



QUALITY OF SERVICE OF SMALL HARDWARE COMPANIES IN A
NORTHERN PERUVIAN PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the quality of service provided by companies plays a fundamental role as a strategy to meet customer expectations and achieve customer satisfaction. The objective of the study was to identify the customers' perception of the quality of service provided by companies in the hardware sector in the province of Tumbes. In the methodology, the approach was quantitative, descriptive level and non-experimental design. The sample consisted of 487 clients of 10 companies that sell construction products. A questionnaire was adapted as a data collection instrument to evaluate the quality of service in a service company. The results showed that high levels of service quality prevailed with 72.48%, followed by medium with 25.87% and low with 1.64%. High levels of service quality were also found according to the sociodemographic variables sex, age and marital status. It is concluded that the majority of the clients considered the quality of service of the small hardware companies to be high, while only a small percentage considered the quality of service to be low.

Keywords: service quality, small enterprises, Peru.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the construction sector has been largely affected by the pandemic of COVID-19, low sales levels, high prices and deficiencies in customer service and orientation have been the major factors to be resolved (Richter, 2020) and, moreover, low customer loyalty has generated certain deficiencies in their commercial development (Rodríguez et al., 2023). (Rodríguez et al., 2023). At the Latin American level, the sum of negative effects in the construction sector, has generated a decrease of 4.3% in 2019 and 2020 in its productivity, generating unemployment and fall of related businesses, similarly in Peru has had a fall of 23.5% according to the Central Reserve Bank, having a negative impact on hardware stores, which need to establish mechanisms and tools to generate a quality service and improve their competitiveness (Suarez & Medina, 2022).. Companies in this sector largely neglect the training of collaborators so they can be more efficient and empathetic (Castrillón & Bermúdez, 2020).. Considering that the expected quality of service is very important in order to build customer loyalty (Mary et al., 2023). According to Guerrero et al. (2022) in the Puerto Lopez hardware sector, companies do not make use of strategies to measure service quality, due to lack of knowledge of customer perceptions on the part of the entrepreneurs.

There have been several theories that, through different approaches, study the quality of service, according to Duque Oliva & Gómez (2014) define service quality as the association of attributes related to a service, which allow the customer or user to judiciously





appreciate its value. Consequently Parasuraman et al. (1993) posit that service quality is a construct between customers' perceptions and expectations. Meanwhile, Alvarado (2013) Alvarado (2013) refers that service quality is a differentiating element or competitive advantage in a market. Likewise, Kotler et al. (2015) (1988) establishes a model with five determining factors in the measurement of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, security, empathy and tangible elements, fundamental to measure the customer's perception regarding the satisfaction of a need and for the measurement of the factors a model known as SERVQUAL was proposed, which proposes a service gap analysis. (Castrillón & Bermúdez, 2020)..

On the other hand, the quality of service is understood as the establishment of the benefits of a good or service, based on the needs of a customer. (Blanco González & Font Aranda, 2022).. Thus Jimenez et al. (2016) consider service quality as multidimensional, measurable and based on consumer perspectives, based on the Grönroos Model (1984), which establishes three components: corporate image, technical service quality and functional service quality.

Several studies have also been carried out on the level of service quality. In the logistics sector, adequate space and personnel knowledgeable about the goods consistent with customer requirements are offered (Rojas-Martínez et al., 2020)The customer responds to all their concerns according to their needs. Likewise, it has been observed that the factors agility, assurance, security and responsiveness positively influence the construct of service quality (Agarwal & Dhingra, 2023).. Likewise, Demarquet & Chedraui (2022) state that the perception of service quality when it is positive is a good approximation to customer satisfaction. In the hardware sector, a study in Venezuela found that service quality is good, but the factor of empathy and responsiveness to the customer was deficient (Bermudez et al., 2018)Similarly Alsabbagh (2023)reports that the main deficiencies in terms of service quality is empathy, the employee is not yet prepared. On the other hand, Afifah & Kurniawati (2021) state that reliability had a very low relationship with customer satisfaction, demonstrating the deficiencies in service quality.

