practical review of SERVQUAL and the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) as a tool for measuring service quality in the gas station sector. The aim of the research is to determine and evaluate the quality of customer service in a network of Lithuanian gas stations. The theoretical part of the article analyses the quality of customer service, its evaluation models and factors, as well as means of assurance in the field of retail trade – in the network of petrol stations. The methodological part presents and describes the access, procedure, instruments and methods of data processing and presentation of the conducted research. The research was conducted using a quantitative research instrument – a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed using SERVQUAL and RSQS methods. The empirical part of the article presents the analysis of the research data on the quality of customer service in the gas station network. The article closes with conclusions and recommendations for improving the quality of customer service in the gas station network. Key findings: all five dimensions of customer service were significant and positively rated by customers. However, in each dimension there are minor problems with the quality of the service: the equipment and cleanliness of the toilets; the modernity of the technologies used to pay for the services; the personal attention paid to the customer by the staff and the information provided on current promotions and discounts available during the service; the greater feeling of security and timely provision of services; the listening to the customer's comments; the confidence in the policy on the protection of personal data.

Keywords

service quality, quality improvement, gas station network

JEL: M21, M11



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1 Introduction

Quality customer service is one way of meeting customers' wants and needs. The right quality of service makes customers feel satisfied or even happy. Customers tend to use the provided services repeatedly if they were previously satisfied with the quality of the provided services and especially with the attitude towards the customer – quality service and communication. Therefore, it is necessary to perceive customers and their quality service as a certain value – the basis of the company's success (Jurgilevičiūtė & Sūdžius, 2010; Riseetyawan,

Sularto, Sari, & Badrunsyah, 2022). Žilinskienė and Norkus (2021) state that customer service is directly related to the quality of the service and vice versa, so companies must constantly assess the quality of their activities by evaluating feedback from their customers. Usually, customers whose needs are not met search for and choose alternatives that better meet their needs and expectations, and in this case companies lose revenue (Bliujūtė & Korsakienė, 2014). It is worth noting that continuous improvement of service quality helps to avoid material losses and ensures further efficient operation of the company and its competitiveness

in the market (Bagdonienė and Hopenienė, 2015). Service quality, including the level of customer service, is one of the main factors in achieving and strengthening customer loyalty. Achieving service quality must be a consistent, long-term and demanding work, thanks to which relationships with customers as business partners are established (Vyšedvorskytė & Vilkaitė-Vaitonė, 2020; Ingaldi, 2021).

In Lithuania there is a lot of competition between the operating gas station networks. Currently, there are more than 15 gas station chains operating in Lithuania, so it is necessary to avoid factors that reduce the attractiveness of gas station chains: poor customer service, low quality, and a small selection of services and products (Šalkauskienė & Poželaitė 2014). The analysed network of gas stations in Lithuania has been in operation for more than 20 years, but prior to that, no research had been conducted on the quality of customer service in this network of gas stations. Taking this into account, the authors pose the following problematic questions: what do customers think about the quality of service at the network of gas stations participating in the study and what factors have the greatest influence on customer satisfaction, what are the problem areas of service quality and what are the directions for its improvement? What is the most appropriate research methodology to study the quality of customer service in gas station networks?

The object of the research is the quality of customer service.

The aim of the research is to determine and evaluate the quality of customer service in a network of Lithuanian gas stations.

The objectives of the research:

1. To analyse the concept of customer service quality and the factors that determine quality.
2. To study the models of service quality assurance and their suitability for assessing the quality of customer service of a filling station chain.
3. To assess the quality of customer service of a gas station chain by identifying its problem areas.
4. To provide directions for improving the quality of customer service in the gas station network.

Limitations of the research. The research was conducted to explain the quality of customer service in one of the gas station networks in Lithuania. The data collected during the research reflects the opinion of only one gas station network on the quality of service, which cannot be equated or absolute for the entire gas station business in Lithuania.

Originality/Significance. The research is original in the sense that gas station networks and their activities, the quality of services provided in them and customer service are rarely the subject of research in Lithuania. The research was conducted after

preparing an original questionnaire and combining two methods of service quality assessment: SERVQUAL and RSQS. The research instrument was adapted to study the service quality of customers in the gas station network, thus contributing to the validation of the RSQS survey scale. The presentation of results can influence the reader's assessment of the quality and credibility of a study. The content identified should be considered by authors hoping to make the results of their service quality research more accessible and understandable to readers.

Research methodology. Comparative analysis of scientific literature, quantitative research method, using a written online survey (questionnaire). Statistical data processing was carried out using SPSS 23.0 and Ms Excel programmes.

