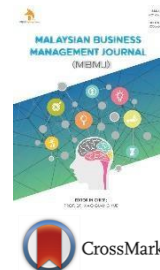




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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ENHANCEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY PROCESSES IN THE CASHIER DEPARTMENT: AN INVESTIGATION OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to enhance service quality processes in the cashier department of Prince Hypermart Argao, a prominent retail establishment in the Philippines. The research employed a SERVQUAL-based questionnaire to gather data from 398 respondents and utilized various statistical tools for analysis. Findings revealed a significant gap between customer expectations and perceived performance across all service quality dimensions, leading to customer dissatisfaction. The largest gaps were found in assurance and empathy, indicating issues with employee interactions and understanding customer needs. Key factors influencing customer satisfaction included transaction accuracy, speed, and efficiency, as well as effective queue management and machine performance. The study concluded that the current service quality in the cashier department does not meet customer expectations, necessitating improvements. Based on the findings, the researchers proposed a comprehensive enhancement plan encompassing training and development, process streamlining, queue management optimization, enhanced communication, physical environment upgrades, and a customer-centric focus. The implementation of these strategies is expected to elevate service quality, improve customer satisfaction, and ultimately increase customer loyalty and profitability for the retail establishment.

KEYWORDS

Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, SERVQUAL, Cashier Department, Retail Store, Enhancement Plan

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive retail landscape, customer satisfaction is paramount, driven by exceptional service quality. While research explores service quality and its role in customer satisfaction, a critical gap exists in understanding these factors specifically within the cashier department of Philippine retail stores, particularly in South Cebu. This region possesses unique customer profiles and shopping trends compared to other areas. Existing research often delves into broader service quality aspects, neglecting the essential role cashiers play in shaping customer experience. This neglect can result in customer dissatisfaction and ultimately lead to customer defection.

Customers expect efficient and accurate transactions, friendly and helpful service, and a pleasant overall experience. The cashier department plays a crucial role in fulfilling these expectations, as it is the primary point of interaction for customers during the checkout process. However, inefficiencies in these processes, such as long waiting times, errors in transactions, and inadequate customer service, can lead to customer dissatisfaction and potentially drive customers away. To address this problem, the researchers suggest applying Operations Management principles, which aim to improve profits by achieving customer satisfaction through service quality.

This study aims to investigate the current level of service quality in the cashier department and identify key factors that influence customer satisfaction. By understanding the gaps between customer expectations and perceived performance, the study will provide insights into areas that

require improvement. The scope of the study includes examining the cashier department's processes, such as scanning items, processing payments, queue management, and overall customer service. The findings will help the retail store develop strategies to enhance service quality, improve customer satisfaction, and ultimately increase customer loyalty and profitability.

1.1 Theoretical Background

Service quality and Customer satisfaction are positively correlated (Khan et al., 2014, after, Sureschchandar et al, 2002; Boulding et al., 1993; Tambi et al., 2008; Marković et al., 2013). An antecedent of service quality is to ensure customer satisfaction (Marković et al., 2013). The SERVQUAL Scale, established, is one of the most widely used service quality assessment scales (Parasuraman et al., 2005). It measures service quality both before and after service consumption using a 44-item scale that is further divided into five areas (tangibles, reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness) (Khan et al., 2014). Customer satisfaction, according to Kotler, is a "person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her customer expectations." The satisfaction goals are set by customers themselves before they set out to make a purchase and include both product and service. Despite the use of abstract concepts such as pleasure and disappointment by Kotler, the definition is not at all unclear.

The key component of this research is the Servqual Theory from the combined theoretical frameworks, after, on how customer loyalty and satisfaction are influenced by the quality of the services provided (Khan

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and Fasih, 2014; Parasuraman, et al., 2005). Additionally, the impact of service quality on the theoretical framework satisfaction and loyalty (Kaura et al., 2012). And Philip Kotler's idea of customer satisfaction.