Finally, in the national context, a series of studies have been carried out to determine the reality of the quality of service in different sectors. In the hospitality sector there is a poor level, lack of security protocols, lack of uniformed personnel and environments with deficiencies in their facilities are evidenced. (Larico, 2022)Likewise GestióManagement (2023) states that 71% of Lima residents would not return to a business where they were given bad service. Meanwhile, in the commercial sector, they combine education,





experience and soft skills to offer a quality service (Florián et al., 2023). (Florián et al., 2022)..

Therefore, the objective of this study was to identify the quality of service perceived by the clients of the hardware sector companies located in the province of Tumbes. The results will provide information on mechanisms for improving the quality of customer service in different productive sectors of the region.

METHODOLOGY

The focus of the study was quantitative, because numerical data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using statistical techniques to obtain results that would allow generalizations to be made about the population that purchases construction products. On the other hand, the descriptive level was used to describe the characteristics of the quality of service perceived by customers, without seeking to establish causal or causal relationships between variables (Mar Orozco et al., 2020)..

Likewise, the research was of non-experimental design because no variable was manipulated in the study, but rather the variable of interest was observed and measured as it is presented in reality. In addition, the study was cross-sectional because the variable of interest was assessed at a single point in time, without following the participants over time (Supo & Zacarías, 2020)..

Sample

The sample consisted of 487 customers of 10 companies that sell construction products located in the province of Tumbes in the Republic of Peru, and the sampling was non-probabilistic by convenience applied to customers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study (Otzen & Manterola, 2017).

INSTRUMENT

Service quality questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to evaluate the quality of service in a service company, based on the Servqual model by (Parasuraman et al., 1988) as well as adaptations of (Lee & Moghavvemi, 2015; Shokouhyar et al., 2020).. The questionnaire





consisted of 5 dimensions, namely reliability (4 items), tangibility (5 items), empathy (3 items), price (3 items) and worker competence (3 items). Each item was evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A reliability analysis of the instrument was performed, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.922 was obtained, indicating a high internal consistency of the questionnaire.

rocedure

To carry out the data collection, a visit was made to the companies that distribute and sell construction products in the province of Tumbes, Peru. The managers and/or owners of the companies were contacted to request access to the customer service area so that clients could be approached and asked to participate in the research. Clients who agreed to participate were given a detailed explanation of how to answer the questionnaire, the purpose of the study and the guarantee of confidentiality of their responses.

Subsequently, the data obtained from the surveys were tabulated in Excel and exported to SPSS software, where descriptive statistical analyses were performed and the reliability of the instrument used was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

RESULTS

Table 1 Sociodemographic data

		Fr.	%
Sex	Woman	158	32,44
	Man	329	67,56
	Total	487	100,00
Age	Up to 18 years old	26	5,34
	19 to 30 years old	147	30,18
	31 to 59 years old	267	54,83
	60 and over	47	9,65
	Total	487	100,00
Marital status	Married	153	31,42
	Single	210	43,12
	Cohabitant	92	18,89
	Divorced	22	4,52
	Widowed	10	2,05
	Total	487	100,00
Reason for purchase	Repair	245	50,31
	Finishing	142	29,16
	New construction	68	13,96
	Expansion	29	5,95
	Supplier (resale)	3	0,62



	Total	487	100,00
Type of payment	Cash	397	81,52
	Credit card	48	9,86
	Debit card	16	3,29
	On credit	9	1,85
	Digital wallet	17	3,49
	Total	487	100,00

Table 1 presents the results of the sociodemographic profile of customers who purchased construction products. The results indicate that the majority of buyers were men (67.56%), while women represented 32.44% of the total. In terms of age, the highest percentage of customers was in the 31 to 59 years old age bracket (54.83%), followed by those between 19 and 30 years old (30.18%). In addition, only 5.34% of clients were up to 18 years of age, while 9.65% were over 60 years of age.

In terms of marital status, it was found that most of the clients surveyed were single (43.12%), followed by those who were married (31.42%) and cohabiting (18.89%). On the other hand, only 4.52% were divorced and 2.05% were widowed.

Regarding the reason for purchase, the majority of customers purchased construction products for repair (50.31%), while 29.16% purchased for finishing. On the other hand, 13.96% of purchases were for new construction, while only 0.62% were for resale.

Regarding the type of payment, most customers chose to pay in cash (81.52%). (9.86%) used credit cards as a method of payment, while 3.29% used debit cards. In addition, (1.85%) of customers purchased products on credit, while (3.49%) used a digital wallet for payment.

