Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
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Cultural differences in perception and evaluation of customer service. Case: World of Delights Oy

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Abstract

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The objective of the research was to find out whether customers who are representatives of different cultural groups perceive and evaluate customer service differently. The study was aimed to discover how representatives of different cultural groups feel about customer service offered in case company shops as well as identify those cultural differences.

This study was carried out at the airport where the case company's shops are located. Empirical data were collected by handing out a questionnaire to shops' customers. In total 159 questionnaire forms where collected from representatives of five cultural groups: Finnish, Russians, Americans, British and Japanese. Respondents were asked to evaluate or show the level of agreement/disagreement concerning statements from questionnaire. In addition to that, data for this study were also collected by personal observations.

The results of the study show that consumer behaviour is heterogeneous. Contrary to expectations, the results indicate that cultural background affects on how customers perceive and evaluate customer service. Further study is required to create a guideline for sales assistants about how to offer great customer service to culturally diverse clientele.

Keywords: culture, customer service, customer satisfaction

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Abbreviations

IDV – Individualism/collectivism dimension

IBM – International Business Machines (company)

MAS – Masculinity/femininity dimension

Oy – Osakeyhtiö (eng. limited company)

PDI – Power distance

SPSS – Statistical package for the social sciences

TARP – Technical assistance research programs

UAI – Uncertainty avoidance

1   Introduction

Recent years have seen an increased interest in the influence of culture on consumer behaviour (Hofstede & Mooij 2011, p. 181). This interest has created a need to study that influence. Therefore, the topic of this research is cultural differences in perception and evaluation of customer service**.** There is no doubt that, nowadays, businesses operate in a highly diverse and international environment and deal with customers from all over the world. In order to gain a competitive advantage, companies do their best to keep positions in a market and generate profits. That is why it is extremely crucial to understand customers, their habits and needs, and even more importantly, companies need to collect information about how customers feel about a company and its offered services.

It can be stated that understanding is a key to success. This understanding refers both to understanding customers, their needs and desires as well as customers' understanding about a company's service. It goes without saying that service employees and customers who have the same cultural background are more likely to understand each other in a better way as they definitely share the same expectations about how customer service should be provided (Tom, Sharma & Kim 2014, p. 159). Due to growing immigration, globalization and international tourism, employees interact with customers from all other the world on a daily basis. Critical issue here is to know how to deal with those global customers because they all have different expectations from the customer service.

Culture shapes the way customers think about customer service. Apparently, culture is something that is learned, shared and transmitted from one generation to another and it is extremely important to understand this, especially in services marketing as culture definitely affects on how customers evaluate a customer service (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, pp. 40-41). More and more organizations are becoming multicultural which creates a need to understand what kind of cultural effect on perception and evaluation of customer service exists.

So-called phenomenon is a starting point of this research which can be explained as a consideration that there are possible differences in perception and evaluation of customer service which occur while customers directly interact with offered

customer service. It should be noted that the nature of those differences is considered to be cultural. As it was mentioned earlier the study is focused on how customers feel about a service but not how they make decisions and why they buy.

There are plenty of research works available which studied the phenomenon previously. Due to the complex nature of that phenomenon, it was introduced gradually. First of all, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) explained the nature of customer expectations of customer service by creating a model which specified three types of service expectation (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1993). That alluded to the fact that there were differences in customers' expectations about customer service. Obviously, the nature of those differences could be partly explained by the effect of national culture. Based on that, Mooij (2011) introduced the study of how culture affects on consumer behaviour. In addition to that, it is important to be mentioned that Hofstede (2001, 2005) studied culture and its influence on people's attitudes and mental processes.

As it was stated by Hofstede and Mooij (2002), in the future, buying behaviour will become even more heterogeneous because of cultural differences. In addition to that, manifestation of differences will become even stronger. This phenomenon makes it increasingly important to understand values of national cultures and their impact on consumer behaviour. (Hofstede & Mooij 2002, p. 61.)

It is well-known fact that great customer service creates a competitive advantage for companies. That is why businesses strive to offer a high-quality service to their customers. However, it should be considered that all customers cannot be treated in a same way. There is no doubt that many companies implement individual techniques to approach their customers or customer segments but not always efficiently. This research is focused on how important it is to consider cultural backgrounds of customers while offering customers service.

The importance of customer satisfaction lies in its ability to influence not only on present situation but on post-purchase behaviour. Satisfied customers are believed to share their positive experiences with others as well as make more repeat and bigger purchases. On the other hand, dissatisfied customers may engage in

negative word-of-mouth communications or feedback via e.g. social media which importance nowadays is undoubtable. (Tom et al. 2014, p. 159.)

1.1 Objectives and research questions

The main objective of this research is to find out if customers perceive and evaluate offered customer service differently depending on their national cultures. In other words, the research is aimed to clarify what kind of service expectations customers have and whether those expectations are different and depend on customers' national cultures.

As it was explained earlier the phenomenon of this research is that there are cultural differences in perception and evaluation of customer service. Based on that, written above objectives are defined. Correspondingly, the main research question is stated as following:

- How do representatives of different cultural groups perceive and evaluate customer service?

In addition to that, there are two sub-questions defined in order to support answering mentioned above one:

- What kind of cultural differences can be identified based on theoretical reviews and answers given by research participants?
- How those differences can be explained?

Research questions are built in order to set a scope of this study and help to achieve the objective. The author's aim is to find out answers on those questions by doing an empirical research.

Moreover, it should be mentioned that there was no previous research conducted for a case company and this study is the first milestone of more extensive and detailed study in the future if needed.

1.2 Delimitations of the study

Delimitations are done in order to exclude unnecessary details, information and theories from the study. In this case there is a huge amount of information available for each key concept, so it is important to set frameworks clearly.

First of all, study of culture is mainly focused on studying the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Even though such issues as components of culture and layers of culture are discussed, they do not present a deep theoretical review. In other words, only those topics are selected for further review which can be used to explain differences in perception and evaluation of customer service.

Secondly, consumer behaviour as studying subject is excluded from this research. As it was mentioned before, this paper is focused on understanding of how customers feel about customer service but not on why the buy and make their decisions. Thus, it should be noted that while presenting empirical analysis of selected cultures using Hofstede's dimensions, behavioural characteristics of representatives of selected cultures are mentioned in order to create a general understanding about customers from those selected cultures.

Thirdly, customer satisfaction which is one of the major parts for this research is focused on one case company and its customers. In other words, customer satisfaction is studied in terms of one company and its clientele. Moreover, the study of customer satisfaction is focused on the influence of customer service and service quality on it, meaning that customer satisfaction concerning the company's products is excluded from this study.

Besides that, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is viewed from the prospective of 4-D model which includes such dimensions as power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity. Later added dimensions, which are long/short-term orientation and indulgence/restraint, are not analysed in this study.

Next, it goes without saying that there is a variety of people's mental processes such as cognition, learning, perception, creativity, attribution, information processing, communication, decision-making, etc. However, it is important to consider that this research is focused only on perception and evaluation processes.

Corresponding to selected cultures, research is focused on five cultural groups which are Finnish, Russians, Americans, British and Japanese customers. The selection was done by implying three key factors: numbers of daily visits, whether cultures were studied by Hofstede and the ability of research participants speak and understand English effortlessly. In addition to that, it should be noted that personal characteristics of research participants such as gender, age, occupation, etc. are excluded from the questionnaire and are not acquired as an empirical data.

The last delimitation is a study of customer service. It is a well-known fact that customer service has both pre- and post- purchase stages. However, due to the fact that case company shops are located at the airport area, almost all customer service activities are focused on a present situation when a customer is already in the shop. This specific location creates a challenge to e.g. follow-up to post-purchased communication.

1.3 Key concepts

This research is focused on three main concepts which are undoubtedly connected to each other in this study:

- Culture

Hofstede (2001) conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. He defined culture as collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede 2001, p. 1).

- Customer Service

As it was stated by Fogli (2006), customer service is the interaction between the customer and a representative of the organization which is not limited by a single

function meaning that it is a very comprehensive phenomenon. The core of its importance is that the quality customer service is defined by the customer who receives it. In other words, it is a process of meeting the needs and expectations of the customers as defined by the customer. (Fogli 2006, pp. 4-5.)

- Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction with a service encounter is an emotional state experienced by customers in response to an evaluation of their service experience. In other words, customer satisfaction is a function of expectations and the extent to which perceived service performance meets customer expectations. If the perceived service performance exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs, which in turn increase the level of satisfaction. On the other hand, when the perceived service performance falls short of expectations, this leads to negative disconfirmation and may result in customer dissatisfaction. (Tom et al. 2014, p. 161.)

1.4 Research method

In order to achieve objectives and answer on research questions, it is crucial not only to present a theoretical review but also acquire empirical data. To choose a right method to acquire that data it is important to have a clearly stated research questions which should be answered by empirical findings.

Basically, there are two types of research methods: qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical or numerical analysis of data collections what can be done by using special statistical tools, for example, SPSS data editor. Corresponding, qualitative research examines attitudes, feelings and motivations of product users. (Proctor 2005.)

As for a chosen research method, quantitative approach is used. It means that the empirical data is attained by conducting a survey about customers' evaluation of customer service and their expectations about high-quality customer service provider. The analysis of empirical data was done by using SPSS data editor.

It seems to be reasonable to introduce three preliminary factors which influence on selection of research participants and case cultures before the actual sampling process is explained:

- representatives of only five cultural groups are selected for analysis which are: Finnish, Russians, Japanese, Americans and British
- in order to acquire enough empirical data to make possible generalization and comparison, those cultural groups are chosen whose representatives' number is the highest from those customers who visit the shops. In other words, those selected cultural groups represents likely the highest percentage of daily customers
- selected cultures were studied by Hofstede (2001)
- survey's participants are able to speak and understand English effortlessly.

It should be noted that detailed sampling process is introduced in chapter 5.2. Mentioned above preliminary factors were explained in order to describe general boundaries of research and set a scope for actual sampling process.

1.5 Case company

World of Delights is an international retail organisation. The company was founded in 1958 in the Netherlands and has its presence nowadays in Finland and Denmark with over 60 stores. (World of Delights n.d.) The company has several key business concepts which act as "small individual companies" (Pisters 2015, pp. 11-29):

- FineFood delicatessen which is a delicacies store. The idea of this concept is to combine both local products together with those ones, which are imported from all other the world. It should be mentioned that Fine Food stores are the case stores for this research.
- Let's play! shops which specialize in selling toys and attributes for children.
- Planes@plaza shop concept based on selling aviation related toys and attributes.

- Say cheese stores represent cheeses from all over the world.

- SVNRS which in other words are souvenir stores. It should be mentioned that at Helsinki Airport FineFood and SVNRS concepts share the same location, meaning that SVNRS shops are a part of case study as well.

- NL+ retail concept includes shops which specialize in selection of Dutch souvenirs with a heavy dose of soccer and sports attributes.

- Swarovski boutiques which are franchised from an Austrian company.

- V!ZZ!T concept which is very closed to FineFood concept and its purpose is to give passengers a last chance to make purchases.

As it was mentioned earlier, FineFood shops at the Helsinki Airport are the case companies. In Finland company is registered as World of Delights Oy and operates at Helsinki Airport. There are three shops those concept is to combine Finnish and Scandinavian delicacies as well as international products.

1.6   Thesis structure

Thesis chapters divide the paper into seven equally important parts. In chapter 1, introduction part is presented in order to shortly explain a research plan. Next, chapters 2,3 and 4 are dedicated to theory. In chapter 2, theoretical framework of culture is presented where definitions of culture, its attributes and explanation of Hofstede's cultural dimensions are discussed. Chapter 3 covers theory about customer service and such topics as importance of customer service, customer service model and issues of service quality. Chapter 4 presents theoretical frameworks of customer satisfaction where customer perceptions and expectations are defined and explained.

Empirical part is presented in chapters 5 and 6. In chapter 5 the research methodology is explained in details and as research method, sampling process, process of gathering data and questionnaire design are discussed in that chapter. Research results are shown in chapter 6. This chapter is divided into two parts: the analysis of case cultures and the analysis of questionnaire results.