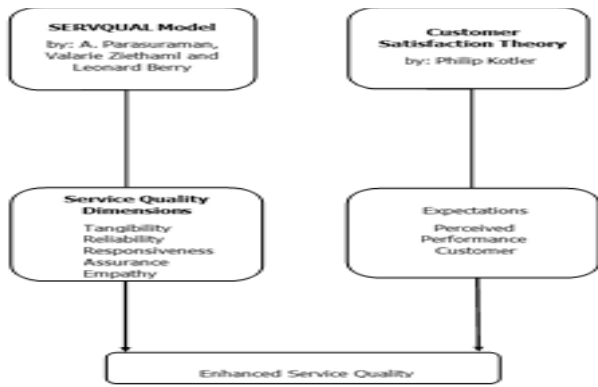


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The researchers used a questionnaire survey to gather qualitative and quantitative data from customers in the cashier department of Prince Hypermart Argao. The SERVQUAL-type questionnaire, adapted, measured service quality using the gap concept and five service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Chingang and Lukong, 2010).

2.2 Research Environment

The study would be conducted within Prince Hypermart located in Argao, Cebu which investigates customer satisfaction in enhancing service quality processes in the cashier department. Argao is a coastal municipality situated on the eastern coast of Cebu Island, approximately 84 kilometers South of Cebu City, covering 158.50 square kilometers, or roughly 3.24% of Cebu's total land area (PSA, 2020).

Prince Hypermart, the specific site of this study, is a prominent retail establishment in Argao. This location was chosen for data collection to gain insights into the research questions. With a population of approximately 78,187 (PSA, 2020), Argao provides a representative sample for the study, including both urban and rural residents.

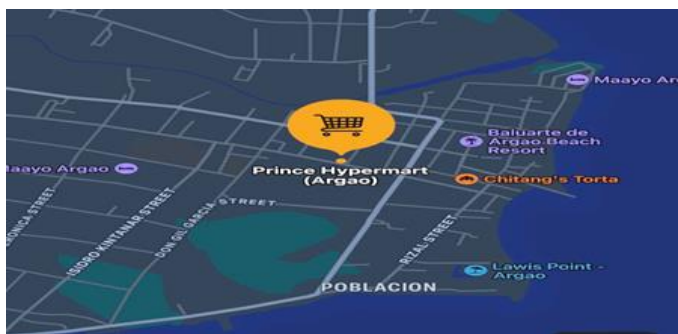


Figure 2: Location Map of the Study Site

2.3 Research Respondents

The target respondents were current customers of the retail establishment. Random sampling was used to select 398 respondents, ensuring an unbiased representation of the customer base.

Slovin's Formula: Where: n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error

For this, the total population is 78, 187. The total margin error would be a = 0.05 or 95% confidence interval.

Computation:
$$\frac{N}{(1+Ne^2)}$$

$$N = \frac{78,187}{1+78,187(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = 398 \quad n = \frac{78,187}{196.47}$$

2.4 Research Instrument

The research instrument combined quantitative analysis methods, key performance metrics, and operational strategies aligned with operations management principles using the sequencing method. This approach aims to enhance service quality, streamline operations, and elevate the overall customer experience.

2.5 Treatment of Data

The research study employed quantitative analysis methods to interpret the collected data. The primary data collection instrument was a SERVQUAL-type questionnaire, adapted from Chingang Nde and Lukong (2010), which utilized a Likert scale to measure customer perceptions of service quality across five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

2.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated for each question to provide an overview of the central tendency and variability of responses.

FORMULA:

Mean (μ):
$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

(To get the mean, take all the values and add them all up and divide by the total number of observations you have)

2.7 Formulas for Specific Measures

TANGIBLE (TA) = (TA1+TA2+TA3+...)/n

RELIABILITY (RL) = (RL1+RL2+RL3+...)/n

RESPONSIVENESS (RN) = (RN1+RN2+RN3+...)/n

ASSURANCE (AS) = (AS1+AS2+AS3+...)/n

EMPATHY (EM) = (EM1+EM2+EM3+...)/n

OSQ - Overall service quality = (TA+RL+RN+AS+EM)/5

Queuing Management: Formulas were used to analyze queuing management, including arrival rate (λ), service rate (μ), utilization factor (ρ), waiting time, and queuing length.