Figure 1 Levels of perceived service quality

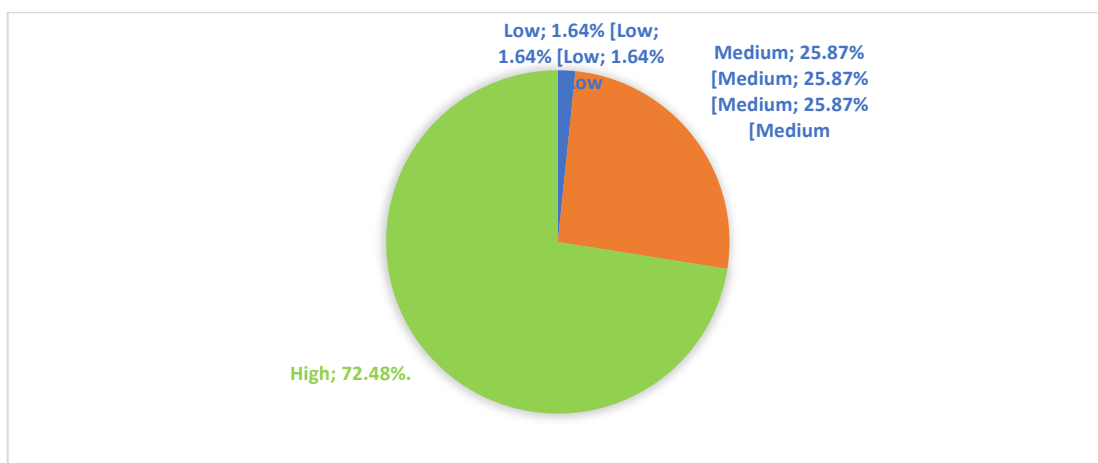




Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of the quality of service perceived by clients. 1.64% of the clients considered the quality of service to be low, 25.87% of the clients considered it to be medium, while 72.48% of the clients considered the quality of service to be high. These results show that the majority of clients are satisfied with the quality of service provided.