The last chapter is dedicated to conclusions. In addition to that, limitations are presented there as well as recommendations for future research. Figure 1 graphically illustrates the structure of the thesis:
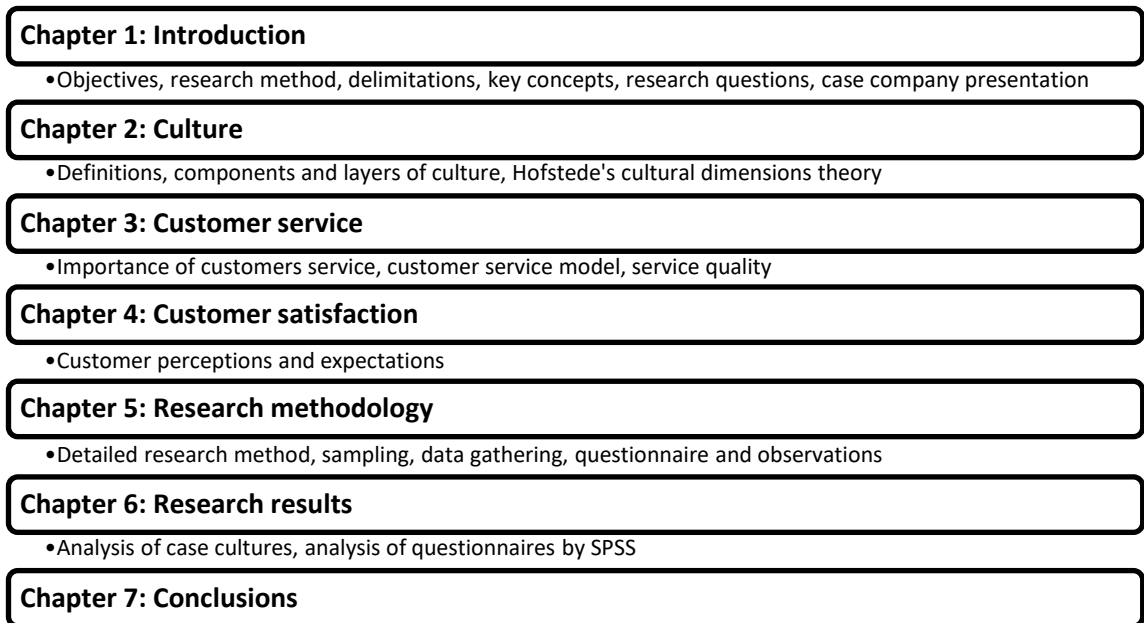
Chapter 1: Introduction
•Objectives, research method, delimitations, key concepts, research questions, case company presentation

Chapter 2: Culture
•Definitions, components and layers of culture, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

Chapter 3: Customer service
•Importance of customers service, customer service model, service quality

Chapter 4: Customer satisfaction
•Customer perceptions and expectations

Chapter 5: Research methodology
•Detailed research method, sampling, data gathering, questionnaire and observations

Chapter 6: Research results
•Analysis of case cultures, analysis of questionnaires by SPSS

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Figure 1. Structure of thesis

2 Culture

This chapter is dedicated to cultural study. The following chapters reveal information about the components and layers of culture as well as the explanation of cultural dimensions theory. Mainly, this chapter explains cultural dimensions theory by Hofstede (2001). Apparently, almost all research on cross-cultural consumer behaviour uses the Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture (Hofstede & Mooij 2011, p. 181). Hofstede published his cultural dimensions model at the end of the 1970s based on a decade of research. Since then, it has become an internationally recognized standard for understanding cultural differences. (Mind tools content team n.d.) The main idea of theory is to present how a certain national culture affects on values of its members and how those values, in return, affect on people's behaviour.

2.1 Definitions of culture and its components

It goes without saying that culture affects on how people think, act and perceive things. Hofstede (2001, p. 9) defined culture as a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

Culture is considered to be a big influencer on peoples' attitudes, values, actions, etc. Imrie, Cadogan and McNaughton (2002) stated that culture has a fundamental role in forming consumer evaluation and choice behaviour. They also described culture as an accumulation of learned meanings within a human population. Those learned meanings or values endow individuals with rules that provide guidance in their behaviour as consumers. (Imrie, Cadogan & McNaughton 2002, p. 11.)

It is a well-known fact that culture can be defined in many ways. According to Kluckhohn (1951), culture consists of patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Kluckhohn (1951) affirmed that culture includes values, rituals, heroes and symbols. (Hofstede 2001, p. 9.) Below, Figure 2 represents the "onion diagram" in order to show manifestations of culture at different levels of depth.
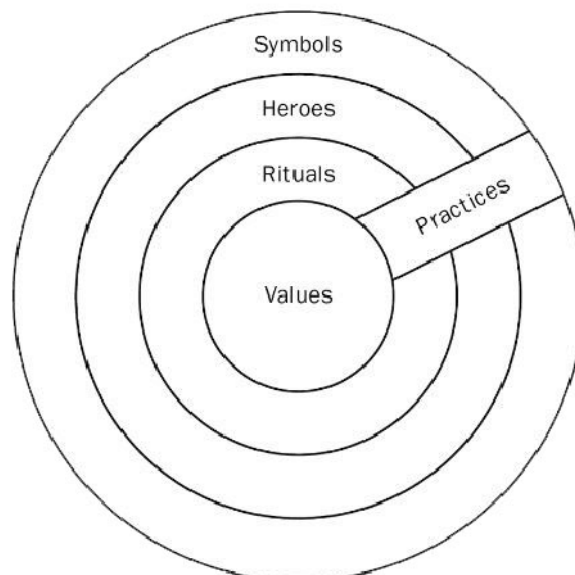

Figure 2. Onion diagram (Hofstede 2001)

Cultural differences manifest themselves in several ways. First of all, it is crucial to explain a concept of values as their influence on a way people perceive things cannot be ignored. According to Hofstede (2001), value is a broad tendency to

prefer certain states of affairs over others (Hofstede 2001, p. 5). Corresponding to that, Kluckhohn (1967) implied a broader definition of a concept of value. According to Kluckhohn, value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of actions (Hofstede 2001, p. 5). Values are invisible until they become evident in behavior, thus, they represent a "cultural core".

According to Mooij (2011), for some time already it has been believed that the different value orientations cause variations in preferences of customers for products and services. As it was mentioned earlier, values of customers defined by their culture. Hence, it makes it extremely important to understand that influence of concept of value. Mooij (2011) defined that a value refers to a single belief of a very specific kind, as opposed to an attitude that refers to an organization of several beliefs around a specific object or situation. Mooij also added that values have cognitive, affective and behavioral components. Thus, values are expressed in abstract terms, people generally know what their preferred "state of being" is. A value has a behavioral exponent in the sense that it is an intervening variable that leads to action when activated. (Mooij 2011, p. 28.)

Next, there are visible manifestations of a culture which are rituals, heroes and symbols. Symbols are words, gestures, pictures and objects that carry complex meanings recognized as such only by those who share the culture, e.g. words in language. Due to the fact that new symbols are easily developed and old ones disappear as well as they can be copied by another cultures, they represent the most superficial layer of "onion diagram". Another component is heroes who are the role models of a certain society who possess characteristics that are highly prized in a culture. As for rituals, they are collective activities that are technically unnecessary to the achievement of desired ends but that within a culture are considered socially essential, keeping the individual bound within the norms of the collectivity. Moreover, Figure 2 represents the term practices. As such, those practices are visible only to an outside observer, however, their cultural meanings are invisible and lie precisely and only in the ways these practices are interpreted by insiders. (Hofstede 2001, p. 10.)

To sum up the importance of understanding of culture and its components and their influences, it should be underlined that culture comprises values and ideologies of a certain community or group of individuals. Culture influences on how people behave, act and perceive. In other words, those components of any national culture help to understand person's attitudes, way of thinking and acting. (Management Study Guide Content Team n.d.)

2.2 Layers of culture

Besides definitions and components of culture, it is reasonable to provide an information about the layers of culture. Because almost every person belongs to different groups at the same time, people unavoidably carry several layers of mental programming. Hofstede (2005) defined those levels of culture as following:

- national level (person's nationality or country of origin)
- regional and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or linguistics affiliation level (e.g. people are representative of different religious groups within one nation)
- gender level (male or female)
- generation level (children, parents, grandparents)
- social class level (e.g. people have different occupation and educational opportunities)
- organizational, departmental and/or corporate levels (for employed people).

As it was mentioned earlier, each cultural level provides a certain mental programming. However, it is not necessary that those mental programs from various levels are in harmony. More often, they are partly conflicting. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, p. 11). Due to that, it makes it extremely difficult to generalize people's attitudes even when they are representatives of one cultural group.

2.3 Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

As it was defined, cultural dimensions theory is an internationally recognized standard for understanding cultural differences. Hofstede believed that a strong

reason for collecting data at the level of nations is that that cross-cultural research promotes cooperation among nations (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). The data for that cross-cultural study was collected in a large multinational corporation, IBM. The company's international employee attitude survey program was conducted between 1967 and 1973 and consisted of more than 116 000 questionnaires from 72 countries in 20 languages. The analysis was focused on identifying differences in answers on questions about employees' values. In addition to statistical analyses across individuals, the analysis of variance was carried out using country, occupation, gender and age as a criteria but the most crucial were correlation and factor analyses based on matched employee samples across countries. The initial analysis included only 40 countries with approximately 50 respondents to each. Later, the analysis was extended by 13 more countries. (Hofstede 2001, p. 41.) Nowadays, usable dimensions scores are available for 72 countries. Next paragraphs define the meaning of each dimension of Hofstede's theory. In addition to that, there are graphs presented which illustrate scores of selected cultures for research by each dimension of Hofstede's model.

Power distance (PDI) is the first dimension. The basic issue of this dimension is human inequality which can occur in areas such as wealth, prestige and power. Power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between parties. This term was taken from the work of the Dutch social psychologist Mauk Mulder who defined power distance as the degree of inequality in power between a less powerful individual and more powerful other when that individual and other belong to the same social system. (Hofstede 2001, pp. 79-143.)

Power distance dimension explains, for instance, differences in the way people behave in the public and private domains and the importance of appearance as well as status and brands. Moreover, it shows differences in communication behaviour, such as information gathering for decision-making process as well as differences in complaining behaviour of consumers and behaviour of personnel. (Mooij 2011, p. 47.)
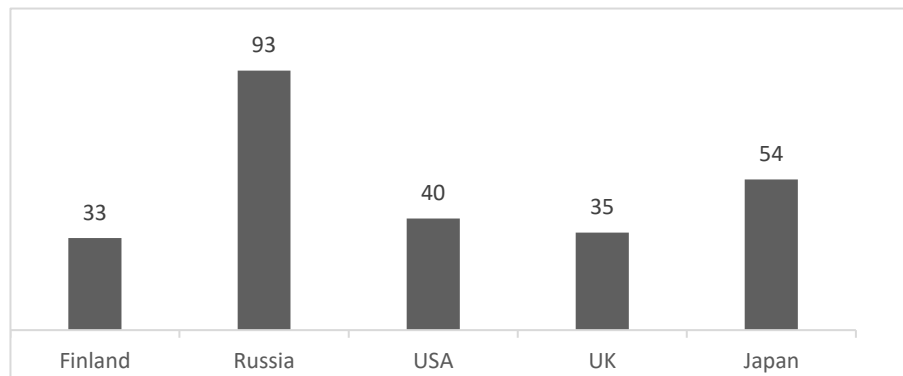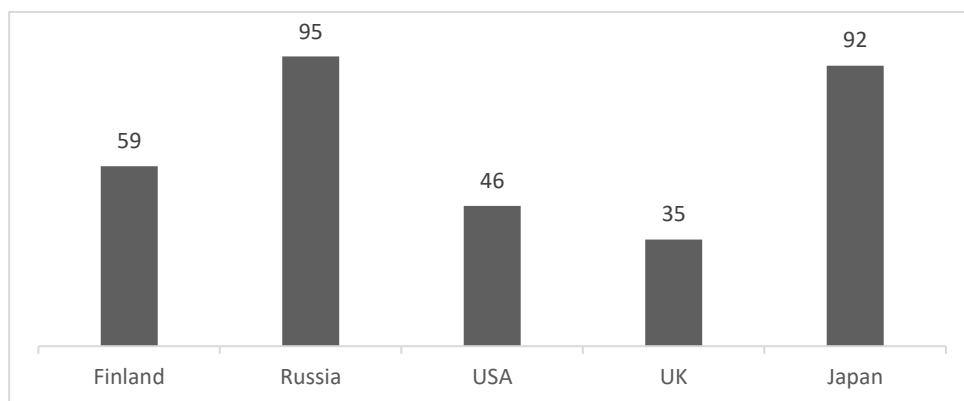
Graph 1. Power distance scores of the case cultures

Generally, there are several basic characteristics which can be applied to high or low power distance cultures. According to Smit (2012), cultures which score low in power distance dimension such as Finnish, American and British cultures are more likely to value independence and equality and avoid hierarchical structures. In contrast, people from high power distance cultures such as Russian and Japanese cultures accept dependence on power holder. Moreover, representatives of high power distance cultures believe that hierarchy is a key structure of society, organization, family, etc. and more powerful representatives of their society should be treated differently and given privileges. (Smit 2012.) In addition to that, Wursten, Fadrhonc and Roersoe (2009) found out that in customer service, power distance is crucial to be taken into consideration, especially if the culture is characterized by high power distance characteristic. In cultures that scores high on power distance dimension, perception of status is a very sensitive issue in the contact between a customer and a sales assistant as in those cultures customer is seen as a "king". Apparently, if a sales representative is from a high power distance index country, obviously, she/he will treat that customer with the proper respect. However, if a sales assistant is from a culture which scores low on power distance and a customer from a high power distance culture, perhaps, conflicts might arise, as a customer expects to be treated like royalty, and a sales assistant treats him/her equally. (Wursten, Fadrhonc & Roersoe, 2009, p. 3.)