2 Literature Review

Determinants of customer service quality. Service quality can be defined as the perceived difference between the actual service experienced by customers and their expected expectations, i.e., it is a measure of how well the level of service provided meets customer expectations. For customer satisfaction to be positive, two different aspects of service quality must be considered: technical quality and functional quality. Technical quality is the external expression of quality and reflects what the customer receives during the service. Functional quality is the process by which quality is experienced and achieved. Both technical and functional quality must meet or exceed customer expectations, then service quality is high and customers are satisfied, and conversely, if expectations are not met, then quality is low and customers are disappointed (Tjiptono & Chandra, 2005; De Keyser & Lariviere, 2014; Ingaldi, 2021). Thus, service quality can be described as a momentary experience, as it is assessed at the time of receiving/delivering the service. Since the user is the main evaluator of service quality, companies need to consider not only technical and functional quality, but also what quality the customer expects. It can be assumed that customer service quality equals perception – expectations (Zeithaml, 2002).

Riseetyawan, Sularto, Sari, & Badrunsyah (2022) explain that consumer satisfaction is a person's feelings of satisfaction and disappointment resulting from comparing their perceptions or impressions of the purchased product or service received with their expectations. Customers expect impeccable service and to receive a product or service that is appropriate in terms of price and quality. The main criteria used by customers to assess service quality as a component of service quality are:

- trust is the fulfilment of promises by the company and its employees, honesty, self-confidence of service personnel, competence and problem-solving skills;

- assurance means providing reliable and sufficient information about goods and services, creating the impression of a competent and professional employee;
- responsiveness and attentiveness – this means responding promptly to customer requests, speed of service, helpfulness and initiative;
- sensitivity and empathy – this is the ability and desire of the institution's staff to understand the client, his qualities related to feelings and needs, fostering the client's sense of need;
- fostering self-esteem – this is showing clients that they are important and visible, the ability to feel and understand clients' needs and their situation (Małuszyński, Gajewska, & Małuszyńska, 2016).

According to Šalkauskienė (2018), customer satisfaction is mainly determined by: emotional satisfaction when using the product, feeling of prestige, fashion, availability of the product (service) (does it take a long time to buy the product (service)); service quality (70% of it depends on the human factor, i.e., on the service personnel). The quality of customer service is important not only for customer satisfaction, but also for the development of the company, as well as for satisfaction with the work and behaviour of the service personnel. Customer service consists of four successive stages: acceptance of the customer, clarification of the situation (need), satisfaction of the need, feedback communication (finding out whether the customer was satisfied).

In most cases, the quality of customer service is determined by the work of the service employee (Šalkauskienė & Poželaitė 2014). Falter & Hadwich, (2019) also state that direct customer-employee contact has a significant impact on the customer's perception of service quality. According to them, service employees need to be well trained and prepared in order to be able to spread positive emotions and maintain good mutual relations when meeting with customers. Therefore, service staff should be qualified, professional and well versed in their work. Service personnel must be familiar with the products and services in order to answer all customer questions. Therefore, company managers must be responsible for preparing employees,

improving their qualifications and organising training. Service personnel need to be introduced to the company's customer service culture, the company's policies and values, and the service standards to be followed when serving customers. When improving the quality of customer service, it is very important to involve employees in the process as much as possible. Active participation of employees in considering the principles of customer behaviour ensures that the quality of customer service will contribute to building relationships with customers (Šalkauskienė, 2018). The quality of customer service is influenced by objective and subjective factors Šalkauskienė & Poželaitė (2014) (Table 1).

It is very important for companies to identify, shape and manage consumer expectations. The tools for forming user expectations can be divided into four main groups: communication actions (information messages of various types), acquired experience, word-of-mouth communication and product/service features (Bakanauskas & Račkauskaitė, 2010). Another important determinant of service level is the satisfaction of customer needs. In order to meet customer needs, it is necessary to know what they are. Once the needs have been clarified, we know not only what the user expects, but also what he or she really wants.

Internal and external factors also have a significant impact on the quality of customer service. Internal factors include the company's attitude towards the customer and service personnel, company culture, staff qualifications and professionalism, staff involvement in the service quality improvement process, training and staff motivation. External factors are related to users/customers' expectations, their attitude towards the chosen company, recommendations from relatives or friends, price, means of public information. All these factors have an impact on service quality.

