EVALUATING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION LEVEL AT KAUFLAND: THE SERVQUAL METHOD

A. GRANCEA[1]   M. BĂLĂŞESCU[2]

Abstract: *The study focuses on evaluating the level of customer satisfaction of the Kaufland retailer using the SERVQUAL method. Through a comprehensive analysis, various aspects of the quality of services provided by Kaufland will be examined, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible aspects of the shopping experience. Respondents were surveyed through a specially designed questionnaire to assess their perceptions and expectations regarding service quality. The conclusions obtained will provide insight into how Kaufland satisfies its customers and will offer valuable suggestions for improving the shopping experience and customer loyalty within their chain of stores.*

Key words: *consumer satisfaction, SERVQUAL method, service quality; retail industry.*

1. Introduction

Currently, there is a significant increase in the purchases of food products among Romanians. At the same time, there is a growing preference for products sold by major retail chains, such as hypermarkets and supermarkets. As the volume of purchases grows, the importance of the quality of the services offered by retailers becomes increasingly clear to most consumers. This quality of service is considered essential for every aspect of the shopping experience, from product selection to completing the transaction and the immediate subsequent period. In this context, we aim to initiate a marketing research project to evaluate the quality of services provided by the company Kaufland. The main objective of this research is to identify the level of customer satisfaction regarding the quality of services offered by Kaufland.

2. Literature Review

Several authors have argued that the vast majority of consumers can be seen as both emotional and rational decision-makers, a concept introduced in literature that has led to numerous studies aimed at determining customer experience across various

[1] Transilvania University of Braşov, adrian.grancea@student.unitbv.ro
[2] TransilvaniaUniversity of Braşov, mariusbalasescu@unitbv.ro , ORCID ID0000-0002-0781-9145

industries. In the context of the retail industry, modern retailing has become synonymous with providing customers with more control, choice options, comfort, and a memorable experience (Ong et al., 2024; Sumrit, Sowijit, 2023; Hoque et al., 2023; Jonkisz et al., 2021;). As the emphasis on customer experience has grown, retailers have realized the need to differentiate their offerings and services (Bonfrer et al., 2022; Fornari et al.,2020; Odongo, Motari, 2022; Jiang et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2022; Shiwakoti et al., 2022).

Moreover, studies have highlighted key elements of consumer experience in the retail sector, including the social environment, service interface, specific in-store atmosphere, product diversity, pricing policies, promotional offers, and loyalty programs (Roggeveen et al., 2020; Lyu et al., 2022; Paz, Delgado, 2020; Karasan et al., 2022). On the other hand, other existing research has emphasized that pricing strategies, product quality, supply chain management, geographical location, and promotion are key elements in shaping customer experience in this sphere (Jimo et al., 2022; Bonfanti et al., 2023;).

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, it is also asserted that consumer experience extends beyond the mere quality of various products or services. Rather, it encompasses various impressions and interactions that are formed during and after the experience with the product or service (Siqueira et al., 2020; Chunhui, Keat, 2023; Lizarelli et al., 2021). Loyal consumers also play an important role for major retail companies. Essentially, a loyal customer is one who is fully dedicated to the brand, consistently making purchases and thereby aiding in profit growth. However, it is noteworthy to mention that customer satisfaction is the key determinant for loyalty (Arul et al., 2023; Hwang et al., 2021; Martínez, Casielles, 2021). Additionally, service quality is an extremely important factor in re-stimulating product purchases. It should be emphasized that the quality of the service provided is crucial, as it determines the overall success of both the product and the service in achieving maximum customer satisfaction (Afroj et al., 2021; Mosimanegape et al., 2020; Glavelia et al., 2023).

3. Material and Methods

It is important to mention that the main objective of the study was to identify the level of consumer satisfaction using the SERVQUAL method for assessing service quality. The research was conducted among residents of the Braşov County and throughout Romania. At the same time, this research specifically targeted individuals over the age of 18, who have visited and purchased food or non-food products from the Kaufland hypermarket. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the research addresses both individuals with low to medium income and those with medium to high income. Furthermore, it is stated that the research is conducted among both female and male individuals.

