

REICE
Revista Electrónica de Investigación en Ciencias Económicas
Abriendo Camino al Conocimiento
Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, UNAN-Managua

Vol. 10, No. 20, julio - diciembre 2022 REICE ISSN: 2308-782X
<http://revistacienciaseconomicas.unan.edu.ni/index.php/REICE>
revistacienciaseconomicas@gmail.com

The Impact of Globalization and Digitalization of The Economy on The Development of
E-Commerce

El impacto de la globalización y la digitalización de la economía en el desarrollo del
comercio electrónico

Fecha recepción: noviembre 02 del 2022
Fecha aceptación: noviembre 17 del 2022
DOI: 10.5377/reice.v10i20.16031

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Resumen

En el contexto de la globalización y digitalización de la economía, así como del período pandémico y pospandémico, se ha acentuado el desarrollo del comercio electrónico y la urgencia de asegurar la eficiencia y competitividad de las tiendas online. Un factor importante en la eficiencia y competitividad de un minorista es la satisfacción de las necesidades del cliente, que depende directamente de la calidad del servicio minorista. En este sentido, el estudio tiene como objetivo proponer un método para evaluar la calidad del servicio minorista en el comercio electrónico. El método presentado se basa en SERVQUAL y SERVPERF, desarrollándolos y adaptándolos al comercio electrónico teniendo en cuenta la especificidad de su modelo de negocio. Los autores sugieren cinco grupos de parámetros para la evaluación de la calidad del servicio minorista en línea (interacción en línea, interacción humana, confiabilidad, tangibles y garantía) que combinan un total de 21 parámetros individuales. También se calculan indicadores de calidad de resumen. La agrupación basada en evaluaciones de percepción y puntos de importancia para los enfoques de gestión óptimos para cada parámetro. El método presentado es aplicable a los competidores, lo que es casi imposible con el enfoque cuantitativo. Además, si es necesario, el método puede complementarse con indicadores cuantitativos y evaluaciones de expertos por parte de los empleados de la tienda en línea.

Palabras clave: Comercio al por menor; Organización comercial; Comercio electrónico; Servicio de comercio; Calidad de servicio.