Service quality measurement and assurance. To achieve impeccable service quality, companies must continuously analyse customers' opinions and expressed satisfaction, the main goal of which is to eliminate gaps related to customer service. The main goal of the company – to improve the quality of

TABLE 1 Factors influencing the quality of customer service

Subjective factors	Objective factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The customer's sympathy for the staff – The customer's trust in the staff and the company – The staff's sincere attention and concern for the customer's well-being – Staff respect for the customer and honesty in offering goods or services – Personal characteristics of the staff – Staff competence – Pleasant environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Service culture (cleanliness, customer confidence, staff appearance, courtesy, helpfulness) – Staff qualification – Clarifying customer needs and presenting the best offer – Quick response to the customer and their needs – Communication skills – Availability (convenience of location and working hours) – Attention to regular customers

Source: Šalkauskienė & Poželaitė (2014)

customer service – must be based on the users' expectations, on the evaluation of the quality experienced, and only then the measures to improve the quality of customer service will ensure greater satisfaction with the services. Measuring the quality of customer service is a component of measuring the quality of the company's overall activity (Salkauskienė, 2018).

In order to control service quality, companies need to be aware of evaluation methods and how to choose them correctly when improving and analysing the quality of customer service. There are many different quality evaluation models. They allow researchers to assess quality in different aspects and to identify shortcomings in service delivery. The abundance of service quality assessment models presented in the scientific literature reveals the complexity of service quality assessment and reflects the search for a universally applicable quality assessment model (Kinderis, Žalys & Žalienė, 2011; P.J. et al., 2021).

In order to better manage the quality of the services provided, companies should use several service quality management models, as this would allow quality to be studied more accurately. In most cases, companies use only one model to save time and money, but it is likely that such studies do not reflect the real situation regarding service quality in companies.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985) proposed the SERVQUAL methodology to measure and describe the overall quality of service. SERVQUAL is a methodology that helps to determine the level of quality of services provided using 5 dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, sensitivity and empathy. Tangibility is defined as the physical appearance of equipment, technology, staff and means of communication. Reliability is defined as the ability to deliver services reliably and thoroughly. Responsiveness refers to the willingness to help the user and the speed of service. Responsiveness reflects the characteristics of staff knowledge and respect for the consumer and the ability to instil confidence. Empathy includes caring and individual attention to customers. All of these dimensions include a number of service characteristics, which are presented to consumers in the form of statements and a rating scale. Traditionally, a survey based on the SERVQUAL methodology consists of 22 statements on service quality criteria that are rated using a Likert scale, the limits of which can vary depending on the SERVQUAL modification chosen. Later, all statements are grouped into the 5 dimensions of service quality mentioned above, which help to determine the differences between expected and experienced service quality and to identify gaps in service provision, i.e., areas where service providers should improve.

In their work, Finn & Lamb (1991) emphasised that the measurement of service quality in the retail

sector differs from the methods used to measure service quality in other sectors. To overcome this limitation, the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) was developed (Dhabolkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1995). Later, Siu & Tak-Hing Cheung (2001) conducted a study recommending the refinement of the RSQS scale to be applicable to retail organisations, focusing on the consistency of measuring the quality of goods sold and services provided, and noting the lack of research on retail service quality and the importance of ratings. The researchers emphasised the need for regular research on service quality to assess the need for and consideration of improving the services and products sold, their range and customer satisfaction.

This scale has five dimensions:

- physical aspect, which measures the appearance and convenience of the shop/station;
- reliability – how staff deliver on their promises;
- personal interaction – measuring whether staff are courteous and build trust;
- problem solving – how they respond to customer complaints, changes and returns of unsuitable goods;
- policy – convenience of shop/station working hours, parking facilities, quality of goods and ability to pay by credit card.

Identifying and assessing the above dimensions helps to determine service quality from the customer's point of view. The RSQS consists of 28 scales, 17 of which belong to SERVQUAL, and 11 scales were determined based on the analysis of scientific literature and qualitative research with the help of researchers (Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz (1995), Siu & Tak-Hing Cheung, (2001). This scale (model), a number of empirical studies have shown high validity in assessing service quality in different retail units (Mehta, Lalwani, & Li Han, 2000; Siu & Chow, 2004; Kaul, 2007; Martinez & Martinez, 2010; Nallamalli & Shekhar, 2011; Sriram, 2019).

According to Simmers & Keith (2015), the RSQS is specifically designed to measure service quality in the retail sector. According to them, the physical dimensions of the RSQS scale are somewhat broader than the material values dimension of SERVQUAL, as they include the appearance and convenience of the store layout. RSQS is a performance-based measure of service quality specific to the retail sector (Farooqi & Banerji, 2013). However, the aforementioned researchers point out that this scale (model) cannot be generalised and applied to study the quality of goods and services (including service) of all retail entities. The RSQS needs to be modified and adapted to study retail trade entities in countries with different cultures, so the authors of this article also considered the specifics of the country and the business context of gas stations when preparing the research instrument.

