ABOUT CUSTOMERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS SERVICE IN RETAIL STORES

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Abstract

Customer service in retail stores is of great importance in creating customer satisfaction. The needs of Georgian consumers in the services offered in stores are changing. Today, consumers are often well informed. Customers want and expect to receive quality products, provide the right level of service and much more. Along with buying the products they need, consumers also expect the buying process to be enjoyable and convenient for them. Existing retail stores that compete with each other contribute to increasing consumer expectations. Personal communication is very important in sales. Sales staff practically helps people make the right choice.

The aim of our research - to study the attitude of consumers to the services available in stores, to the sales methods and to the staff. Based on the results of the study, a number of shortcomings were identified. The final part of the article presents our main recommendations that will help retail stores improve their operations.

Keywords: *marketing research, service, sales in retail stores, customer satisfaction, sales staff*

INTRODUCTION

Today it is growing more and more purchases without a store, but still, the purchases in the stores themselves are of great importance. People spend a significant portion of their time shopping in stores. In the modern market conditions, companies have paid great attention to the issue of customer retention and their loyalty. In today's competitive retail market, as customer service improves, customer expectations and demand to the service level increase from time to time. Customer needs and purchase patterns have changed [1]. To meet different needs, companies typically apply differentiated and customer-oriented marketing strategies to gain a competitive advantage in the market, which allows them to stand out in the competition. In a modern competitive society, it is important to build long-term and stable relationships with customers [2]. The issue of building customer loyalty is not solved only by the activities of sellers. Rather, a customer-oriented organization should be created: create an attractive image for the client, improve the organization's system, and introduce standards of service quality.

Customer satisfaction is related to the quality of service. Customer service is a process of creating significant benefits, what is connected with additional cost. Therefore, it is important that the company pays for expenses at the optimum level for it. Specialists consider three indicators of the level of customer service:

- Availability;

- Functionality - is determined by such indicators as: speed, smoothness, flexibility, elimination of defects and deficiencies;

- Reliability is the ability to maintain the planned level of availability and functionality of customer service operations [3].

The number of retail enterprises in Georgia is quite a lot. Inside the country there are hypermarkets, various types of chain stores, shopping centres, convenience stores (ordinary district stores, in most cases small) and much more. The volume of retail trade turnover in Georgia is growing more and more, which is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Volume of Turnover of retail trade enterprises Mln.GEL (at current prices)

Retail Trade [4]

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
9 591.0	9 861.9	10 622.3	11 949.9	14 140.5
In percent to the previous year (at constant prices)				
114.4	98.7	106.1	105.9	116.1

LITERATURE REVIEW

When selling consumer goods, two components are important: technological and psychological. The technological component is, for example, the physical characteristics of the store and the organization of the trading process in it:

- Physical location;

- Facade, interior design, trade equipment and goods delivery system;

- Product range and its prices;

- Organization of the sales process;

- Technical features of purchases - contractual and other documentation, payment terms, warranty, delivery conditions.

The psychological component is the atmosphere that determines a certain emotional mood. Good atmosphere encourages customers to shop.

An increase in the number of regular customers ensures the efficient operation of retail stores and an increase in their profits. Factors affecting the formation of customer loyalty can be divided into tangible and intangible factors. Material factors are customer-oriented - to make a profit, they are focused on saving money and time. Conventionally, they can be divided into traditional and program factors. The circle of traditional material factors is rather narrow. They may include the location of outlets (near the house, office, located on a daily route), the assortment of goods (the availability of basic essential goods), their quality, etc. Under these factors consumers repeated purchases are made not based on conscious emotional loyalty, but "automatically"[3].

Loyalty program factors are quite expensive, include preferential promotions (discounts), gifts for purchase, discount cards, gift certificates, vouchers, bonuses, club cards, etc. Intangible factors should provide emotional customer satisfaction through quality service and attention. When consumers' in-store experiences are in focus, there are considerable differences between retailers' and consumers' opinions on what constitutes pleasurable experiences and how these might be induced in store environments. Retailers are focused on finding new ways of enhancing consumers in – store experiences, consumers' description of memorable in store experiences are still constituted by traditional values [5].

Buyer satisfaction is greatly influenced by the staff working in the store. Important their qualifications, knowledge of sales procedures, as well as their attitude towards customers. So sales workers need to have a number of qualities [6] [7].

An important issue is the application of branding principles in stores. Traditionally, branding has not been a top priority for most retailers. But over time, that is likely to change leading retailers are beginning to discover their own brands as a potential source of competitive advantage. This raises two questions for them:

- How do consumers perceive our stores and our brand?