Figure 2 Rating of service quality dimensions

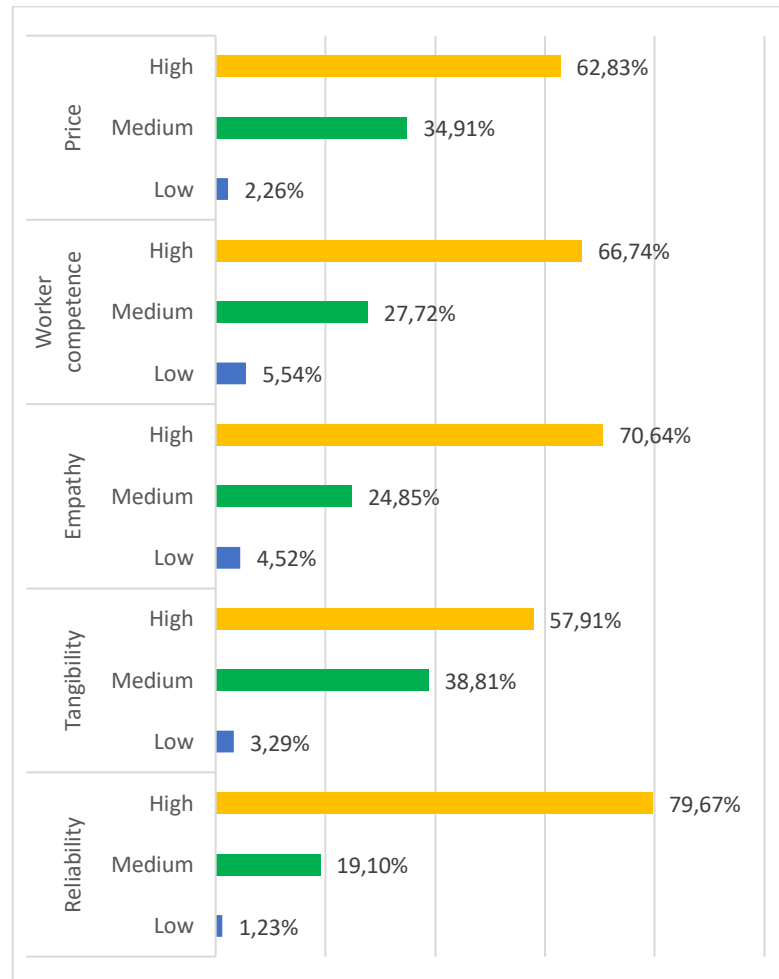


Figure 2 shows the distribution of customer responses regarding perceived quality of service in different dimensions, with all dimensions rated as high. The reliability dimension received the highest rating, with 79.67% of responses rated as high, followed by tangibility with 57.91% in the same category. The empathy dimension also received a high rating, with 70.64%. Worker competence and price also received high ratings with 66.74% and 62.83% respectively. And less than 5% on average of clients rated the service quality dimensions as low.





Table 2 *Quality of service by gender*

		Sex		
		Woman	Man	Total
Quality of service	Under	3	5	8
		1.90%	1.52%	1.64%
	Medium	39	87	126
		24.68%	26.44%	25.87%
	High	116	237	353
		73.42%	72.04%	72.48%
Total	158	329	487	
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	

Table 2 shows that the proportion of men and women who evaluated the quality of service as high is very similar, 73.42% for women and 72.04% for men. As for medium service quality, the proportion of men who evaluated it as medium is slightly higher than that of women (26.44% vs. 24.68%). Finally, there is a slightly higher proportion of women who evaluated the quality of service as low with 1.90% compared to men 1.52%.

Table 3 *Quality of service by marital status*

		Marital status					
		Married	Single	Cohabitant	Divorced	Widowed	Total
Quality of service	Under	3	5	0	0	0	8
		1.96%	2.38%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.64%
	Medium	37	51	28	7	3	126
		24.18%	24.29%	30.43%	31.82%	30.00%	25.87%
	High	113	154	64	15	7	353
		73.86%	73.33%	69.57%	68.18%	70.00%	72.48%
	Total	153	210	92	22	10	487
		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 3 shows the quality of service according to the marital status of the respondents. In terms of service quality, the high level is the most representative in all marital status groups, followed by the medium and low levels.

In terms of percentage distribution, it is observed that there is no significant difference between the different marital statuses in terms of quality of service. Overall, the percentage of respondents reporting high service quality is similar for all marital statuses, ranging from 68% to 74%.





Table 4 *Quality of service according to age*

		Age				
Level		Up to 18 years old	19 to 30 years old	31 to 59 years old	over 60 years old	Total
Quality of service	Under	1	3	4	0	8
		3.85%	2.04%	1.50%	0.00%	1.64%
	Medium	7	45	62	12	126
		26.92%	30.61%	23.22%	25.53%	25.87%
	High	18	99	201	35	353
		69.23%	67.35%	75.28%	74.47%	72.48%
Total	26	147	267	47	487	
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	

The quality of service according to age can be seen in Table 4, where the majority of clients, regardless of their age, rate the quality of service as high. However, there are some notable differences in the proportion of clients who rate the service as medium or low in each age group.

The youngest client group, up to 18 years of age, has the highest proportion of clients who rate the service as low compared to the other age groups. In addition, this group has the lowest proportion of clients who rate the service as high. On the other hand, the group of customers aged 31 to 59 years has the highest proportion of customers who rate the service as high and the lowest proportion of customers who rate the service as medium.

DISCUSSION

The quality of service provided by companies will influence consumer satisfaction, experience and loyalty (Shi & Shang, 2020). Several studies have shown that perceptions have greater power to explain service quality than the objective measures that companies can provide (Vallejo-Borda et al., 2020).

The study focused on evaluating the quality of service perceived by customers in hardware stores in Tumbes. The results revealed that the majority of clients (72.48%) considered the quality of service to be high, while only a small percentage (1.64%) rated it as low. These findings are significant, as they contrast with the results found in other economic sectors in Peru, such as the health, commerce, education and financial sectors, where service quality was reported to be high (Febres-Ramos and Mercado-Rey, 2020; Vergaray et al., 2022; Núñez et al., 2019; Oruna et al., 2023), and low in the tourism sector (Silva et al., 2021; Larico, 2022).





Hardware companies are concentrated in a very small geographic area and sell identical products, which makes for a market characterized by perfect competition (Rème 2005). In this type of market, supply is abundant and customers have information on product prices. These conditions force companies to compete intensely to attract customers, focusing on various factors such as location, product availability, opening hours, promotions, and especially on providing a high quality of service (Benavente & Contreras, 2009).