The chosen research method is the survey-based inquiry. The survey was conducted electronically. Responses were obtained by completing an online questionnaire. The form was created in "Google Forms" and then distributed on social media networks. The sample consisted of 223 individuals, which is considered non-representative, and the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population.

The 24 variables included in the research instrument, namely the questionnaire, were

identified through a brainstorming process involving 10 individuals. This process entailed the generation of ideas and suggestions in a collaborative environment aimed at identifying the most relevant aspects to investigate. These variables have been selected and shaped with the assistance of research from specialized literature to ensure comprehensive coverage of the domain of interest.

4. Results and Discussion

In this process, the 24 customer expectations have been ranked in a table, and an average score has been calculated for each variable. This undertaking involved analysing and classifying customer expectations based on their relative importance.

The hierarchy of expectations and the average score obtained for each variable   Table 1

Expectations	Average Score
1) The prices of products displayed in the online catalogueue should match those in the hypermarket	5
2) Shopping carts should be clean	5
3) The hypermarket should have fresh food products	5
4) Cashiers should behave kindly towards customers	5
5) Products within the hypermarket should not be expired	5
6) Product prices should be visible	4,9
7) The waiting time at the checkout should be maximum 5 minutes	4,8
8) Through the loyalty card, customers should benefit from discounts	4,8
9) The staff within the hypermarket should quickly resolve any issues that arise	4,8
10) The hypermarket should provide self-service checkout counters for customers	4,8
11) The hypermarket should be clean	4,8
12) Aisles should be properly labelled	4,7
13) The hypermarket should offer a wide range of products	4,7
14) Payment with POS should be available at the checkout	4,7
15) Products on offer should be highlighted	4,7
16) The working schedule of the hypermarket should be convenient for customers	4,7
17) Products should be easily found on shelves	4,6
18) Sales staff should be willing to answer customer questions	4,6
19) The online catalogue should function efficiently	4,5
20) The interior of the hypermarket should have good lighting	4,5
21) The hypermarket should provide customers with sufficient parking spaces	4,2
22) The design of the hypermarket should be pleasing	4,2
23) Sales staff should have appropriate attire	4
24) The equipment and technologies used by the hypermarket should be modern	3,8

Following the obtained results, it was found that respondents have high and very high expectations from hypermarkets. As observed in the graph above, the highest scores were given for the following variables: "The price of products displayed in the online catalogue should match that in the hypermarket", "Shopping carts should be clean",

"The hypermarket should have fresh food products", "The cashier should behave kindly towards customers", "Products within the hypermarket should not be expired". Following the calculations performed, for all mentioned variables, an average score of 5 points was obtained, indicating that respondents have very high expectations. Additionally, from the data analysis, it can be inferred that respondents have lower expectations from hypermarkets when it comes to its design (obtained average score = 4.2 points), shop assistants' attire (obtained average score = 4 points), or the equipment and technologies used (obtained average score = 3.8 points). Therefore, it is also noted that for the remaining analysed variables, the obtained average score is close to 4 points on a scale from 1 to 5.

The perceptions of respondents regarding the Kaufland hypermarket have been ranked in the table below. Additionally, it is mentioned that an average score has been calculated for each variable.

