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Theoretical Aspects and Methodological Approaches to Sales Services Quality Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The article defines trade service quality and proposes an object-oriented approach for its essence interpretation, according to which such components as product offering and goods quality, service forms and goods selling methods, merchandising, services and staff are singled out; a model of managing retail outlets trading service, which covers levels of strategic, tactical and operational management and is aimed at ensuring customers' perception expectations, achieving sustainable competitive positions and increasing customers' loyalty is worked out; a methodology of trade services quality estimation that allows to carry out a comparative assessment of cooperative retailing both in terms of general indicators and their individual components, regulate the factors affecting trade services quality and have a positive administrative action is developed and tested; the results of evaluation of the customers' service quality in the consumer cooperative retailers, dynamics of overall and comprehensive indicators of measurement of trade service quality for selected components are given; the main directions and measures for improving trade services quality basing on quantitative values of individual indicators for each of the five selected components (product offering and goods quality, service forms and sale methods, merchandising, services, staff) are stated.

Keywords: Sales services quality; Components; Product offer and goods quality; Attendance forms and sales methods; Merchandising services; Personnel; Sales services quality management model; Sales services quality comprehensive assessment technique

INTRODUCTION

Improvement of sales services quality in retail companies, its correspondence to consumers' expectations would make it possible to improve their competitiveness and loyalty of the population, receiving the said services.

In order to improve the competitiveness of retail companies it is necessary to develop methodical approaches, which would make it possible to carry out the comprehensive assessment of sales services quality both from the positions of a company and a consumer and substantiate the directions of its improvement.

Due to this, of paramount importance is both scientific and practical necessity of conducting the research dedicated to the improvement of methodical approaches and development of directions for the improvement of sales services quality in retail companies.

The following researchers have been engaged in the development of theoretical foundations and methodical approaches to sales services quality assessment in retail companies' substantiation of the directions of its improvement as well as the study of marketing aspects and methodical approaches to the assessment of trade companies' activity [1-20].

METHODS

Fundamental and applied work of domestic and foreign researchers in the field of the theory and practice of sales activities of the market subjects, quality of sales services, consumer loyalty study and retail sales efficiency assessment served as theoretical and methodological basis of the research. In order to reach the set goals the authors used dialectical and systemic approaches to the study of economic phenomena and processes; general scientific methods (observation, comparison, measurement); economic and statistical methods of data processing (grouping, comparison, index method); separate normative method of analysis and methods of social study (questionnaire).

For the study and approbation of the suggested technique of the trade service quality comprehensive assessment we have selected two self-service shops, which are typical for consumer cooperation as they were built according to approximately one design, have the same sales area, analogical assortment and provide the same list of services

For the study we have selected two self-service shops with 190 m² of sales area, which mainly sell foodstuffs including socially important ones.

For in-depth assessment of consumers' trade service quality we examined the said process in the shop "Gastronom" of the Prokhorovka district consumer society and the shop "Minimarket" of the Rakitnoye district consumer society for the period of 2012-2013. The selection of the said shops is determined by the fact that during a certain period of time they sold goods with traditional sales methods and starting with

2007 they were renovated and transferred on self-service and at present they possess high competitive advantages. For calculations we have selected the indicators, on which it is possible to obtain operational information according to the statistics reporting and with observation method.

The assessment of the trade service quality from the positions of consumers was done through their survey at the companies under study 100 people took part in the survey; mainly these were rural consumers and general public who are served by consumer cooperation.

The survey questionnaire included questions, which feature the quality of trade service by the selected components: goods offer and goods quality (width, depth, renewal and sustainability of assortment, goods prices); service form and sales methods (share of goods sold from the counter and by self-service method, settlement method, absence (presence) of lines, time spent for servicing of one buyer, average number of items per one purchase etc.); featuring merchandising (satisfaction of consumers with merchandising methods – planning and layout of equipment; convenience of goods selection; colors used for sales area design; lighting, aromas, etc.); featuring services (availability and quality of the provided services); featuring personnel (employees' look, working place condition, communications with consumers, trade service culture, shop's sales area personnel qualifications etc.).