Regarding the descriptive behavior of reliability, it was observed that it obtained a higher rating compared to the other dimensions. These results are consistent with other studies that also evaluated reliability as high (Vázquez, 2015), as opposed to those that rated it as medium-low (Mosquera-González et al., 2019; Álvarez, 2015). Hernández-Mendo and Blanco (2009), refers to the ability of the companies to execute the promised service in a reliable manner. These results indicate that hardware companies adequately report the characteristics of their products, which meet the quality and quantity demands required by customers.

Regarding tangibility, the majority of customers (57.91%) rated it as high, suggesting that they perceive the physical appearance of the hardware stores and the products offered as satisfactory. These results coincide with other studies that also evaluated tangibility as high (Sanmiguel et al., 2015; Mosquera-González et al., 2019; Ganga et al., 2019). Likewise, Gadea-Cavazos et al. (2018) refer to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and materials. These results indicate that hardware product companies have organized environments, adequate product identification and presentation, and that personnel always appear correctly presentable.

In relation to the empathy dimension, it was observed that it obtained a high rating by clients (70.64%), suggesting that they feel that they are given personalized attention and that their needs are understood. These results are similar to other studies that also assessed empathy as high (Vazquez, 2015; Ganga et al., 2019), as opposed to those that rated it as medium-low (Sanmiguel et al., 2015). Authors such as Mangold Glynn & Babakus (1990) and Rad (2010), cited by De la Hoz (2014), point out that this dimension refers to the care and personalized attention provided to customers. These results indicate that within the facilities, kindness and education are perceived in the treatment of the client, where the staff attends, listens and solves the client's doubts showing courtesy as a letter of introduction.

In addition, both worker competence and price also received high ratings (66.74% and 62.83%, respectively), indicating that clients perceive employees as competent and





consider prices to be reasonable. These data are similar to those obtained in other studies that also evaluated price as high (Campo et al., 2011). However, they differ from those that rated employee competence as medium-low (Sanmiguel et al., 2015; Alvarez, 2015; Carter et al., 2023). These results show that the personnel handle correct information about the characteristics and benefits of the products, which allows them to resolve customers' doubts and facilitate the immediate purchase of the products acquired.

In relation to the perception of service quality according to gender, our results reveal that there are no significant differences between men and women. Both groups evaluated service quality as high in similar proportions. These results coincide with previous studies that also obtained similar ratings between both sexes (Febres-Ramos and Mercado-Rey, 2020; Carhuancho-Mendoza, 2021). However, they differ from the results of Davila & Chirinos (2022) who found significant differences in perception. According to Sun & Qu (2011), gender is expected to be a fundamental discriminator of the market segment in the service industry; however, the variety of the results could be due to the fact that the studies were conducted on people from different cultures.

In terms of marital status, it was observed that the percentage of respondents reporting high service quality was similar for all marital statuses, ranging from 68% to 74% of respondents. No significant differences were found between the different marital statuses in terms of service quality. Similar results reported by Meesala & Paul (2018) regarding marital status found no significant differences in the quality of service they received in a hospital. However, Hossain et al., (2023) conducted a study in older adults receiving medical care in public and private health services, finding that those who invested more in health expenses to receive good care were married than widowed.

Finally, in relation to service quality according to age, it was found that the majority of clients, regardless of their age, rated the quality of service as high. However, there were notable differences in the proportion of clients who rated the service as medium or low in each age group. The youngest client group, up to 18 years of age, showed the highest proportion of clients who rated the service as low compared to the other age groups. In addition, this group had the lowest proportion of clients who rated the service as high. These results are similar to those obtained in previous studies that also evaluated service quality according to age (Dávila & Chirinos, 2022; Febres-Ramos & Mercado-Rey, 2020).

These results contribute to the understanding of service quality in the hardware store context and support the importance of maintaining high standards in the dimensions assessed. To further improve service quality, companies can focus on strengthening reliability, tangibility, empathy, staff competence, and ensuring competitive prices. This





study provides strong evidence that hardware stores in Tumbes are meeting customer expectations in terms of service quality. These results can be useful for hardware store managers and owners when designing strategies and actions to improve the customer experience and strengthen their market position.

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