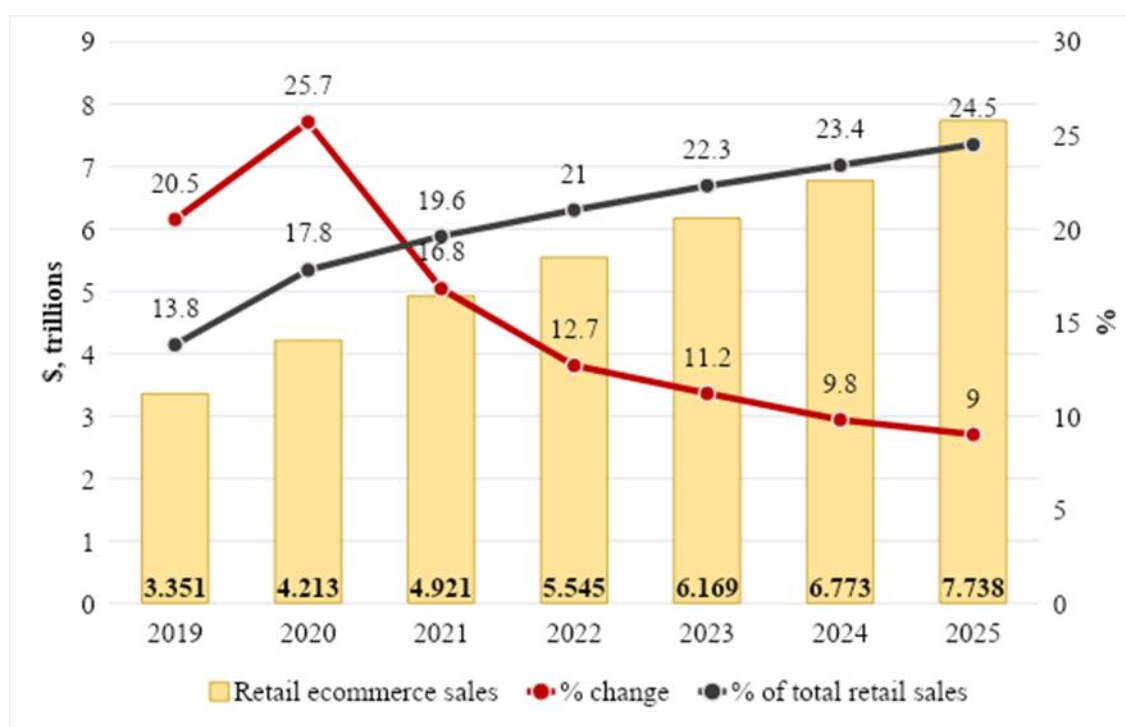
Abstract

Against the backdrop of the globalization and digitalization of the economy, as well as the pandemic and post-pandemic period, the development of e-commerce and the urgency of ensuring the efficiency and competitiveness of online stores have risen. An important factor in the efficiency and competitiveness of a retailer is the satisfaction of customer needs, which is directly contingent on the quality of retail service. In this connection, the study aims to propose a method for assessing the quality of retail service in e-commerce. The presented method relies in the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, further developing and adapting them to e-commerce minding the specificity of its business model. The authors suggest five groups of parameters for online retail service quality assessment (online interaction, human interaction, reliability, tangibles, and assurance) combining a total of 21 individual parameters. Summary quality indicators are also calculated. Grouping based on perception assessments and significance points to the management approaches optimal for each parameter. The presented method is applicable to competitors, which is almost impossible with the quantitative approach. Furthermore, if needed, the method can be supplemented by quantitative indicators and expert evaluations by online store employees.

Keywords: Retail trade; Trade organization; E-commerce; Trade service; Service quality.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of the globalization and digitalization of the economy, as well as the pandemic and post-pandemic period, the development of e-commerce, including online retail, has intensified. In 2021, the number of online shoppers in the world reached 2.14 billion people with e-commerce accounting for more than 18% of all retail sales (Zuykova, 2022). It is forecasted that by the end of 2022, the volume of global Internet sales will reach 5.5 trillion dollars and continue to grow (Figure 1), and by 2040, about 95% of all purchases will be made online (Chernev, 2022).

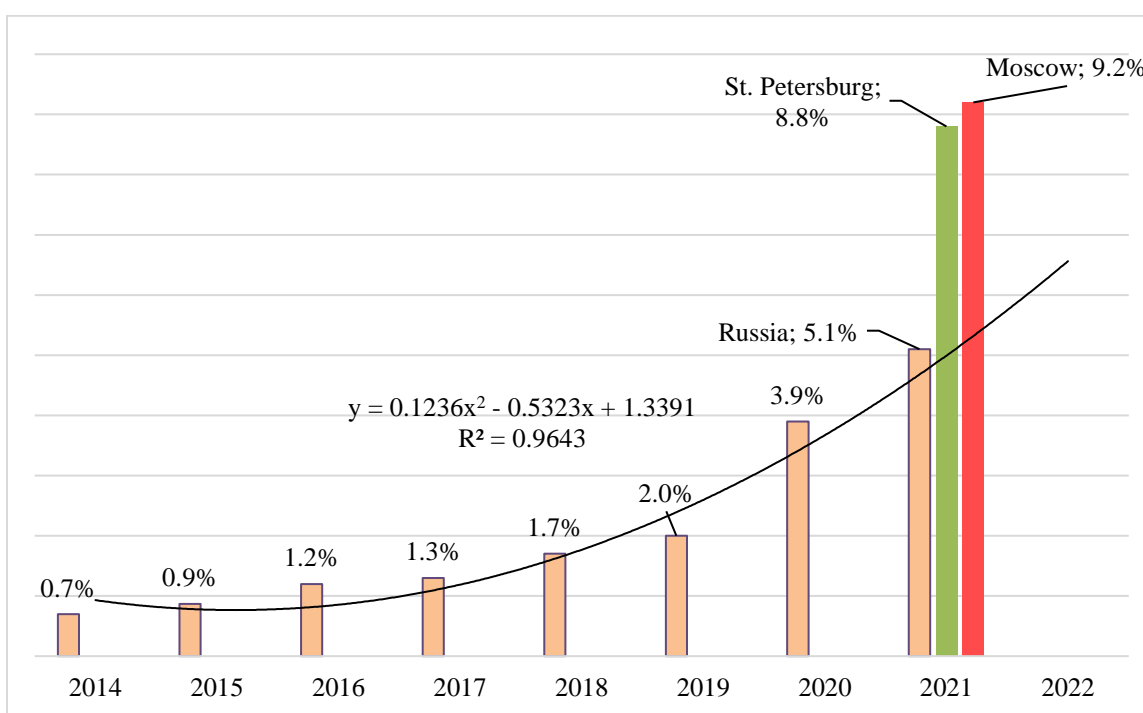


Source: Von Abrams (2021)