- How can we use brand management to improve business performance? [8]

As a result of its activities, the store will establish its defined image in the society. The retailer's image, first of all, depends on the image of products what it sells. Also personnel image and visual characteristics, the location, price and quality of the service play an equally important role in shaping the store's image [9]. It should be noted that the approaches to sales themselves have changed. He became more focused on the buyer, solving his problems [10].
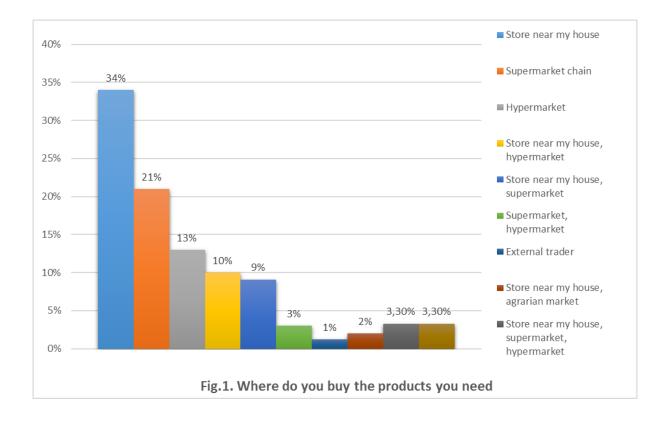
METHODOLOGY

In the research process researcher can gather secondary data, primary data, or both [11]. In our study there are used marketing research methods. In the work there are used the concepts of marketing theories, statistic data, results of the carried out research, information existing on web-pages of certain Georgian organizations, etc.
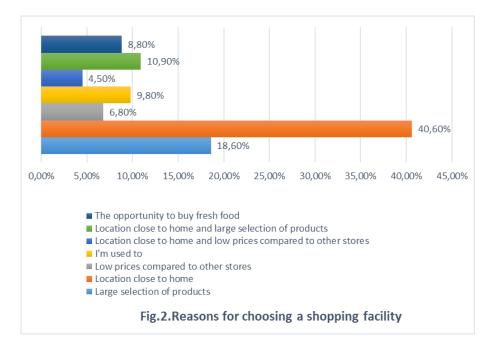
In our study there are used a quantitative survey method [12]. The object of our research is the customer attitudes towards service, selling methods and trade personnel in Tbilisi (capital of Georgia) retail trade. In June 2019 we carried out the research using questionnaire survey. People of different ages, genders, education levels, nationalities and religions took part in our survey, who wished to participate in the study. The questionnaire included twenty-five questions. Open and closed type questions were included in the questionnaire. The survey was anonymous.
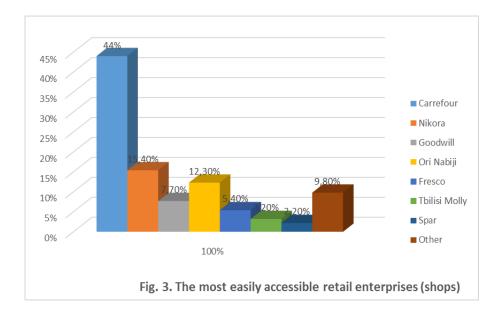
FINDINGS

During the research we establish in what kind of trade enterprises (stores) respondents buy products for their own consumption and household needs. As it turned out, most customer purchases are made in shops near the house and supermarkets (Fig.1).

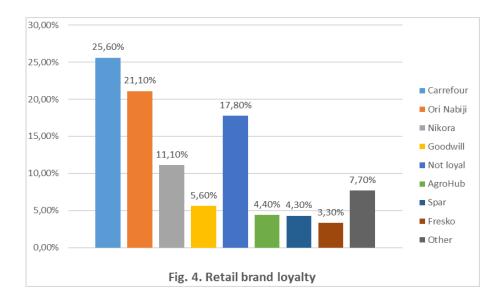Fig.1. Where do you buy the products you need

The location of the store, the range of goods in the store, etc. are of great importance for the commercial success of the store. Georgian researchers mention this in their articles [13]. When we asked why they use this type of shopping facility, most of respondents, 40,6 % named location close to home; 18,6 % of respondents named - large selection of products; 10,9 % of respondents named two reasons: location close to home and large selection of products; 9.8% of respondents said that they are accustomed to shopping in this store, etc.

Fig.2.Reasons for choosing a shopping facility

We asked to the respondents a question: "which of the existing stores can be reached most easily in terms of transportation". The most easily accessible to the majority of respondents (44%) are supermarkets of "Carrefour Georgia", supermarkets "Nikora" were named in second place, stores of "Ori Nabiji"- in third place, etc.

Fig. 3. The most easily accessible retail enterprises (shops)

In our opinion, applying proven principles and approaches to creating a successful brand is an important issue for stores as well [14] [15]. To the question: "Are you a loyal buyer of any particular store (merchant)?", The vast majority of respondents, 25.6%, indicated that they are loyal buyers of Carrefour, 21.1% of respondents are loyal buyers chain of stores "Ori Nabiji", 11.1% of respondents are "Nikora"'s loyal buyers and so on. But 17.8% not show loyalty to any of the stores.