The second dimension is called uncertainty avoidance (UAI). Basically, this dimension can be explained as uncertainty about the future with which humans try to cope through the domains of technology, law and religion. Important is that uncertainty avoidance should not be mixed up with the term of risk avoidance.

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Hofstede (2001) stated that society had developed ways to cope with uncertainty of living on the brink of an uncertain future by adopting technologies. Different societies have diverse ways of how to cope with uncertainties which belong to the cultural heritages of those societies. Corresponding to uncertainty avoidance in organizations, rules help to reduce the level of uncertainty. (Hofstede 2001, pp. 145-148.) Uncertainty avoidance dimension explains differences in travelling, foreign language speaking and contacts people have with foreigners (Mooij 2011, p. 49).

Graph 2. Uncertainty avoidance scores of the case cultures

Abhay Shah (2012) defined that cultures with high uncertainty avoidance index such as Finnish, Russian and Japanese cultures have societies where people do not like to take risks and prefer security and safety in everyday life. In order to provide that safety and comport they create rules and structures. Correspondingly, uncertainty accepting cultures such as American and British cultures have greater tolerance for different ideas, prefer autonomy and have less regulations and high codes of behavior. (Shah 2012.)

As it was mentioned, uncertainty avoidance index determines the degree to which people prefer structured over unstructured situations. In other words, this dimension indicates people's need for predictability and shows the extent to which they are willing to take risks. Regarding to customer service, in a culture characterized by strong uncertainty avoidance, customers are not risk takers and want everything to be under control, thus, they need much more information to make a decision. On the other hand, people from countries characterized by low uncertainty are more relaxed and open and require less information for decision-making process. Uncertainty avoidance acts as a moderator between perceived service

quality and customer satisfaction. In addition, in uncertainty avoiding cultures, people tend to show emotions whereas uncertainty accepting cultures, emotions preferably are not shown. Apparently, this could lead to confusion if sales representative communicates with a customer from the opposite scale on the dimension. One of the two most likely perceives the other to be as too loud, emotional or even aggressive. (Wursten et al. 2009, p. 3.)

Next dimension is individualism and collectivism (IDV) which shows the relationship between the individual and the group in the way people live together. The norms which are prevalent in a society and are expected from its members will strongly affect the nature of the relationship between a person and the organization. It is clear that collectivist cultures have greater emotional dependence. Opposite to that, in individualist societies, people act more independently. In addition to that, it is crucial to understand that the concept of trust for people from collectivist societies is important. Thus, trust should be established between two parties before any relationship could start. (Hofstede 2001, pp. 209-278.)

Individualism/collectivism dimension explains, for example, many differences in communication behaviour, both interpersonal and mass communication and direct and indirect communication, e.g. information gathering from the media or word-of-mouth (Mooij 2011, p. 48).
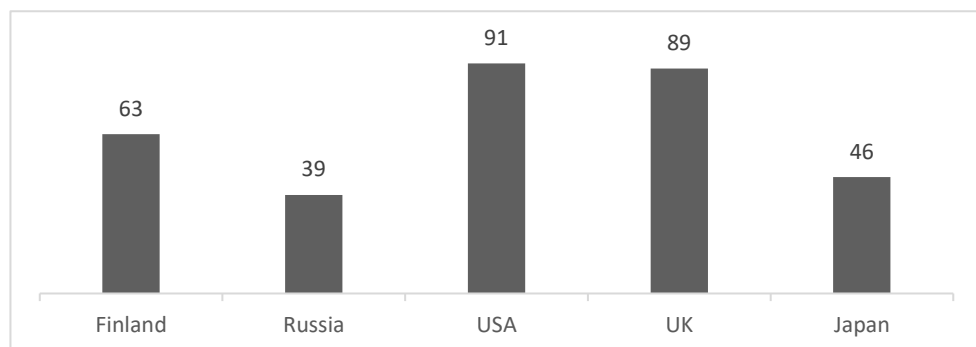

Graph 3. Individualism/collectivism scores of the case cultures

Collectivist cultures such as Russian and Japanese cultures are embedded within a group, while individualist cultures (Finland, the USA and the UK) place more emphasis on an individual's autonomy and independence (Power, Schoenherr & Samson 2010). Hofstede (2005) defined that people from individualistic cultures

value personal time, freedom and will to accept challenges (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, p. 76).

Individualism/collectivism dimension refers to the direction of loyalty as it determines whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we". In terms of customer service, this dimension explains what is the most important: task or relationship. Therefore, it is essential for sales assistants to build a harmonious relationship and establish trust with customers. (Wursten et al. 2009, p. 3.)

The fourth dimension is called masculinity with its opposed pole which is called femininity (MAS). The basis of this dimension is the duality of genders. Biological implications of both genders form the main characteristics of feminine and masculine cultures such as relationship, helping the others as well as some physical implications such as power, for instance. It should be mentioned that it is important not to confuse masculinity and femininity and individualism and collectivism as there are clear differences between them which were studied experimentally. Because, those two dimensions represent absolute different cultural characteristics, both of them have a very different consumer behaviour. (Hofstede 2001, pp. 279-311.) Masculinity/femininity dimension explains such issues as gender related difference in shopping as well as differences in buying status brands, luxury goods, etc. (Mooij 2011, p. 48).
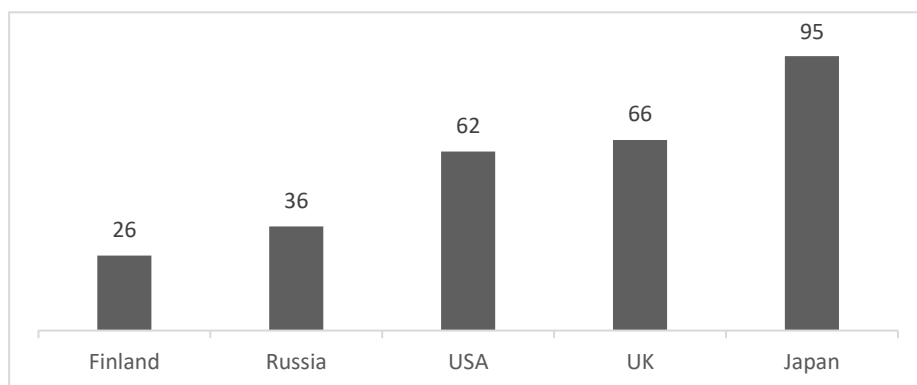
Graph 4. Masculinity/femininity scores of the case cultures

Accordingly, there are several basic characteristics of masculinity/femininity. In general, this score measures the gender role differentiation. For people from feminine cultures such as Finland and Russia, relationships and quality of life are

important. In contrast, for masculine cultures such as American, British and Japanese cultures, challenge, earnings, recognitions and advancement are important (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, p. 132).

In customer service, this dimension is revealed in the degree to which customers are sensitive to be served ahead of other customers or having an extra discount or attention. In feminine cultures sales assistants should focus less on exceptional favors but more on a long-term, reliable and pleasant relationship. Moreover, in cultures score low on masculinity dimension, it is important to treat customers equally and not give preferential treatments to certain customers over others. (Wursten et al. 2009, p. 3.)

3   Customer service

This chapter is dedicated to customer service and such topics as the importance of customer service, customer service model and service quality where SERVQUAL and gaps models are explained. This module was important to be studied carefully particularly for this research, as a client company is highly interested to be one of the best representatives of quality customer service at the airport area.

3.1   Importance of customer service

Fogli (2006) defined customer service as transactions aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of the customer as defined by the customer. It is the service encounter or series of encounters. (Fogli 2006, p. 4.) According to Ueltschy, Laroche, Eggert & Bindl (2007), different customers express different levels of satisfaction for the same or similar service encounters due to the fact that customer satisfaction from customer service is evaluated based on individual's perceptions e.g. culture (Seo 2007, pp. 13-14).

As it was stated by Zeithaml and Bitner (2000), customer service is the service provided in support of a company's reputation and operations (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 4). One of the main objectives of any company is to provide high-quality customer service to its customers, so its importance cannot be ignored. It goes

without saying that customer service plays a crucial role in creating the competitive advantage.

Lucas (2012) defined the customer service as the ability of knowledgeable, capable and enthusiastic employees to deliver customer service to their customers in a manner that satisfies their needs and results in positive word-of-mouth publicity and return business. Lucas stated that most of the expectations of quality service that customers have create a need for well-trained and better-educated customer service representatives and those representatives need to know not only up-to-date product information but also to be familiar with current organizational policies, focuses and procedures. (Lucas 2012, p.7 & 25.)

Undoubtedly, high-quality customer service should be developed in any organization. Thus, it is important to understand that different customers have different expectations about how customer service should be provided. Quality customer service keeps customers satisfied and happy which results in bigger profits for companies.

Customer service is essential due to its influence on the whole business. According to TARP's (Technical Assistance Research Programs Inc) research which was aimed to study customer service in the public sector, 31% of customers who encountered the problem did not complain (Goodman & Newman 2003, p. 51). Also, Goodman (2009) pointed a couple of key factors why poor customer service and "silent" customers are harmful for any company (Goodman 2009, pp. 16-18):

- Most customers do not complain and noncomplaining customers hurt business.
- It results in loss in revenue.
- Bad feedback travels fast.

Customer service in the airport environment is a comprehensive phenomenon. Due to the fact that almost all customers have limited time for decision-making process and shopping, sales people compel to identify needs in a quick manner but still provide a high-quality customer service. In addition to that, there is much more bigger risk to dissatisfy customers and more importantly, never get feedback on poor customer service.

3.2 Customer service model

It goes without saying that every sales assistant should make a customer feel special. Roberts-Phelps (2001) introduced so-called "customer service model" which shows that there are two possibilities why customers want to contact customer service assistants. First of all, they need to find a solution for their problem. Secondly, customers want to feel in some way special. Based on that Robert-Phelps defined the seven most essential elements in making customers feel special (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 41-54):

- speed and time (speed with which a company or organisation can deliver customer service which indeed can help to gain a competitive advantage and allow to offer higher satisfaction)
- personal interaction with a customer (every opportunity should be identified that can help to make the customer feel unique and individual)
- expectations (a company should have an ability to manage expectations well and then systematically and consistently exceed them)
- courtesy and competence (common courtesies and manners are very important, competence means that assistants should do their best and "get things right" at the first time)
- information and keeping a customer informed (it is important to keep customers informed about things they are waiting or looking for)
- attitude and customer liaison (generally, such attitudes as positiveness, enthusiasm and help have to be applied while interacting with customers)
- long-term relationships (customer will feel special if the organisation that they have dealt with once or just a few times actually reward, recognise and encourage their loyalty at some extent).

The idea behind is to begin to implement actions based around those seven elements and make them a constant focus of attention as it helps to become unerringly more customer-focused and as a result, customers will become increasingly more loyal and profitable. (Roberts-Phelps 2001, pp. 41-54.)

3.3 Service quality: gaps model of service quality and SERVQUAL dimensions

Service quality is one of the most researched areas in services marketing. Each company has its own quality level which is defined internally in order to achieve customer satisfaction. Zeithaml, Babakus and Boller (1988,1992) stated that service quality is an important antecedent of consumer assessments of value. In turn, value assessments influences on consumer satisfaction and motivate behavioural intentions (Imrie et al. 2002, p. 10).

During the past few decades service quality has become a major area of attention to practitioners, managers and researchers owing to its strong impact on business performance, financial costs, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability (Naik, Gantasala & Prabhakar 2010, p. 241). In addition to that, recently, many studies point out the importance of culture when it comes to service quality as behavioral norms and attitudes that reflect the consumer's ideal of quality service, might be largely dependent on cultural orientation (Mattila 2015, p. 258).