Figure 1: Retail e-commerce sales worldwide, 2019-2025

In China, the global leader in terms of e-commerce development, the 2021 e-commerce sales accounted for over half of retail sales, in South Korea and Great Britain this share was almost 29%, and in the US and a number of West European countries (Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, France, and Spain) – from 10 to 20%. By the end of 2022, the market share of e-commerce is expected to grow further in all of the above countries (Cramer-Flood, 2021). In the Russian retail market, the share of online sales grew by 95%

in the pandemic year 2020 compared to the previous year and by 35% in 2021 (The share of online sales in the total volume of retail trade turnover (2014-2021, 2022). According to forecasts, the turnover of online commerce will keep growing (Krasilnikova, 2022), and the development of digital technology will maintain its transformative influence on the sphere of commodity circulation and trade (Ramazanov et al., 2019, 2021). Despite its steady growth, the share of online sales in Russia remains below that in the leading countries, amounting to 5.1% in total across the country and less than 10% in Moscow and St. Petersburg (Figure 2).



Source: The share of online sales in the total volume of retail trade turnover (2014-2021) (2022)

Figure 2: The share of e-commerce in Russia's retail turnover

Given the intensive development of global e-commerce and its insufficient realization in individual countries, of great importance are the issues of improving the competitiveness and efficiency of online stores. The main factor in a retailer's survival in a competitive environment is customer need satisfaction, which is directly contingent on the quality of retail service (Tepanon, Thatiroth, 2016; Nguyen, 2020). At the same time, consumer demand for quality shopping services is constantly growing (Mayorova et al., 2020).

Aleksandrova et al. (2021) argue that the issues of maintaining high competitiveness, competitive positions, and advantages of trade enterprises through ensuring the quality of trade services to consumers do not receive enough attention in current research. In addition, when considering the quality of service in e-commerce, it is vital to account for the specifics of its business model.

The management of retail service quality assumes the presence of methods for its assessment. In this connection, the purpose of this study is to propose a method for assessing retail service quality in e-commerce.

Materials and Methods

Retail service quality assessment methods

Since the quality of retail service is defined by its capability to satisfy customer needs, its assessment is widely conducted via the sociological method, including the SERVQUAL model (which implies the assessment of the gap between the actual and expected quality of services) and the models based on it, including SERVPERF (measures the perception of service quality, excluding expectation measurements), SERVPERF-M (reduces the number of attributes evaluated), Qualitometro (separates expectation and perception assessments in time), normalized quality models (correlate quality perceptions with ideal and attainable expectations), and numerous modifications, such as the RSQS model adapted for the retail sector. These methods have been applied in studies of the quality of shopping service and customer satisfaction conducted by Banerjee et al. (2017), Panda and Swar (2017), Amenta et al. (2019), Ching-Chan Cheng et al. (2021), and other researchers.

At the heart of service quality is customer satisfaction, which as a rule relates to minimizing financial and time expenses. On the other hand, this service has a material nature for the trade company and aims at the realization of its commercial goals (Deputatova & Zvereva, 2018). As a result, a conflict of interest between the customer and the seller emerges, which can be resolved as part of retail service quality assessment through a combination of sociological and expert methods. While the sociological method reflects the opinion of consumers, the expert method accounts for the interest of traders.

One method employed in assessing the quality of service in trade is the mystery shopper method, which delivers a comprehensive characteristic of the work of sales personnel and outlines directions for its improvement but is not applicable in the analysis of the overall system of trade service quality. The mystery shopper method is effective with competitors, provides an assessment of the company's competitiveness, identifies the positive and negative factors of retail service quality that affect it, and reveals the reserves for its improvement.

The analytical calculation method of assessing the quality of retail service involves the calculation of quantitative indicators such as the average time and speed of service, the average receipt, the coefficients of breadth, renewal, and stability of the product range, the average number of items in the purchase, the rate of purchase completion (conversion), the number of satisfactory reviews, the coefficient of aesthetic customer satisfaction, and so forth.