The hierarchy of perceptions   Table 2

Perceptions	Average Score
1) The products within the Kaufland hypermarket are not expired.	5
2) Payment with POS is available at the checkout counter.	4,9
3) The Kaufland hypermarket offers fresh food products.	4,7
4) The Kaufland hypermarket provides a wide range of products.	4,7
5) The working hours of the Kaufland hypermarket are convenient for customers.	4,7
6) The Kaufland hypermarket provides self-service checkout counters for customers.	4,6
7) The Kaufland hypermarket is clean.	4,6
8) Shop assistants within the Kaufland hypermarket have appropriate attire.	4,5
9) Shop assistants within the Kaufland hypermarket are willing to answer customer questions.	4,4
10) The price of products displayed in Kaufland's online catalogue matches that in the hypermarket.	4,3
11) Shopping carts at the Kaufland hypermarket are clean.	4,3
12) Promotional products are highlighted within the Kaufland hypermarket.	4,2
13) The Kaufland hypermarket's online catalogue functions efficiently.	4,2
14) Cashiers at the Kaufland hypermarket are friendly with customers.	4
15) Through the loyalty card, the Kaufland hypermarket customers benefit from discounts.	3,9
16) The equipment and technologies used by the Kaufland hypermarket are modern.	3,9
17) Products are easily found on shelves within the Kaufland hypermarket.	3,9
18) Product prices are visible within the Kaufland hypermarket.	3,7
19) The Kaufland hypermarket provides sufficient parking spaces for customers.	3,7
20) Inside the Kaufland hypermarket, the lighting is good.	3,7
21) Aisles are properly labelled within the Kaufland hypermarket.	3,6
22) The design of the Kaufland hypermarket is pleasant.	3,2
23) Shop assistants within the Kaufland hypermarket have appropriate attire.	3,1
24) The waiting time at the checkout counter is maximum 5 minutes.	2,5

Following the evaluation of respondents' perceptions regarding the quality of services provided by Kaufland, it was found that the products within the hypermarket are not expired (obtaining an average score of 5 points), payment with POS is available at the checkout counter (obtaining an average score of 4.9 points). Additionally, it was observed that the Kaufland hypermarket offers a wide range of products (obtained average score = 4.7 points) and has convenient working hours for customers (obtained average score 4.7 points). Lower scores were given for variables such as "Products are easily found on shelves within the Kaufland hypermarket" (average score = 3.9 points), "The hypermarket provides sufficient parking spaces for customers" (obtained average score), "Aisles within the Kaufland hypermarket are properly labelled" (obtained average score = 3.6 points).

Respondents' Satisfaction with the Kaufland hypermarket   Table 3

Perceptions – Expectations		Results
1.	Shop assistants within the Kaufland hypermarket have appropriate attire.	Shop assistants should have appropriate attire.	0,5
2.	Payment with POS is available at the checkout counter.	Payment with POS should be available at the checkout counter.	0,2
3.	The equipment and technologies used by the Kaufland hypermarket are modern.	The technologies and equipment used by the hypermarket should be modern.	0,1
4.	The working hours of the Kaufland hypermarket are convenient for customers.	The working hours of the hypermarket should be convenient for customers.	0
5.	The products within the Kaufland hypermarket are not expired.	The products within the hypermarket should not be expired.	0
6.	The Kaufland hypermarket offers a wide range of products.	The hypermarket should offer a wide range of products.	0
7.	The Kaufland hypermarket is clean.	The hypermarket should be clean.	- 0,2
8.	Shop assistants within the Kaufland hypermarket are willing to answer customer questions.	Shop assistants within the hypermarket should be willing to answer customer questions.	-0,2
9.	The Kaufland hypermarket provides self-service checkout counters for customers.	The hypermarket should provide self-service checkout counters for customers.	- 0,2
10.	The Kaufland hypermarket offers fresh food products.	The hypermarket should have fresh food products.	- 0,3
11.	Promotional products are highlighted within the Kaufland hypermarket.	Promotional products should be highlighted.	- 0,5
12.	The Kaufland hypermarket provides sufficient parking spaces for customers.	The hypermarket should provide sufficient parking spaces for customers.	- 0,5
13.	The price of products displayed in Kaufland's online catalogue matches that in the hypermarket.	The price of products displayed in the online catalogue should match that in the hypermarket.	- 0,7
14.	Inside the Kaufland hypermarket, the lighting is good.	Inside the hypermarket, the lighting should be good.	- 0,8