Parasuraman (1985) defined that service quality can be determined by the differences between customer expectations of service provider's performance and their evaluation of the customer services they received. Service quality is a concept that has aroused considerable interest and debate in the literature because of the difficulties in both its definition and measurement with no overall consensus emerging on either. (Raval 2014, pp. 83-85.)

Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1998) developed a widely quoted measurement instrument SERVQUAL which is illustrated in Figure 4 (Fogli 2006, pp. 6-7). In addition to that, gaps model of service quality was developed which it represented below in Figure 3:
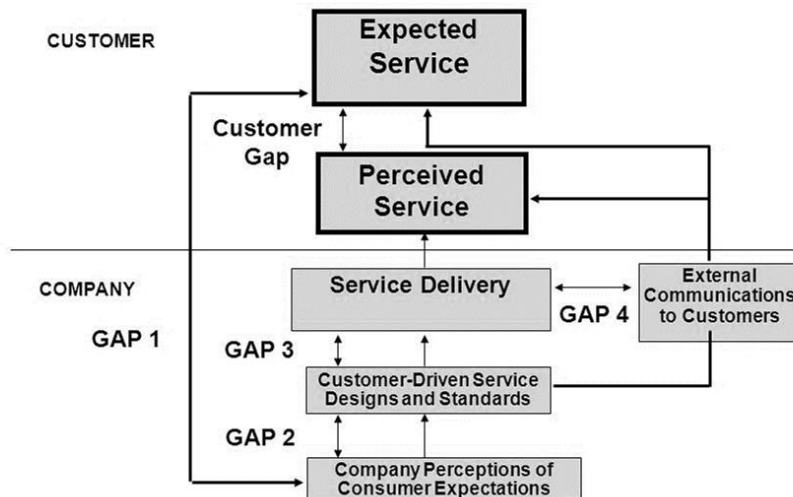
Figure 3. Gaps model of service quality (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000)

The main focus of the gaps model is the customer gap which is defined by the difference between customer expectations and perceptions. Expectation refers to what a customer has about a service experience, yet perception reflects how service was received. The main goal of a company is to close that gap between what is expected and what is received. It should be done in order to satisfy customers and build mutually beneficial relationships. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 26.)

Corresponding to customer gap, company gaps underlie causes behind that customer gap:

Gap 1 – Not knowing what a customer expects.

Gap 2 – Not selecting the right service design and standards.

Gap 3 – Not delivering the service standards.

Gap 4 – Not matching performance promises.

It is a well-known fact that a primary cause for not meeting customer expectations is that there is a lack of accurate understanding of what exactly a customer wants (gap 1) (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 26). It is important to be mentioned that even if a company does have a clear understanding of its customers' expectations it might happen that those expectations are more likely to be perceived differently.

As it was mentioned earlier, customers who are representative of different cultures expect, perceive and evaluate customer service differently (gap 2).

While analysing potential causes for gap 3, it is critical to ensure that service delivery matches to service designs and standards, which means that there are right processes created and right people are hired to enhance that match. Final gap occurs when what is promised was delivered. In order to close this gap, communication should be established with customers to ensure that promises were or will be kept. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 27.)

To sum up everything mentioned above, gaps model shows the importance of understanding customers' expectations and a company's ability to meet those expectations by offering a high-quality customer service. In addition to that, gaps model focuses on strategies and processes that companies should employ to drive service excellence. To do so, company gaps should be researched and eliminated first.

Bittner and Hubbert (1994) defined service quality as consumers' overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services. There is no doubt that there is a direct link between service quality and expectations of a customer. When a customer begins a customer service relationship with a company, he or she already has certain expectations. Generally, those expectations are connected with such issues as response time, courtesy, empathy and reliability. In case of mismatching customer's expectations with mentioned before characteristics, customer is more likely to judge the customer service as poor and its likely to feel dissatisfied. (Fogli 2006, p. 6.)

Schneider, Holcombe and White (1997) defined that basically, any model of measurement of customer perceptions of service quality focuses on meeting customers' expectations. Usually, in that kind of model, service quality is defined as the difference between customers' expectations of what should happen in a service interaction and their perceptions of what actually happens. (Fogli 2006, p. 6.) It is important to understand that expectations are based on many factors such as e.g. previous customer relationship experience, personal factors or cultural background.

Consumer perception of service quality is a complex process. Perhaps, one of the most popular models for measuring service quality is called SERVQUAL which was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998). SERVQUAL model is based on the perception gap between the received service quality and the expected service quality and was widely adopted for explaining consumer perception of service quality. Originally ten dimensions of service quality were proposed (reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding the consumer, and tangibles). However, later those ten were reduced to five (reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances and tangibles) which are presented in Figure 4. (Ravichandan, Tamil, Arun & Prabhakaran 2010, p. 118.):
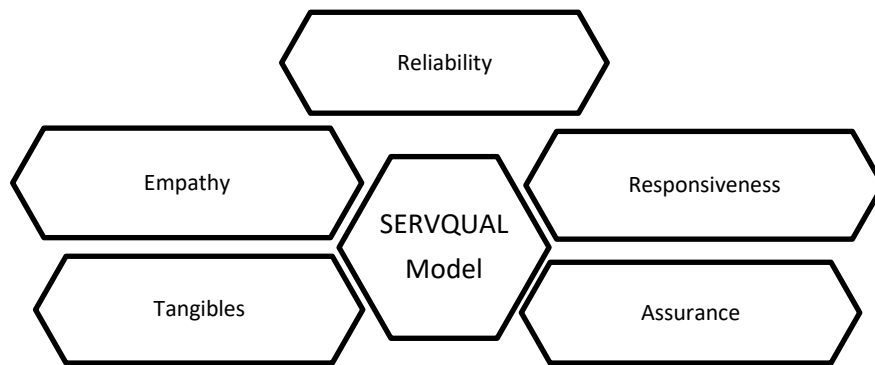
Figure 4. SERVQUAL dimensions (modified according to Fogli 2006)

Next there are explanations presented of each dimension of SERVQUAL model (Fogli 2006, p. 7):

- Reliability is an ability of the organization to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Customers consistently rate reliability as more important than other dimensions. The example could be e.g. an accurately and appropriately made payment transaction.
- Responsiveness is the organizations' willingness to help customers and provide prompt customer service. Example includes customer's waiting time.

- Assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of the employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence in the customers. Examples include greeting and thanking customers or level of expertise about a certain product. Thus, this dimension is rated as less important than reliability, assurance is usually related to higher levels of customer commitment.

- Empathy is caring and individualized attention the employees provide to customers. Example includes acknowledging customers' needs. As well as assurance, empathy is linked to higher levels of customer commitment.

- Tangibles is related to physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel. Examples include cleanliness of the shop. Surprisingly, this dimension is rated as less important than the other dimensions.

4 Customer satisfaction

This chapter is dedicated to customer satisfaction, particularly to customer expectations and perceptions. First of all, the definitions of customer satisfaction are presented from different prospective. Next, chapter 4.1 is focused on how customers perceive customer service, how they assess whether they have experienced quality service and whether they are satisfied. In chapter 4.2 information about various levels of customer expectations is presented.

Oliver (1997) defined customer satisfaction as consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgement whether a product or service provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilments. In other words, according to Zeithaml and Bitner (2000), customer satisfaction is the customers' evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met their needs and expectations. Failure to meet needs and expectations is assumed to result in dissatisfaction with the product or service. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 75.)

Good customer satisfaction has an effect on the profitability of every business. For instance, when customers perceive good service, each will typically tell nine to ten people about his/her positive experience. The University of Michigan found that for every percentage increase in customer satisfaction, there is an average increase of 2.37% of return on investment. (Naik et al. 2010, p. 242.)

Kotler (2000) defined satisfaction as a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations. Besides that, those feelings might refer to customer service performance as well. Hokanson (1995) determined factor which influence on customer satisfaction (Haaften n.d.):

- friendly employees
- courteous employees
- knowledgeable employees
- helpful employees
- accuracy of billing
- billing timeliness
- competitive pricing
- service quality
- good value
- billing clarity
- quick service.

Certainly, list of aspects which influence on customer satisfaction is not limited by above mentioned factors. The focus of this study is to show the influence of good customer service and service quality on customer satisfaction. The list created by Haaften determines important milestones of customer service and service quality which help to build great customer satisfaction.

4.1 Customer perceptions

It goes without saying that expectations are dynamic and depend on customers' personality and cultural background. Due to dynamic nature of expectations, it is crucial to understand that what is considered as quality service today might be different tomorrow. Customers perceive customer service in terms of its quality and how satisfied they are in general with their experiences. Nowadays, companies recognize that they can compete more effectively by distinguishing themselves with respect to service quality and improved customer satisfaction. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 74.)

Indeed, it is important to understand the differences between two main concepts: quality and satisfaction as they are fundamentally different in terms of their underlying causes and outcomes. Certainly, those two concepts have common things. However, satisfaction is generally viewed as a broader concept while service quality focuses specifically on dimensions of customer service. Based on that, it can be stated that service quality is a component of customer satisfaction. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p74.) In order to graphically illustrate the differences, the following Figure 5 is presented:
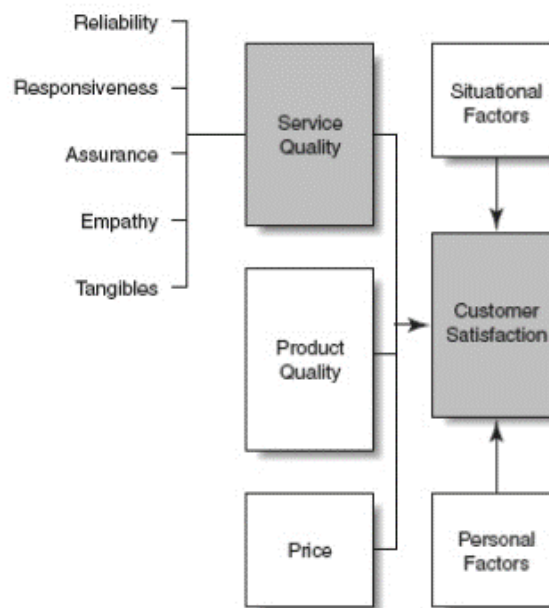
Figure 5. Customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000)

As shown in Figure 5, service quality is a summarized evaluation of perception of specific dimensions of customer service: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. The detailed explanation of service quality dimensions can be found in chapter 3.3. Correspondingly, satisfaction is more comprehensive as it is influenced by customers' perceptions of service quality as well as product quality, price, situational and personal factors.

4.2 Customer expectations

Customer expectations are beliefs about customer service delivery that function as standards or reference point against which performance is judged. Due to the

fact that customers compare their perceptions of quality customer service with these reference points when evaluating that customer service, knowledge about customer's service expectations is critical for any organization. Certainly, that knowledge about what customers expect is the first and the most major steps in providing quality customer service and improving customer satisfaction. It is crucial "not to be wrong" at that first step and provide exactly what customers want. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, pp. 48-49.)

Despite the importance of managing customer expectations, many previous investigations have examined the effect of customer expectations on customer service satisfaction. As it was mentioned, managing customer expectations is essential to achieve customer satisfaction. High-quality customer service which meets customer expectations, provides competitive advantage and increases market competency. (Hsieh, Yuan, & Liu 2012, pp. 698-699.)

Fundamentally, there are two levels of expectations. A dual-level model of customer expectations provides the optimal method for characterizing customer expectations (Hsieh et al. 2012, p. 699). The first level can be termed as desired service and defined as the level of service the customer hopes to receive. In other words, it can be called as the "wished for" level of performance. Desired expectations are those ones, which customers believe "can be" and "should be". (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 50.)

Correspondingly, another type of expectations, which are lower by their nature, are called adequate service expectations. Adequate service is the level of service which customers accept and represents the "minimum tolerable expectation". The bottom level of performance of adequate service is acceptable by customers and reflects the level of service customers believe they will get on the basis of their previous experiences. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 50.)

Figure 6 represents those two expectation levels as the upper and lower boundaries of the expectations. This model illustrates the idea that customers assess customer service performance on the basis of two standards: what they desire and what they deem acceptable (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 50-51).

Desired Service

Adequate Service

Figure 6. Dual customer expectation levels (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000)

In other words, dual customer expectation model displays minimum tolerable and ideal levels. Adequate level is the minimum tolerable expectation or the bottom level of performance acceptable to the customer. Correspondingly, the highest level of customer expectations is called desired level, which is the level of customer service that a customer hopes to receive. Thus, desired customer service is a blend of what the customer believes can be and should be offered and provided. (Rishardh 2015.)