Specific methods often use these approaches and methods in combination. For instance, let us consider the study by Aleksandrova et al. (2021) on the influence of retail service quality on the competitiveness of a regional enterprise, in which the importance of service quality is assessed as a factor in competitiveness. This study employs the method of expert evaluation. The degree of significance of particular quality factors is determined based on a survey of customers and employees. A direct assessment of the service quality of a company and its competitors is carried out with the help of mystery shoppers. Kuzmenko and Iakimik (2017) combine expert evaluations, a customer survey, and the mystery shopper method when assessing the quality of retail services of consumer cooperation enterprises. Prushkovskii (2017) includes in his system of retail service quality assessment the quantitative indicators of the service system's efficiency and the qualitative indicators of consumer satisfaction (individual, summary, and integral).

Uriasieva and Kalugina (2017), having systematized the existing approaches to assessing the quality of trade service, note the lack of comprehensive strategic tools and propose to adapt to this purpose a balanced system of indicators that will connect the key indicators of trade service quality with the strategically important indicators of the company's performance. However, the development of a comprehensive system of quality

indicators based on the key determinants of company competitiveness is not performed by the authors and is anticipated in further research.

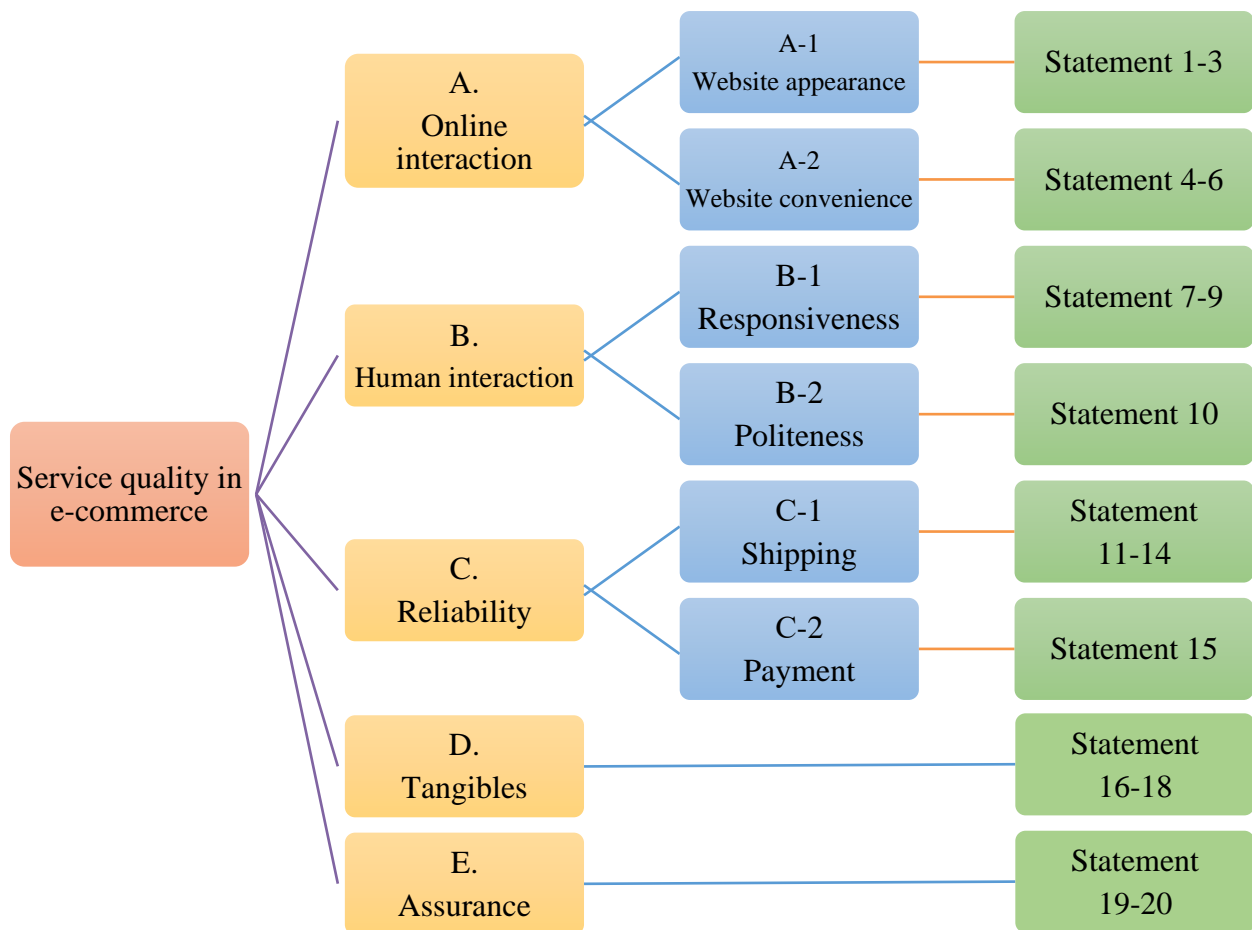
Despite the thorough development of the methodological aspects of overall service quality assessment, the application of the known methods and indicators to e-commerce enterprises is quite limited. Firstly, the existing methods focus on the quality of employees' work, while in e-commerce the interaction of customers with employees is minimal (although present). Secondly, several parameters specific to the Internet environment are overlooked, including the convenience of ordering from the website, shipping options, the quality of online consultations, and so on.