Perceptions – Expectations		Results
15.	Shopping carts at the Kaufland hypermarket are clean.	Shopping carts at the hypermarket should be clean.	- 0,8
16.	Through the loyalty card, the Kaufland hypermarket customers benefit from discounts.	Through the loyalty card, customers should benefit from discounts.	- 0,9
17.	Products are easily found on shelves within the Kaufland hypermarket.	Products should be easily found on shelves.	- 0,9
18.	The design of the Kaufland hypermarket is pleasant.	The design of the hypermarket should be pleasant.	-1
19.	The Kaufland hypermarket's online catalogue functions efficiently.	The online catalogue should function efficiently.	- 1
20.	Aisles are properly labeled within The Kaufland hypermarket.	Aisles within the hypermarket should be properly labeled.	-1,1
21.	The cashier at The Kaufland hypermarket is friendly with customers.	The cashier at the hypermarket should be friendly with customers.	-1,1
22.	Product prices are visible within The Kaufland hypermarket.	Product prices should be visible.	-1,2
23.	Staff within The Kaufland hypermarket quickly resolves any issues.	Staff within the hypermarket should resolve any issues quickly.	-1,7
24	The waiting time at the checkout counter is a maximum of 5 minutes.	The waiting time at the checkout counter should be a maximum of 5 minutes.	-2
Average score obtained		-1,27

Following the calculations, it emerged that respondents are disappointed with the services provided by Kaufland. For the variable "Checkout time is maximum 5 minutes", respondents' expectations are very high (obtained score = 4.8), while perceptions are very low (average obtained score of 2.5). The difference is -2 => P<A – customers are disappointed.

For the variable "Staff at Kaufland resolves issues quickly," respondents' expectations are high (average obtained score = 4.8), while perceptions are lower (average obtained score = 3.1). The difference is -1.7 => P<A – customers are disappointed.

For the variable "Product prices are visible at Kaufland", respondents' expectations are high (average obtained score = 4.9), while perceptions are lower (average obtained score = 3.7). The difference is -1.2 => P<A – customers are disappointed.

For the variable "Aisles are properly marked at Kaufland", respondents' expectations are high (average obtained score = 4.7), while perceptions are lower (average obtained score = 3.6). The difference is -1.1 => P<A – customers are disappointed.

For the variable "Kaufland's online catalogue operates efficiently", respondents' expectations are high (average obtained score = 5), while perceptions are lower (average obtained score = 4). The difference is -1 => P<A – customers are disappointed.

For the variable "Products are easily found on shelves at Kaufland", respondents' expectations are high (average obtained score = 4.6), while perceptions are lower (average obtained score = 3.7). The difference is -0.9 => P<A – customers are disappointed.

For the variable "Kaufland offers a wide range of products", respondents' expectations are equal to perceptions. The difference is 0 => P=A – customers are satisfied.

For the variable "Equipment and technologies used by Kaufland are modern", respondents' expectations are lower (average obtained score = 3.8), while perceptions are higher (average obtained score = 3.9). The difference is 0.1 => P>A – customers are pleased.

For the variable "POS payment is available at Kaufland checkout", respondents' expectations are lower (average obtained score = 4.7), while perceptions are higher (average obtained score = 4.9). The difference is 0.2 => P>A – customers are pleased.

For the variable "Staff at Kaufland have appropriate attire," respondents' expectations are lower (average obtained score = 4), while perceptions are higher (average obtained score = 4.5). The difference is 0.5 => P>A – customers are pleased.

5. Managerial Implications

The quality of services offered by the company Kaufland was evaluated using the "Servqual" method. The analysis of the results revealed significant discrepancies between customers' expectations and their perceptions regarding the Kaufland hypermarket. In light of these findings, certain recommendations are necessary to enhance the customer experience within this company.

The first aspect identified is the waiting time at the checkout, which was perceived as prolonged by customers. To address this issue, we suggest additional staff should be hired and the number of available checkout counters increased. Additionally, installing new self-service checkout counters could help reduce waiting time and improve the flow of customers.

Another crucial aspect is how staff handles customer issues and requests. Customers appreciate promptness and efficiency in resolving their problems. Therefore, it is recommended to implement a reward system for staff that provides quick and efficient assistance, while those who do not adequately respond to customer needs should undergo disciplinary measures.

Regarding the visual and informational aspect, the design and labelling of product prices should be improved to facilitate navigation and identification by customers. Additionally, it is important for the prices displayed in the online catalogue to be regularly updated to accurately reflect those in the hypermarket.

