



**CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER PURCHASING
BEHAVIOUR AT SUPERMARKETS IN THE GREATER AREA OF ETHEKWINI.**

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**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelors
degree of Technology: Retail Business Management**

In the Faculty of Management Sciences at

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

OCTOBER 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to God for the gift of life He has given me and always being faithful in His promises concerning my life.

I would like to thank my supervisor Mr Tlapana for guiding me throughout this research project and always being patient with me.

I dedicate this study to my special and supporting mother Tendero Musasa who persuaded me to pursue my studies and always believed in my abilities. To you Mum, your efforts and love won't go unnoticed.

Special thanks to my friends Fadzai Felistas Munikwa, Cosmas Nyachowe and Tafadzwa Ndadziyira for your continued support and ideas throughout this research study. I deeply appreciate your company every day.

DECLARATION

I Tinashe Musasa declare that this dissertation is my own work and findings apart from where it is indicated. All references were accurately presented to the best of my ability.

Tinashe Musasa

ABSTRACT

Customer service is a crucial element of the retail mix that can pose great significance in store operations. In today's competitive environment whereby customers are easily turned off by any imperfection in a store setting; well thought customer service strategies are always crucial (Timm 2008:110). Well-structured customer service strategies are essential because they positively influence customer expectations and perceptions. These expectations and perceptions of customers determine their buying behaviour at a retail outlet (Harris 2010:17). Inability of service strategies to meet or exceed expectations and perceptions of customers result in customers deserting such service offerings for better ones elsewhere (Johnston and Marshall 2010:173).

The primary goal of this study was to ascertain the influence of customer service on buying behaviour of customers at supermarkets in the greater area of Durban. To meet objectives of this study, a quantitative research was conducted at supermarkets namely Pick and Pay Berea, Shoprite West Street and Cambridge Market. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents selected. A sample comprising of 45 respondents was questioned in line with this study. Non-probability convenience sampling was utilised in selecting respondents. Based on literature and findings of this study, conclusions and recommendations were drawn.

This study identified that customers are not satisfied with the standard of service offered at the above mentioned supermarkets. A gap between what customers expect and what they perceive is currently offered at these supermarkets was revealed. Problems were identified in customer service offered pertaining staff attitude, operating hours, and speed of service delivery. It is recommended that supermarkets in the greater part of Durban attend to these problems and put in place proper strategies to solve them and satisfy customers.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The retail industry is seriously becoming competitive as time passes, with customers frequently changing their preferences and tastes. As customers have become more sophisticated, their demands and expectations are increasing as well. Retailers should aim at providing top class customer service to gain competitive advantage and retain customers (Levy and Weitz 2012: 500). This chapter provides a brief discussion of the research problem and the aims of this project.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO STUDY

According to Ellickson (2011: 2) supermarkets came into existence around the start of the twentieth century. During this time grocery stores were small occupying around 1000 square feet. Their centre of attention was limited to only one facet of food retailing. Supermarkets of this era only sold “dry grocery” items which included canned products and non- perishables. Produce vendors and butchers were detached units; however for convenience of customers they clustered together (A quick history of the supermarket 2012).

During the 1990s in the retail industry, a new way of operating developed. This way placed its focus on valuing the needs of the customer in making all business decision. It was during this era that the saying ‘the customer is always right’, governed most retail operations (Thompson 2012). In today’s retail environment, customer expectations and needs are changing frequently. This makes customer service an important tool in supermarkets in order to gain customer loyalty and develop a competitive edge.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Customers are becoming more complex in terms of their preferences and tastes making it difficult for the retailer to ascertain their behaviour towards service delivery. It therefore implies that each retail outlet should continuously evaluate and restructure its current customer service strategies to keep abreast with changing customer trends (Harris 2007:15). Levy and Weitz (2012: 276) suggest that a bond can be developed between the customer and the retailer which is not simply based on low prices or brands but goes beyond. This bond can therefore be developed through offering personal attention to the customers.

Well defined customer service strategies are important in satisfying and creating a competitive advantage. Today’s customers are more demanding than ever to the extent that timely executed and friendly service has now become the norm in the retail industry (Tlapana 2009:14). This demanding nature of customers gives the retailer uncertainties on what to expect from customers upon service delivery.

A sound customer service strategy is one that recognises customers’ expectations and surpasses them (Beard 2013:2). This shows that there is always a risk of losing customers when they feel their expectations are not met or surpassed. This research study therefore,

explores more on customer service and how it influences the behaviour of customers making purchases.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this research study is to determine the impact of customer service on purchasing behaviour of customers in supermarkets in the greater area of Durban. The following sub objectives are drawn from the main goal of the research.

1.5 SUB OBJECTIVES

- To determine important elements of customer service;
- To investigate imperfections within customer service strategies in supermarkets;
- To ascertain whether customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive from supermarkets in Berea, Market, West Street and;
- To suggest ways of improving customer service in supermarkets in greater area of Ethekewini.

1.6 RATIONALE OF STUDY

This study will play part in the development of supermarkets in the greater area of Ethekewini. It will measure and evaluate levels of customer satisfaction in line with customer service, which will provide information for supermarkets in Ethekewini about customer needs and expectations. Recommendations will be provided based on findings that will assist supermarkets in improving their service levels to better satisfy customer needs.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Self-administered questionnaires were used to gather data from respondents, in which they stated their opinions regarding customer service and its influence on buying behaviour. This research study is quantitative in nature. Convenience or accidental sampling was utilised to enable effective collecting of data. This method was used because practically not everyone is prepared to answer questionnaires, therefore widening the scope of possible participants increased the researcher's chances of obtaining data which also can be gathered quickly (What is a convenience sample 2014).

The sample size comprised of supermarket customers in Berea, West Street and Market area. A total of 45 questionnaires were dispensed and completed at the following supermarkets:

NAME OF STORE	SAMPLE SIZE
Pick and Pay Berea Centre	15 respondents
Cambridge Market	15 respondents
Shoprite West Street	15 respondents
Total sample size	45 respondents

1.8 LIMITATIONS

Because of time and cost constraints this study will be limited to some parts of Ethekewini that include Berea, Glenwood and West Street. It therefore implies that generalising data found in this study to all supermarkets in KwaZulu Natal or South Africa would be inappropriate. In this study reviewing literature will be restricted to customer service, its elements and their impact of consumer purchasing behaviour.

1.9 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This study consists of five chapters which include the following:

1.9.1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as an introduction of the entire research study. It covers the background to this study, research problem, research objectives, rationale of this study, research methodology and limitations of the study.

1.9.2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature relevant to customer service and buying behaviour of customers. It portrays how consumers make buying decisions using their expectations and perceptions to evaluate service quality.

The chapter will also highlight basic elements of customer service which include building customer intelligence, listening to customers, resolving problems fairly and doing this quickly.

1.9.3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, approaches utilised to collect data are stated. Sampling methods used are stated, the form of questionnaire and procedures used to analyse results are also provided. Validity and reliability of this study are explored in this chapter.

1.9.4 CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The objective of this chapter is to logically portray statistical data gathered through use of questionnaires. Data was presented in meaningful formats easy for readers to understand.

1.9.5 CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The last chapter of this study presents conclusions based on findings in chapter 4 and 2. Recommendations are also provided to improve the research design and customer service performance.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 presented a summarised background pertaining customer service and its impact on buying behaviour at supermarkets in Durban. It examined the problem statement of this study, aims of study, rationale of study, research methodology as well as limitations of the study.

The following chapter reviews literature extensively and serves as the foundation of important aspects to be touched throughout this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the research study provides in-depth and synthesised information pertaining variables found in customer service and their impact on purchasing behaviour of customers. According to Heppell (2010:4) five star services have become more important than ever before if a store is committed to achieve its goals, wants to be identified and gain customer confidence that is competitive advantage.

The aim of this literature review goes beyond a plain investigation of information; it presents a number of listed items in creative manner relevant to the research study. This review of literature serves as a research catalyst necessary throughout this research from its initiation to the end. It provides a theoretical basis on which data and findings of this research can be positioned and assists in perfecting as well as introducing pertinent ideas to this study (Tlapana 2009:14).

2.2 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

2.2.1 Customer service

Refers to the retailer's efforts to enhance customers' shopping experience by making it more rewarding through offering a set of activities or programmes (Harris 2010:2). Such activities tend to increase the overall value of any product or service customers purchase in a store.

Similarly, Ward (2014:3) suggests that customer service in general refers to a firm's ability to meet its customer needs and wants. However, this definition does not show the transactional description of customer service. For example, a supermarket provides a variety of merchandise displayed on shelves in which customers can choose from and take to check-out counters. In this case, the supermarket meets the customer's need for merchandise but from a customer's perspective there will be no customer service delivered.

Nowadays understanding customer service solely based on the retailer's ability to meet customer requirements is not enough. To adequately define customer service, basic elements have to be incorporated which include effectively meeting customer requirements through supply and delivery of expert, beneficial, superior service and assisting earlier, during and subsequently when a customer's needs is served (The definition of customer service 2012).

2.2.2 Customer purchasing behaviour

Refers to the process utilised by customers in the searching for, choosing, buying, using and disposing of products or services to satisfy their needs and wants (Consumer buying behaviour 2010). This behaviour is usually influenced by the social and cultural background of each customer.

Schiffman, Kanuk and Wisenblit (2010:3) have the same opinion that customer behaviour explains consumer customs that are revealed in looking for, buying, utilising, assessing and disposing of products or services that are believed to be able to satisfy needs. From the above definitions, it can be deduced that consumers are viewed as coherent decision makers who only pursue satisfaction of their self-interests.

2.2.3 Supermarket

Refers to a large retail outlet whose operations are based on self-service and mostly sells food items and other household goods. There is a clear arrangement of goods under one roof with the goods including food, drinks, utensils even clothes (Supermarket 2013).

2.3 BASIC NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

To achieve excellent service delivery, retailers must be aware of what their customers want. However, retailers have developed a habit of disregarding customers' expectations in constructing their service packages. Frequently they suppose they know what their target markets need and proceed from there. This can bring catastrophic results on the retailers operations in form of lost sales, lost customers and lack of a competitive edge (Cant 2010:107). Likewise, Thomas and Tobe (2013:9) support that retailers initially determine their present capabilities, what they can afford and use these restrictions to structure their goals and preferences. Generally, it is essential for retailers to know intimately their customers.

Although customers' needs and wants differ, are difficult to distinguish and sometimes can be impractical, five basic needs can be drawn from all customers. These include:

- **Service.** From a customer's perspective, expectations of service vary with the level of purchase that they engage in. This means that insignificant, impulsive purchases are associated with smaller service whereas significant purchases that have been cautiously planned should have superior service (Harris 2010:5). However, understanding the scope of a customer's need for service this way would not be enough. There is need to realise that there is a wide variety of elements that need to be included in service to satisfy customers. These include friendliness, fairness, understanding and empathy. Timm (2008:130) further suggests that empathising customer concerns involves avoiding the attitude of defending oneself or demanding for unnecessary details, rather the store employees should accept the customer's complaint as legitimate because it is genuine to the customer. It therefore implies that although customers are content with receiving smaller service for smaller purchases they make, they still expect solid and basic service delivery that is friendly, welcoming and flexible.
- **Price.** The cost customers incur in making purchases has become crucial in their buying decisions. Efficient utilisation of limited financial resources is important to every customer. With many supermarkets available for customers to choose from, customers try to spend their monies economically. However, quality concerns make it harder for customers to decide how much they are willing to pay (Worsham 2010:3).

James (2012:1) similarly suggests that close to every sales circumstance a customer says something about the cost or price of an item being too high. He further asserts that sales people have to probe the real concern of the customer whether it is price, product or service.

- **Quality.** In terms of products to be purchased, reasonably high quality items are sought by consumers. Customers require products to be durable and working until the time they decide to replace them. If these quality concerns are met by the retailer, customers are less moved by price attached to such products (Chang 2008:165). On the other hand, quality of customer service is a major concern for customers. Swinton (2009:1) further suggests that the quality of customer service is crucial in differentiating between good, bad and indifferent retailers. Basically, reasonably good customer service retains customers while poor service pushes customers away.
- **Action.** Customers have developed a demanding nature when making their every day purchases. They require immediate action from store personnel when a problem or question arises. Use of open return policies and toll free customer care lines can address this need among customers. Supermarkets for instance need to offer exclusive attention to their customers to witness significant improvements in their service performance and gain loyalty of customers (Timm 2008:60). Harris (2010:5) further emphasises that customers like every human being desire to be valued and be seen as an important priority, such that when they require assistance it will be ready and waiting for them. It implies that there is great need to ensure that speed is integrated with customer service to avoid any customer dissatisfaction.
- **Appreciation.** Customers need to be valued by retailers for their contribution to the overall business success. A simple 'thank you' to a customer at checkout counters can be basic way of appreciating customers. Harris (2010:5) suggests that special discounts, politeness and recognising customers by name are a positive start of showing customers your gratitude. In addition, store personnel can let customers know that they are glad to be chosen for doing business.

2.4 CUSTOMER ATTRIBUTES

Each and every customer is unique and has a particular set of attributes. A retailer needs to understand such a set of attributes that define his/her customers. This understanding not only does it help the retailer to identify his/her customers but also helps in building a suitable customer service package. Customer attributes are features that enable customers to be grouped based on demographic, psychographic, or firmographic information (Harris 2010:8).

- **Demographic information** entails the easiest and most logical way of categorising customers. It includes variables such as age, gender, marital status, income, occupation, family life cycle, and religion. Retailers like Pick and Pay and Makro have been gathering such information through use of smart shopper cards (Schiffman, Kanuk and Wisenblit 2010:76).

- **Psychographic information** includes customers’ lifestyles, attitudes, culture, social class, and reference groups. This information provides a shrewd picture of a retailer’s customers. It assists in understanding what different customers expect and how they behave. For example, despite the fact that individuals earn the same salary, it does not mean they spend it similarly (Riley 2012:4).
- **Firmographic information** includes facts about a company and the include business type, number of employees, operation hours, and so on. Supermarkets operate in a business to business environment and it is essential that they understand themselves entities not as eventual customers. In making business decisions, people often use their personal experiences (McDonald 2014).

2.5 CLASSIFICATION OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

According to Cant (2010:109) customer service can be classified into pre-purchase, post-purchase, and ancillary services. Both pre-purchase and post-purchase are time related whereas, ancillary service though not related to time they are still important to the retailer. However, the disadvantage of such classification is that the significance of service will be ignored. Services can be considered essential, others can be expected and the last group can be optional. The most crucial thing is that essential service is provided which might include parking space, flexible shopping hours, or sales personnel assistance.

Figure 2.1 CLASSIFICATION OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Pre-purchase services	Post-purchase services	Ancillary services
Advertising	Regular wrapping or bagging	Cheque cashing
Shopping hours	Gift wrapping	Free parking
Interior display	Accepting returns	Credit
Accepting telephone orders	Delivery	
Accepting online orders	Swiping of bank cards	
Sales personnel assistance		

Source: Adapted from Cant (2010:109).

2.6 ELEMENTS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Basic elements required in providing customer service; all revolve around communicating with the customer. Communication is a two way process in which there is an understanding and sharing of information or ideas between two or more people (Communication 2014). An understanding should always be reached in communicating with the customer, if service providers are going to be proficient in their methods of communication.

2.6.1 BUILDING CUSTOMER INTELLIGENCE

The retailer always faces the challenge of communicating effectively with customers; if there is no good understanding of who their customers really are. An intimate understanding of customers is the key to providing rewarding customer service for the retailer. Building customer intelligence provides a way to develop this kind of understanding about the

customer. Customer intelligence involves a continuous process of collecting information, creating a historical database and developing an understanding of current, prospective and lost customers (Harris 2010:73).

Customer intelligence assists the retailer to better serve different kinds of groups of customers in the store. This intelligence provides informed ways of tailoring service, or service approaches to specific customers in the store. Effective market segmentation (that is dividing a market into groups of customers with similar tastes or preferences), can be achieved when a store has in-depth knowledge of its customers (Kotler and Keller 2011:64).

2.6.2 LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS

Today's customers can easily become emotional about their problems with the retailer. To avoid or reduce animated reactions from customers, store personnel should listen and give customers enough time to reveal their complaints. Johnston and Marshall (2010:173) further suggest that active listening which involves giving the speaker undivided attention enables better understanding of the customer's complaints and can relieve tense moments.