Queuing Management

where: λ is the arrival rate

Queue Length: Average Queue Length

$$L_q = \frac{\lambda^2}{\mu(\mu-\lambda)}$$

μ is the service rate ρ is the utilization factor

Waiting Time:

Arrival rate: The average number of arrivals per unit of time.

$$\lambda = \text{Total number of arrivals} / \text{Total time period}$$

Service rate: The average number of customers served per unit of time.

$$\mu = \text{Total number of customers served} / \text{Total service time}$$

Utilization: The proportion of time the service facility is in use.

$$\rho = \lambda / \mu$$

Transaction

Speed:

Speed = Total time spent (serving time)/Total transactions processed (customer served)

Accuracy:

Accuracy = 100% - Error Rate

Error Rate = $|\text{Observed Value} - \text{Actual Value}| / \text{Actual Value} \times 100$

Efficiency: Efficiency Ratio =

where: Output = how long the task ought to take

Input Value = how long it actually takes

Operation Sequencing- It is to plan the order of the operation by process, regarding the fixed orders through the Operation Order Release Planning. It is to grasp the progress status of the operation, to consider the priority, setup time, and etc., and to 385 make an operation sequencing list.

Table 1: Operation Sequencing				
Job	Pos 1		Pos 2	
	In time	Out time	In time	Out time
Scanning of Items	0	0 + 3:34 = 3:34	0	0 + 7:22 = 7:22
Payment and Exchange	3:34	3:34 + 1:35 = 5:09	7:22	7:22 + 3:12 = 10:34

Overall Service Quality: Customer Satisfaction was calculated as the sum of scores across the five SERVQUAL dimensions. Service Quality Rating was calculated as the difference between expectations and perceived performance scores, divided by the expectations score.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Demographic Profile

Table 2: Respondents Profile		
Gender	Total Respondent	Percentage
Female	257	64.57
Male	141	35.43
Overall Total	398	100

Table 2 shows the respondents profile of the survey respondents indicates that a significant majority, 64.57%, are female, while 35.43% are male. This aligns with research findings that suggest women often have a stronger influence on purchasing decisions within households due to their multiple roles (Guha, 2013). Furthermore, women view shopping as a social necessity and feel a sense of independence when making purchases, similar to men (Bakshi, 2012).

3.2 Current Service Quality

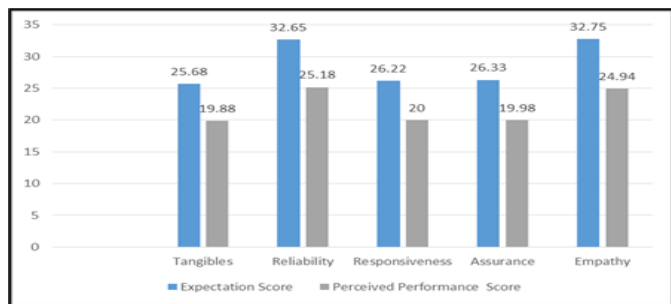


Figure 3: Current Level of Cashier's Service Quality

Figure 3 shows the results from the customer expectation and perception survey reveal that the majority of customers are dissatisfied with the services offered by the store, indicating that these services did not meet customer expectations. The relatively low service quality score on the tangibles and assurance dimensions, particularly regarding cashier service quality, suggests that the store is marginally falling short of customer expectations. According to the study in "The Application of SERVQUAL Distribution in Measuring Customer Satisfaction of Retail Companies," customers perceive discrepancies in cashier performance, raising concerns about the tangibility and responsiveness of service (Haming et al., 2019).

3.3 Key Factors in terms of Transaction

Table 3: Key factors within the cashier department that influenced customer satisfaction in terms of Transaction				
No. Of Samples per Day	Error Rate	Accuracy	Speed	Efficiency
1	88.90%	11.10%	5.67	52.94%
2	14.85%	85.15%	3.45	87.07%
3	60.18%	39.82%	4.81	62.43%
4	41.82%	58.18%	4.25	70.51%
5	59.00%	41.00%	4.77	62.86%
Total	52.95%	47.05%	4.59	67.17%