RESULTS

Theoretical aspects of sales services quality study

The analysis of the structure and composition of consumer cooperation retail trade companies showed that the system of the Belgorod Oblast Consumer Union witnesses the trend for the growth of self-service shops – from 18 units in 2012 to 38 units in 2013, including in the countryside – from 5 units in 2012 to 21 units in 2013. Retail trade self-service shops enjoy a number of advantages: reasonable use of sales areas, opportunity for independent selection of goods for consumers, acceleration of service speed and sales methods etc., i.e. self-service shops possess competitive advantages. Thus, it is reasonable to conduct trade service quality assessment at consumer cooperation retail trade companies, which use self-service methods and have prospects for development.

The results of the assessment and analysis of self-service shops activities are typical for the large number of analogical shops of consumer cooperation.

Russia witnesses the trend for the growth of the number of chain retailers, which considerably influence the activity of other agents of retail trade including consumer cooperation organizations

It is necessary to note that at present the majority of consumer cooperation shops do not correspond to the requirements, characteristic of the new format shops. In this connection, it is necessary to develop the technique of their activity assessment and substantiate the directions of their efficiency and competitiveness improvement

At present retail trade companies pay special attention to sales services quality, which is caused by the imperatives of the external environment with the following characteristic features: excess of supply over demand, introduction and wide spread of new formats of retail trade units, which alongside with goods sales ensure for consumers maximally comfortable buying conditions; increase of income of the population and consumer demand; development of market infrastructure, etc.

Comparative analysis of different viewpoints on the subject of the study made it possible to state that the quality of sales services is interpreted as the activity of a sales person directed at meeting the needs of a buyer in the process of buying goods and/or services and other. Alongside with this, the concept under study is presented in the economic literature as the totality of the characteristics of the process and conditions of sales services or the totality of means and methods, ensuring satisfaction of buyers' needs in goods and services. Taking into account that given concept possesses many aspects and its content is interpreted by some researchers controversially, the authors suggest the object-oriented approach to the essential interpretation of sales services quality, in accordance with which the most reasonable is the highlighting of such components as product offer and goods quality, services method and sales methods, merchandising, services, personnel (Figure 1). Proceeding from the said above, we understand under the sales services quality the totality of characteristics, which reflect goods properties from the point of view of their consumer value and the conditions of sales services process from the positions of the maximum correspondence of the expectation to the perception by a consumer of sales services quality in retail companies.

The selected components reflect the sales services quality from the positions of a trade company's commercial result, shop application of progressive methods of goods sales, elements of service culture, time consumption for goods purchase, after-sale services to consumers, professional qualifications of the personnel and communicative influence.

In the component product offer and goods quality it is necessary to assure efficient work with goods suppliers, regulate goods assortment, taking into account market situation and their demand. In order to improve attendance form and goods sales methods retail companies have to assure the introduction of innovations in commercial and technological, organizational and managerial, commercial and operational processes.

To increase the quality of sales services to consumers retail trade companies have to develop a number conceptual directions for the component merchandising: develop the strategy of goods positioning, use the technique of marketing interaction in the course of services provision to consumers, stimulate sales via the use of advertising technologies.