Managers should pay special attention to the behaviour and attitude of staff towards customers. Staff should be polite and courteous in their interactions with customers, and managers should take disciplinary action if these standards are not met.

Furthermore, another important aspect is cleanliness and hygiene within the hypermarket. Shopping carts should be regularly inspected and sanitized to ensure a clean and safe environment for customers.

Finally, products on sale should be clearly and attractively displayed to draw customers' attention and provide them with a more enjoyable and efficient shopping experience.

6. Conclusion

After careful examination of customers' perceptions and expectations regarding the services provided by the company Kaufland, several important conclusions can be drawn to enhance the customer experience:

Firstly, the analysis reveals significant discrepancies between what customers desire and how they perceive the services offered by Kaufland. This disparity highlights the need for a review of how the company delivers its services to better align with customer expectations.

A key area that requires increased attention is the waiting time at the checkout and the ability to quickly resolve customer issues. Improving efficiency and response time in these areas could lead to a more pleasant experience for customers and increase their satisfaction.

Additionally, aspects related to the design and labelling of prices, as well as hygiene and cleanliness in the hypermarket, play a crucial role in customer perception. Investing in these areas can significantly contribute to increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Another important aspect is the attitude and behaviour of the staff towards customers. A well-trained and courteous team can create a positive atmosphere and positively influence the customer experience in the store.

In conclusion, addressing the needs and expectations of customers is essential for the success and sustainability of any business. Implementing improvement measures revealed by the analysis of customer perceptions can play a crucial role in strengthening Kaufland's position in the market and increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

References

Afroj, S., Hanif, F., Hossain, M.B., Fuad, N., Islam, I., Sharmin, N., Siddiq, F., 2021. Assessing the municipal service quality of residential neighborhoods based on SERVQUAL, AHP and Citizen's Score Card: A case study of Dhaka North City Corporation area, Bangladesh. *Journal of Urban Management*, 10(3), September, pp. 179-191. DOI: 10.1016/j.jum.2021.03.001.

Arul Oli, A., Dhanasekaran, C., 2023. A study related to product service systems (PSS), SERVQUAL and knowledge management system (KMS) – A review. *Materials Today: Proceedings*, Vol. 80, Part 3, pp. 3579-3584. DOI: 10.1016/j.matpr.2021.07.321.

Bonfanti, A., Vigolo, V., Yfantidou, G., Gutuleac, R., 2023. Customer experience management strategies in upscale restaurants: Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 109, pp. 103416. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103416.

Bonfrer, A., Chintagunta, P., Dhar, S., 2022. Retail store formats, competition and shopper behavior: A Systematic review. *Journal of Retailing*, 98, pp. 71–91. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretai.2022.02.006.

Cachero-Martínez, S., Vázquez-Casielles, R., 2021. Building consumer loyalty through e-shopping experiences: The mediating role of emotions. *Journal of Retailing and*

Consumer Services, Volume 60, p. 102481. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102481.

Fornari, E., Grandi, S., Menegatti, M., Fornari, D., 2020. Discounters versus Supermarkets and Hypermarkets: what drives store-switching? *THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF RETAIL, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMER RESEARCH*, 30(5), pp. 555–574. DOI: 10.1080/09593969.2020.1773896.

Glaveli, N., Papadimitriou, D., Karagiorgos, T., Alexandris, K., 2023. Exploring the role of fitness instructors' interaction quality skills in building customer trust in the service provider and customer satisfaction. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(3), pp. 767-788. DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2021.1928256.

Hoque, U.S., Akhter, N., Absar, N., Khandaker, M.U., Al-Mamun, A., 2023. Assessing Service Quality Using SERVQUAL Model: An Empirical Study on Some Private Universities in Bangladesh. *Trends in Higher Education*, 2, pp. 255–269. DOI: 10.3390/higheredu2010013.

Hwang, S., Lee, M., Park, E., Pobil, A.P., 2021. Determinants of customer brand loyalty in the retail industry: A comparison between national and private brands in South Korea. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 63, p. 102684. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102684.