However, there is a so called zone of tolerance presented in Figure 7, which is defined as the extent to which customers recognize and are willing to accept variation between desired and adequate service levels. In other words, zone of tolerance is the assumption that customers recognize and are willing to accept as a degree of level of heterogeneity in service quality (Dean 2004, p. 62). Dual-levels model explains that if customer service drops below adequate service which is the minimum level considered to be acceptable by customers, they probably will be frustrated and dissatisfied with that customer service. Correspondingly, if service performance is outside the zone of tolerance at the top end where customer service performance exceeds desired service expectations, customers will be extremely pleased and satisfied. In fact, customers' service expectations are characterized by a range of levels, bounded by desired and adequate customer service, rather than a single level. That zone of tolerance represents the differences between those two levels of expectations. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, pp. 51-53.) In addition to that it should be mentioned that due to the dynamic nature of expectations, levels might change from time to time. Moreover, different customers define the zone of tolerance differently for themselves. There are many issues and aspects which "shape" that tolerance zone and cultural factors

and customers' cultural background play a significant role in that formation as well.

Figure 7. The zone of tolerance (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000)

As it was mentioned, the zone of tolerance might vary depending on a customer's perceptions and expectations. Apparently, the zone of tolerance is characterized by tolerance bands which represents the differences between desired customer service and the level of service which is considered to be minimally acceptable. Thus, those tolerance bands vary in sizes depending on different customers, they also are changing over time by expanding, contracting or moving up or down based on expectational changes. (Kettinger & Lee 2005, p. 616.)

Due to the fact that expectations play an important role in customer evaluation of customer service, there is a need to understand which factors affect on shape of those expectations. Davidow and Uttal (1989) defined that those customer service expectations are formed by many uncontrollable factors, from the experience of customers with other companies to a customer's psychological state at the time of customer service delivery (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, p. 55). Figure 8 summarizes all factors which affect both desired service expectations and adequate service expectations:
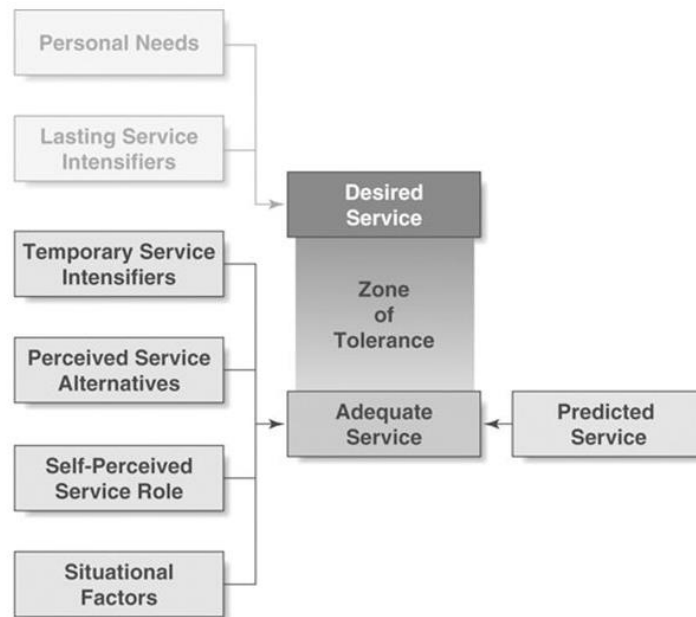
Figure 8. Factors that influence on desired and adequate service expectations (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000)

First, there are two influencers on desired service expectations, which are personal needs and lasting service intensifiers. So, personal needs, those states or conditions essential to the physical or psychological well-being of the customer, are preliminary factors that shape that level of expectations. Next, there are service intensifiers which are individual, stable factors that lead the customer to an increased sensitivity to customer service. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, pp. 55-56.)

Next, there are factors which affect adequate level of service expectations. They are temporary service intensifiers, perceived service alternatives, self-perceived service role and situational factors. The first set of elements, called temporary service intensifiers, are usually short-term, individual factors that make a customer more aware of the need for service. The second factor is perceived service alternatives which are other companies which can provide the similar customer service. If customer is familiar with the other alternatives, his/her adequate level of service expectations will be higher than of those customers who believe that it is not possible to get better customer service elsewhere. A third factor affecting the level of adequate service is the customer's self-perceived service role. Sometimes customers' expectations are partly shaped by customers' opinions about how well those customers themselves can perform the same customer service.

The fourth influencer is situational factors which can be defined as service performance conditions that customers view as beyond the control of the customer service provider. In addition to that, the level of predicted service also influences on adequate expectations. Predicted service is the level of customer service customers believe they are likely to get. (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, pp. 55-60.)

Basically, Figure 8 represents a model which provides a complex framework of service expectations and their protentional influencers. Parasuraman (1993) stated that this model offered precise foundation for measuring customer expectations. In addition to that, model clarified the differences between two levels of customer expectations and their antecedents. (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1993, p. 10.)

Measuring of customer satisfaction is the area of interest for researchers and managers. Moreover, there were debates about whether or not customer expectations should be monitored and measured (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1994, p. 201). As a concluding point, it can be stated that nowadays, service providers can fulfill customer expectations and achieve customer satisfaction only if they deliver customer services in a manner that considers the determinants of customer expectations (Hsieh et al. 2012, p. 700).

5   Research methodology

The objective of this chapter is to explain research methodology in details. First of all, the discussion of applied criteria is presented which was used by the author during the whole research process. Secondly, research method and sampling process is discussed in chapter 5.2. In chapter 5.3 the process of data gathering is explained. The information about how questionnaire was built can be found in chapter 5.4.

Figure 9 represents the research design which can be defined as detailed outline of how a research investigation was done (Business Dictionary n.d.). This figure clearly represents the research process and its stages:
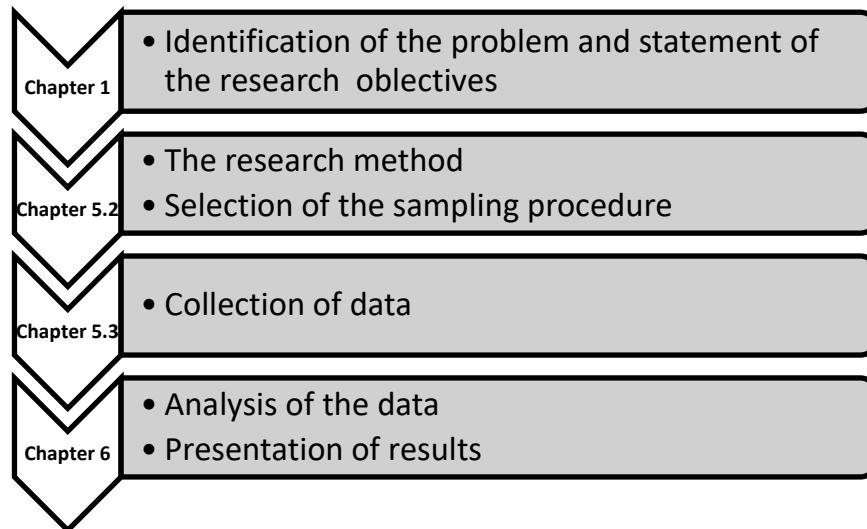
Figure 9. Research process (modified according to McDaniel & Gates 2013)

5.1 Criteria for an effective customer service research

Before starting collecting empirical evidence, it was important for the author to plan the process of gathering the empirical data carefully and conduct customer expectations and evaluate survey efficiently and with desired outcomes. To do so, the model created by Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) was used, which is presented in Figure 10:

Figure 10. Criteria for an effective research (Zeithaml & Bitner 2000)

Starting from research methods, the main research approach was quantitative, and qualitative approach was not applied in this research. Next, the author included both perceptions and expectations of the customers into research. In addition to that, customers' behavioral intentions were discussed to create a general picture about selected case cultures and their representatives. Corresponding to financial costs, its consideration was excluded from planning process due to the fact that only such resources as author's academic and practical skills and supervisor's guideline were involved. Next, the importance of statistical validity was considered while conducting research because the case concepts and theories are extremely extensive topics and it was crucial not to lose a focus while gathering empirical data. As for measuring priorities/importance, the author defined beforehand that customer feelings and expectations about customer service should be measured and studied and there were no other priorities. Next, as it was mentioned before, since customer expectations and perceptions are dynamic and complicated, the study of only them was not enough and it seemed to be reasonable to include the study of cultural theory together with some other supplementary studies.

5.2 Research method and sampling

As it was mentioned previously in chapter 1.4, the quantitative approach was selected as a research method. Quantitative method specifies on generating numerical data which is transformed into usable statistics. In addition to that, this approach is used to quantify attitudes, opinions or behaviours to generalize results from a larger sample population. (DeFranzo, 2011.) The reason for choosing numerical approach is the process of analysing the empirical data. Due to the fact that the survey questions were designed by using measurement scales, the analysis of the filled questionnaires was done by using the tools of SPSS data editor.

In order to conduct a research successfully, it was crucial to select a sample carefully to avoid bias while acquiring empirical data. Undoubtedly, incorrectly selected sample representatives might provide wrong data and as a result the research failure, incompetence and inefficiency.

Sampling is a process which is used in statistical analysis in order to create a sample. Correspondingly, sample itself is the portion of the population selected for analysis. As it was mentioned in the beginning, there were certain criteria applied for sample selection already before an actual sampling process was done. First of all, the amount of customers from a certain cultural group who visit company shops should be high enough to make possible generalization and comparison. In other words, those cultural groups were selected whose number of representatives represents the highest group of those customers who visit the shops. In addition to that, those selected cultural groups represent likely the highest percentage of daily customers.

Next, the Hofstede's cultural theory and 4-D model cannot be applied to all cultures. Corresponding to that, the second criteria was that the selected cultures must be studied by Hofstede and included in IMC study or added separately later.

Due to the fact that the researcher planned to gain empirical data not only by conducting a standard survey by using fixed questions but also by trying to create a small conversation with each survey participant in order to get essential details, which might be missed by just answering those fixed questions, it was important that communication between the researcher and research participants was efficient. To do so, the third criteria was defined as an ability of survey participants to understand and speak English effortlessly.

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┌─────────────────────┐
│   Define target     │
│    population       │
└─────────────────────┘
          ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│   Develop a frame   │
└─────────────────────┘
          ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│ Select sample design│
└─────────────────────┘
          ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│ Determine appropriate│
│    sample size      │
└─────────────────────┘
          ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│ Select appropriate  │
│   sample members    │
└─────────────────────┘
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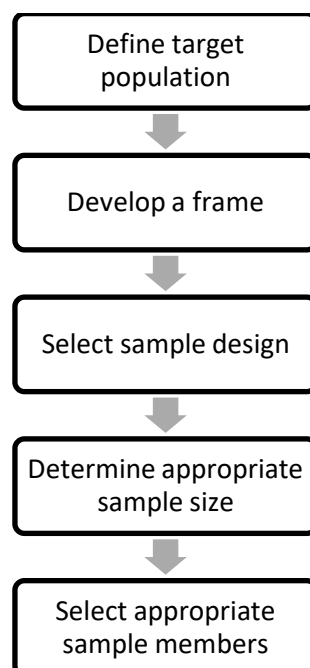
Figure 11. Steps in developing a sample (Proctol 2005)

Figure 11 illustrates a basic sampling process which was used for this research as well. At first step, target population was defined, which was all customers from selected cultural groups (Finnish, Russians, Japanese, British and Americans) who visited FineFood shops at the time of survey conduction. Next, due to the fact that there was no chance for the author to create a sampling frame, the decision was made to use a filter question to determine those customers who are representatives of selected cultural groups. Filter question was defined by asking customers their nationality and if customers were qualified, they were offered to fill a questionnaire form.

The third step explains the choice of sampling method. Based on criteria, non-probability method called stratified random sampling was applied. The idea of this sampling method is that sample itself is designed to give fair representation to the various layers or sub-groups within a population (Morris 2003, p. 49). Sub-groups were defined as case cultures which are Finnish, Russian, American, British and Japanese cultures. Likewise, this method was applied as there was a possibility to distinct stratum in the population. Based on that, representatives from each strata or sub-group were in the sample: population was divided into strata and a random people were selected from each stratum. (Waters 2001, p. 73.) This method is the best way to guarantee an exact proportionate representation of the population. In addition to that, stratified random sampling method helps to achieve representation with a smaller number (Nardi 2014, pp. 121-122, p. 128).