According to the component services it is recommended to provide maximal number of additional services to consumers with the view of providing them comfortable conditions for goods purchases. Here we talk about the use of the system of cumulative discounts and bonus systems, sales of flowers, medications, periodicals, and organizations of departments for provision of services to the disabled, senior citizens and families with many children, organization of street sales in summer.

| Sales services quality | | |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Components | Characteristics | |
| Product offer and goods quality | Price and quality of goods, assortment breadth and depth | |
| Attendance form and sales methods | Salon services, individual services over the counter, individual services by salesperson consultant in self-service shops, self-service, sales of goods through catalogues and samples | |
| Merchandising | Typification and specialization of a shop, architectural peculiarities of sales area, shop's interior, sales area layout, equipment types and configuration, sales area lighting, color design, sounds and music, smells, signs and pointers, goods display, advertising, promotion campaigns | |
| Services | Sales of goods | Provision of additional services |
| Personnel | Employees' qualifications level, consumers' service time, employees' appearance | |

Figure 1. Structural components of sales services quality

Retail trade company's personnel occupy a special position in the process of sales services. In order to ensure its communicative interaction with consumers it is necessary to improve professional qualifications of employees in the sphere of sales services quality, develop motivational programs, which would include material incentives in the form of bonuses or leisure trips and provision of preferences to the sales area employees.

In order to ensure the implementation of the conceptual directions of the sales services quality improvement we suggest the model of the said process management in consumer cooperation retail companies, which makes it possible to reveal the correspondence of the expectation to the perception by a consumer (Figure 2).

In the frameworks of the recommended model sales services quality improvement envisages not only the study of market situation, but consumer expectations as well, which in consumer cooperation possess their own specificity, predetermined by the multi-functionality of the shops of the said system, their financial situation (in many cases they are plannable loss making due to the social mission of the system), as well as their location, typification and specialization of the retail trade network.

Sales services quality management model envisages the realization of strategic, tactical and operational measures, aimed at assuring the correspondence of expectation to perception by a consumer of sales services quality according to the selected quality components.