Table 3 presents the key factors within the cashier department that impact customer satisfaction during transactions, based on the observation of twenty customers per day. The error rate, indicating the percentage of mistakes made during transactions, ranged from 14.85% to 88.90%. Notably, the customers on days 2 and 5 experienced significantly lower error rates, which likely contributed to their higher satisfaction levels. This underscores the importance of minimizing errors to improve customer satisfaction and overall service quality. Accuracy, measured as a percentage, varied between 11.10% and 85.15%, reflecting differences in transaction precision. The customers on day 2, who had the highest accuracy rate, likely benefitted from more careful attention to detail, suggesting that maintaining high accuracy is essential for enhancing customer satisfaction and trust. According to the study, accuracy is critical in service encounters, playing a vital role in meeting customer expectations and ensuring satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Speed, rated on a scale of 1 to 5, ranged from 3.45 to 5.67, with day 1 customers experiencing the fastest transactions. This supports assertion that speed is significant in service operations, as quicker transactions contribute to higher customer satisfaction by reducing wait times and delivering efficient service (Fitzsimmons', 2010). Lastly, efficiency, also expressed as a percentage, ranged from 52.94% to 87.07%. Customers on days 2 and 4 enjoyed the highest efficiency rates, indicating that their transactions were handled with optimal use of time and resources. It emphasizes the importance of efficiency in service operations, as it contributes to customer satisfaction and effective service delivery (Chase et al., 2019). In summary, these findings highlight that reducing errors, ensuring accuracy, maintaining speed, and optimizing efficiency are crucial factors in enhancing customer satisfaction within the cashier department.

3.4 Key Factors in terms of Queue Management

Table 4: Key factors within the cashier department that influenced customer satisfaction in terms of Queue Management					
20 Customers per Day	Waiting Time (Minutes)	Arrival Rate (seconds)	Service Rate (Minutes)	Utilization (Seconds)	Queueing Length (Seconds)
1	3.48	0.47	4.18	0.11	0.01
2	2.85	0.17	6.65	0.03	0.01
3	2.87	0.23	4.82	0.05	0.04
4	3.49	0.29	5.47	0.05	0.05
5	3.65	0.14	4.89	0.03	0.03
Total Mean	3.27	0.26	5.2	0.27	0.02

The table 4 presents the key factors identified in the cashier department's queue management and customer satisfaction. The average customer wait time is approximately 3.27 minutes, indicating a moderate waiting period before service, which aligns study showing that retail wait times typically

range from 2 to 4 minutes, depending on store size and customer flow (Zhang et al., 2018). The customer arrival rate is around 0.26, reflecting a consistent flow of customers throughout the day, suggesting the need for adequate staffing and efficient processes to maintain smooth service and reduce wait times. The service rate of 5.20 indicates that cashiers can serve customers efficiently, though it's important to monitor this rate, particularly during peak hours, to prevent long waits. The utilization rate is approximately 27.21%, indicating that cashiers are moderately busy and have the capacity to handle more customers without being overburdened, though it's crucial to balance workload and service quality. Finally, the queuing length of around 0.03 suggests effective queue management, with minimal customer wait times, though ongoing monitoring is necessary to prevent congestion and ensure a positive customer experience.

3.5 Transaction Sequence in Big Cart

Table 5: Transaction sequence of Multiple Machine in Big Cart

Machines	Operations (Minutes)		Total (Minutes)	Idle Time (Minutes)
	Scanning of Items	Payment and Exchange		
POS 1	3.34	1.35	5.09	32.26
POS 2	7.22	3.12	10.34	27.01
POS 3	2.41	1.45	4.26	33.09
POS 4	4.33	3.23	7.56	30.19
POS 5	5.03	4.08	9.11	28.24
POS 6	5.27	4.03	9.3	28.05
POS 7	5.11	4.11	9.22	28.13

Table 5 shows variations in the performance of seven machines used for scanning and processing transactions in the cashier department. Machine 2 has the longest operation time of 10:34 minutes, while Machine 3 has the shortest at 4:26 minutes. Despite these differences, all machines show considerable idle time, ranging from 27:01 to 33:09 minutes, indicating potential inefficiencies and gaps in workflow management. Reducing this idle time could enhance overall efficiency and customer satisfaction, as supported, highlights the importance of optimizing operations to improve service quality and reduce costs in retail settings (Fitzsimmons, 2010; Chase et al., 2019).

3.6 Transaction Sequence in Small Cart

Table 6: Transaction sequence of Multiple Machine in Small Cart

Machine s	Operations (Minutes)			Total (Minute s)	Idle Time (Minute s)
	Scannin g of Items	Paymen t and Exchang e	Baggin g		
POS 1	2.08	1.04	1.03	4.15	17.4
POS 2	2.21	1.45	1.12	5.18	16.37
POS 3	3.15	2.34	1.43	7.32	14.23
POS 4	3.57	1.25	1.27	6.09	15.46
POS 5	2.36	1.45	1.02	5.23	16.32
POS 6	4.14	2.01	1.23	7.38	14.17

The table 6 presents the transaction sequence and performance metrics of various machines in an express lane, covering times for scanning items, processing payments and exchanges, bagging, total transaction time, and idle time. Machine 6 takes the longest for all stages, indicating potential inefficiencies or delays, while Machine 1 is the most efficient, with the shortest total transaction time. Idle time varies among machines, with Machine 3 showing the least inactivity. These results highlight the need to

improve Machine 6's performance to reduce processing times and boost overall efficiency in the express lane.