The last two steps helped to define the sample size and its members. Corresponding to size, the decision was made to collect minimum 30 filled questionnaires from each case cultural groups which defined the total sampling as minimum 150 participants. Respectively, sample members were chosen randomly from those who made a purchase(s) at FineFood shops at the time of survey conduction.

5.3 Process of data acquiring

Knowing how much to collect was one of the problem in data-collecting process as basically, in this case especially, there was almost a limitless amount of empirical data available. An optimal amount of data collection was defined by the point in which costs became greater than benefits. (Waters 2001, p. 62.) Approximately, about two weeks was spent on the process of conduction of survey. After that time, it started being a challenge for a researcher to proceed with data-collection process as the conduction of questionnaire interviews was affected by time limitation. Corresponding to observations as a method of acquiring data, they were carried out for a longer time and started a couple of months in advance before questionnaire forms were collected. Therefore, the following amount of survey forms were collected from each cultural group:

- survey forms filled by Finnish: 30
- survey forms filled by Russians: 35
- survey forms filled by British: 31
- survey forms filled by Americans: 31
- survey forms filled by Japanese: 32.

A total amount of filled questionnaire forms equalled to 159.

5.4 Questionnaire design and observations

Undoubtedly, questionnaires are the most common data-gathering method. Nonetheless, a key element in the achievement of reliable and valid information in research is the construction of well-designed and manageable questionnaires (Nardi 2014, p. 71). The quality of information from questionnaire depends critically on how careful questions were designed. Rankings are immensely useful, practically in situations that would have too many dimensions to measure individually. In addition to that Morris (2003) suggested that it is essential to provide codified responses as far as possible. (Morris 2003, pp. 44-52).

Self-administrated questionnaire type was chosen for the process of acquiring empirical data. This type of questionnaires is the best designed for measuring of variables with numerous values or response categories that are too much to read.

Moreover, the anonymity of self-administrated questionnaires let respondents to be more candid and honest. (Nardi 2012, p. 72.)

The questionnaire for this research was built by using questions and statements. The first eight questions were aimed to define how representatives of selected stratum evaluate customer service and its attributes by using a scale from 1 to 4 where 1 was considered as poor, 2 as fair, 3 as good and 4 as excellent. The next six statements were formed in order to identify the extent of agreement or disagreement of research participants with statements related to cultural issues and customer service. Customers were asked to evaluate statements by using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was considered as strongly disagree, 2 as disagree, 3 as neutral, 4 as agree and 5 as strongly agree. The whole version of question-naire form in English can be found in Appendix 1.

As it was mentioned, another method of collecting empirical data which was used in this research is called observation, which is a direct data gathering process. Personal observation approach was used as it is one of the methods which is aimed to collect data by personal involvement of researcher. Undoubtedly, the only reliable way to get facts that are needed is a way when facts are personally collected (Morris 2003, p. 51).

Disguised observation method was used which can be defined as the process of monitoring people who do not know that they are being watched. As it was mentioned, the advantage of observational method is that the researcher is personally involved in the process. Together with that, another advantage of this method is that first-hand information is not a subject of many of the biasing factors associated with the survey approach. (McDaniel & Gates, pp. 155-156.)

6 Research results

This chapter is dedicated to empirical evidence and its analysis and presentation of results. First of all, in chapter 6.1 analysis of case cultures can be found by using Hofstede's dimensions. Next, statistical analysis of questionnaires and presentation of results are presented in chapter 6.2.

6.1 Analysis of selected cultures by using Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

As it was mentioned earlier, the study of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory was an extensive part of this research. Before presenting empirical findings, it seems to be reasonable to provide the analysis of selected cultures by using 4-D Model in order to create a general picture about each case culture. Dimensions of Hofstede's theory provide excellent variables for cross-cultural analysis. In addition to that, exploration of cultures through the lens of the 4-D Model gives a good overview of the deep drivers of those cultures. As it was stated by Mooij (2011), Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory can explain more than half of the differences in consumption and consumer behaviour (Mooij 2011, p. 55).

In order to conduct analysis, case characteristics of consumer behaviour through the lens of cultural dimensions theory and graphs are presented. It should be mentioned that the analysis was done by summarizing theoretical knowledge about selected cultures as well as the author's observation experience and practical knowledge, which were acquired while conducting a survey and working at the case company.

First, the Finnish culture was viewed. Finland scores very low on power distance dimension (PDI) (33) meaning that Finnish people accept independence in a high extent. That independence might occur not only in working and personal life but while shopping as well. This should be taken into consideration while offering customer service and approaching Finnish customers. In addition to that, people from low PDI cultures do not expect to get any special privileges.

Corresponding to individualism/collectivism (IDV) score, Finnish culture is highly individualistic (63). Individualists value their time a lot which means that they are not ready to spend a lot of time on shopping and waiting. Moreover, they set their goals (e.g. what they should buy) in advance which means that they do not expect to get an assistance while shopping.

Finnish culture scores low in the level of masculinity (MAS) (26) which means that Finnish culture is a feminine. According to Mooij (2011), in feminine cultures a large share of the family's food shopping is done by men. An interesting fact

concerns coffee. Mooij defined coffee as a symbol of togetherness and considered that people from feminine cultures drink more coffee. (Mooij 2011, pp. 315-316.) This might be a reasonable fact for sales assistants to offer coffee products to Finnish (as well as to Russian) customers.

Both Finland (59), Russia (95) and Japan (92) score high on uncertainty avoidance dimension (UAI). According to Mooij (2011), higher UAI cultures stand for valuing purity and basic products meaning that e.g. they prefer mineral water rather than tap water even if the last one has a great quality. In addition to that, Mooij (2011) found out that they prefer to eat more fresh fruits and the issue of cleanliness is more relevant for them, which means that people from uncertainty avoiding cultures expect more neat and cleaner look/appearance. Correspondingly, uncertainty accepting cultures value look more than cleanliness. Moreover, customers in uncertainty avoiding cultures tend to be hesitant toward new products and information in order to eliminate possible risks and disappointments. Also, it should be mentioned that people from uncertainty avoiding cultures are more likely to have an impulsive buying which is a buying when person has no actual intention to buy a product yet buys it. (Mooij 2011, p. 166 & 344.)
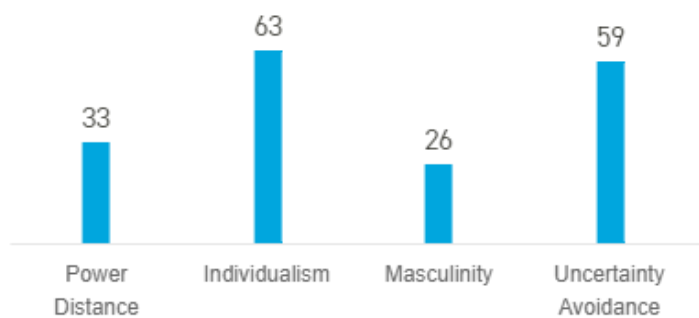
Graph 5. The 4-D model chart for Finnish culture (Hofstede Insights n.d.)

Next, the analysis of Russian culture is presented. It is clearly seen that Russia scores extremely high on PDI dimension (93). Undoubtedly, high score came from the Russian history but it still has its effect on today's cultural behavior. Due to that high score on PDI index it can be stated that the Russian people appreci-

ate guidance and pieces of advice. However, it should be mentioned that subordinary issue should not be ignored. People from high PDI cultures believe that services (customer service in particular) are the must and they have very high expectations about how customers should be treated especially if customers' income and status are high enough. It should be taken into sales people's considerations that sometimes people from high PDI cultures behave "demanding" not because of they do not respect work and service but because it comes from their expectations about high-quality customer service. In addition to that, representatives from high PDI cultures believe that skills, wealth, power and status go together hand by hand which means that as customers they might consider sales assistants' skills (e.g. expertise or knowledge about products) as poor because his/her status and income are "hidden" from them while being at work.

Russia scores very low on IDV score (39) which means that the Russian people are representatives of collectivistic society. It can be clearly seen while observing Russians' shopping as they usually do it in groups, communicate constantly while shopping and consulting to make a decision. Moreover, people from collectivistic societies expect to be able to touch, see and recognize the texture of products (Mooij 2011, p. 312). That is why it is important for shop assistants to give those customers a chance to "interact" with a product before buying.

As well as the Finnish, the Russian culture is feminine (36). Representatives of feminine cultures tend to find a resolution of conflicts by compromising and negotiations (Hofstede & Hofstede 2001, p. 147).
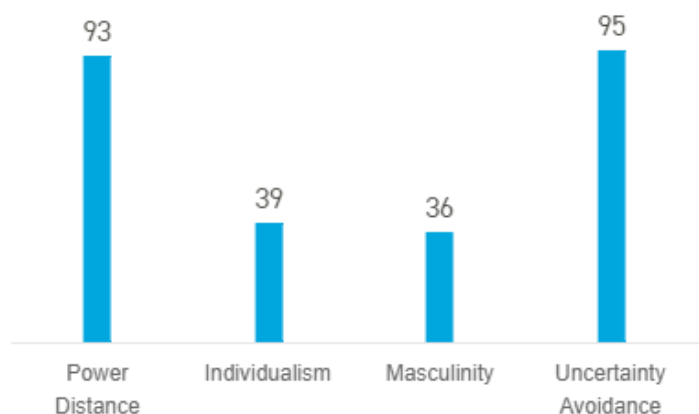
Graph 6. The 4-D model chart for Russian culture (Hofstede Insights n.d.)

Corresponding to American (40) and British (35) cultures, as well as the Finnish one, they score low on PDI dimension. Together with independent buying, people from low PDI cultures believe that everyone has equal rights and respect. Sometimes it reflects while sales assistants interact with customers as usually people from low PDI cultures highly appreciate and respect sales assistants' work and what he/she does for them in a special way.

Both American (91) and British (89) cultures are highly individualistic ones. As well as Finnish, American and British people do not spend a lot of time on shopping and have specific goals which were set in advance. In addition to that, the level of trustworthiness of people from individualistic cultures is high enough meaning that they expect that everything that was said by shop assistant is true as they believe that sales people have a certain level of expertise and professional knowledge, which is more likely to be undoubtable by customers. As for shopping itself, individualists are more likely to seek for "fun" shopping and prefer browsing rather than actual shopping with specific goals. (Mooij 2011, p. 341.) An interesting fact is the English language itself. According to a language study made by Kashima and Kashima (n.d.), languages spoken in individualistic cultures tend to require using the "I" pronoun when referring to themselves. Moreover, the English language which is native (the USA and the UK) or widely spread (Finland) is the only one that writes "I" with a capital letter. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, pp. 92-93.)

Corresponding to MAS index, both Americans (62) and British (66) are representatives of masculine cultures. As it was stated by Mooij (2011), status purchases in general are more frequent in masculine cultures (Mooij 2011). It can be stated that people from masculine cultures prefer expensive or branded products. In addition to that, they often consider foreign goods as more attractive than local products. Moreover, in masculine cultures something "big" (e.g. big box of chocolate) is beautiful and highly appreciated. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, p. 140.)