Store staff should be willing to give customers time to air their complaints without interrupting. Interrupting customers can further worsen the emotional state of the customer. Offering sympathetic responses can be of help for store's staff in cooling down emotional customers. Careful listening to what the customer feels is a fair solution to his or her complaint, is required not just assuming what the customer wants. Assuming that a refund is fair enough for a customer returning spoiled fruits might not be enough. However, offering an apology for the inconvenience of coming back to the store might be reasonable (Levy and Weitz 2012:520).

2.6.3 RESOLVING PROBLEMS FAIRLY

It is important that a store employee focuses on bringing back the customer when confronted with a complaint. In the event that customers feel their complaints have been handled fairly, positive impressions about the store can be created. Levy and Weitz (2012:520) explain further that customers make evaluations on how their complaints were resolved based on distributive and procedural fairness.

Distributive fairness or justice represents the decision chosen by the service provider in dealing with a complaint or compensating for the inconvenience caused, in which customers compare benefits received with costs (loss). An example is when a store employee offers a customer a refund or an apology. On the other hand, Nikbin et al (2010:48) suggest that procedural justice is the fairness perceived by customers of the process utilised by the service provider.

These two types of fairness show that customers opt for tangible solutions to a complaint than intangible ones (that is distributive fairness). In line with procedural fairness, customers expect store personnel to follow company guidelines to ensure consistency in dealing with different customer complaints (Levy and Weitz 2012:521).

2.6.4 QUICK RESOLVING OF PROBLEMS

Customers are concerned about the time taken to resolve their complaints or deliver any kind of service. It is important that every store employee is capable of dealing with customer complaints on their own, to avoid time wasting experienced by referring a customer to another employee for assistance.

2.7 APPROACHES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

(Customisation and Standardisation)

According to Levy and Weitz (2012:501) a customised approach to customer service revolves around structuring service to meet individual needs of customers, whereas a standardised approach involves adherence to certain set rules or store policies of executing customer service. Singh (2011:561) advocates that a customised approach is founded on the philosophy that every customer is valuable and plays a substantial role in determining the retailer's success, whereas standardised approach ensures that there is a similar experience pertaining quality, taste and feel despite location.

Personalised (customised) strategies to customer service ensure superior and unique service is provided. Hyken (2013:2) further advocates that personalised superior service ensures that customers come back and make purchases from the retailer because of the intimate touch associated with this customer service approach. However, inconsistencies might occur in delivery of the service. It depends on personal attributes of the service provider how good or bad the service will be. Standardisation brings consistency in service delivery and ensures time saving. Levy and Weitz (2012:502) explain that store personnel are guided by rules under the standardised approach which makes the whole process faster and consistent. For instance, KFC offers the same quality of food and service across all its outlets in South Africa; this is due to their utilisation of standardised ways of delivering customer service.

2.8 CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

It is important that customer service in retail outlets is tailored to meet customer expectations to ensure customers are satisfied. According to Harris (2010:17) expectations can be primary or secondary, with primary expectations being fundamental requirements of the customer from service to be provided, and secondary expectations are centred on past experiences that serve as improvements on primary expectations. A customer visiting a supermarket expects to find a particular product at a reasonable price (primary expectation) on the other hand; based on past experience a customer would expect courtesy among salespeople (secondary expectation).

Expectations of customers change frequently, with each individual having a unique set of expectations. This brings a challenge for the retailer on what to include and how to structure service. At the same time these frequent changes provide an opportunity for retailers to be true reflections of what customers want them to be (Harris 2010:18).

2.9 EVALUATING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPENSE

Although superior customer service is crucial in the successful operation of any retail outlet; careful evaluation of the customer service cost is important before implementing a service strategy. Personalised high-quality service strategies are more likely to be expensive for the retailer. It therefore becomes important for the retailer to use the cost-benefit analysis system to assess the cost and benefits of a particular service policy. There will be need to drop a service policy if its costs outweigh benefits (Levy and Weitz 2012:503).

Decisions on whether to adopt a service strategy should not be entirely based on cost of such a service. There might be a case whereby a particular service policy accounts for a significantly large portion of the retailer's costs. However, benefits drawn from such a service policy should also be considered. Aten (2011:3) further suggests that if a project's benefits do not outweigh costs, the investment would not be worthwhile. For example, a retailer might be battling in deciding whether or not to employ more personnel to speed up service. This might imply a significant rise in labour cost however; some studies suggest service delivery speed is vital in satisfying customers. Tschol (2013:5) supports the idea of integrating speed with service, suggesting that in the current competitive environment if one does he loses as customers require faster delivery of service. An example is of Dell now a significant computer manufacturing and retail business, which managed to convince consumers that it can deliver custom-made computers within 4 hours.

2.10 HOW CUSTOMERS ASSESS QUALITY OF SERVICE

It is important for the retailer to understand how customers evaluate service quality within the store. This facilitates implementation of relevant alterations to improve the overall service package that satisfies customers. Customers significantly use their perceptions and expectations to evaluate service quality. Schiffman, Kanuk and Wisenblit (2010:175) define perception as one's effort of choosing, arranging and deducing stimuli into a picture that is logical and significant. On the other hand, expectations are purely based on customers' understanding, familiarity and experience. Levy and Weitz (2012:504) further explain that customers are content when their perception on service exceeds or equals their initial expectations and they are dissatisfied if the opposite occurs.

2.11 FUNCTION OF EXPECTATIONS

According to Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009:81) customers' expectations are beliefs or ideas regarding delivery of service which are used as a benchmark to compare actual performance of the service provider. These expectations are crucial for supermarkets in determining their customer service performance because they genuinely influence behaviour of customers. Basically, expectations reflect what customers want and hope for in their subsequent encounters with the supermarket's personnel.

However, Kopalle, Lehmann and Farley (2010:251) suggest that expectations are influenced by a number of factors for example socio-cultural factors in which the store management has to be aware of to exploit potential opportunities, and achieve effective management of

customer relationships. It can therefore be drawn that an intimate understanding of customers like their background, is required to fully anticipate their expectations.

Customer understanding, familiarity and past experiences form the basis of customer expectations. For example, customers expect easily accessible parking space when visiting supermarkets. Today's world is growing at a faster pace technologically proving customers with up to date and accurate information as well as making them more educated. This drives customers to become more demanding in stores and change their expectations. Similarly, Lucas (2012:218) suggests that nowadays customers expect automated response systems when e-shopping or doing it over the telephone. This system ensures faster delivery of service and makes customers perceive negatively towards retailers who do not offer such a service.

Expectations differ with types of stores. As mentioned earlier, at traditional supermarkets customers expect convenient parking and in-store they expect to make faster payments at check-out counters. In supermarkets what one might not expect are store employees suggesting better items to buy and how to prepare food. However, such unexpected services can impress customers especially if they are important to them. Likewise, Travis (2013:110) supports this by giving an example of a customer who forgets a purchased item at the till end and a store employee makes an effort to ensure the item gets back to the customer. This act by an employee shows empathy and may impress the customer. All these efforts by the retailer's staff are a reflection of the phrase the customer is the King.

Since expectations play a significant role in a customer's decision making process, two levels of expectations are discussed below.

2.12 LEVELS OF EXPECTATIONS

Harris (2010:17) believes that store retail outlets within their customer service packages should understand that customers have distinct levels of expectations in order to fully satisfy customer requirements. Primary expectations and secondary expectations constitute the overall expectations of each customer.

- Primary expectations explain the most essential requirements of customers from an interaction within the store environment. For instance, when visiting a supermarket every customer expects to easily locate merchandise and make payments of purchased items quickly without standing in long queues.
- Secondary expectations are founded on the customer's previous experiences which act as augmentations of primary expectations. From the previous example, within the supermarket the customer expects to receive friendly service and good quality products.

Although customers' expectations frequently change with each individual customer having a distinctive set of expectations, it is important that the customer service of each supermarket addresses these challenges. Below are five suggestions of how to exceed expectations of customers.

2.13 METHODS FOR SURPASSING CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS

Harris (2010:20) suggests that there are five ways to exceed what customers expect from service. These include:

- Getting acquainted with customers. This involves knowing who your customers are, and the reason why they prefer doing business with you. It implies discovering customers' tastes and preferences. A market research could be required to find out this vital information from customers. However, customers' expectations are volatile to the extent that continuous conducting of market researches could be impractical for the retailer; Customer relationship management can play an important role in meeting this challenge. According to Plunkett, Allen and Attner (2011:9) customer relationship management enables supermarkets to pursue and evaluate changing customer preferences (expectations). It combines various information parts from customer profiles usually sourced from past transactions and analyses such information to improve service delivery.
- Asking customers' expectations. It involves learning from customers what they really view as an advantage of making purchases from the store and what they would like to see which is not yet covered.
- Informing customers what to expect. In this case the retailer informs customers of his capabilities. The danger lies in overstating such capabilities to the extent that the retailer will not be able to meet what has been promised. Zeithmal, Bitner and Gremler (2009:117) substantiate that failure to meet promises leads to customer dissatisfaction resulting in loss of sales.
- Living up to customer expectations. This involves the retailer's commitment to accomplish what has been promised to customers in order to meet or exceed their expectations.
- Preserving uniformity. As mentioned earlier, supermarkets should not communicate with customers something that is beyond their reach, but should always aim at delivering consistent service. Customers need to be assured that every time they visit a particular outlet; they will receive the same positive experience.

An important input to go beyond customers' expectations is recalling that expectations are always changing. What was formerly considered exceeding customers' expectations may currently be similar to what competition is offering. If a retailer fails to keep abreast with current competition, there is a danger of losing customers. The following is a discussion of how perceptions are used by customers to evaluate customer service.

2.14 FUNCTION OF PERCEPTIONS

Perception of customers plays an important role when customers evaluate service in stores. However, customer service is an intangible aspect and it makes it hard for customers to assess precisely. Five features of customer service are available in which, customers use to make their evaluations pertaining quality of service delivered at stores. These include dependability, guarantee, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness.

2.14.1 DEPENDABILITY: Meeting promises.

Dependability refers to the ability of store personnel to execute service reliably and precisely. For example, delivering service as stated or promised like meeting stated delivery dates or providing accurate warranties as stated in contracts (Levy and Weitz 2012:505).

According to Yeo (2008:271) inconsistencies between what has been promised and the actual service delivered can be an outcome of imprecise communication in advertisement, or sales promotions. In this case, the retailer 'oversells' his services to the extent that his full potential cannot match what has been promised. This can pose adverse effects on the supermarket's performance as customers are more likely to be dissatisfied with the service they receive. It therefore implies that store management should communicate exactly what they can deliver or ensures that actual performance complements what has being promised to customers. Nowadays, reliability of a service is a crucial determinant of perceptions of service quality among customers (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler 2009:117).

2.14.2 GUARANTEE OR ASSURANCE: Instigating trust and confidence.

Guarantee or assurance entails the skill and politeness of store employees and their capabilities to deliver trust and confidence in customers which can be achieved through meticulous training of staff.

Yeo (2008:281) suggests that store employees' knowledge, courtesy and ability to instil trust and confidence are important in assuring customers within the store. Store personnel need to manage excess demands of customers during peak hours to ensure that assurance as a service quality dimension is addressed.

2.14.3 TANGIBLES: Physical presentation of service.

Tangibles are physical facilities, tools, staff, and communication equipment at the store. It explains the outward look of these facilities. Tangibles are a viable source to manipulate in order to enhance the store's image and deliver strong messages of superior service to the customers (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler 2009:117). In the case of supermarkets, it is important that the store itself is tidy; merchandise placement should be neat, and aisles distinct and logical. Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal (2006:42) further suggest that appearance of a store's human resources is also important in this instance.

2.14.4 EMPATHY: Treatment of customers on a personal level.

Empathy involves store's staff ability to recognise customers' emotional requirements, comprehend the cause of such conditions, and take action appropriately. It may include offering customised service or even recognising a customer by name (Jane 2013:2).

It basically covers care and personal attention afforded by store personnel to customers during their shopping experiences. Empathy shows the store employees' enthusiasm and competence to answer to personal customer needs. The goal of empathy as a service quality

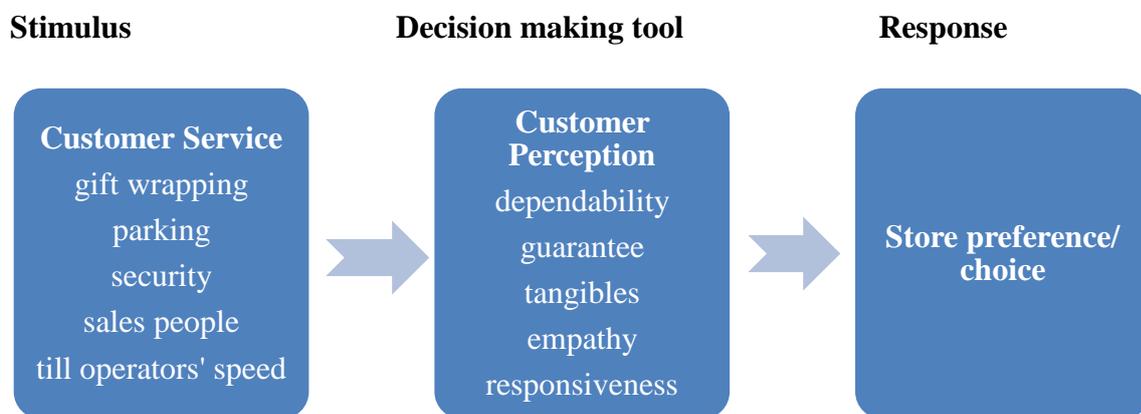
dimension is to offer customers increased facilities and improve the service competence through personalised service (Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal 2006:42).

2.14.5 RESPONSIVENESS: Eagerness to help

Responsiveness refers to store’s staff enthusiasm to assist customers and offer quick service. For instance, responding to calls or emails immediately. Responsiveness is meant to address customers’ need or feeling that they are important (Lucas 2012:349). In this case whoever is providing the service should be active, voluntary, and flexible in solving customers’ difficulties or requests. In supermarkets, employees should continuously engage in personal interaction with customers and show personal interest in their well-being.

In general, a service strategy that adequately addresses the above five aspects is more likely to delight customers and facilitate customer retention.

Figure 2.2 ILLUSTRATION OF CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR



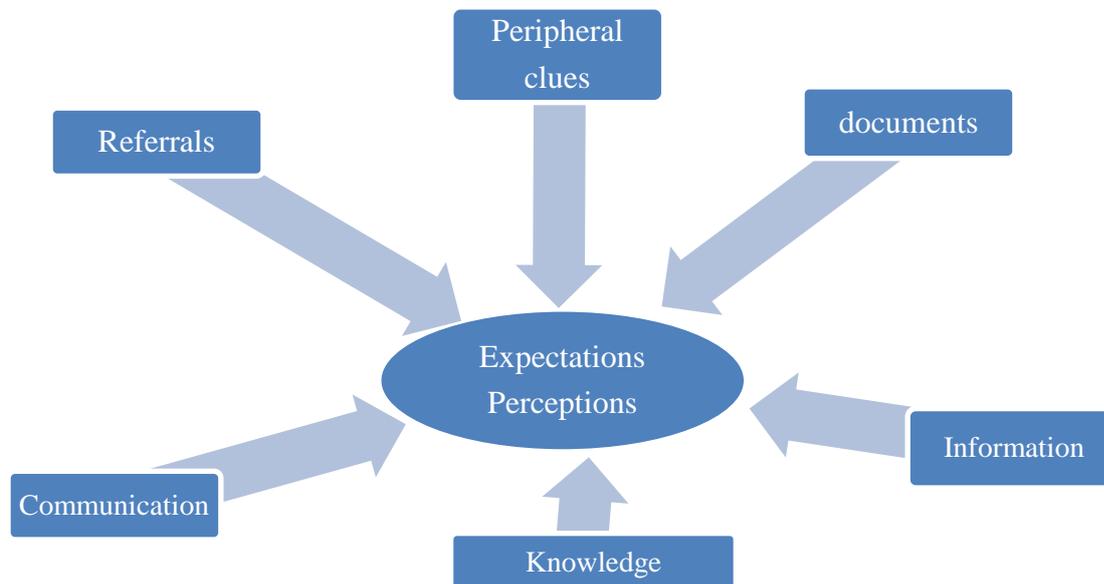
Source: Adapted from du Plessis et al (2012:270).

As illustrated in the above diagram, the stimulus refers to customer service in form of gift wrapping, parking, security, sales people’s assistance, and till operators’ speed. After being exposed to such stimuli, a customer develops a perception towards service delivered. Du Plessis et al (2012:270) explain that this perception is based on five characteristics of service which are dependability, guarantee, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. A customer then finally decides whether to stay with a particular store or search for better service elsewhere (response).