Fig. 4. Retail brand loyalty

We identified the main reasons for customer loyalty to retail stores. So, for example, Carrefour supermarkets have the largest number of loyal buyers. Carrefour loyal customers say, they like:

- The ability to choose a wide range of products,
- affordable (or relatively low) prices,
- high level of service,
- attentive staff,
- pleasant atmosphere and large trading floor space,
- opportunities to buy fresh food,
- frequent promotions,
- opportunity to buy ready-made food (salads, pizza, etc.),
- there is a cafeteria in the store.

According to the results of our research, by the number of loyal customers, in second place after Carrefour, are the shops of "Ori Nabiji". Their regular customers say, what determines their loyalty:

- Low prices,
- helpful and friendly staff,
- proximity to the place of residence (house),
- availability of products of frequent consumption in assortment.

Chain of stores "Nikora" ranks third in terms of regular customers. Its loyal customers named the following main reasons for their loyalty:

- Points accumulation cards,

- high quality products,

- high level of service,

- territorial proximity,

- pleasant atmosphere in the store,

- attentive staff.

Advertising and promotion plays a large role in attracting user attention. It provides customers with information about companies and products. Implemented marketing at the point of sale in a large retail chain gives the same results as TV advertisement [11].

Therefore, in the research process, we determined, which stores used effective advertising and promotion tools. Respondents named, in their opinion, the most famous chain stores. Most of respondents named stores of "Carrefour Georgia". Buyers talked about the advantages that, in their opinion, are available in stores of this chain: a pleasant atmosphere and music; well-used Indicators for the store sections and placing products. With their help, a person can easily find the products he needs; Low prices for buyers in comparison with many other stores; Product tasting; A variety of additional services (entertainment space for young children, a cafeteria, etc.).

According to respondents of "Nikora" supermarket chain used with advertising in store windows, with large banners. The banners depict people of all generations who eat "Nikora" products. "Nicora" chain uses print ads in the form of brochures, etc.

"Fresco" supermarket chain actively uses discount information, promotions on mobile phones, has a pleasant atmosphere in stores, music, and the use of cards.

Our research has identified the main causes that lead to consumer irritability and negative attitudes. Among these reasons, the respondents most often named the following:
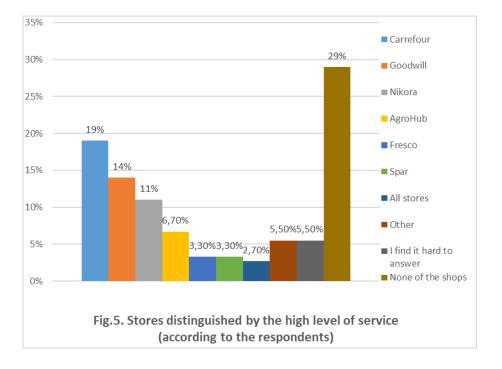
- Long standing in line,

- Inattention to customer questions,

- Attempt to deceive consumers,

- Slow service, etc.

To the question: "What types of violations are most often encountered in retail trade outlets in Georgia?"- the respondents named the following:

- "Sometimes the price of a product listed on the store counter does not match the price I actually pay, the seller tells me that the price has increased and we have not yet been able to make a change to the product on the counter";

- "After buying the product I opened it at home and saw, that the product was old and spoiled";

- Hygienic conditions are violated.

To the question-"in your opinion, which trade facilities in Georgia are distinguished by the high level of their services?" – the respondents gave us the following answers (see diagram, Fig.5):

Fig.5. Stores distinguished by the high level of service
(according to the respondents)

CONCLUSIONS

As research has shown, customer service in stores has many drawbacks. Which leads to dissatisfaction of buyers. In such a situation, in our opinion, it is important to consider the following key recommendations:

- Stores that trade food products need to pay special attention to have fresh food in their store, tighten control over their expiration dates, also, strictly adhere to ideal cleanliness and hygienic conditions;

- Retail stores should use honest methods of working, follow the truth and they should not deceive buyers, e.g., by price, and so on. Which should be monitored by the store manager;

- Increase the remuneration (wages) of trade workers who are in direct contact with consumers, will bring positive results. Because it is the sales staff that serves other people, contributes greatly to other people's well-being, helps consumers make purchasing decisions. Unfortunately, the salaries of such staff in our country today are very low. Only truly motivated sales staff will be able to put customer needs first and foremost;

- It is very important to get qualified people who need to have the personal characteristics (sociability, restrained, etc.) needed for a sales career. It is also essential to conduct their training periodically to help sales staff become better at certain key competencies.

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