3.7 Overall Service Quality

Table 7: Assessing Overall Service Quality through Customer Expectations and Perceived Performance

SERVQUAL Dimension	Expectation Score	Perceived Performance Score	Service Quality Gap Score
Tangibles	6.42	4.97	-1.44
Realiability	6.53	5.03	-1.49
Responsiveness	6.55	4.99	-1.55
Assurance	6.58	4.99	-1.58
Empathy	6.55	4.98	-1.56

The table presents an analysis of overall service quality using the SERVQUAL model, which measures the gap between customer expectations and perceived performance across five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 2017; Pizzi and Vescovi, 2007). The data reveals a significant discrepancy between what customers expect and what they actually experience. Expectation scores for these dimensions are high, ranging from 6.42 to 6.58, while perceived performance scores are notably lower, between 4.97 and 5.03. This results in substantial negative gaps, with the largest being -1.58 for assurance, followed by -1.56 for empathy, -1.55 for responsiveness, -1.49 for reliability, and -1.44 for tangibles. These gaps indicate that the service fails to meet customer expectations, leading to dissatisfaction and highlighting the need for improvements to bridge the gap between customer expectations and service delivery.

4. DISCUSSION

According to the study, several key findings reveal significant areas for improvement in the cashier department at Prince Hypermart Argao. The demographic profile indicates a predominant female customer base, aligning with research that highlights women's influential role in purchasing decisions. This insight suggests that tailoring service approaches to better meet the preferences and needs of female customers could enhance overall satisfaction. The current level of service quality is a major concern, with a significant portion of customers expressing dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction is particularly evident in the tangibles and assurance dimensions, which point to potential issues with both the physical environment and staff interactions. Previous studies have underscored the importance of these factors in achieving high customer satisfaction, suggesting that improvements in the store's environment and employee service quality are necessary to close the gap between customer expectations and actual experiences.

Key factors influencing customer satisfaction, such as error rates, accuracy, speed, and efficiency, were identified as crucial in shaping customer perceptions. The study reveals that high error rates and inconsistent accuracy negatively impact customer trust, reinforcing findings from existing literature that stress the importance of accuracy in service encounters. Additionally, the study confirms that faster and more efficient transactions are highly valued by customers, supporting earlier research that emphasizes the role of speed and efficiency in improving service quality and customer satisfaction. In terms of queue management, the moderate average wait time and steady customer flow suggest that while current operations are manageable, there is room for optimization. The cashiers' utilization rate indicates they have the capacity to handle more customers, which implies that adjustments in queue management and staffing could further enhance service efficiency and reduce wait times. The analysis of machine performance reveals significant idle times across the equipment used for scanning and processing transactions. These idle times point to potential inefficiencies in workflow management. Addressing these inefficiencies could lead to substantial improvements in both operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, aligning with existing literature that highlights the benefits of optimizing equipment utilization to streamline processes.

The study highlights a substantial gap between customer expectations and perceived service quality. This discrepancy indicates that the store's current service delivery fails to meet customer expectations, leading to

dissatisfaction. The SERVQUAL model's dimensions of service quality illustrate the need for targeted improvements across all areas to align with customer expectations and enhance overall service quality.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the current service quality in the cashier department of Prince Hypermart Argao falls short of meeting customer expectations, resulting in widespread dissatisfaction. Customers expressed notable discontent with aspects such as tangibles and assurance, highlighting the need for improvements in both the physical environment and employee interactions. Key factors influencing customer satisfaction, including error rate, accuracy, speed, and efficiency, have been identified as crucial for enhancing service quality. Effective queue management and optimizing machine performance are essential for reducing waiting times and addressing idle periods, which can significantly improve operational efficiency and customer experience. The significant gap between customer expectations and perceived performance across all service quality dimensions underscores the necessity for comprehensive enhancements in the cashier department's operations and service delivery. Improving these processes is imperative for boosting customer satisfaction and achieving a higher standard of service quality.

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