2.16 HOW TO MANAGE CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

Horovitz (2004:10) explains that perceptions and expectations are connected and successful businesses (i.e. supermarkets in this case) utilise the following tools to handle both perceptions and expectations. These tools include peripheral (secondary) clues, information delivered to customers, documentation, testimonials and advertising.

Figure 2.3 ILLUSTRATION OF HOW TO MANAGE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS



Source: Horovitz (2004:11).

The above diagram illustrates that expectations and perceptions are linked and that six tools can be utilised to handle these expectations and perceptions. These tools include peripheral clues, documents, information, knowledge, communication and referrals.

- Peripheral clues explain material communication processes that highlight the retailer's ability to assist the customer before he or she is assisted. For instance, supermarkets' call centre agents can answer phones just before the first ring to give an impression that they are efficient.
- Information delivered to customers assists them in embracing or understanding the retailer's pricing or way of operating. For example, SPAR in all its marketing efforts, emphasises its goal to deliver highest quality products explaining why their prices are slightly high compared to other supermarkets.
- In terms of documentation, both technical and commercial documents should be apparent. This is done so that the firm can be perceived as transparent and user friendly. SPAR within their website, they publish financial statements to customers or prospective shareholders (Horovitz 2004:11).
- Testimonials of customers create the retailer's positive image of the ability to serve efficiently. SPAR has been continuously advertising customers' stories about how their lifestyles have been impacted by SPAR. These include SPAR's sponsorship in sports events.
- Horovitz (2004:11) suggests that advertising should target at under promising so that the retailer can over-deliver, which will help in minimising incorrect perceptions, or expectations, and improve opportunities of satisfying customers.

2.17 SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer service strategies that cover both service quality and customer satisfaction are the true definition of efficient customer service. Theron, Bothma and du Toit (2003:93) define service quality as the customer's complete impression of the store's customer service, while customer satisfaction is the result of discrete service encounters regardless of communication channels used (written, telephonic, face-to-face, or technology based). In essence, service quality is an evaluation of how well service provided correspond customers' expectations (Service quality 2014).

Starting from the first encounter with store employees, customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction contributes significantly to the customer's total perception of the store's service quality. Human et al (2013:395) further explain that in the event that the customer's first encounter with the store personnel is positive, his or her perception of the store's service quality will also be positive. This reinforces the following statement, first impressions make lasting impressions.

From the initial interaction of a customer with the service personnel, the following interactions will either enhance or diminish the first impression. Positive first impressions followed by inferior service on the second encounter tend to leave customers still positive toward the store, although less than previously. This shows the significance of first impressions on the customers' attitude because they set the rhythm of subsequent interactions (Hyken 2013:2). For the store to fortify a positive image after a good first impression, an equally good service on the following incident would be important.

However, if the customer's second experience is sub-standard the first positive impression the customer held could be completely wiped out. Additionally, negative first impressions place the retailer in a negative position. In this situation second chances may not be available for the retailer as the customer might not return (Hyken 2013:2). In general, it is crucial that the first impression is solid and subsequent interactions are equally good. In this case, a strange slip in customer service performance might be forgiven by customers provided that it does not recur.

In conclusion, Theron, Bothma and du Toit (2003:94) liken service quality with a bank balance. At any given time one might either withdraw or deposit the bank balance. The danger lies in making large withdrawals (that is sub-standard customer service) which would result in an overdraft (sub-standard overall impression of the retailer's service quality). This is not a good position to be in for the retailer pertaining customer service. Moreover, a strong first deposit (first impression) facilitates a strong foundation to retain customer loyalty.

2.18 FEATURES OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

A better understanding of the characteristics of any service helps the retailer to structure effectively a service package that lures customers. Customer service comprises of four features which include intangibility, perishability, simultaneity and heterogeneity (The nature of services 2010:9).

2.18.1 INTANGIBILITY

du Plessis et al (2012:312) define intangibility as a service's characteristic that it cannot be seen, smelt, or touched making it difficult to explain, grasp or demonstrate. In general, it is unrealistic to offer a sample of customer service. For example, demonstrating how sales people handle customer complaints in fashion outlets. It therefore implies that potential customers base their decisions on other people's past experiences and knowledge about a store. It becomes important that the retailer's employees deliver superior customer service to ensure that word of mouth spreads favourably about the store.

2.18.2 PERISHABILITY

Perishability of customer service explains that a service cannot be kept as stock and be used in the future. It also means that unused service today cannot be stored to satisfy periods of peak demand in future periods. Perishability of a service raises concerns of limited capacity to satisfy customer demand which might end up in lost sales revenues. For example, a supermarket without adequate till operators might lose sales as customers avoid longer queues and shop elsewhere. Perishability alerts store management to evaluate its service capacity and demand to ensure a balance is reached and customers are satisfied (Service marketing 2012).

2.18.3 SIMULTANEITY

Simultaneity explains that service production and consumption are inseparable they occur simultaneously. Du Plessis et al (2012:313) similarly suggest that delivery of a service cannot be split from the individual producing it. Inseparability of customer service limits the trading area a service can satisfy, as consumers have to visit a particular outlet to receive a service. For example, for a fashion outlet to cater for a customer's suit size requirements, the customer has to be physically present at the outlet. This brings a challenge for the store management to cater for customers who might not be able to visit the store. The internet provides a viable option of dealing with proximity challenges. Through use of online shopping, customers can effectively deliver their size, colour, or style requirements to fashion outlets without being physically present.

2.18.4 HETEROGENEITY

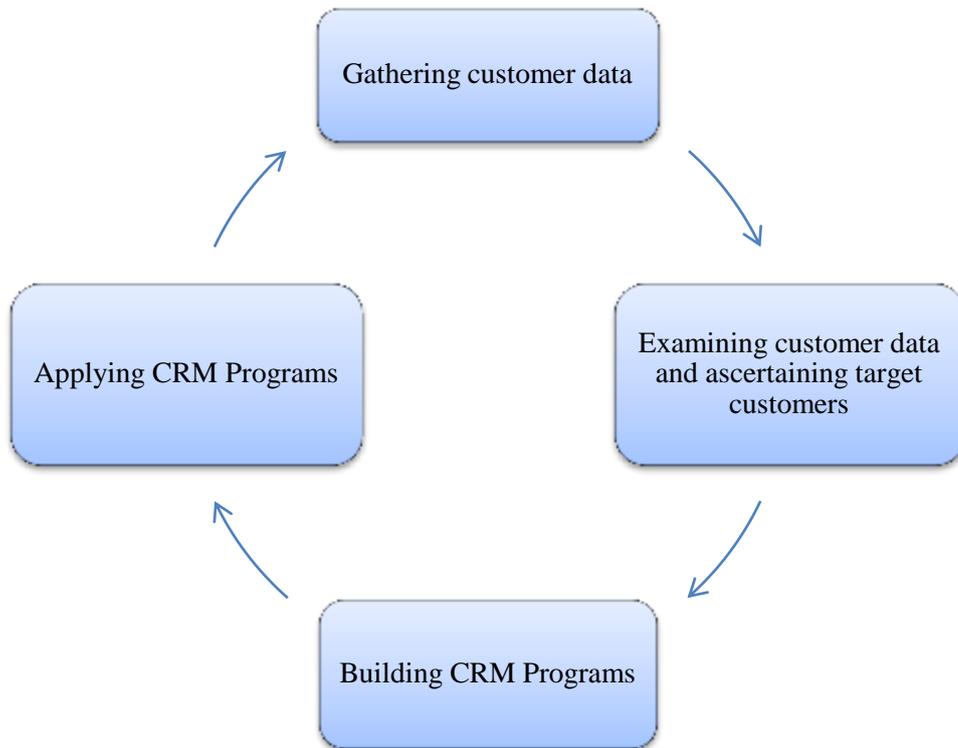
Heterogeneity of customer service explains variability of service from one customer to another. In this case there is lack of consistency in delivering service (Heterogeneity 2014). Inconsistencies occur in service delivery because of different people involved in its execution. Different people have different capabilities and personalities making it almost impossible to standardise service. However, sufficient human resources training can be useful in equipping store employees how to execute customer service properly. Quality control in this instance becomes a crucial for store management. Total quality management needs to be implemented to ensure quality standards are reinforced in service delivery.

2.19 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Customer relationship management refers to the business viewpoint and group of approaches, programs, and schemes that concentrate on recognising and constructing loyalty with the store's most appreciated customers (Levy and Weitz 2012:275). Egan (2011:33) similarly suggests that, customer relationship management is associated with the management of a long term relationship with the customer and involves use of information technology. It implies that it is more tactical than long term. The goal of customer relationship management is to create stronger bonds with valued customers in the hope that the retailer's profit position will improve significantly.

Customarily, supermarkets concentrated on luring all possible customers to visit their facilities, explore through the store and even pay a visit on their web sites. This has been achieved through use of aggressive advertising, sales promotions and equal treatment of all customers. Considering today's extremely competitive business environment, retailers now shifted their focus to offering more value to their valued customers. This goal has been reached through use of direct promotions and service to gain loyalty of customers. In general, customer relationship management is all about gaining customer loyalty. According to Hayes (2013:5) customer loyalty revolves around appropriate customers, convincing them to buy, buy regularly and buying in greater quantities. On the other hand, loyalty of customers goes beyond repeated visits to a particular store. It is more of commitment of the customer to the extent that he/she resists any promotional activities of competitors (Baron, Conway and Warnby 2010:31). As mentioned earlier in the problem statement of this research project, customer taste and preferences are ever changing such that, continuous evaluation and restructuring of customer service packages becomes important. Customer relationship management is an appropriate tool to keep abreast of such changes in the consumer market. It ensures that the right service is delivered at the right time to consumers.

Figure 2.4 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PROCESS CYCLE



Adapted from Levy and Weitz (2012:277)

The above illustration shows that customer relationship management is a continuous procedure which converts customer information into loyalty through four stages:

- Gathering customer data;
- Examining customer data and ascertaining target customers;
- Building customer relationship management programs; and
- Applying customer relationship management programs.

2.20 WHAT TURNS CUSTOMERS OFF

It is important for the retailer to recognise what turns customers off. Lack of such an understanding can result in loss of customers due to dissatisfaction. Timm (2008:110) identified three categories of customer turnoffs which include:

- Value turnoffs;
- System turnoffs; and
- People turnoffs.

Getting a clear picture of these forms of customer turnoffs, allows supermarkets to identify major causes of customer dissatisfaction and avoid them to ensure satisfaction of customers.

2.20.1 VALUE TURNOFFS

This type of turnoff is based on the customers' feeling that they are not receiving adequate value from the product or service they buy. Generally, poor quality products or inferior service disappoints most customers. Value explains a comparison of quality with price paid. The general belief is that the more an individual pays for an item, the more value he/she receives (Definition of perceived value 2011). It is the duty of store management to ensure that the supermarket provides the right value to customers. In other words, store management determines what the supermarket will offer to customers (value proposition).

2.20.2 SYSTEM TURNOFFS

The term system in customer service context explains processes, procedures, or policies utilised to present a product or service to the customer. They describe the method used to deliver value to the customer. They include things like store location, parking space, phone lines, training of employees, computer systems for managing customer transactions, guarantees and product returns, and customer follow up procedures (Timm 2008:111).

Timm (2008:111) indicates that store management is responsible for ensuring that system turnoffs are eradicated to avoid customer dissatisfaction. This is so because changes in systems often require money invested for example, additions of staff and their training. On the other hand, store employees play part in proposing system changes. Store systems contribute significantly to both employees' and customers' convenience. It therefore means that ineffective utilisation and design of systems not only does it nullify the worth of systems but can also lead to customer turn offs. Examples include situations whereby transactions are complex for customers resulting in dissatisfaction, or when there are numerous complaints about long queues, untrained sales personnel and poor store appearance (Recognise what turns off your customers 2013).

2.20.3 PEOPLE TURNOFFS

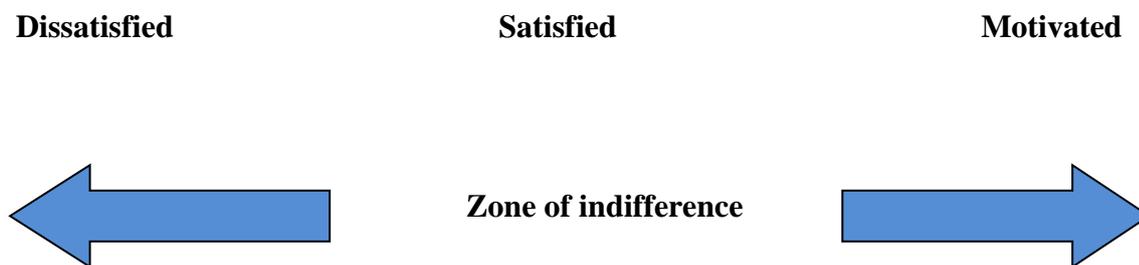
This last category, people turnoffs, results from poor communication. Improper communication either verbally or non-verbally by store personnel annoys customers. Examples of people turnoffs include the following:

- Failure of store personnel to greet or welcome a customer;
- Store employees who deliver inaccurate information or show signs of lack of knowledge;
- Conduct that shows elements of being rude; and
- Any kind of message that makes customers feels uncomfortable.

Similarly, Bleuel (2007:6) suggests that inappropriate behaviour of store employees in which they are impolite, or show any indifferent attitude; turns customers off. It is the duty of every store employee to reduce this kind of customer turn off. Although training of staff might be considered appropriate, the ultimate responsibility to change communication skills rests with the employee.

From the above mentioned customer turnoffs, the goal of every retail outlet should be to eliminate or avoid those to ensure customers are satisfied with service provided at the same time retaining customer loyalty. However, it is important that the store management is aware of the concept called zone of indifference. Timm (2008:116) suggests that although customers might be satisfied they may be unmoved, or not motivated. In this case, only dissatisfaction is absent and the actual drive to become a loyal customer will be missing. It therefore implies that the zone of indifference is the space between dissatisfaction and motivation. Retailers face the challenge of shifting their customers past satisfaction to motivation. This can be achieved by acting on customers' perceptions and expectations.

Figure 2.5 Distinction between satisfaction and motivation



Source: Timm (2008:116).

The above diagram shows the zone of indifference as the point between dissatisfaction and motivation. It distinguishes satisfaction from motivation.

2.21 CONCLUSION

In summary, retailers should aim at providing customer service that reflects customer expectations. At the same time they should aspire to exceed these expectations. It is important that retailers when constructing their service strategies, they take into account expectations and perceptions of customers (Levy and Weitz 2012:504). In its most basic form, customer service should have intimate knowledge of the customers it serves to ensure satisfaction of customers.

This chapter reviewed literature on expectations and perceptions of customers, how customers evaluate service quality, elements of customer service, approaches to customer service, purchasing behaviour of customers, how to manage perceptions and expectations, customer relationship management and what turns customers off.

From this review, it can be drawn that customers are substantial players in determining the success or failure of customer service. Their expectations and perceptions direct the path in which customer service techniques should follow. The next chapter discusses the research methodology utilised in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section reviews the research methodology that was used in this study to collect first hand information from customers selected in the research field. It covers the research design, sampling method, data collection and analysis, reliability and validity, as well as pilot testing conducted in this research study. This research study employed the exploratory method of researching and all data collected from respondents about their insights on customer service and customer behaviour was entirely quantitative in nature.

3.2 STUDY TYPE

Primary data was assembled through use of surveys. Questionnaires were designed and a pilot test was conducted to have a better understanding about which information to include in questioning respondents. Questionnaires comprised of closed ended questions that provided choices of answers to respondents. However, a single open ended question was included to minimise the possibility of biased conclusions from data collected.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study was quantitative in nature. This involved the use of prearranged questions in questionnaires, with response alternatives preset, making it easier to appraise the research data gathered. According to Burns and Bush (2010:204) quantitative research involves the use of well thought out questions accompanied with reply choices that had been programmed, and a group of respondents. Labaree (2013:4) further describes quantitative methods as purposeful measurements and arithmetical scrutiny of data gathered through use of polls, questionnaires or surveys.

From the objectives of study perspective, an exploratory research was conducted in this research study. This was done to gain a better understanding of the research problem, considering that not many studies have been carried out pertaining customer service, and its impact on buying behaviour. Kumar (2011:11) substantiates that an exploratory research is a study conducted with the aim to either discover a field where less concrete information is known, or to examine possibilities attached to a certain research endeavour.