3 Materials and Methods

There are more than 20 gas station networks in Lithuania. For the purpose of the study, it was decided to select one of the 5 largest gas station networks. One of them, which was established in 2000 and currently has 80 gas stations in Lithuania with 578 employees, agreed to participate in the study. One of the selection criteria was that the network should not only sell gas and goods, but also provide additional services.

The quantitative research was conducted through a written questionnaire. The advantage of a written questionnaire survey is that it takes less time to collect information, it is inexpensive and the reliability of the questionnaire can be assessed using mathematical-statistical methods.

The research instrument – a questionnaire – was prepared on the basis of the analysis of scientific and theoretical material. The questionnaire contained 21 questions: 18 closed questions with multiple choice answers and 3 semi-open questions. The first part of the questionnaire contains questions about the reasons for choosing the company, the goods purchased, the purchasing methods and the services used. The second part of the questionnaire contains questions on the quality of services. The questions have been compiled on the basis of the SERVQUAL methodology and the Retail Trade Service Quality Scale (RSQS) methodology, resulting in a unique questionnaire. The third part of the questionnaire is designed to determine the socio-demographic parameters of the customers (age, gender, education, income, etc.). Respondents rated the statements in the questionnaire on a 5-point symmetrical Likert scale.

The research period was 2 weeks, April 2022. The study was conducted in the following stages: theoretical systematic analysis of scientific literature, preparation of the research methodology, creation and testing of tools, collection of research data, their analysis and preparation of a research report.

The survey sample was formed by a probabilistic method through a survey of the company's customers on the website www.apklausa.lt. About 40,000 people visit the entire network of gas stations every day. This number can be considered as the size of the research population. Based on Paniotto's formula calculation, the planned size of the research sample was 381 respondents, after applying 5% error and 95% probability. However, 186 respondents were interviewed during the time allotted for the study. As a result, the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population.

The research data was analysed using the SPSS 23.0 statistical programme for social research. Descriptive statistics were used and the percentage distribution of responses was calculated. Graphical

data analysis was carried out using a Ms Excel spreadsheet and presented in a descriptive manner.

Research ethics. The ethical principles of social research were followed during the research. It was not difficult to maintain the principles of protection and confidentiality, as it was not possible to establish a direct link between the respondent and the questionnaire, he/she filled in, since neither the name nor the surname or any other identifying information was required in the questionnaire, so the principle of anonymity was guaranteed. The introduction to the questionnaire described who was conducting the research, for what purpose and where the data collected would be used. This information was available to all participants in the study. Completion of the questionnaire was treated as consent to participate in the study. Respondents were free to decide whether or not to participate in the research, so the principle of voluntariness was not violated. Respondents were protected from emotional, financial and physical harm. The principle of honesty was also followed, with data presented exactly as it was received. The research was conducted according to the principles of clarity, relevance, universality and plausibility. There were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in the questionnaire.

4 Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic features of the respondents. The majority of respondents were women – 67.2%, compared to 32.8% for men. The age of the respondents who participated in the survey was mostly between 18 and 30 years old – 45.7%, 30.6% participated between 31 and 45 years old. The respondents who participated in the survey were at least – 1.6%. the respondents who participated in the survey were 61 years old and older, and one respondent (0.5%) did not indicate his age. Most of the respondents were from Klaipėda County (54.3%). Most of the respondents had higher education (38.2%), 31.2% were students, 16.1% had vocational education and 12.9% had secondary education. The analysis of the social status of the respondents showed that the majority of the respondents who took part in the survey were working people – 47.8%, working students – 24.2%, students – 22.6%, 2.2% of the respondents were on maternity leave. 41.9% of the respondents had an average monthly income of 500-1000 EUR, 32.3% of the respondents earned 1000 EUR or more and only 1.1% of the respondents did not state their monthly income.

The frequency of the respondents' visits to the gas stations in the network was also determined: 2.7% of the respondents visit the company's gas stations every day, 9.7% visit them once a week, 13.4% visit them several times a month. There are 28% of respondents who visit the gas station network several times a year. In summary, almost half (45%) of the

respondents visit the service station network often enough to be able to assess the quality of service.