Jiang, X., Zhang, J., Yang, C., Wan, R., 2023. Evaluating the service quality of insular and coastal recreational fisheries by integration of the SERVQUAL-fuzzy Kano model and importance-performance analysis. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Vol. 243, 1 September, p. 106753. DOI: 10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2023.106753.

Jimo, A., Braziotis, C., Rogers, H., Pawar, K., 2022. Additive manufacturing: A framework for supply chain configuration. *International Journal of Production Economics*, Vol.253, p. 108592. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijpe.2022.108592.

Jonkisz, A., Karniej, P., Krasowska, D., 2021. SERVQUAL Method as an "Old New" Tool for Improving the Quality of Medical Services: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18, p. 10758. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph182010758.

Karasan, A., Erdogan, M., Cinar, M., 2022. Healthcare service quality evaluation: An integrated decision-making methodology and a case study. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, Vol. 82, Part A, August, p. 101234. DOI: 10.1016/j.seps.2022.101234

Lai, P.-L., Jang, H., Fang, M., Peng, K., 2022. Determinants of customer satisfaction with parcel locker services in last-mile logistics. *The Asian Journal of Shipping and Logistics*, 38(1), pp. 25-30. DOI: 10.1016/j.ajsl.2021.11.002.

Lizarelli, F.L., Osiro, L., Ganga, G.M.D., Mendes, G.H.S., Paz, G.R., 2021. Integration of SERVQUAL, Analytical Kano, and QFD using fuzzy approaches to support improvement decisions in an entrepreneurial education service. *Applied Soft Computing*, Vol. 112, November, p. 107786. DOI: 10.1016/j.asoc.2021.107786

Lyu, J. (Daisy), Krasonikolakis, I., Vrontis, D., 2022. A systematic literature review of store atmosphere in alternative retail commerce channels. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 153, pp. 412-427. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.08.050.

Mosimanegape, P., Jaiyeoba, O., Iwu, C.G., Chekula-Mahama, C., 2020. Examining the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the public service: The case of Botswana. *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, Vol. 17, 2020,

E-ISSN: 2224-2899, pp. 579-593. DOI: 10.37394/23207.2020.17.57.

Odongo, N.H., Motari, W.O., 2022. Consumers' perceptiveness towards store brands within supermarkets. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT*, 22(13), pp. 2459–2468. DOI: 10.1080/15623599.2020.1795986.

Ong, A.K.S., German, J.D., Dangaran, P.C., Paz, J.J.B., Macatangay, R.R.G., 2024. Service quality and customer satisfaction analysis among motorcycle taxi transportation in the Philippines through SERVQUAL dimensions and social exchange theory. *Case Studies on Transport Policy*, Vol. 15, pp. 101139. DOI: 10.1016/j.cstp.2023.1011

Paz, M.D.R., Delgado, F.J., 2020. Consumer Experience and Omnichannel Behavior in Various Sales Atmospheres. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11:1972. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01972.

Roggeveen, A.L., Grewal, D. Schweige, E.B., 2020. The DAST Framework for Retail Atmospherics: The Impact of In- and Out-of-Store Retail Journey Touchpoints on the Customer Experience. *Journal of Retailing*, 96(1), pp. 128–137. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretai.2019.11.002.

Shiwakoti, N., Jiang, H., Nguyen, A.D., 2022. Passengers' perception of safety and its relationship with demographics, service quality, satisfaction and loyalty in airlines sector - A case study of Vietnam to Australia route. *Transport Policy*, Vol. 124, pp. 194-202. DOI: 10.1016/j.tranpol.2021.04.029.

Siqueira, J.R., ter Horst, E., Molina, G., Losada, M., Mateus, M.A., 2020. A Bayesian examination of the relationship of internal and external touchpoints in the customer experience process across various service environments. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 53, p. 102009. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.102009.

Wang, C., Ooi, B.K., 2023. Exploring Territorial Elements in Servicescape: A Comprehensive Literature Review. *Journal of World Economy*, 2(4), pp. 55-70. DOI: 10.56397/JWE.2023.12.05.