In an effort to obtain a solid overall picture of the population under study, a cross sectional research was conducted in this study. Cross sectional research entails gathering of information to make conclusions about a sample or population under study on one occasion (Hall 2011:173). The significant benefit of this type of research is that, it allows comparison of different elements at the same time (Cross sectional vs longitudinal studies 2009).

3.4 POPULATION

Population in this study indicates all possible individuals or elements that could be included in this research but because of time and money factors a sample has to be selected from this population. It can be also defined as the general group of individuals or objects that can be considered under a research study and known to have similar characteristics (Research population 2009).

For the purpose of this research study, the target population was all customers who buy at supermarkets in the greater part of Durban with the main focus on selected individuals within Berea, West Street and Market area.

3.5 SAMPLE SIZE

Sample size in this research study refers to the amount of individuals included in the survey. The sample size of this study comprised of 45 respondents from three different supermarkets in Berea, West Street and Market area. 15 respondents were questioned at each of the three supermarkets which include Pick and Pay, Shoprite and Cambridge. The sample was made up as shown by the following table:

NAME OF STORE	SAMPLE SIZE
Pick and Pay Berea Centre	15 respondents
Cambridge Market	15 respondents
Shoprite West Street	15 respondents
Total sample size	45 respondents

3.6 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

Questionnaires were used as measuring instruments in this research project. Primary data was gathered through use of a survey. The questionnaires comprised mostly of closed ended questions, this reduced errors associated with illiteracy among respondents and ambiguity of questions. One open ended question was included in the questionnaire to ensure data to be collected was free from bias (Naser 2012:1).

3.7 SAMPLING AND SAMPLING METHOD

Sampling refers to a method in which a demonstrative group of individuals is selected from the whole population under study, and utilising the primary information for research purposes (Latham 2010:2). This research study used non probability sampling in choosing individuals to participate in the survey. Kumar (2011:206) defines this method of sampling as a process that does not follow concepts about probability in selecting rudiments from the targeted population.

For the purpose of convenience in reaching sample participants, convenience (accidental) sampling was used in this research. Not everyone will be prepared to answer questionnaires, therefore widening the scope of possible participants increases the researchers' chance of obtaining data and also can be gathered quickly (What is a convenience sample 2014).

Similarly, Somekh and Lewin (2008:219) support that choosing convenience sampling for researching is mainly driven by the need for easy access to the proposed sample.

3.8 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire dominantly comprised of closed ended questions whereby respondents were required to select a particular choice from a list of possible choices given. A rating scale was also utilised in which respondents were presented with a range of categories serving as possible responses that could be selected by respondents. All questions were developed in a way that answered the research problem and objectives of this study.

A Likert scale was used in designing questions with response options ranging between strongly agreeing and strongly disagreeing. Likert scales give room for easier understanding and analysing of results. LaMarca (2010:2) similarly suggests that likert scales make questionnaire answering easier for participants and responses are much easier to code when gathering data. In addition, clear and plain questions were used to make it easier for respondents to understand. Questions were developed from reviewing the pertinent literature of this research topic.

The questionnaire was pre-tested first before it was used for the final research of information from respondents. This was done to gain knowledge of portions which required restructuring so that respondents could clearly envisage what was questioned; it also helped in adding some relevant questions that were omitted at first.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION

A survey was conducted to gather data from the target population (sample). Surveys are methodical ways of collecting information using questionnaires from a considerably large amount of people (Hawkins *et al* 2007:750). To obtain sufficient information about this research topic, questionnaires were dispensed to the sample accompanied with personal interviews with participants.

To make the research task easier for the researcher, close friends also graduates were used in dispensing and assisting respondents in answering the questionnaires. These assistants were thoroughly informed about the research topic and how to answer questions that were likely to arise during interviewing respondents.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data obtained from questionnaires was counted and double checked for any errors before capturing any information. These results from questionnaires were presented in graphic formats like tables, bar and pie charts. A brief analysis accompanied these graphic presentations in this project, explanations about the meaning of figures and graphs were included, as well as conclusions of the results.

3.11 VALIDITY

According to Kumar (2011:177) validity revolves around suitability, eminence and precision of methods adopted in finding answers to research questions. In addition, Phelan and Wren (2009:1) define validity as the extent to which an experiment measures what is intended to be gauged or assessed. However zero measurement errors are not practical in a research. In this research, preventative measures were utilised to minimise occurrence of errors. Questionnaires for instance had brief questions that were easy to understand for respondents. When distributing questionnaires, respondents were informed well about the purpose of the questionnaires and how they can answer questions.

3.12 RELIABILITY

Kumar (2011:181) defines reliability of a test as the degree to which recurring measurements conducted will produce similar outcomes under regular conditions. It therefore means reliability is concerned about constancy, logicity and precision of findings in a research project (Miller 2010:1). A larger sample of the whole population was chosen, with 45 respondents taking part. Face to face interviews with respondents were conducted, to help them better understand questions and reduce errors. Questionnaires included instructions for participants to ensure everything was clear.

3.13 PILOT TEST/ SURVEY

It refers to a small scale, preliminary research carried out to gain a clear image of what the researcher wants to know and how to go about it, without the cost and strength required for a full or mature research (Crossman 2013). At least 10 questionnaires were distributed for pre-test purposes to 10 respondents. This helped in understanding which questions were important or not and disclose any flaws within the questionnaire design before the final research.

3.14 LIMITATIONS

Because of time and cost constraints this study was limited to some parts of Ethekwini that included Berea, West Street and Market. It therefore implies that generalising data found in this study to all supermarkets in KwaZulu Natal or South Africa would be inappropriate. In this study reviewing literature was restricted to customer service, its elements and their impact of consumer purchasing behaviour.

3.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter explained the research methods employed in acquiring, analysing and evaluating data from the research field. It also looked at issues of validity and reliability of data. Plausible measures were implemented to ensure that data obtained had minimum errors. The next chapter provides a detailed analysis of data and discussion of results.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a comprehensive analysis of data is provided based on findings of this research study. Use of mathematical and graphical representations is evident in this entire chapter as well as interpretation of data. The presented data and analysis of findings are based on information gathered through use of questionnaires administered to respondents around Berea Centre, Market and West Street.

4.2 RESPONSE RATE

Questionnaires were dispensed outside three selected supermarket stores in Durban for the purpose of this research study. These three supermarkets included Pick and Pay at Berea Centre, Cambridge near Market and Shoprite along West Street. The overall number of respondents who managed to convincingly complete questionnaires was 45. Of these 45 respondents, 15 were questioned from each of the three supermarkets. Table 4.1 below shows the classification of responses from the three supermarkets selected.

Table 4.1 Response Rate

STORE NAME	INTENDED SAMPLE	ACTUAL SAMPLE	RESPONSE RATE
Pick and Pay Berea Centre	15	15	100%
Cambridge Market	15	15	100%
Shoprite West Street	15	15	100%
TOTAL RESPONSES	45	45	100%

From table 4.1 it can be seen that the desired response percentage of 100% was achieved. Of the 45 questionnaires dispensed, all of the 45 were successfully completed by respondents. Each store had an average number of 15 respondents thus a 100% response rate.

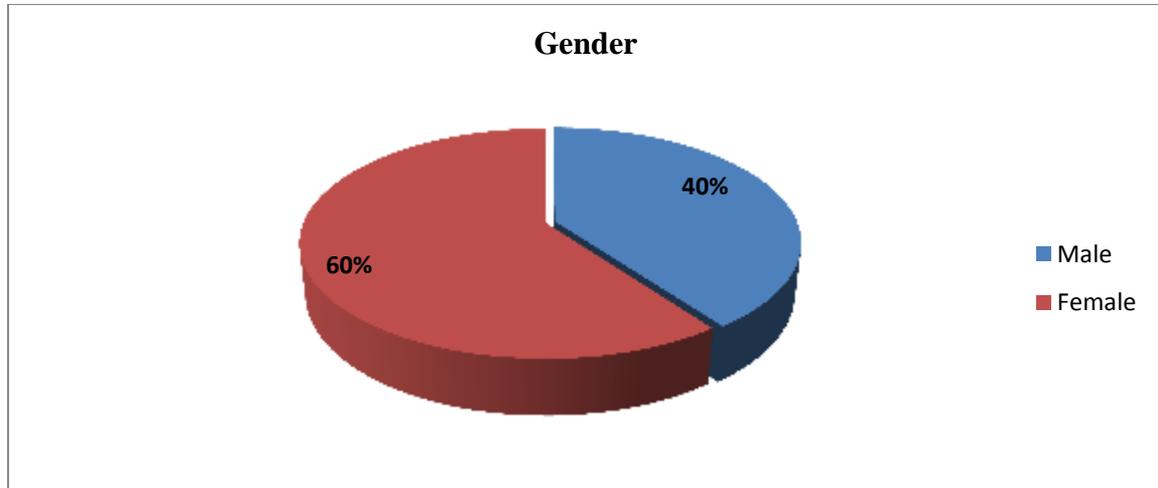
4.3 FREQUENCIES

According to Babbie (2008:450) frequency distribution refers to an explanation of the number of times various attributes of a variable are observed in a particular sample. Frequency distributions are easily understood when expressed in form of graphs and tables. This study expresses all frequencies in form of tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

4.3.1 Gender of respondents

Figure 4.1 below shows gender distribution in percentages in this study.

Figure 4.1

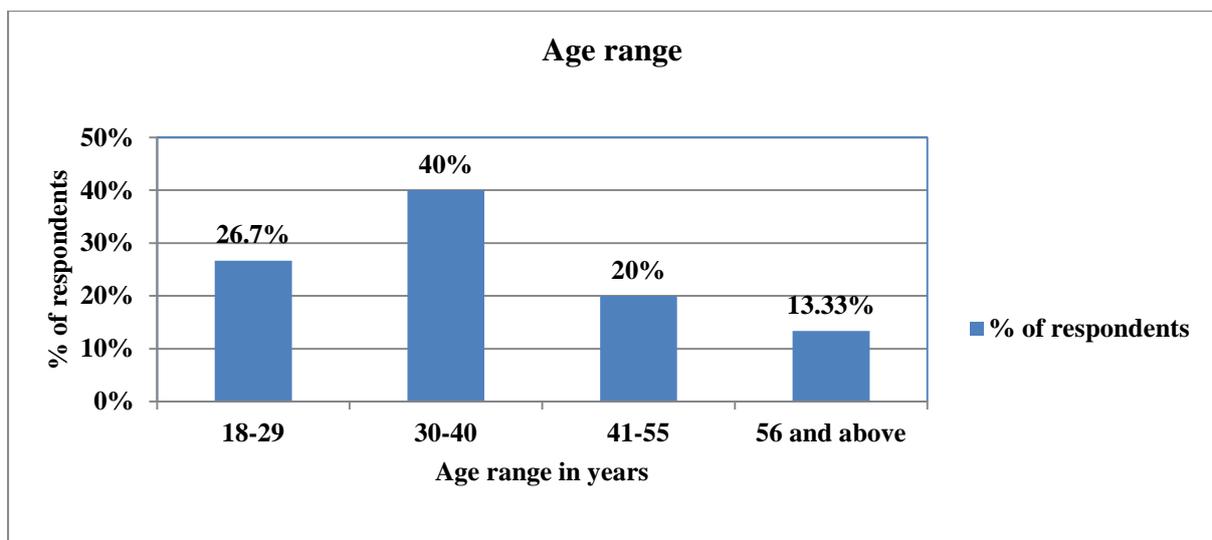


The pie chart above shows that 40% of the respondents were male, whilst the other 60% comprised females from the selected sample of study. It can be concluded that women still remain predominant shoppers in supermarkets.

4.3.2 Age of respondents

Figure 4.2 below depicts the age of respondents in years from the sample.

Figure 4.2



From Figure 4.2 above, 26.7% of the respondents were within the ages of 18 to 29. 40% of the respondents were in the 30 to 40 years age range, 20% in the 41 to 55 years age range and the remaining 13.33% were above 56 years of age. Consequently, the majority of shoppers are between the ages of 18-40 years representing 66.7% of respondents. Older citizens

contribute a smaller percentage of shoppers at supermarkets. This data insinuates that the age range of 18-40 has a major impact on the performance of most supermarkets.

4.3.3 Educational qualifications of respondents

Figure 4.3 below illustrates educational qualifications of respondents expressed in percentages.

Figure 4.3

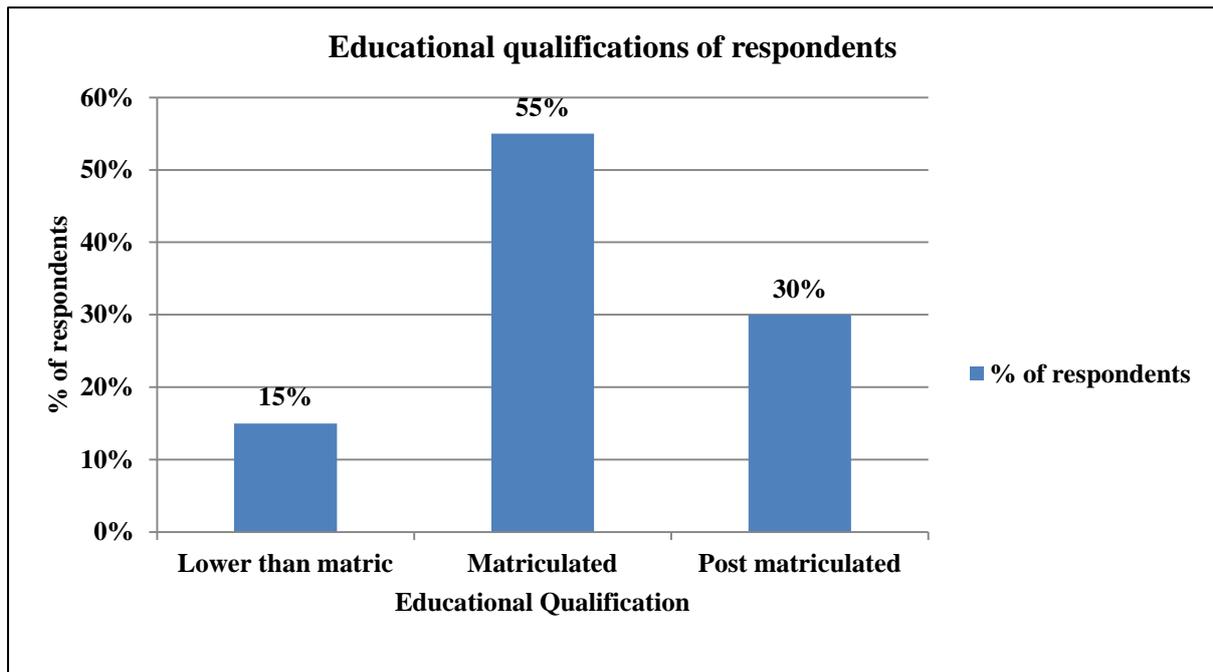


Figure 4.3 illustrates that 15% of respondents do not hold any matriculation certificate, 55% do have matriculation certificates and 30% are post matriculated from the selected sample. As a result, 85% (55%+30%) of respondents have at least the matriculation certificate and comprise the larger part of customers at supermarkets. It therefore means that levels of education tend to dictate spending capacity of shoppers at supermarkets.

4.3.4 Frequency of shopping

Figure 4.4 shows the number of shoppers' visits in a week expressed as percentages.

Figure 4.4

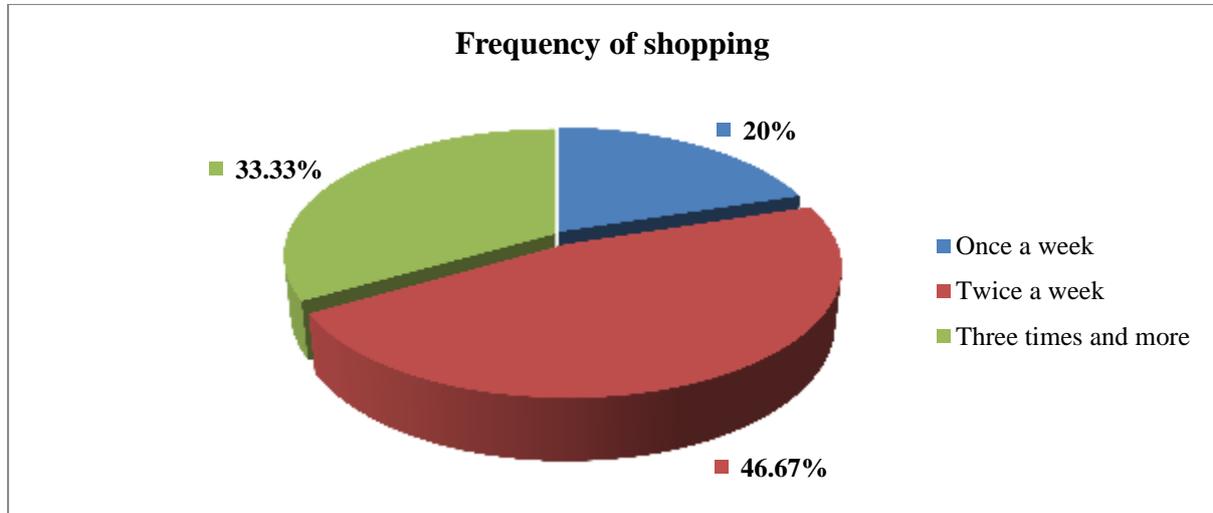


Figure 4.4 above depicts that 20% of respondents visit the supermarkets once a week, 46.67% twice a week and 33.33% not less than times a week. This shows that 80% (46.67+ 33.33%) of respondents go for shopping not less than twice in a single week. It implies that consumers are frequently visiting supermarkets to satisfy their requirements. The Nielsen Company (2012:2) substantiates that consumers are now substituting restaurant trips with grocery due decreasing buying power of consumers and more health awareness.