The aim of the survey was to find out which services were used by the gas station network and which goods were bought most frequently by the gas station customers who took part in the survey. Most of the respondents bought fuel (51%), coffee and groceries (35%), washed their cars (4.5%), less often bought goods for their cars and used the trailer rental service at the gas station network.

The majority of respondents chose gas stations in the chain because of their convenient location (29.9%), pleasant and quick service (19.9%), good price/quality ratio of fuel (18.3%), professional staff (10.2%), detailed and attractive company advertising (1.7%), almost 3% chose because of the attractive image of the company. 5.2% used the recommendations of friends and relatives. 4.7% of respondents said it was because of the wide range of goods, 7.6% gave other reasons.

Assessment of customers' attitudes to the quality of service in the gas station chain. The survey asked

respondents to rate the physical aspects of the gas station, personal communication, reliability, problem solving and company policies.

Respondents were presented with 11 statements based on which they could evaluate the physical environment of gas stations (Table 2).

The research data shows that the majority of respondents (over 65%) rated the physical environment of gas stations (all statements) as very good and good. The appearance and dress of staff, the layout and cleanliness of the premises for the sale of services and goods are highly rated, but a small percentage of respondents rate the equipment and cleanliness of toilets and the modernity of payment technologies less well. It is worth noting that men and women rate the physical environment similarly, with almost 72% of women and 66% of men rating the environment as good or very good.

Another set of questions was designed to assess the communication and cooperation between the staff of the service station network. 6 questions were

TABLE 2 Assessment of the physical environment of gas stations

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It's easy to find one's way around the gas station's sales area	44,4%	37,6%	15,2%	1,1%	1,7%
The gas stations are equipped with modern facilities	28,1%	41,5%	28,1%	1,2%	1,2%
Cosy and pleasing to the eye environment	39%	32,6%	23,8%	2,9%	1,7%
The customer service area is clean and comfortable	43%	36,6%	16,3%	2,3%	1,7%
Toilets at gas stations are clean and properly equipped	34,1%	36,4%	24,3%	4 %	1,2%
Convenient entry and exit from the gas station	34,9%	43,6%	17,4%	2,3%	1,7%
Convenient gas station opening hours	38,2%	39,4%	17,1%	3,5%	1,8%
Gas stations provide a modern fuel payment system (payment through self-service cash desks or a mobile application)	43,3%	31,6%	20,5%	2,3%	2,3%
Information on available fuels and their prices is available at the information stand and at each fuel dispenser	41,9%	35,5%	20,9%	0,6%	1,2%
Convenient layout of the gas station sales area and placement of goods	39,4%	34,7%	21,8%	2,9%	1,2%
Appropriate and tidy appearance and clothing of employees (wearing work clothes with company attributes)	46%	33,5%	17,6%	0,6%	2,3%

Source: compiled by the authors

TABLE 3 Assessment of communication between employees of the gas station network

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Employees are competent and have the knowledge to provide customers with information about the products available at the gas station and the services provided	44,9%	35,8%	17%	1,7%	0,6%
Gas station employees serve customers promptly	42,6%	39,8%	15,3%	0,6%	1,7%
Customers receive individual attention at gas stations	34,3%	36,7%	23,7%	3,6%	1,8%
Employees are polite to customers	41,7%	42,3%	13,1%	1,1%	1,7%
Employees admit their mistakes	32,1%	31,5%	31%	1,8%	3,6%
Employees inform about current promotions and discounts	36,6%	32%	25%	4,1%	2,3%

Source: compiled by the authors

submitted for evaluation, the distribution of the answers can be seen in Table 3.

The respondents who took part in the survey (the vast majority of them) gave a positive assessment to the communication of the employees of the gas station network with the customers; in their opinion, the company employs competent, helpful, polite and attentive employees who are able to admit their mistakes. There was a slight lack of individual attention from staff and information about ongoing promotions and discounts. After analysing how women and men rate the communication of the gas station network's employees, it became clear that representatives of both sexes rate it as very good and good, but the rating of women is 10% higher (72.60%) than that of men.

In order to assess the quality of customer service, the issue of customer trust is very important, so

a set of questions was presented to find out whether customers trust the network of gas stations analysed.

After analysing the data presented in Figure 1, it can be said that most of the respondents who took part in the survey trust the gas station network and believe that gas stations fulfil their promises at the agreed time and that the fuel and the bill for it are correctly accounted for. However, there is a small number of respondents who would like to see a greater sense of security and timely delivery of services.

After finding out how respondents assess the reliability of petrol stations, it is necessary to find out what respondents think about how gas station employees solve problems that have arisen (Figure 2).