Similarly, both American (46) and British (35) cultures are uncertainty tolerated cultures. In fact, those cultures value convenience rather purity meaning that they expect to buy more ready-made products (Mooij 2011, pp. 136-137). In fact,

people from low UAI cultures feel happier. It can be clearly identified while observing British and Americans and see that that aspect is affecting on their e.g. greetings as they usually not just greet sales assistants but ask about their mood in a highly polite and happy manner.
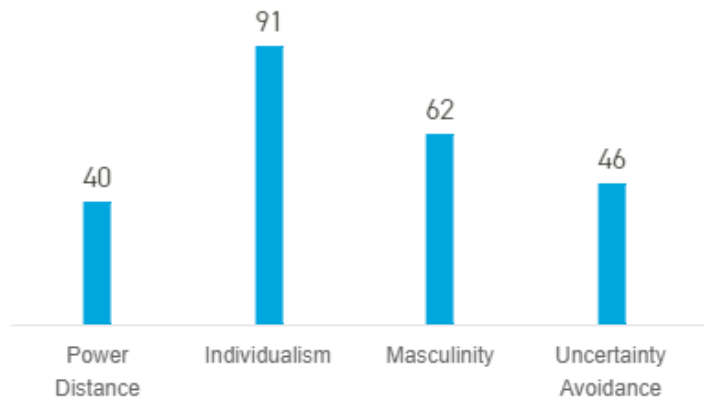
Graph 7. The 4-D model chart for American culture (Hofstede Insights n.d.)
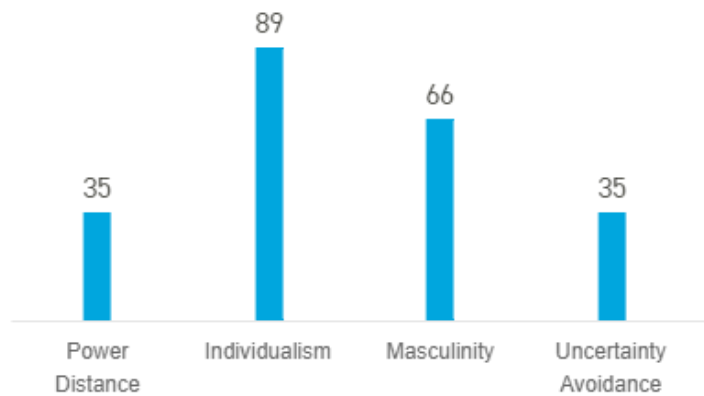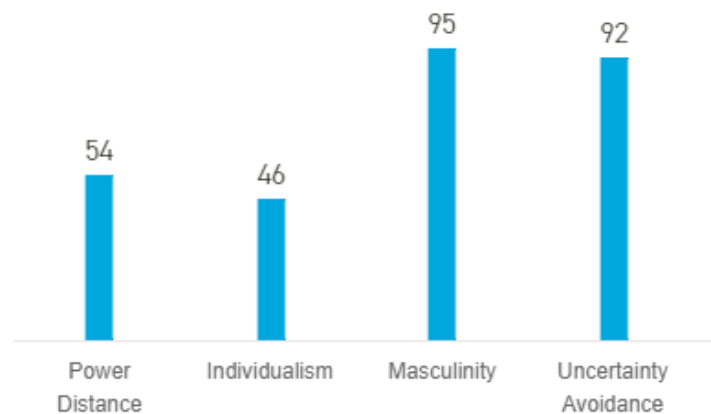

Graph 8. The 4-D model chart for British culture (Hofstede Insights n.d.)

At an intermediate score of 54 on PDI dimension, Japan is a borderline culture. Despite the fact that Japan does not score as high as other Asian cultures on PDI index, its culture still represents more characteristics of high PDI culture, meaning that Japanese customers look for a guidance and accept help and pieces of advice from sales assistants.

Corresponding to IDV score, Japanese people are representatives of collectivistic culture (46). As well as Russian customers, they prefer "collectivistic shopping" to be able to ask for advice from close people. In addition to that, due to the

collectivistic structure of society, both Japanese and Russians usually have joint/extended families which makes their purchases more "extensive". In fact, as people from high PDI cultures, Japanese and Russians expect to get guidance, so it is important for sales assistants to recognize that and consider offering products/items for the whole family even if there is actually only one person who buys. In collectivistic cultures an important shopping distinction is between public and private consumption goods. For members of collectivistic and high power distance cultures where people are status conscious, for public consumption goods and particularly for gifts, social norms are more important than price. Spending money as such can be a social value, demonstrating allegiance to friends and family. (Mooij 2011, p. 341.)

Next, Japan represents the highest score on MAS dimension (95). From the observation it could be clearly seen that Japanese men are decision-makers while shopping as the last word is always on them. In addition to that, they expect that sales assistants communicate more with a male customer rather than with female one.

Graph 9. The 4-D model chart for Japanese culture (Hofstede Insights n.d.)

6.2 Analysis of empirical data by using SPSS data editor and presentation of outcomes

In this chapter, the main research findings are presented. The statistical analysis was done by using SPSS data editor which is a software for editing and analyzing all sorts of data. SPSS means "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" and

was first launched in 1968. (SPSS tutorials n.d.). Data is presented in forms of graphs which were produced by means of SPSS's tools such as statistical testing, crosstabulation analysis and frequencies.

Firstly, Graph 10 illustrates background information about research participants. In total, 159 survey forms were collected from which 30 were filled by Finnish customers, 31 by British, 31 by Americans, 32 by Japanese and 35 by Russians. The percentage of case cultures' representatives from total amount of participants can be seen from the graph. As it was mentioned earlier, personal characteristics of research participants, such as age or gender, were not acquired as an empirical data for this research.
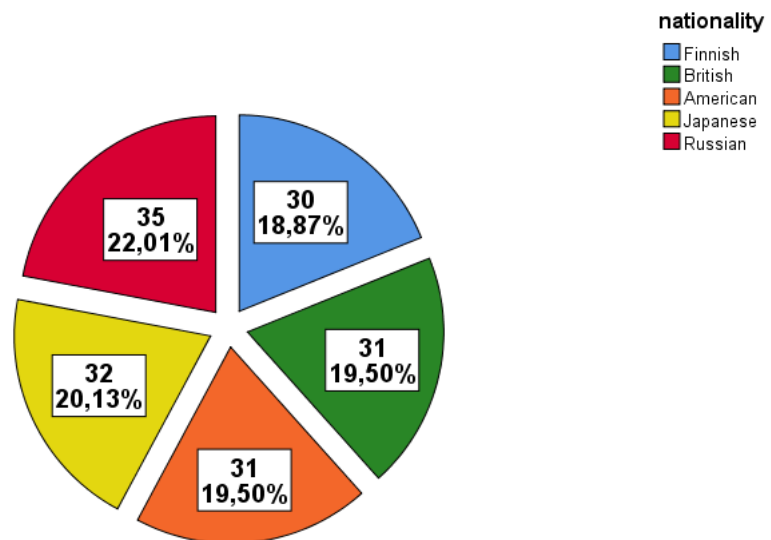
Graph 10. About respondents

Next, there are graphs presented which illustrate numerical and percentage relationships between respondents, their nationalities and their given evaluations and answers on each statement and question from questionnaire. The rest of research results is presented by using different forms of bar charts. According to Morris (2003), bar charts are self-explanatory with a couple of point which are worth mentioning. Morris also defined that the strength of the bar chart lies not so much in its simplicity but in ability to illustrate more complex classifications of the data such as combination of several variables. (Morris 2003, pp. 77-78.) In addition to that, each question and statement from the questionnaire was tested by using Chi-Square test in order to examine if two variables, one of which is

named "nationality" and stays unchanged in all tests, are independent or dependent on each other.
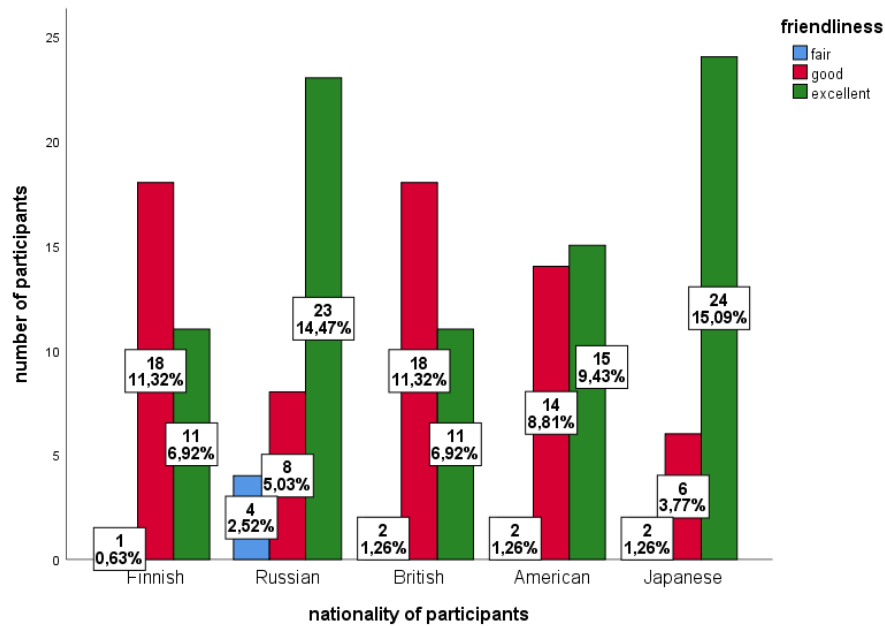
Graph 11. Rating of friendliness of sales assistants

Graph 11 illustrates answers on the second question from the questionnaire where respondents were asked to rate the friendliness of sales assistant(s). As it can be seen, there is no significant difference in ratings of people from different cultures. However, according to Graph 11, Russians and Japanese see sales assistants friendlier rather than representatives of Finnish, American or British cultures. According to Chi-Square test, variables named "nationality" and "friendliness of sales assistant" are dependent on each other which means that customer's nationality affects on his/her answer on question about friendliness.
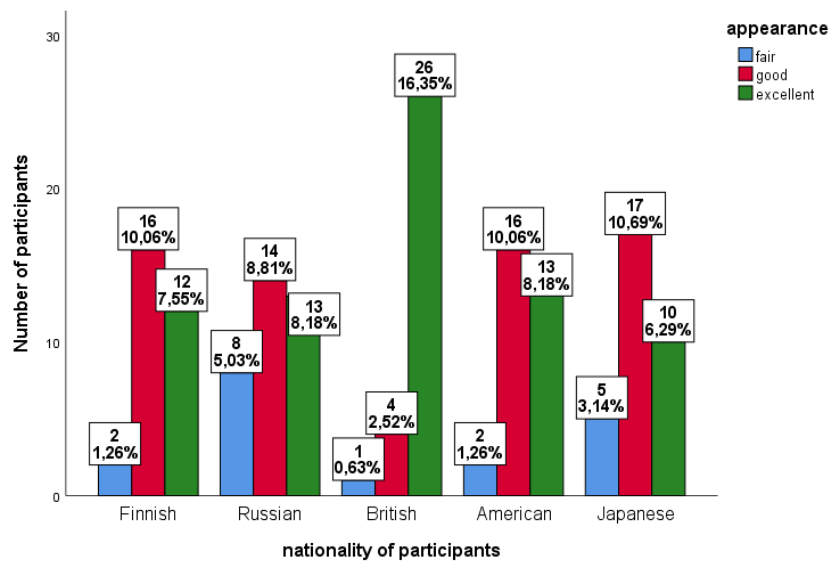
Graph 12. Rating of professional look of sales assistants

Graph 12 represents respondents' evaluation of how neat and clean sales assistants' work look is as well as their professional appearance. As it was mentioned in chapter 6.1, representatives of uncertainty avoiding cultures such as Finns, Russians and Japanese value cleanliness more than look, which is opposite to uncertainty accepting cultures which are Americans and British who pay attention to overall look rather than cleanliness. Question 3 does not clarify what had to be rated: cleanliness of uniforms in particular or professional looks of sales representatives, which is why gained results do not clearly distinguish respondents' answers from different cultures. Chi-Square test shows that variables "nationality" and "professional appearance" of sales assistant are dependent on each other.
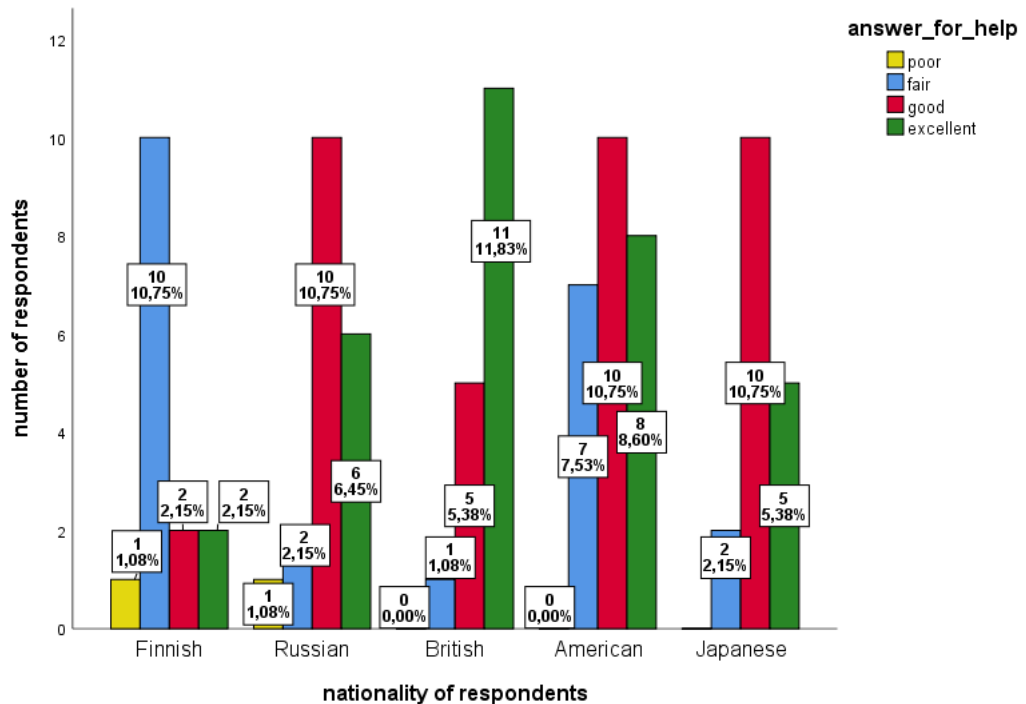
Graph 13. Rating of sales assistants' answers on help request