4.4 FREQUENCIES BASED ON RESPONDENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

4.4.1 Visual appeal of physical facilities

Figure 4.5 below shows what respondents expect in terms physical facilities.

Figure 4.5

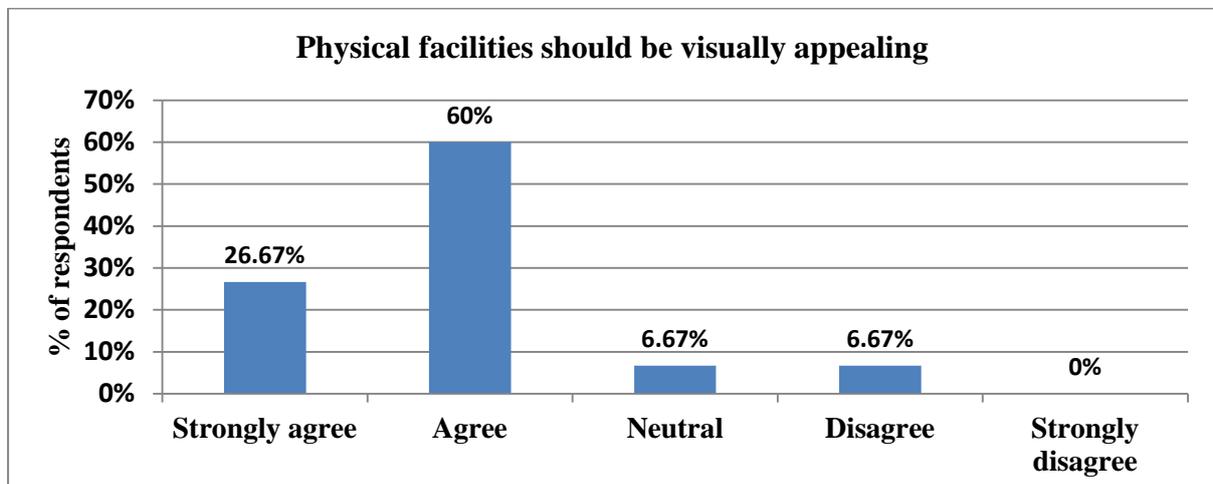


Figure 4.5 shows that 26.67% of respondents strongly agreed that physical facilities at supermarkets in Durban should be visually appealing, whilst 60% also agreed. However, 6.67% were uncertain and the other 6.67% of respondents disagreed that facilities at supermarkets should be appealing. These results indicate that 86.67% (26.67+ 60%) expect facilities at supermarkets to be appealing. Therefore physical facilities at supermarkets contribute to the overall service an outlet can provide to customers. Mack (2012:3) asserts that even though a retailer’s facilities might look as if they do not directly serve customers, an unhygienic environment at a store can easily drive customers away.

4.4.2 Personnel neatness

Figure 4.6 below presents what respondents expect at supermarkets in terms of how neat staff should be.

Figure 4.6

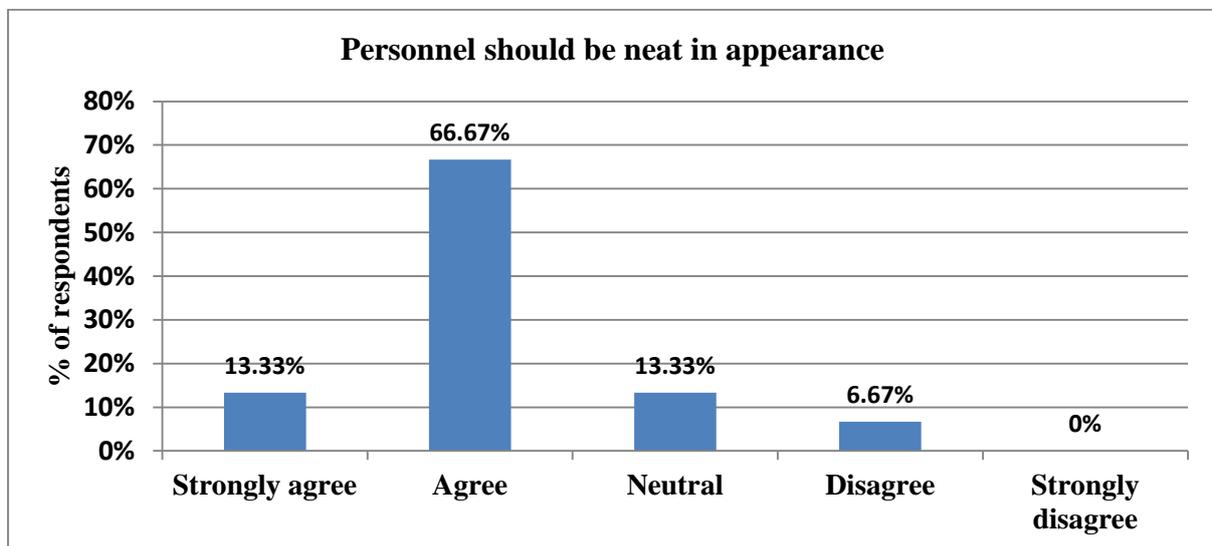


Figure 4.6 indicates that 13.33% of respondents strongly agreed that personnel at supermarkets should be neat in appearance, while 66.67% agreed also. 13.33% of respondents were uncertain and the remaining 6.67% of respondents disagreed that staff at supermarkets are expected to be neat in appearance. This means that 80% (13.33+66.67%) of respondents expect staff to be neat. It can be concluded that personnel appearance at supermarkets affects the mood of shoppers and can form part of customer service.

4.4.3 Staff's interest in solving customer problems

Figure 4.7 shows respondents' expectation levels about interest staff should show when solving customers' problems.

Figure 4.7

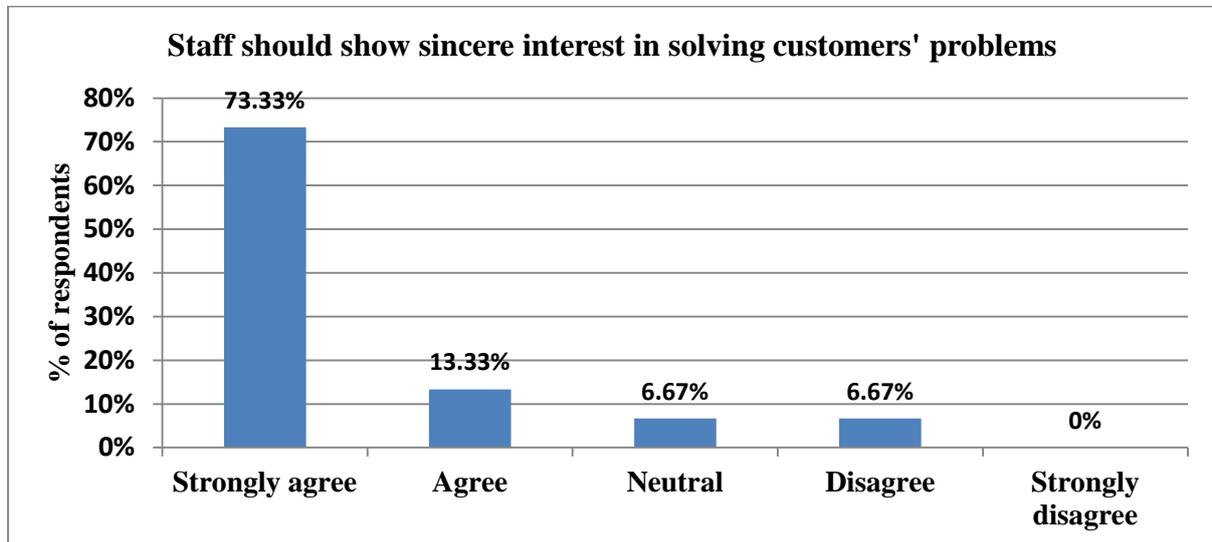


Figure 4.7 indicates that 73.33% of respondents strongly agreed and expect that staff should show genuine interest in solving customer problems and 13.33% also agreed. 6.67% of respondents were uncertain and the other 6.67% disagreed that staff at supermarkets should show an interest in dealing with customer problems. It therefore means that 86.66% of respondents agreed that staff should show an interest in solving customer difficulties. It can be deduced that a genuine commitment of store employees in solving customer problems is crucial in providing a satisfactory customer service package. Machado and Diggines (2012:51) stressed a situation whereby a customer has to look for a service employee to be assisted as part of service failure.

4.4.4 Rate of speed when solving customer complaints

Figure 4.8 below shows respondents' expectations in terms of how quick supermarkets' employees should be when solving customer complaints.

Figure 4.8

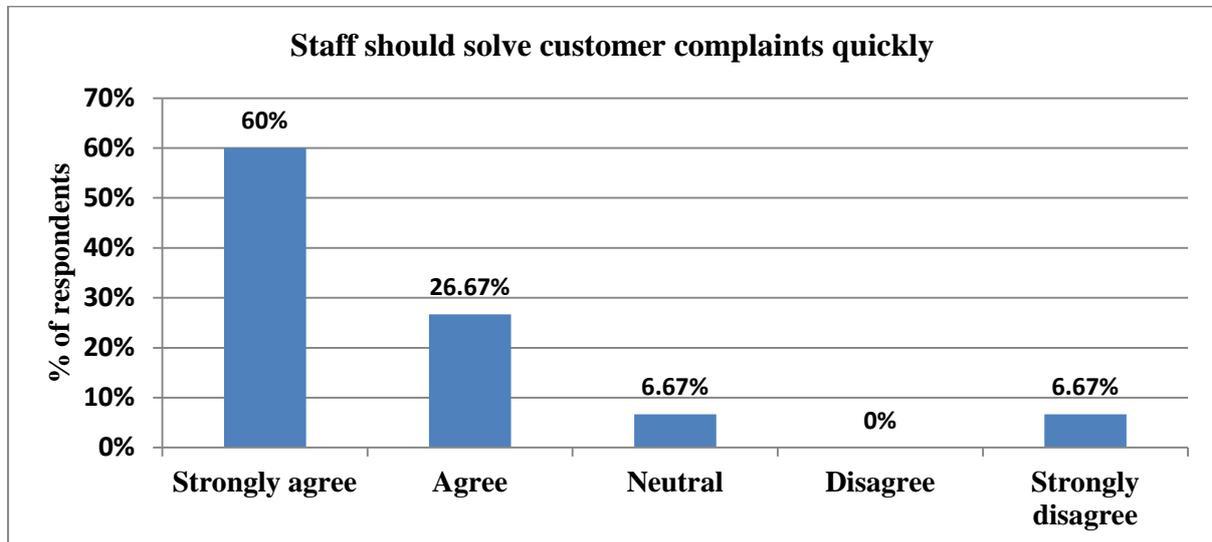


Figure 4.8 points out that 60% of respondents strongly agreed that staff at supermarkets should solve customer complaints and 26.67% of respondents also agreed. 6.67% of respondents were uncertain whilst 6.67% strongly disagreed that staff should be quick in solving customer difficulties. Therefore, the majority of respondents 86.67% expect staff to be quick in solving customer problems. It can be deduced that quick handling of customers is vital in providing sound customer service. Levy and Wietz (2012:512) support that customers are concerned with the time taken in resolving complaint and every staff member should be capable to solve these complaints to avoid any time wasting.

4.4.5 Willingness of staff to assist customers

Figure 4.9 below shows what respondents expect in terms of how willing staff should be in assisting customers.

Figure 4.9

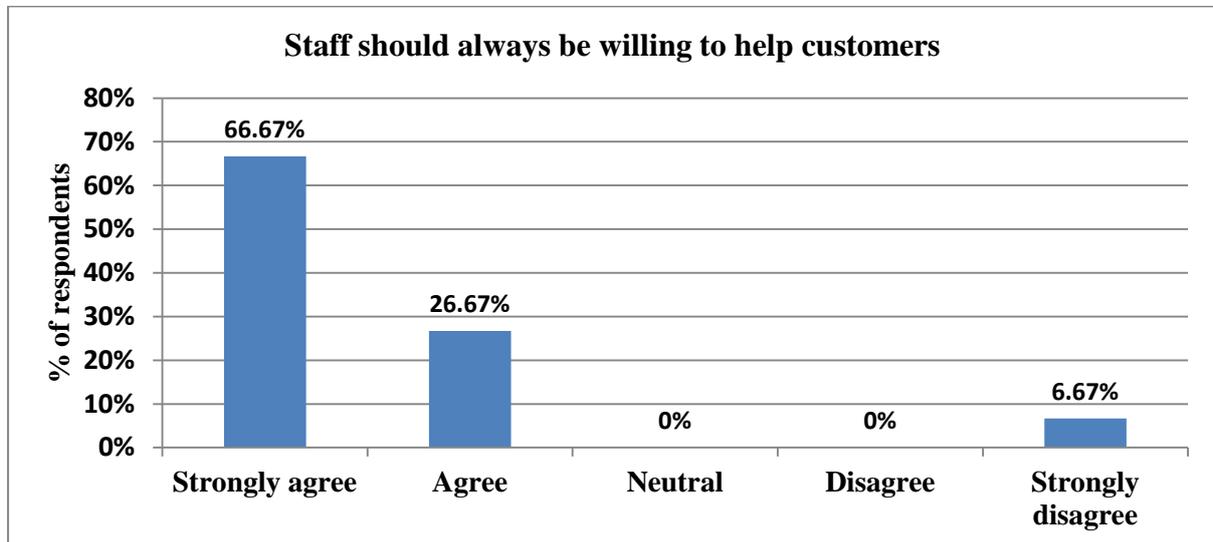


Figure 4.9 reveals that 66.67% of respondents strongly agreed that staff should always be willing to assist customers and 26.67% of respondents agreed as well. On the other hand, 6.67% of respondents strongly disagreed that they expect staff to always be willing to assist customers. Results indicate that the greater portion of respondents (93.34%) agreed and expect staff to always be prepared to help customers. It implies that enthusiasm is an important element in customer service. Similarly, Bleuel (2007:6) proposes that inapt behaviour of store employees in which they are rude, or show any indifferent attitude; turns customers off.

4.4.6 Behaviour of staff and customer confidence

Figure 4.10 below depicts what customers expect pertaining staff's behaviour in instilling confidence in customers.