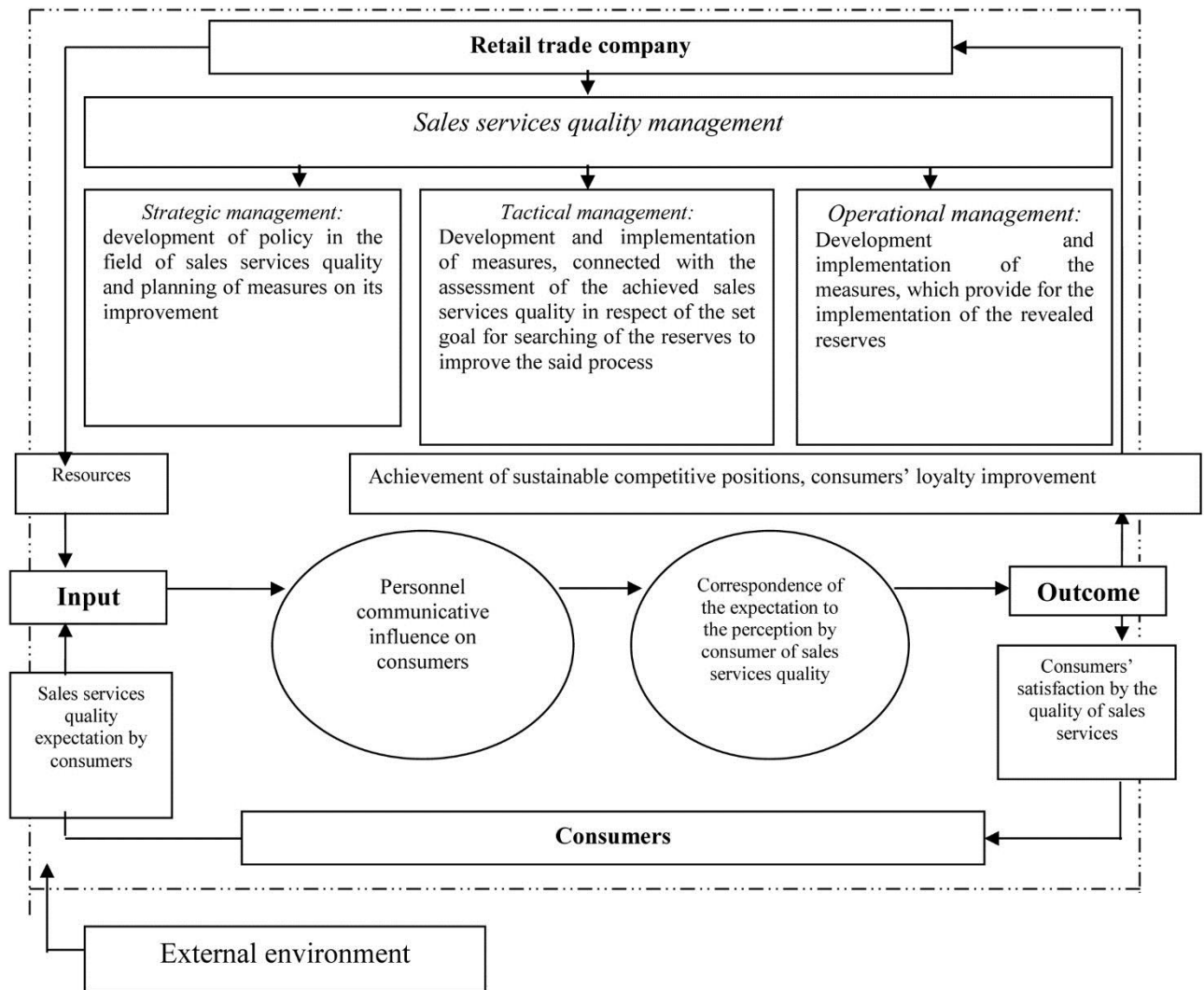


Figure 2. Sales services quality management model in consumer cooperation retail trade companies

The set of strategic, tactical and operational objectives in the frameworks of the suggested model is realized through the improvement of commercial, sales and technological processes, improvement of the communicative efficiency influence of personnel of retail trade companies on shareholders and served population.

Sales services quality assessment technique

We suggest the system of sales services quality assessment indicators, which envisages its assessment according to the selected components (Table 1).

The suggested system of indicators makes it possible to assess sales services quality from the positions of a retail trade company.

Sales services quality improvement ensures competitive advantages for consumer cooperation retail trade companies through the growth of real assets, which, in turn, improve the results of financial and business activities. Proceeding from this we have substantiated the strategic priorities in the sphere of sales services quality improvement at consumer cooperation organizations, which are connected with the creation of the united corporate chain, which envisages the development of unified

standards of trade units design and the services provided in them, introduction of modern technologies in the process of services provision to consumers and creation of Internet shops.

In order to substantiate tactical and operational measures on sales services quality improvement we suggest the technique for comprehensive assessment of sales services quality, which envisages the selection of criteria and set of tools of assessment, ways of collection and analysis of information and includes the calculation of unit, generalizing and comprehensive indicators of assessment from the positions of buyers and retail companies (Figure 3).

Index values ($i_{\text{ed},n}$) of the sales services quality assessment indicators (according to the suggested system) are calculated by way of correlation of the obtained unit values of parameters in the reporting and base periods and on their basis we have built a generalizing indicator of sales services quality:

$$C_j = \sqrt[n]{\prod_{i=1}^n i_{\text{un},n}}, \quad (1)$$

Where C_j – generalizing indicator of sales services quality assessment by a component;

$i_{\text{un},n}$ -unit indicator of sales services quality assessment;

n – number of indicators.

The results of the comprehensive assessment of sales services quality at retail trade companies of the Belgorod Regional Consumer Union are presented in Table 2.

In order to assess sales services quality from the positions of consumers the data was collected through their survey at the companies under study (Table 3).

The results of the sales services quality assessment from the positions of the retail trade company are presented in Table 3.