GOST R 51304-2022 defines the indicators of trade service quality as "quantitative and/or qualitative characteristics of trade services ensuring their ability to meet the identified or anticipated needs of the consumer (buyer)" (GOST R 51304-2022, 2022). Since the overwhelming majority of service quality characteristics are descriptive and challenging to formalize, the basis of the proposed method for e-commerce is the qualitative approach, which can be supplemented by quantitative indicators if needed.

Resulted and Discussion

The proposed method is based on the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models and results from their development and adaptation to e-commerce.

Five groups of parameters, combining 20 individual indicators, are proposed to assess the quality of service in e-commerce (Figure 3).



Source: compiled by the authors

Figure 3: E-commerce service quality assessment model

The method for assessing the quality of service in e-commerce includes the following stages.

Stage 1. Consumer survey.

The survey was conducted on the online store website using pairs of statements describing customer satisfaction with each quality component and its importance (Table 1). Organizationally, there are two options: either to ask the respondent to fill out the entire questionnaire, motivating them with bonuses, or to ask just one question from the list chosen at random. The responses were given on a five-point Likert scale (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree").

Table 1: Parameters of service quality assessment in e-commerce

Nº	Quality assessment	Significance assessment
Online interaction		
1	Appealing website design	It is important to me that the website is nicely designed
2	Sufficient product information	Complete product information is important to me
3	The website allows to easily find the desired product	It is important for me that the product is easy to find
4	Payment options can be selected	The choice of payment options is important to me
5	The website allows for quick purchase	The promptness of purchase is important to me
6	Order settings can be adjusted to the client's needs	The opportunity to change order settings is important to me
Human interaction		
7	Employees sincerely want to help the customer	It is important for me that the employees sincerely try to help the customer
8	Employees offer competent consultations by phone/chat/videoconference	Competent consultations from online store employees are important to me
9	Customers' problems are solved quickly	The speed with which customers' problems are solved is important to me
10	The employees (pickers, couriers) are polite	The politeness of online store employees is important to me
Reliability		
11	Products are always available	It is important to me that the products are always in stock
12	Delivery deadlines are met	Compliance with delivery dates is important to me
13	Quality products are delivered	Product quality is important to me
14	Expiration dates are observed	Compliance with expiration dates is important to me
15	Payment methods are safe	The safety of payment is important to me
Tangibles		
16	The product range meets customers' needs	The product range is important to me
17	Reasonable pricing for goods and services	The price level is important to me

Nº	Quality assessment	Significance assessment
18	Additional services meet customers' needs	Additional services are important to me
Assurance		
19	Product returns are easy to arrange	Easy return policy is important to me
20	The website has reliable reviews	Reliable reviews are important to me

Source: compiled by the authors

Stage 2. Assessment of survey results consistency.

The internal consistency of the survey results is assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The sufficient coefficient value is 0.7 or higher. Lower coefficients indicate the need to identify and work on the reasons for differences in opinions.

Stage 3. Calculation of individual indicators of the online store's trade service.

Each individual indicator is calculated using formula:

$$SQI_j = \sum_{i=1}^k R_{ij} Q_{ij}$$

where SQI_j – the indicator of service quality in the online store by the j-th parameter,

R_{ij} – the significance of parameter j for the i-th customer;

Q_{ij} – assessment of the quality of service provided to the i-th customer by parameter j.