Figure 4.10

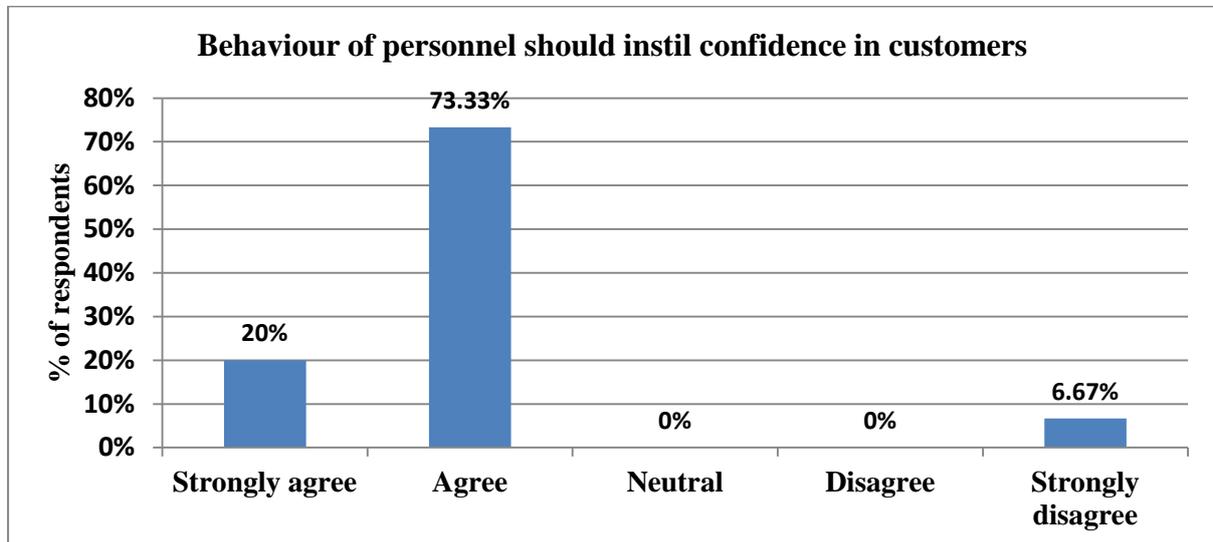


Figure 4.10 above demonstrates that 20% of respondents strongly agreed and expect behaviour of staff to inspire confidence in customers and 73.33% of respondents agreed as well. However, 6.67% of respondents strongly disagreed that behaviour of staff should instil confidence in customers. The majority of respondents (93.33%) agreed and expect behaviour of personnel to instil confidence of customers. It implies that whatever impression or reaction store employees might show should be reassuring in order to convince customers to shop. Harris (2010:20) has a similar opinion that store employees should show confidence when dealing with customers to assure them that they are making right choices in dealing with them.

4.4.7 Safety of customers

Figure 4.11 below depicts what respondents expect in relation with how customers should feel when dealing with store staff.

Figure 4.11

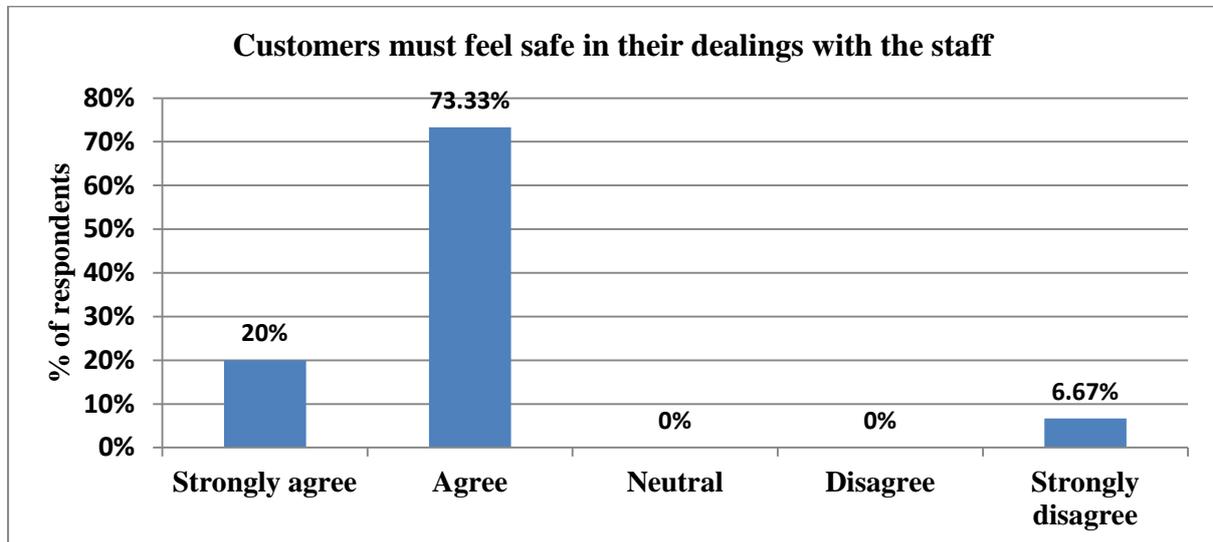


Figure 4.11 above shows that 20% of respondents strongly agreed and expect customers to feel safe when dealing with employees at supermarkets and 73.33% of respondents agreed too. However, 6.67% of respondents disagreed. These results indicate that 93.33% agreed and expect customers to be comfortable during their dealings with store staff. It implies that customer safety should be seriously considered when designing customer service strategies. Furthermore, Young (2010:5) emphasises that trust is important in interactions with customers and actions can express it or remove it.

4.4.8 Politeness of staff

Figure 4.12 indicates what customers expect in terms of staff's attitude.

Figure 4.12

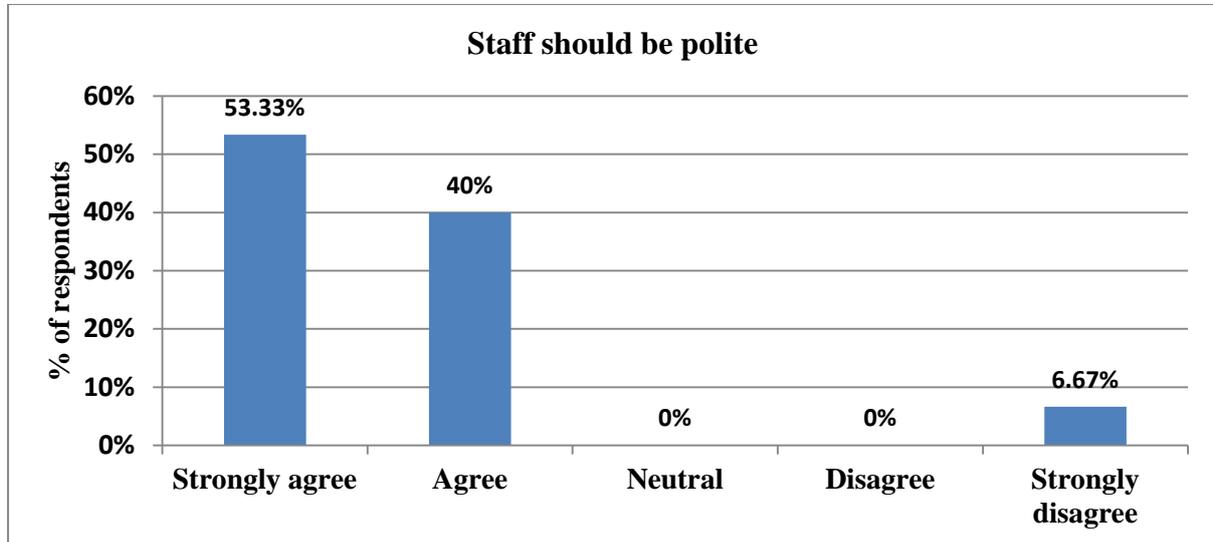
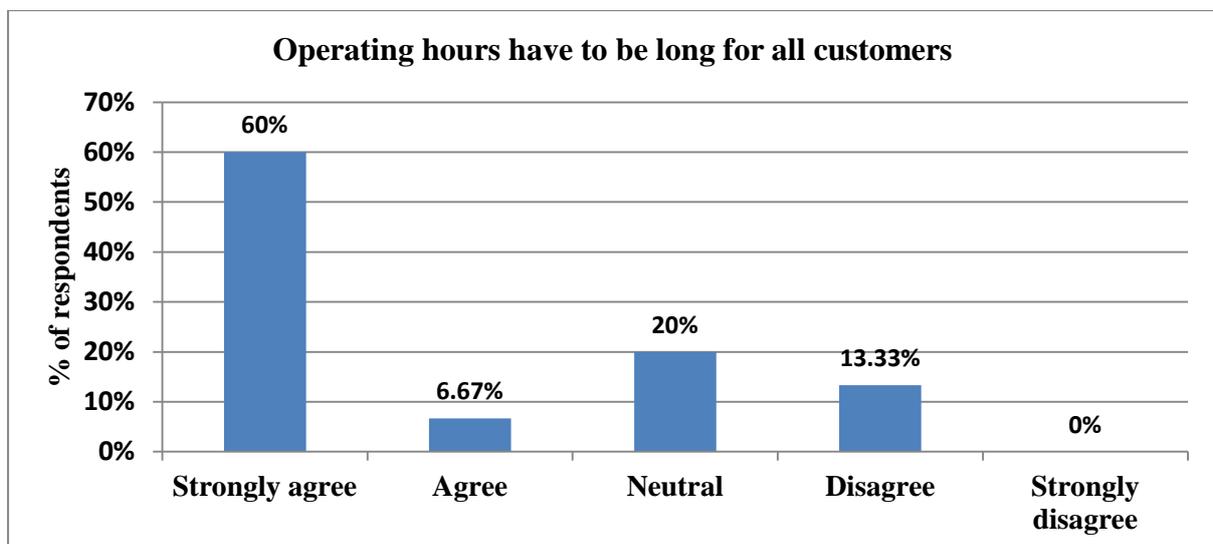


Figure 4.12 shows that 53.33% of respondents strongly agreed and expect staff to be polite and 40% of respondents also agreed. Conversely, 6.67% of respondents strongly disagreed. Therefore this results show that 93.33% of respondents expect store employees to be polite. Likewise, Timm (2008:52) suggests that a plain 'thank you' to customers at tills can be a significant way of appreciating and respecting customers.

4.4.9 Operating hours

Figure 4.13 below depicts respondents' expectation relating to the amount of operating hours at supermarkets.

Figure 4.13

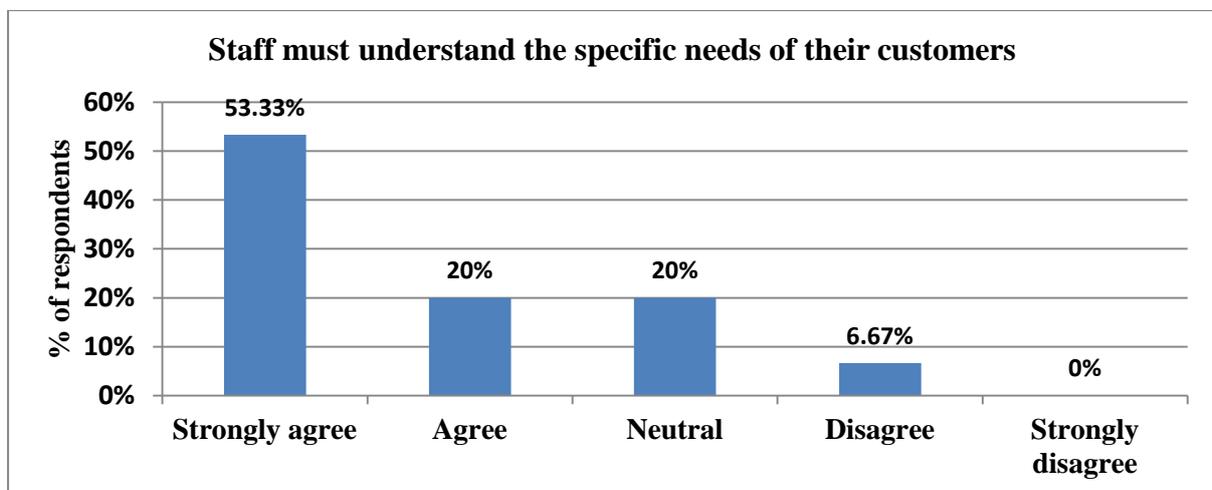


From Figure 4.13, 60% of respondents strongly agreed and expect operating hours of supermarkets to be long moreover, 6.67% of respondents agreed. 20% of respondents are uncertain and the remaining 13.33% of respondents disagree that there should be long operating hours at supermarkets. Results show that most of customers (66.67%) expect long operating hours at supermarkets. Long operating hours are crucial in retailing in order to satisfy different customer requirements (Machado and Diggins 2012:63).

4.4.10 Importance of understanding customer needs

Figure 4.14 shows whether respondents expect staff at supermarkets to understand customer needs.

Figure 4.14



From figure 4.14 above, 53.33% of respondents strongly agree that staff should understand customer needs whilst 20% of respondents also agreed. 20% of respondents are uncertain, whereas 6.67% of respondents disagree that they expect staff to know their specific needs. Results therefore reveal that most customers (73.33%) expect supermarket staff to know their precise needs. It implies that successful customer service at supermarkets should cover an intimate understanding of customer needs. Cant (2010:107) suggests that retail outlets should thoroughly know their customer needs otherwise they will encounter disastrous results in form of lost sales and losses.

4.5 FREQUENCIES BASED ON RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

4.5.1 Visual appeal of physical facilities

Figure 4.15 below illustrates how customers feel about the current state of physical facilities at supermarkets in the greater area of Durban.

Figure 4.15

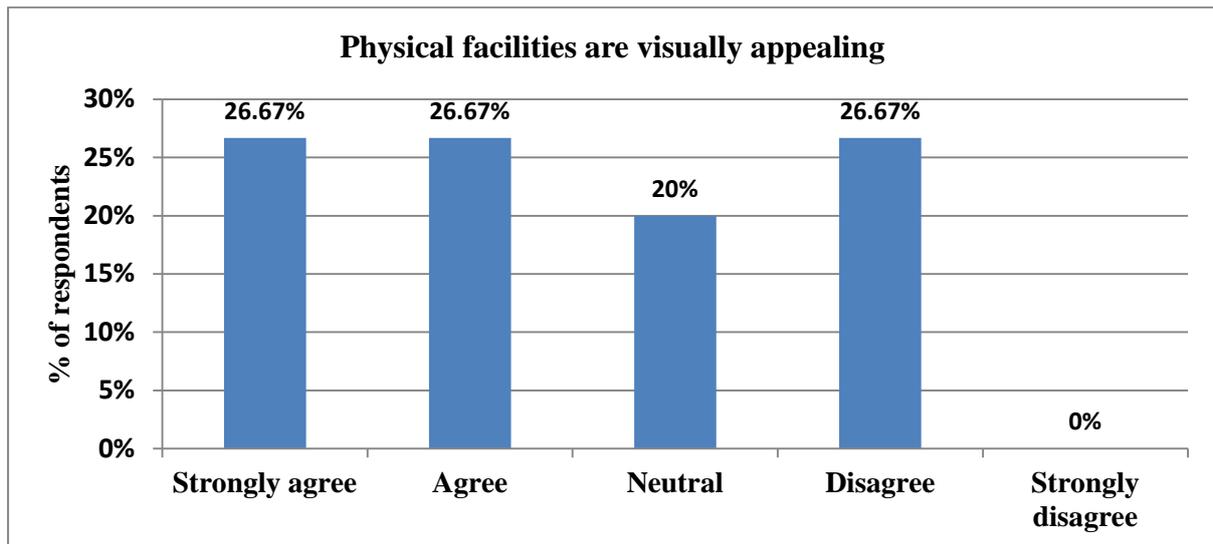


Figure 4.15 shows that 26.67% of respondents strongly agreed that physical facilities at supermarkets are appealing, another 26.67% of respondents agreed as well. 20% of respondents were uncertain whereas the remaining 26.67% of respondents disagreed that current physical facilities at supermarkets are appealing. Despite the majority of customers (53.34%) finding the facilities at supermarkets attractive, another significant portion of customers (46.67%) are either uncertain or disagree. This implies that there is still some sort of improvement required at supermarkets in Durban to satisfy this uncertain or dissatisfied portion of customers. The look or feel of retail outlets influence the mood of customers and can even encourage them to make purchases (Floor ideas 2008).

4.5.2 Personnel neatness

Figure 4.16 shows how customers feel about the appearance of staff at supermarkets in the greater part of Durban.