Table 1: Sales services quality assessment indicators at retail trade companies

| Sales services quality components | Indicators |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Product offer and goods quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assortment breadth coefficient, C_b; - assortment depth coefficient, C_d; - assortment renewal coefficient, C_r; - assortment sustainability coefficient,; - goods price coefficient, C_{gp}; - average trade margin, \overline{TM} , %; - share of low quality products in retail trade turnover C_{iqp} , %. |
| Attendance forms and sales methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - share of self-service shop turnover in the consumer cooperation retail trade turnover, C_{AF} , %; - retail trade turnover per 1m² of self-service shop total area, ΔT_{sTA} , thousands of Rb/m² ; - retail trade turnover per 1m² of self-service shop sales area, ΔT_{sSA} , thousands of Rb./m² ; - average number of product names with one purchase, \overline{PN} , unit; - return on sales, R , %; - average time for one consumer servicing, A_{TP} , min./people.; - sales area share in the total shop area, C_{SA} , %. |
| Merchandising | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - installation area coefficient, C_i; - exposition area coefficient, C_e; - advertising profitability, P_a , %; - coefficient of access to sales area, C_1; - purchase completion coefficient, C_2; - share of investments, allocated for purchase of modern sales equipment in the total amount of investments, I_T , %; - consumers' satisfaction coefficient by merchandising elements, B_J. |
| Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coefficient of additional services correspondence, C_S; - number of provided services, S_C , number; - services stability coefficient, S_{SS}. |
| Personnel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coefficient of professional qualifications of sales area employees C_{PQ}; - personnel stability coefficient, C_C; - number of personnel, who received bonuses and preferences, N_r , people.; - number of thank you letters for high quality of sales services, Q_{thl} , number; - material remuneration volume, Q_{MR} , thousands of Rubles |

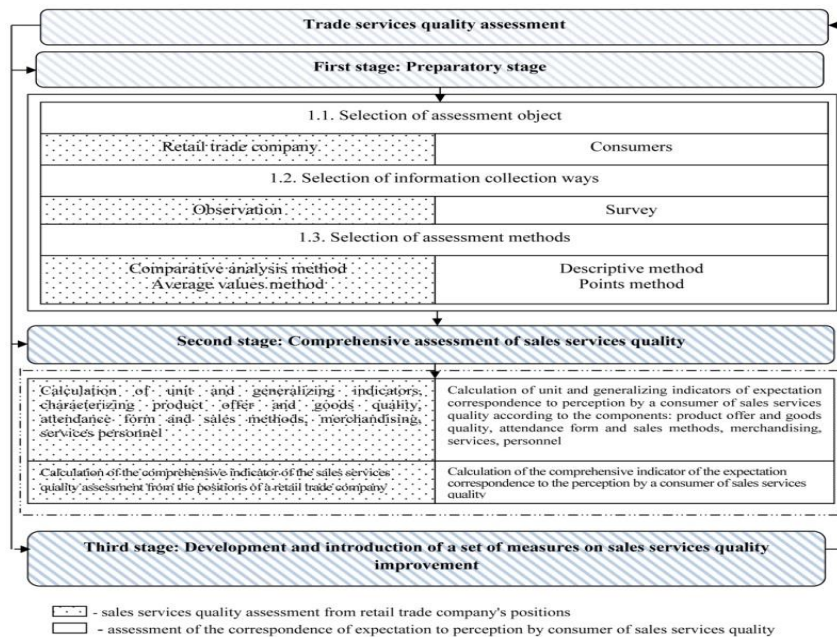


Figure 3: Stages of the sales services quality comprehensive assessment technique implementation in consumer cooperation retail trade companies

Table 2: Dynamics of the generalizing and comprehensive indexes of sales services quality indicators at the shop *Gastronom* of the Prokhorovka district consumer society and the shop *Minimarket* of the Rakitnoye district consumer society, the Belgorod Regional Consumer Union during 2012–2013 (from the positions of retail trade companies)

| Indicators | 2013 to 2012. | |
|---|--|---|
| | Shop <i>Gastronom</i> Prokhorovka district consumer society | Shop <i>Minimarket</i> Rakitnoye district consumer society |
| Generalizing indexes of trade services quality assessment characterizing: | | |
| - product offer and goods quality | 1.04 | 1.0 |
| - attendance forms and sales methods | 1.03 | 1.02 |
| - merchandising | 1.02 | 1.01 |
| - services | 1.03 | 0.97 |
| - personnel | 1.15 | 1.15 |
| Comprehensive indicators of consumers' trade services quality assessment | 1.05 | 1.03 |