The survey data shows that forecourt staff usually respond promptly to problems that arise and solve them, give change and receipts honestly and replace

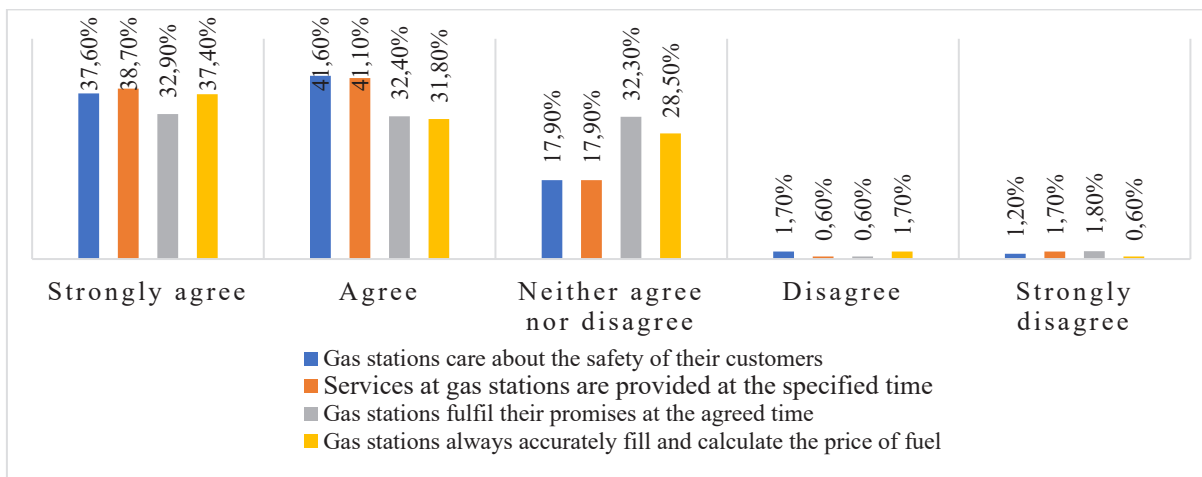


FIGURE 1 Assessment of trust in gas stations

Source: compiled by the authors

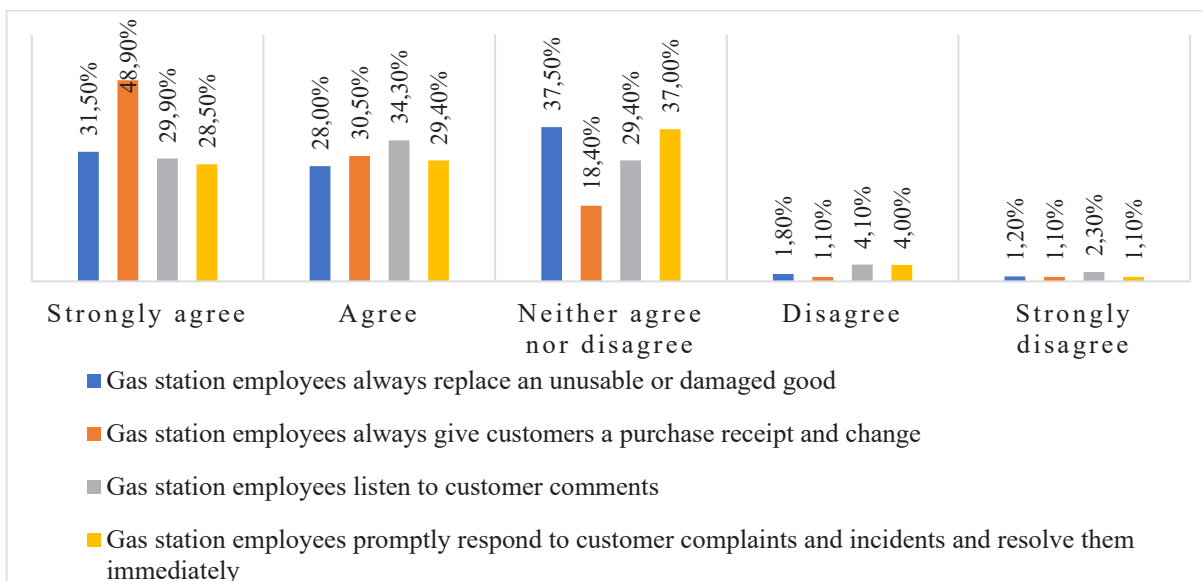


FIGURE 2 Assessment of trust in gas stations

Source: compiled by the authors