Figure 4.16

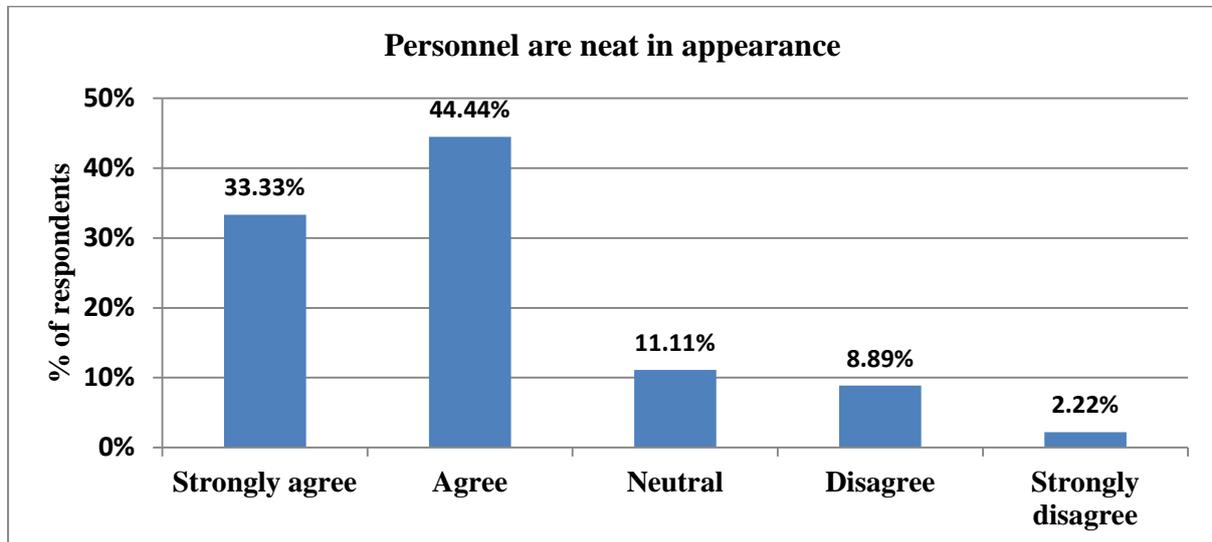


Figure 4.16 demonstrates that 33.33% of respondents strongly agreed that staff is neat in appearance, also 44.44% of respondents agreed. 11.11% was uncertain, 8.89% of respondents disagreed and the remaining 2.22% of respondents strongly disagreed that staff at supermarkets is neat in appearance. These results hence show that the greater number of customers (77.77%) is content with how supermarket staff looks. This impression among customers assists supermarkets in building strong store images necessary in drawing customers to shop.

4.5.3 Staff interest in solving customer problems

Figure 4.17 below demonstrates how consumers feel about the way supermarket staff handle customers' problems.

Figure 4.17

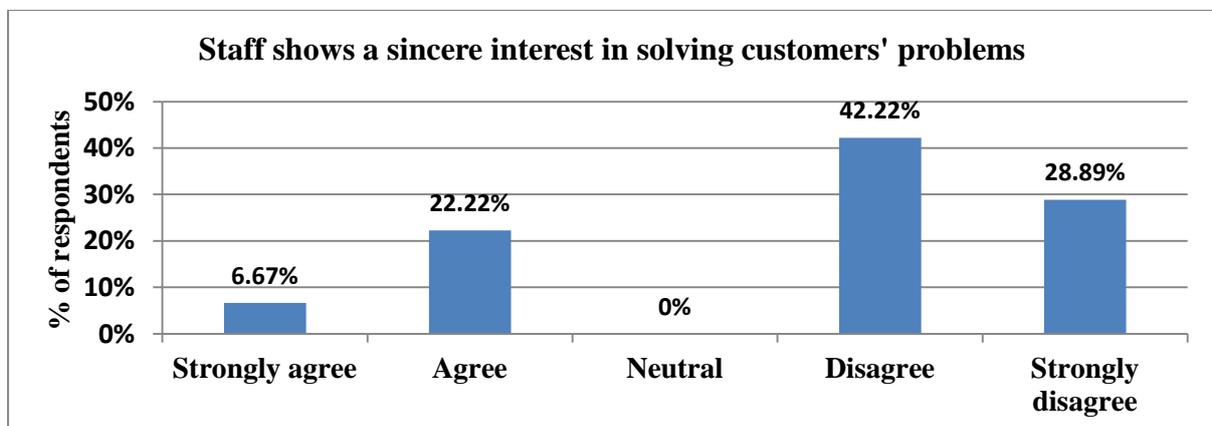


Figure 4.17 above depicts that 6.67% of respondents strongly agreed that supermarket staff show genuine interest in solving their problems and 22.22% of respondents agreed as well. 42.22% of respondent disagreed while the remaining 28.89% of respondents strongly disagreed that interest is shown in staff when they solve customers' problems. In general, the larger part of customers (71.11%) is not satisfied with the level of interest staff demonstrate when dealing with their difficulties. This finding signifies that shoppers in the greater area of Durban are not content with supermarket staff attitude; this can adversely influence customer visits of supermarkets. Thomas and Tobe (2013:43) mention that customers are also human beings and like to feel valued such that when a need or problem arises store employees should be available to help.

4.5.4 Speed of solving customer complaints

Figure 4.18 below shows whether or not customers feel supermarket staff currently deal with customer complaints quickly.

Figure 4.18

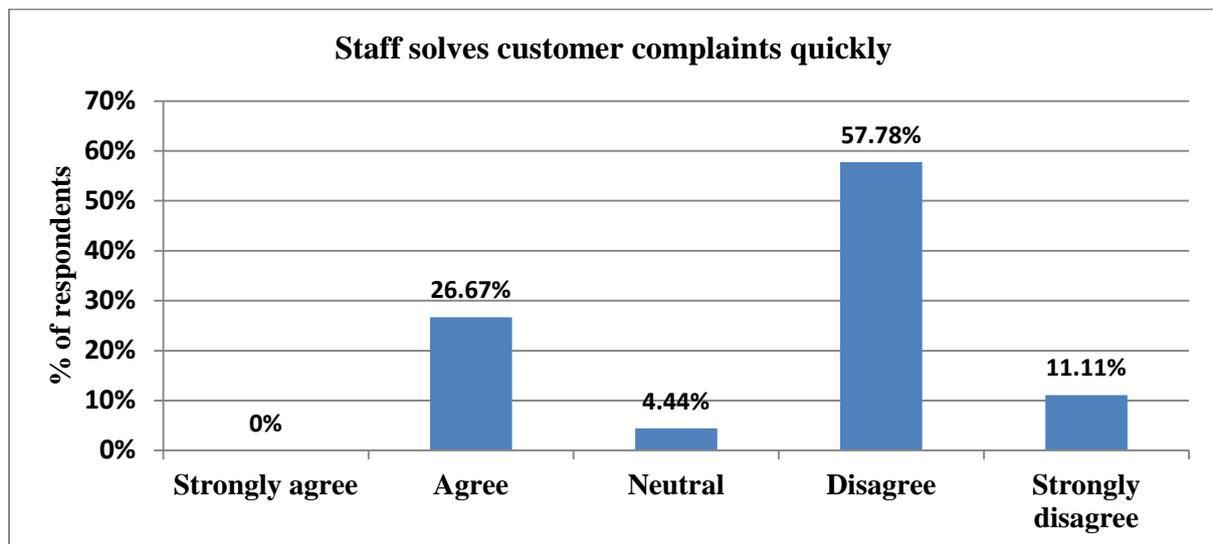


Figure 4.18 above indicates that 26.67% of respondents agreed that staff is solving customer complaints quickly at supermarkets. However, 4.44% of respondents were uncertain, 57.78% disagreed and 11.11% of respondents strongly disagreed that staff are solving complaints quickly at supermarkets. Therefore these results show that a significant amount of respondents (68.89%) are dissatisfied with the current speed of service offered to deal with customer complaints. It implies that shoppers are dissatisfied with service speed at supermarkets, it is imperative that significant improvements in form of service speed are implemented at supermarkets to avoid losing customers. Lucas (2012:218) supports this finding by suggesting that today's competitive world now pushes consumers to demand swift service and makes them disapprove retailers who are slow in delivering service.

4.5.5 Willingness of staff to assist customers

Figure 4.19 shows whether or not customers view supermarket staff as willing to help them.

Figure 4.19

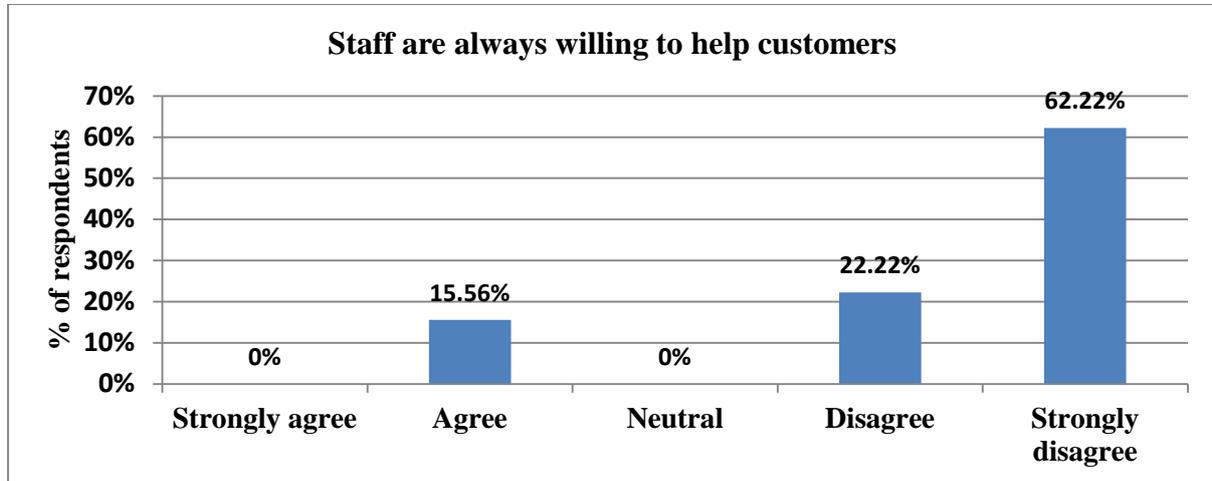
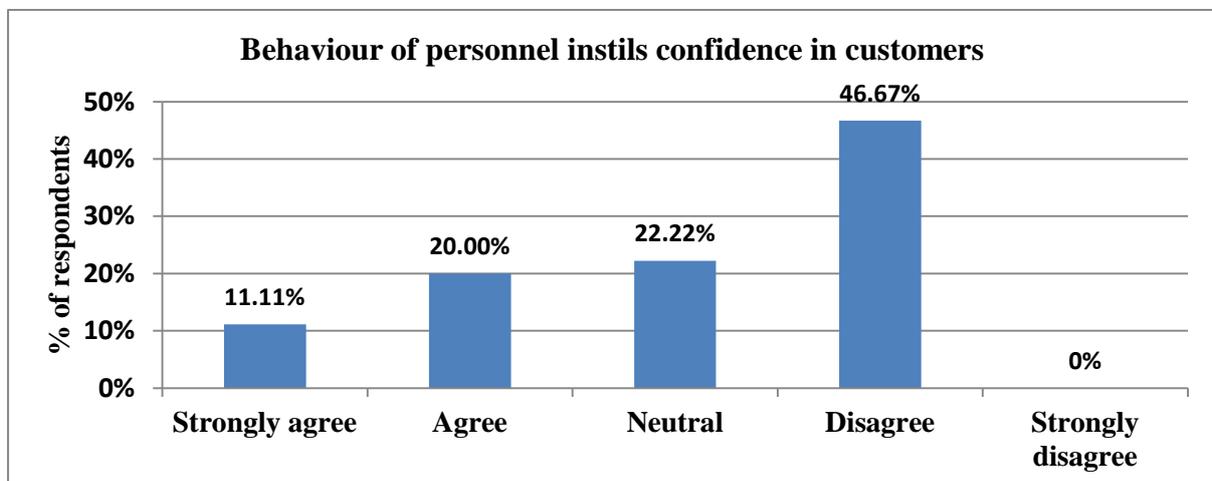


Figure 4.19 illustrates that 15.56% of respondents agreed that staff are always willing to assist customers. On the other hand, 22.22% disagreed and 62.22% of respondents strongly disagree that supermarket staff are at all times prepared to help customers. In general, the majority of respondents (84.44%) are against the idea that staff at supermarkets is always willing to help customers. This indicates that staff at most supermarkets is reluctant to assist customers and this negatively affects customer patronage. Similarly, Harris (2010:3) suggests that showing eagerness to help customers and demonstrating courtesy drives consumers to keep visiting the store.

4.5.6 Behaviour of staff and customer confidence

Figure 4.20 indicates customers' feelings about staff behaviour at supermarkets in inspiring confidence of customers.

Figure 4.20



The above figure 4.20 shows that 11.11% of respondents strongly agreed that behaviour of staff at supermarkets inspires confidence of customers and 20% also agreed. 22.22% of respondents were uncertain whereas 46.67% disagreed. Findings show that the majority of respondents (46.67%) do not feel that staff at supermarkets instils confidence in customers. Heppell (2010:4) further suggests that customer service has become crucial in retail operations such that it can be a source of gaining customer confidence and create a competitive advantage. This shows that employee performance in service delivery is important in gaining customer support.

4.5.7 Safety of customers

Figure 4.21 below indicates whether or not customers feel safe when dealing with staff at supermarkets.

Figure 4.21

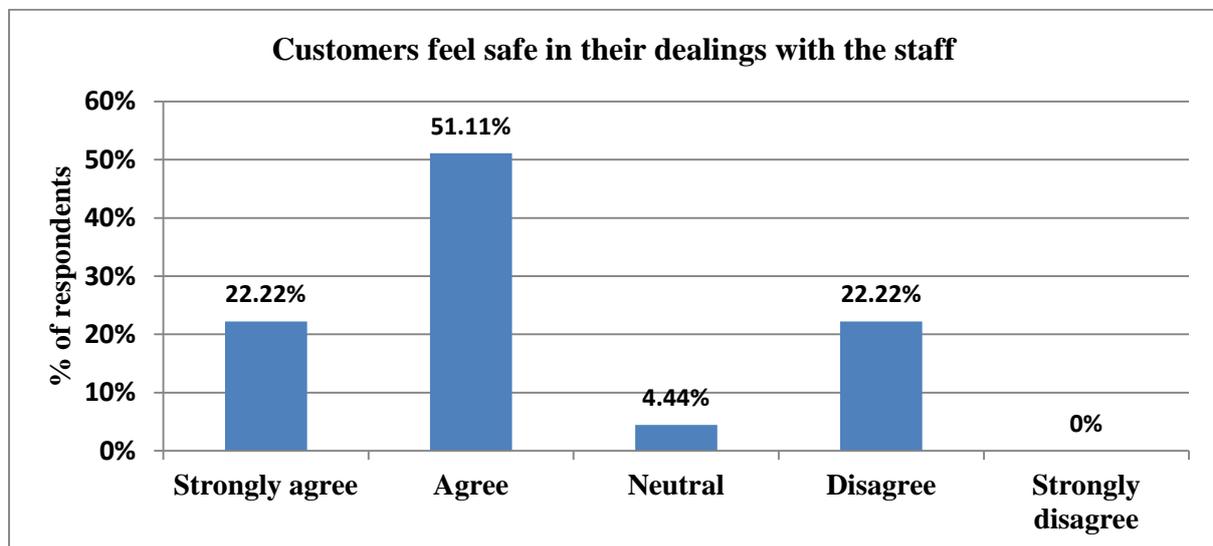


Figure 4.21 shows that 22.22% of respondents strongly agreed that customers feel safe when dealing with staff at supermarkets and 51.11% also agreed. 4.44% were uncertain and 22.22% of respondents disagreed that customers feel safe to make dealings with staff at supermarkets. These findings show that most customers (73.33%) feel safe when dealing with supermarket staff.

4.5.8 Politeness of staff

Figure 4.22 shows whether customers feel supermarket employees are polite or not.

Figure 4.22

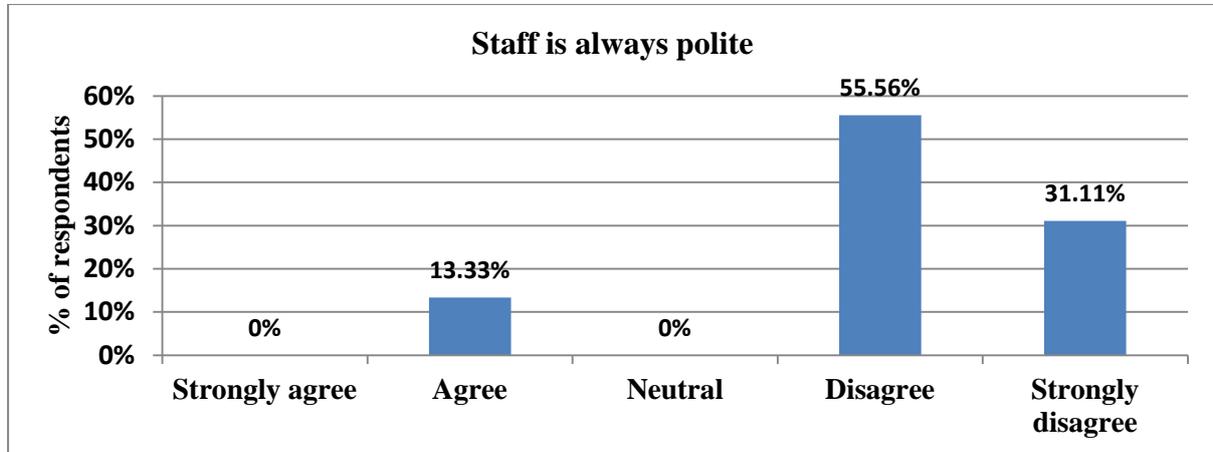


Figure 4.22 shows that only 13.33% of respondents agreed that staff at supermarkets is polite. 55.56% of respondents disagreed and the remaining 31.11% of respondents strongly disagreed that staff is polite at supermarkets. These results indicate that most customers (86.67%) find supermarket employees impolite at times. This can be considered inconsistent with literature which emphasises that being appreciated is another customers' need and the way to satisfy this need is by being polite to customers and even recognising customers by their names (Harris 2010:5).