Table 3: Dynamics of the generalizing and comprehensive indexes of sales services quality indicators at the shop *Gastronom* of the Prokhorovka district consumer society and the shop *Minimarket* of the Rakitnoye district consumer society, the Belgorod Regional Consumer Union during 2011–2012 (from the positions of the correspondence of the expectation to the perception by the consumer)

| Indicators | 2012 to 2011 | |
|---|---|--|
| | Shop <i>Gastronom</i> Prokhorovka district consumer society | Shop <i>Minimarket</i> Rakitnoye district consumer society |
| Generalizing indexes of trade services quality assessment characterizing: | | |
| - product offer and goods quality | 1.01 | 1.0 |
| - attendance forms and sales methods | 1.01 | 1.01 |
| - merchandising | 1.02 | 1.01 |
| - services | 1.09 | 1.04 |
| - personnel | 1.04 | 1.05 |
| Comprehensive indicators of consumers' trade services quality assessment | 1.03 | 1.02 |

With the view of providing the details of calculation we present the results of the comprehensive indicators calculation of trade service quality from the positions of a retail trade company and from the positions of consumers in the shop “Gastronom” of the Prokhorovka district consumer society and the shop “Minimarket” of the Rakitnoye district consumer society, shown in Figure 4.

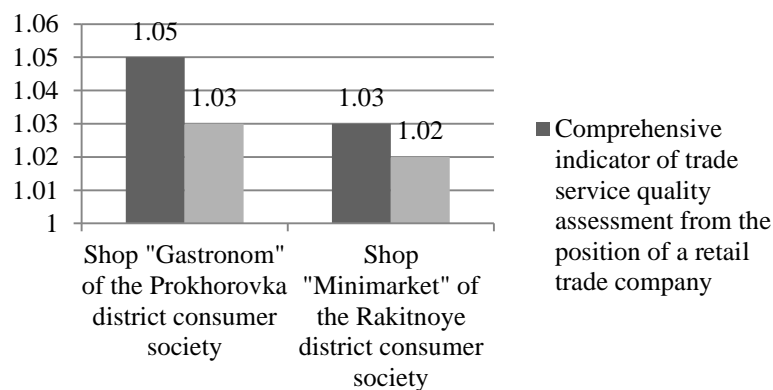


Figure 4: Results of comprehensive indicators calculation of trade service quality in the shop “Gastronom” of the Prokhorovka district consumer society and the shop “Minimarket” of the Rakitnoye district consumer society

The values of the comprehensive assessment of trade service quality from the positions of the retail trade company appeared to be higher than those from the positions of consumers, which is determined by the subjective overestimation by a retail trade company by separate components, which is connected with the

opportunity of obtaining bonuses and a better position of a shop in the ratings of consumer cooperation retail trade companies.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results of the comparative analysis make it possible to conclude that the comprehensive indicator of the sales services quality for the positions of a retail company is higher than that from the positions of consumers, which points out to the necessity of the development of operational and tactical measures on the improvement of sales services quality with the view of meeting the correspondence of the expectation to the perception of the said process (Figure 5). We have substantiated the measures on sales services quality improvement, the development of which was done on the basis of quantitative values of unit indicators on each of the five selected components as they were calculated with the view of searching the ways for the reserves of sales services quality improvement in retail companies within the frameworks of the operational management of the said process.