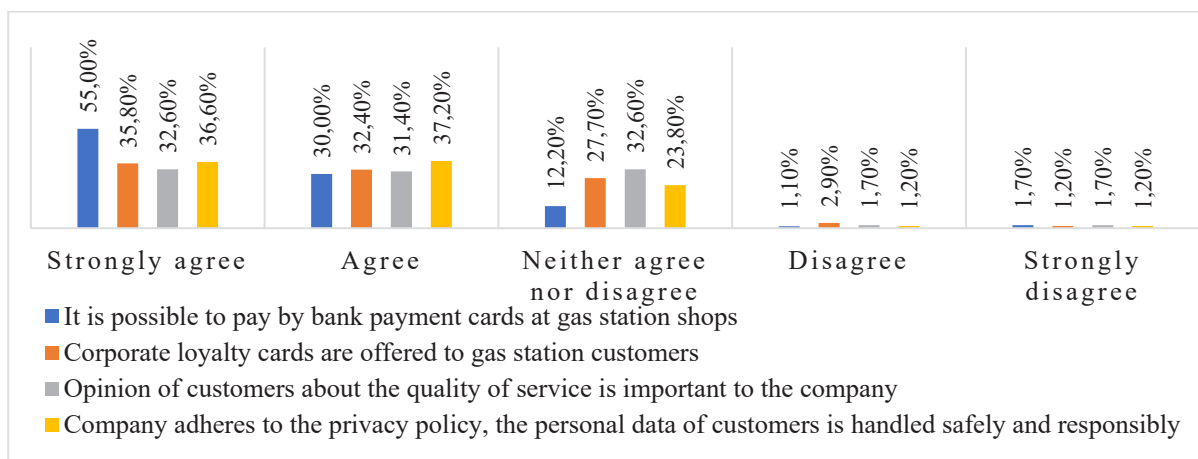


FIGURE 3 Assessment of trust in gas stations

Source: compiled by the authors

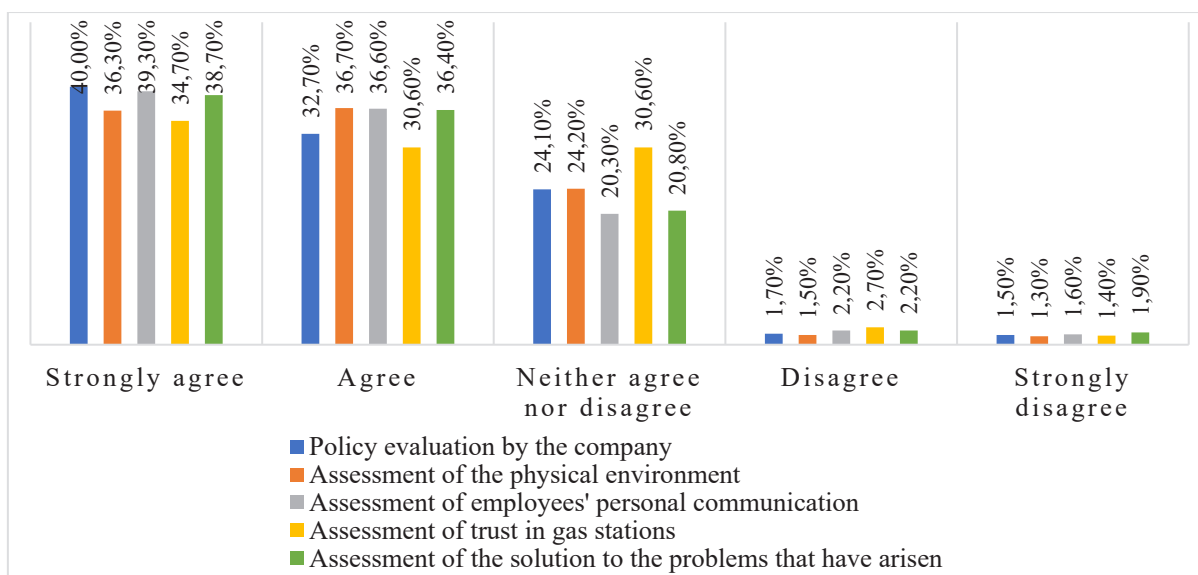


FIGURE 4 Assessment of trust in gas stations

Source: compiled by the authors

unusable goods where possible. However, it should be noted that around 6% of respondents felt that staff did not listen to their comments.