Parameter significance is calculated through normalization:

$$K_{ij} = \frac{I_{ij} - I_{min}}{I_{max} - I_{min}}$$

where I_{ij} – i-th customer's assessment of the significance of service quality parameter j,

Min, Max – the maximum and minimum assessment scores, respectively.

Stage 4. Calculation of summary indicators of retail service quality.

The previous stage delivers a set of assessments for each parameter. Next, the average scores for a group of parameters are calculated, and on their basis, a summary indicator of the quality of service is computed. Here the arithmetic mean and geometric mean formulas are applicable.

Stage 5. Visualization and analysis of the results.

The results of the calculations provide assessments of the significance, consumer perception, and retail service quality for each individual parameter, their groups, and their totality (integral summary indicator).

Based on customers' assessments of the particular components of trade service quality in a specific online store, as well as the significance of these components, it is expedient to build a perception/significance matrix. This matrix identifies four groups of parameters. The parameters that show low factual assessment with great significance for customers are the priority for the online store manager and require investment in their development. The parameters rated high by customers both in terms of significance and factual experience maintain the achieved level of quality. The third group consists of lower priority parameters with relatively low actual assessments. The latter fact suggests that, nevertheless, online store managers should not omit them when managing the quality of sales service. Finally, the fourth group of parameters with high factual ratings but low importance for customers suggests an unnecessary investment of resources. The management of the online store should thus consider the feasibility of current investments in the development of these shopping service quality parameters.

Discussion

The descriptive nature and objective difficulty of formalizing the components of retail service quality define the advantages of the qualitative (sociological) methodological approach to service quality assessment compared to quantitative methods. The proposed methodology develops the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models, which in their classic or modified versions have proven their effectiveness in various service industries, as reflected in studies by Akdere, Top, and Tekingündüz (2020), Huang, Lin, Fan (2015), Ramos Farroñan et al. (2020), Shi, Shang (2020), Cheng, Chang, Chen (2021), and others. In addition, the model accounts for the peculiarities of online retail shaped by the peculiarities of e-commerce resulting from a specific business model.

In contrast to the mystery shopping method, also widely used in studies on the quality of shopping service (Aleksandrova et al., 2021, Kuzmenko, Iakimik, 2017), the presented method covers all the components of service instead of focusing on the work of employees. This aspect is of particular importance for the e-commerce model, in which face-to-face communication with the seller is minimized.

To reduce the conflict of interest between the seller and the buyer, which inevitably arises in retail service quality assessment (Deputatova, Zvereva, 2018), it is advisable to

supplement the proposed methodology with expert assessments by online store employees, as well as quantitative indicators characterizing the product range, conversion rate, the average receipt, etc. However, given that the commercial success of a retail company directly depends on consumer satisfaction, service quality assessment based on customer surveys remains the most significant. This approach corresponds to R.E. Freeman's stakeholder theory, which is quite popular in modern management (Freeman, 2015; 2016). The stakeholder theory assumes that the main objective of commercial entities is to manage the interests, needs, and expectations of its stakeholders. For retail companies, including those operating in e-commerce, customers are the key stakeholder group, one of the main interests of which is service (Podsypalina, Popenkova, 2018).

Finally, the obtained results allow classifying the components of retail service quality in e-commerce based on their actual assessment by customers and their significance for them. This classification shows practical significance for online store managers since it points to the most optimal management approaches.

Conclusion

The quality of trade service is able to provide a competitive advantage for the retailer, including in the Internet environment. The proposed method resulting from the development and adaptation of the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models to e-commerce assesses the quality of retail service in online stores accounting for the specifics of their operation. The assessment process not only reveals the perception of the actual quality of shopping service in online commerce for each parameter but considers the significance of these parameters. Individual and summary quality indicators are calculated. Classification based on perception assessment and significance defines the optimal management approaches to each parameter. The proposed approach to retail service quality assessment in e-commerce is also applicable to competitors, which is virtually impossible with the quantitative approach. Furthermore, if needed, the method can be supplemented with quantitative indicators and expert evaluations by online store employees.

Acknowledgments

The paper was prepared in accordance with public assignment FSSW-2020-0009 of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation "Development of a Methodology for Managing Competitiveness in Distribution in the Context of Digital Economy".

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