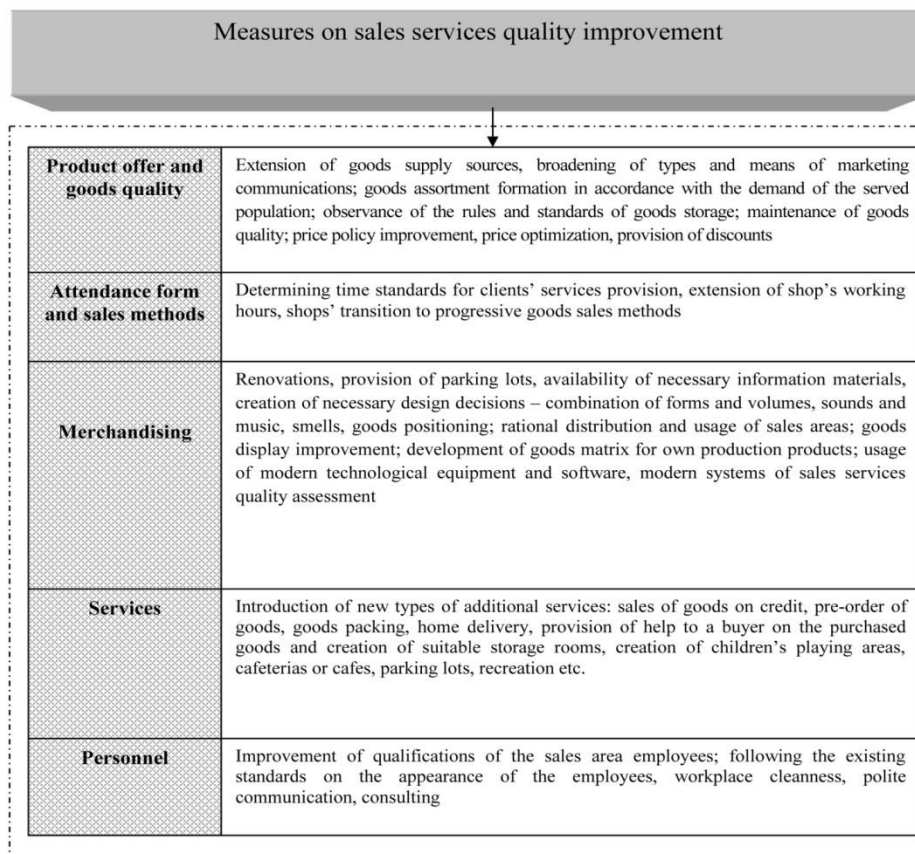


Figure 5: Measures on sales services quality improvement at consumer cooperation retail trade companies

CONCLUSION

The results of the sales services quality assessment from the positions of a retail trade company make it possible to conclude that the quality of sales services at the shop Gastronom of the Prokhorovka district consumer society is by 0.02 points higher than that at the shop Minimarket of the Rakitnoye district consumer society,

which is to a great extent predetermined by higher generalizing indicators of all selected components. Sales services quality assessment from the positions of consumers according to the survey makes it possible to conclude that the quality of sales services at the shop Gastronom of the Prokhorovka district consumer society corresponds to a greater extent to the expectations of consumers. Index values of the comprehensive indicator of sales services quality at the shop Gastronom of the Prokhorovka district consumer society are 1.03 and those at the shop Minimarket of the Rakitnoye district consumer society – 1.02. The dynamics of the comprehensive indicator at the shop Gastronom of the Prokhorovka district consumer society was positively influenced by the measures connected with the provision of services as the indicator, which reflects the said process, has increased during the period under study by 9%.

Summarizing the results of the conducted study it is necessary to note that sales services quality improvement is an important factor of retail companies' competitiveness assurance.

The implementation of the suggested theoretical and methodical foundations and a set of measures on sales services quality improvement at consumer cooperation retail trade companies would ensure attraction of buyers, increase of sales volumes and would provide for retail trade companies' competitiveness improvement and growth of consumers' loyalty.

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