4.5.9 Operating hours

Figure 4.23 shows how customers feel about the current operating hours offered at supermarkets.

Figure 4.23

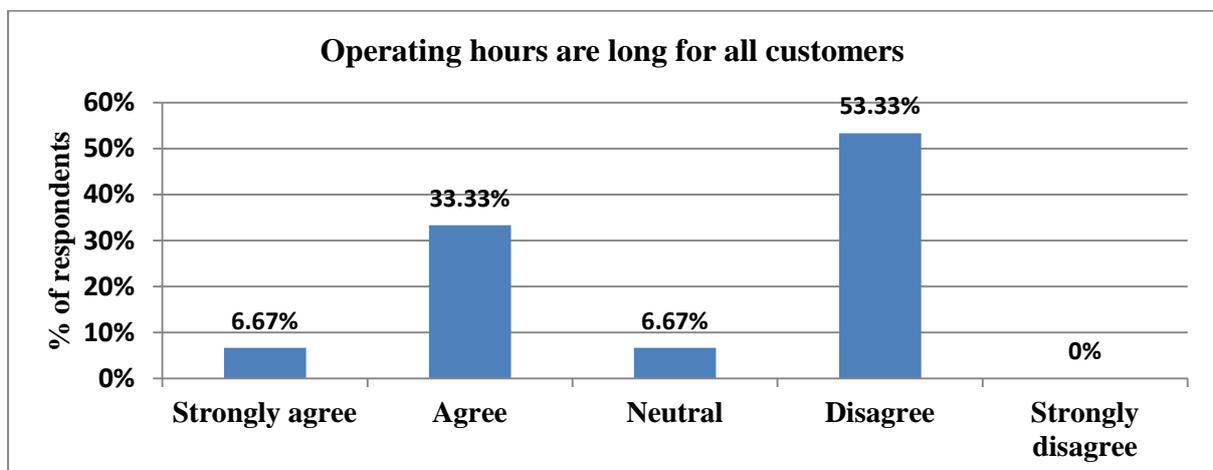


Figure 4.23 indicates that 6.67% of respondents strongly agreed that operating hours are long and 33.33% of respondents agreed as well. 6.67% of respondents were uncertain whilst

53.33% of respondents disagreed that operating hours are currently long enough. Results show that most consumers (53.33%) are not satisfied with the period supermarkets are operating. This might be an indication to supermarkets that there is need to expand operating time to satisfy customer demand.

4.5.10 Staff understanding of customers' needs

Figure 4.24 below illustrates customers' opinion on whether staff at supermarkets understands their needs.

Figure 4.24

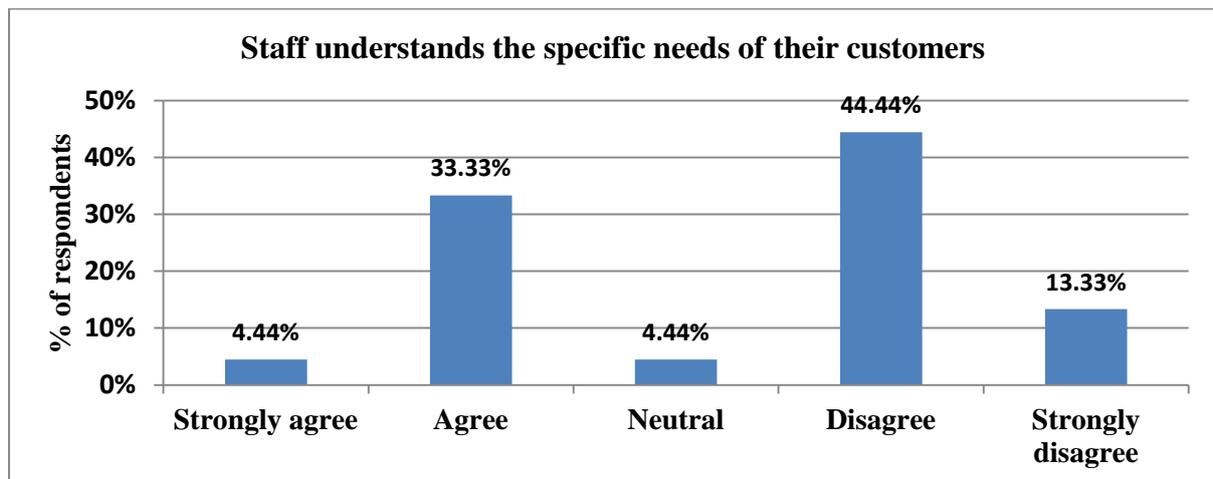


Figure 4.24 shows that 4.44% of respondents strongly agreed that staff understand the needs of customers and 33.33% also agreed. However, 4.44% of respondents were uncertain, 44.44% of respondents disagreed and 13.33% of respondents strongly disagreed that staff at supermarkets are aware of customer needs. Most customers (57.77%) do not feel staff at supermarkets is aware of their precise needs. This shows that proper understanding of customer needs has an impact on the effectiveness of customer service. In support of this, Horovitz (2004:6) emphasises that service strategy begins by adequately knowing customers in terms of who they are, what are their needs and what is in their interest?

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an analysis of data collected from the research study. Results from the study were presented through use of tables, pie charts and bar graphs. Interpretation of findings has also been provided with conclusions mentioned. Relationships were drawn from the results between variables of study. Findings of this chapter identified the following:

- There is a gap between what customers expect from customers service and what they perceive is currently offered at supermarkets; and
- Customers are not satisfied with the overall service currently offered at supermarkets particularly in terms of facilities, operating hours and staff attitude.

The following chapter provides conclusions and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on comprehensively analysing statistical data from findings of this research, a detailed analysis of results is considered necessary in this study. This chapter thoroughly discusses the findings of this survey in line with objectives set in chapter 1. Recommendations are provided which are based on the research design and findings.

5.2 REVIEW OF THEORETICAL STUDY

The main aim of this research was to examine the impact of customer service on purchasing behaviour of customers at supermarkets in the greater area of Durban. The research design and chapter framework were entirely based on the research problem and other smaller problems that arose.

In chapter 2, only literature related to customer service and customer satisfaction was reviewed. The literature revealed elements of customer service and their significance to purchasing behaviour of customers. This research showed that there are problems related with customer service at supermarkets. Consequently, the researcher found it important to explore customer service and its elements at supermarkets in Durban to promote better customer service by supermarkets.

5.3 EMPIRICAL STUDY

In chapter 4 research results were evaluated, translated and presented in various formats. This study was quantitative in nature such that 45 questionnaires were dispensed to gather information from customers within Berea, West Street and Market area. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there are crucial aspects of customer service that supermarkets in Durban have to restructure to ensure improved customer satisfaction.

5.4 ACCOMPLISHMENT OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research objectives represent the foundation of the entire research process. Below is a brief discussion of research objectives achieved:

- **To determine the impact of customer service on purchasing behaviour of customers.**

Reviewed literature in chapter 2 showed that different customer service levels have different influences on customers' expectations and perceptions which determine their buying behaviour. It was found that sound customer service strategies should reflect or exceed expectations and perceptions of customers to ensure positive buying behaviour (Levy and Weitz 2012:504). As a result, the first objective was met.

- **To determine important elements of customer service.**

In chapter 2 it was shown that customer service at its most basic form should cover aspects such as an intimate understanding of customers, proactive listening of customers, fair and quick resolving of customer complaints. Therefore, this objective was achieved.

- **To ascertain whether customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive.**

Chapter 4 of this study analysed satisfaction levels of customers at supermarkets in Durban. It was found that the majority of respondents were not content with the level of interest demonstrated by store employees in solving their issues, speed of solving customer complaints, store employees' attitude, operating hours of supermarkets and store employees' understanding of customers' precise needs. Literature points out that a good retail customer service strategy starts by sufficiently understanding customers regarding who they are, what their needs are and what is in their interest (Horovitz 2004:6). Hence, this objective was achieved.

- **To suggest ways of improving customer service.**

The final part of chapter 5 provides recommendations on how to improve customer service therefore, this objective was also achieved.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Because of time and cost constraints this study was limited to some parts of Ethekewini that included Berea, West Street and Market. It therefore implies that generalising data found in this study to all supermarkets in KwaZulu Natal or South Africa would be inappropriate. In this study reviewing literature was restricted to customer service, its elements and their impact of consumer purchasing behaviour.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.6.1 Recommendations based on research design

- **Sample size**

This research study only focused on respondents around Berea, Market area and West Street. Extending the area of study to other regions within Durban would be more favourable and realistic in drawing conclusions about customers in Durban. Consideration of customers' opinions outside the covered three regions gives the researcher rich information in which he can comprehensively evaluate before making conclusions about the impact of customer service on consumer behaviour in the greater part of Durban.

- **Sampling technique**

In this study, convenience (accidental) sampling was utilised in obtaining data from the customers. However, this technique is prone to setbacks such as bias which tarnishes the whole findings of the survey; also there might be misrepresentation of data since complete random surveys are overlooked. It is recommended that in future studies the researcher uses stratified sampling. Speight, Kalsbeek and DiGiano (2011:331) propose that stratified sampling is a more representative technique that divides the entire population in strata and utilise random sampling. This sampling technique facilitates a statistically more efficient representation of data as one source of variation will be removed. In addition, it enables comparisons to be made across dissimilar regions.

5.6.2 Recommendations based on findings

- **Physical facilities**

It is recommended that supermarkets in Durban improve their physical facilities, findings reveal that a significant portion of customers remain unsatisfied with the current facilities available at supermarkets. Huang (2009:250) substantiates that physical aspects in stores are important elements in which retailers should utilise to gain competitive advantage and promote customer satisfaction. Furthermore, physical facilities are imperative in the service encounter of supermarkets and commendable retailers emphasise store cleanliness and proper layouts that promote customer orientation and identification of merchandise.

- **Personnel neatness**

It is suggested that supermarkets in Durban emphasise on staff tidiness especially front store employees to improve customer satisfaction. Hennig-Thurau (2004:462) suggests that food sales are falling in stores despite deep assortment strategies implemented; the solution to this is examining store cleanliness. Presentable store employees contribute positively to the overall store tidiness and builds customer trust about who handles the food they buy.

- **Staff interest in solving customer problems**

It is essential that store employees revise their levels of interest towards helping customers at supermarkets in Durban. Sufficient training and development of staff can be helpful to improve service performance at supermarkets. Management at supermarkets may even structure incentives that motivate employees to deliver a more committed level of service. Since customers require to be cherished at stores, supermarket employees should be readily available to assist customers (Thomas and Tobe 2013:43).

- **Pace of solving customer complaints**

Results have indicated that customers are not satisfied with the time taken at supermarkets in Durban to solve customer complaints. Therefore, it is advised that supermarkets should improve the speed of delivering service to customers to satisfy their

requirement for quick service. Jamal and Adelowore (2008:1318) also discovered that today's customers have become more challenging that they demand fast and lively service at most grocery stores.

- **Behaviour of personnel and customer confidence**

Findings indicate that customers do not feel that behaviour of supermarket employees in Durban spurs confidence of customers. Training of employees is necessary so that they can better control their actions during interactions with customers also, hiring the right staff with proper skills of dealing with customers. Schoultz (2014:4) further suggests that customer confidence develops trust which influences customers' decisions of who they do business with. It therefore implies that developing trust in customers should be the top priority for supermarkets in Durban.

- **Customers' safety**

It is suggested that supermarkets in Durban should maintain a safe atmosphere for customers to ensure they feel comfortable to do their shopping without any difficulties. Despite safety measures such as security staff or cameras, a trustworthy staff can be a key to developing and maintaining a safe and conducive shopping environment for customers. Results of this study portray that customers generally consider it safe to deal with store employees.

- **Politeness of staff**

It is advised that supermarket employees should seriously work on improving their attitude towards customers. Based on findings of this study, the majority of customers find store employees impolite. Attitude of store employees has a strong impact on customer patronage. It is more costly to entice new shoppers than retaining existing patrons (Dholawa and Zhao 2010:490).

- **Operating hours**

Findings of this study showed that most customers are not satisfied with the amount of operating hours available at supermarkets. Flexible hours of operation are recommended and even employment of part time staff to cater for longer working hours. In this study, customers at supermarkets in major streets of Durban CBD find operating hours inadequate whereas supermarket near residential areas like Berea seem to satisfy their customers. Literature suggests that retail operations have been evolving over the years to cater for the growing demand such that long operating hours are now the norm in retailing (Fonseca 2009:354).

- **Understanding customer needs**

From the findings, the majority of customers feel that store employees at supermarkets in the greater part of Durban do not understand their precise needs. Khan (2012:6) suggests that fully understanding customers is important in building and maintaining lucrative

relationships with customers through offering greater value and satisfaction. It is recommended that supermarkets should conduct surveys and connect more with customers to know them better and frequently doing so to keep in touch of customers' changing requirements.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the impact of customer service on purchasing behaviour of customers at supermarkets in the greater area of Durban. Aspects relevant to customer service and buying behaviour were explored. It can be drawn that customer service is significant to the success of supermarkets in satisfying customers and retaining them.

Current extremely competitive retail environment necessitates excellent customer service to remain competitive. Ever-changing customer demands of today compel supermarkets to continuously review and restructure customer service strategies to meet and exceed these demands and remain successful.

Recommendations and conclusions provided in this chapter can be useful in determining approaches that can be pursued by supermarkets in Durban to enhance customer service. However, other possible actions not mentioned in this study can be utilised in improving customer service. This research study will be important in perfecting service quality at supermarkets, to satisfy customers at supermarkets in Durban.

6.1 LIST OF REFERENCES

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7.1 ANNEXURE

7.1.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

The objective of this questionnaire is to assist in enhancing the retail organisation in South Africa, particularly customer service. Your collaboration will help in bringing priceless changes in retail organisation and operation. The information you will provide is confidential, it will solely be used for this research study and be destroyed.

Please indicate your opinion on each of the following statements with an (X).

1.1 Gender	
Male	
Female	

1.2 Age in years	
18-29	
30-40	
41-55	
56 and above	

1.3 Highest educational qualifications	
Lower than matric	
Matriculated	
Post matriculated	

1.4 How often do you go shopping in a month?	
Once a week	
Twice in a week	
3 times and more	

2.0 For each of the following statements indicate your opinion with an (X), as they apply to your EXPECTATIONS. Based on your past experiences as a customer, kindly indicate the kind of service that would deliver exceptional quality.

	EXPECTATIONS	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
2.1	Physical facilities should be visually appealing.					
2.2	Personnel should be neat in appearance.					
2.3	Staff should show sincere interest in solving customers' problems.					
2.4	Staff should solve customer complaints quickly.					

2.5	Staff should always be willing to help customers.					
2.6	Behaviour of personnel should instil confidence in customers.					
2.7	Customers must feel safe in their dealings with the staff.					
2.8	Staff should be polite.					
2.9	Operating hours have to be long for all customers.					
2.10	Staff must understand the specific needs of their customers.					

3.0 For each of the following statements indicate your opinion with an (X), as they apply to your PERCEPTIONS.

	PERCEPTIONS	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
3.1	Physical facilities are visually appealing.					
3.2	Personnel are neat in appearance.					
3.3	Staff shows a sincere interest in solving customers' problems.					
3.4	Staff solves customer complaints quickly.					
3.5	Staff are always willing to help customers.					
3.6	Behaviour of personnel instils confidence in customers.					
3.7	Customers feel safe in their dealings with the staff.					
3.8	Staff are always polite.					
3.9	Operating hours are long for all customers.					
3.10	Staff understands the specific needs of their customers.					

4.0 Do you have any suggestions to improve customer service at supermarkets?

Yes	
No	

4.1 If your answer is yes to the previous question, please briefly specify

Thank you very much for your co-operation.