Another important aspect is to find out what respondents think about the company's policies. The gas station chain is committed to handling customers' personal data responsibly and securely and to complying with its privacy policy. It is also possible to pay for goods and services in all the chain's stores by cash, bank transfer and bank cards, as well as to purchase the company's loyalty cards. In order to find out the respondents' opinion on the company's policy, four statements were presented for the respondents to rate (Figure 3).

After analysing the responses, it can be said that most respondents rate the company's policy as very good and good, but not all respondents knew that it was possible to pay with bank cards at

gas station chains. Also, not everyone trusts the company's privacy policy.

Thus, after summarising the research data obtained, it is possible to present a summary of the quality dimensions of all 5 service stations in the network (Figure 4).

The customers of the gas station network analysed rated the physical environment of the stations and staff communication as the best, while the implemented network policy, problem solving and trust aspects were rated slightly worse.

Respondents were also asked whether they planned to continue using the gas station network in the future and whether they would recommend it to others. Around 50% of respondents would recommend the gas station network to others, but only 30% of respondents planned to use the gas station network again in the future.

Both men and women rated the quality of services and goods in the gas station network very similarly, with no significant differences observed, so the data were not analysed by gender.

Respondents were also free to make suggestions and recommendations that they believe would help the network improve the quality of customer service. 37% of respondents believe that the quality of customer service could be improved by increasing staff motivation, almost 17% believe that staff training, service standards and monitoring would improve the quality of customer service, and even 14.5% of respondents suggested a mystery shopper survey. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide their own answers. This option was used by 2.2% of respondents who felt that higher salaries, improved working conditions, etc. could improve service quality.

Based on a systematic approach, the analysis of scientific literature and empirical research helped to obtain data on the object of research, supplemented the theory and methodology of customer service quality. The conducted research confirmed the results of the scientific literature analysis – RSQS is suitable to study gas stations (which sell goods, provide minimal catering and rental services). However, while preparing the research tool, the authors noticed that although the established dimensions of RSQS are very suitable for studying the service quality of customers of gas station networks, the attention paid to the dimensions and the number of their criteria were the same. The authors paid more attention to two dimensions: physical environment and personal communication, and used SERVQUAL for this purpose. This decision was dictated by the peculiarities of the research area, as the gas station business is developed differently in countries with different cultures. The research made it possible to answer the set problematic questions and purpose. In the future, with this methodological basis, the researchers plan to conduct a representative survey on customer service in the gas station network in order to complete and adapt the research instrument as a tool for the gas station networks to prepare the customer service standard.

5. Conclusions and Discussions

Quality customer service means providing efficient, prompt and friendly service, building strong customer relationships, dealing with complaints quickly and efficiently, and responding to customer issues in a timely manner. Quality customer service is the best way to ensure customer loyalty and long-term business success. The quality of customer service is influenced by both internal and external factors. The most important internal factors are: attitude towards the customer, corporate

culture, qualification and professionalism of service personnel, involvement of employees in the process of improving service quality, training, motivation of employees. Service quality is strongly influenced by external factors related to consumers' expectations, their attitude towards the chosen company, recommendations from relatives or friends, price, means of information and the behaviour of service personnel.

After analysing the scientific literature, it can be stated that various quality measurement models, methods and scales are used to study the quality of customer services and satisfaction with the services themselves. The most popular are the SERVQUAL methodology and the RSQS retail service quality scale methodology, which help to clarify the difference between expected and experienced quality, as well as the quality of retail services, including service quality. Both methodologies are validated, but require revision and some adaptation to be applied to different areas of research.

Analysing the data from the service quality survey of gas station customers, it can be said that gas station customers are satisfied with the quality of service. Almost three quarters of respondents rated the five aspects of service quality assessment (physical environment of the gas station, personal communication by staff, company policy, trust in the company, problem solving) as good or very good. However, there are some minor problem areas in terms of service quality: equipment and cleanliness of toilets; modernity of technologies used to pay for services; personal attention of employees to customers and provision of information on current promotions and discounts available during the service; greater feeling of safety and timely provision of services; listening to comments made; confidence in the policy on protection of personal data.

Several directions for improving service quality have been identified. One of them is to increase the motivation of employees by using different and effective means of encouragement and motivation. Incentives should encourage employees to communicate politely and pleasantly with customers, to show more empathy for their complaints, etc. It could be an increase in salary or bonus, announcement of the best employee, etc. Another approach is to provide continuous training for employees on the quality of customer service and to introduce customer service standards in the gas station network. It should also be remembered that the physical condition of the gas station network is an important part of service quality: functional modern design, new and modern customer service technologies help to serve customers faster and more professionally and make them feel more comfortable.

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