Graph 13 demonstrates evaluation of sales assistant(s)' answers on request for help. In should be mentioned that number of missing answers is 66 as not all customers asked for a help or advice while shopping. As Graph 13 shows, Americans and British people give more "excellent" answers on that question. This fact can be explained by ability of sales assistants communicate in English fluently with native speakers, as, according to comments given by research participant

from Russia or Japan, they were not able to adequately evaluate the sales person's answer on request for help due to difficulty of understanding in English. Chi-Square test results shows that there is a correlation between variables "nationality" and "answer for help".
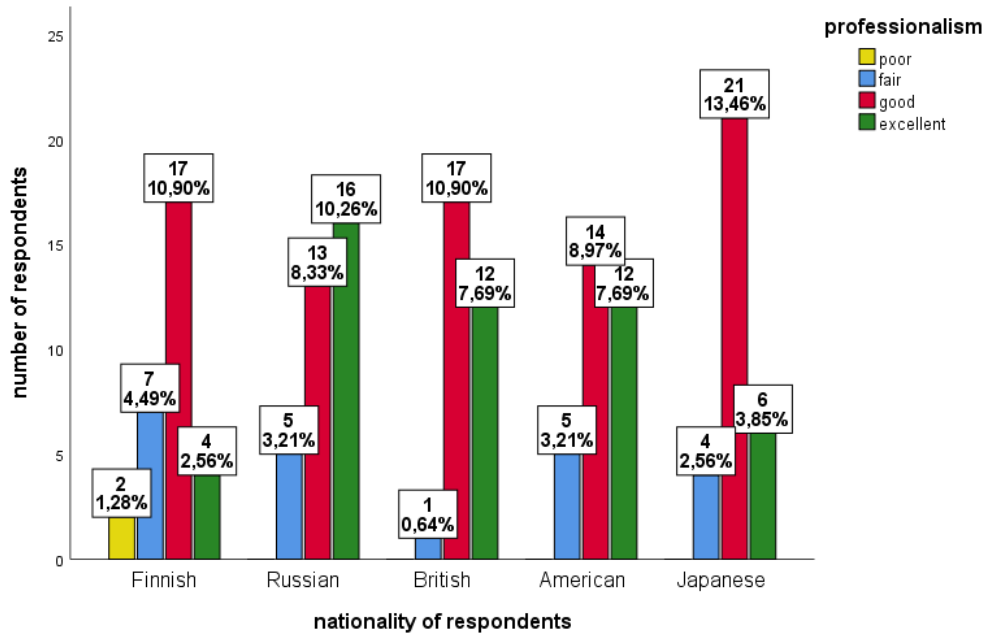
Graph 14. Rating of professionalism of sales assistants

Next, respondents were asked to evaluate the professionalism of sales representatives. Graph 14 displays that the results are positive enough from all cultural groups. However, as it was stated in chapter 6.1, people from individualistic cultures, such as Finnish, American and British cultures, have a special attitude towards the issue of trustworthiness, as people from those cultures believe that something that was said by sales assistant is an absolute truth as he/she has an expertise knowledge on a subject. According to Chi-Square, variables named "nationality" and "professionalism" are depended on each other.
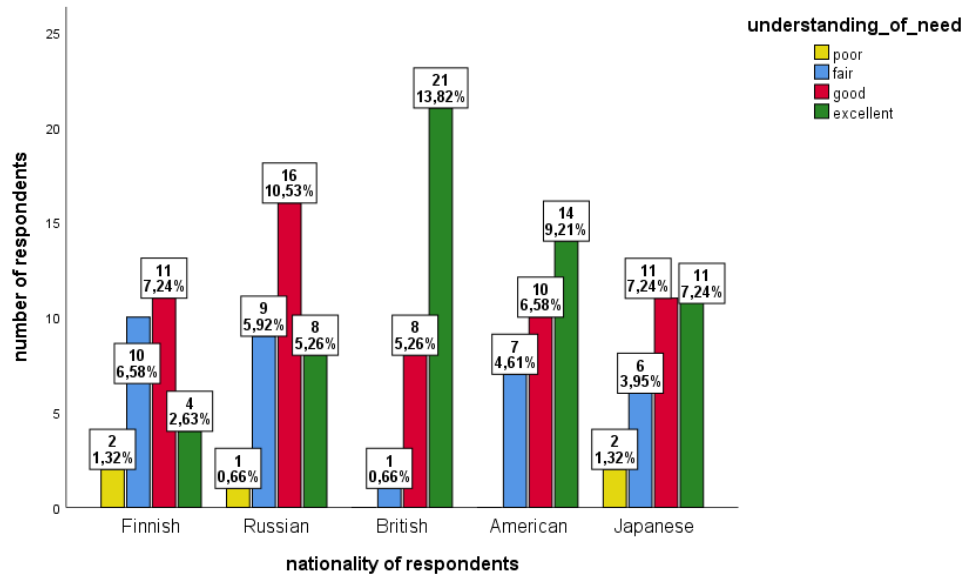
Graph 15. Rating of understanding of customers' needs

Graph 15 presents customers' evaluations points of how well their needs or wishes were understood. British and Americans give the best ratings which in total gives around 24% of "excellent" marks from all responds on this question. However, it should be mentioned that similarly to question 4, respondents from Finland, Russia and Japan commented that their needs might not be understood as well as they could be because of language difficulties. The significance in Chi-square test shows that variables "nationality" and "understanding of need" are dependent on each other which means that customers' nationality has an effect on answering question 6.
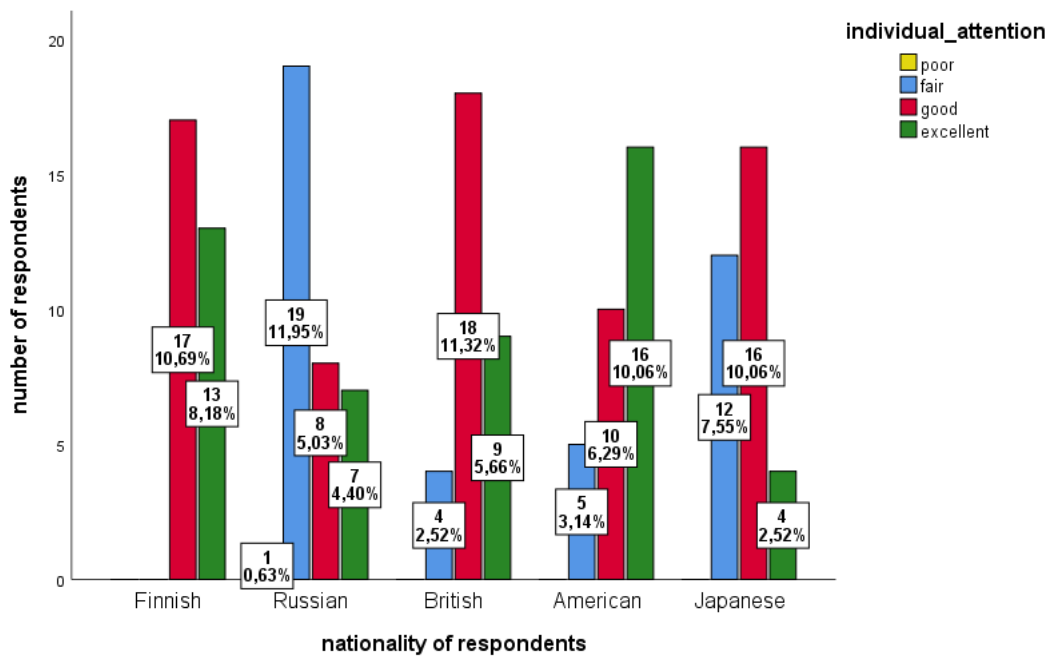
Graph 16. Rating of individual attention from sales assistants

Question 7 was aimed to understand how customers from different cultures evaluate attention given to them by sales assistants. As it was stated in chapter 6.1, people who are representatives of high power distance cultures, such as Russians and Japanese, expect to get better and more personal attention as in those cultures customer is seen as a "king". The explanation can be done based on that fact that graph 16 shows that Russians and Japanese answered that question 7 by giving "worse" evaluations rather than representatives of low power distance cultures. Statistical testing shows that variables named "nationality" and "individual attention" are depended on each other.

The last evaluation question was about general rating of customer service at FineFood shops and graph 17 illustrates collected results:
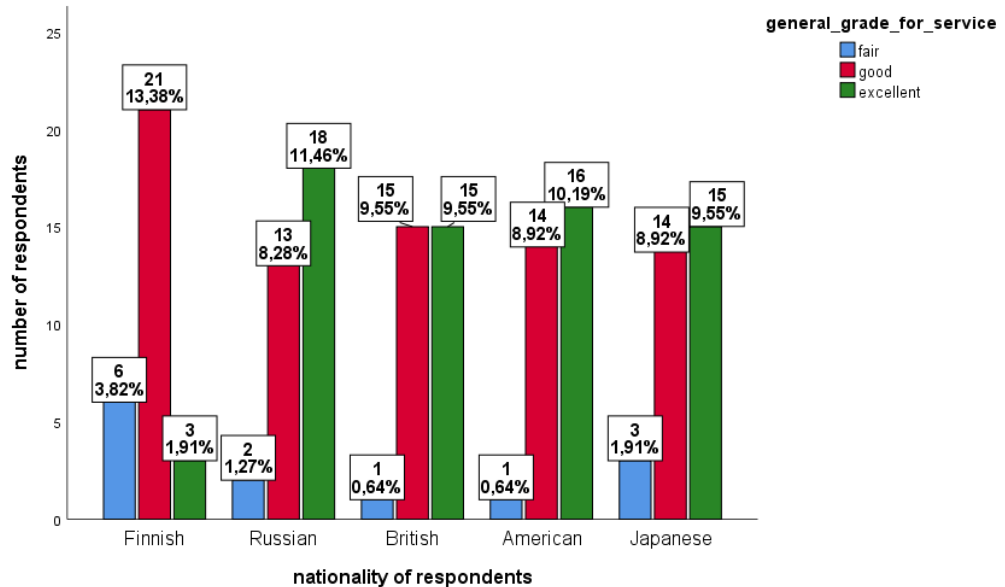
Graph 17. Rating of customer service at FineFood shops

From the graph it can be clearly seen that evaluations from all cultures are extremely positive. It should be mentioned as well that "poor" rating is totally absent from acquired survey forms. According to Chi-square test, there is a correlation between participants' cultural orientation and their evaluations given on question 8.

Next, there are graphs which present the level of customers' agreement or disagreement with given statements.
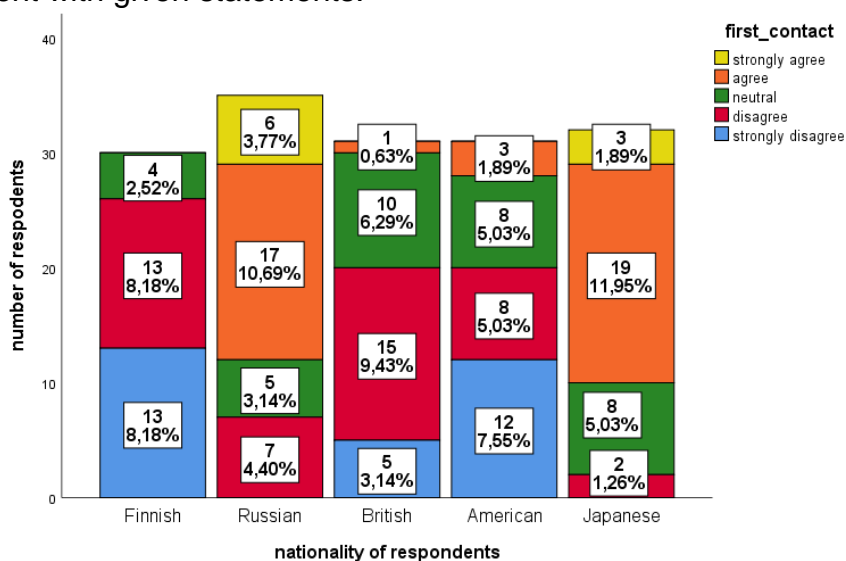
Graph 18. Rating of offering help

Stacked graph 18 represents respondents' opinions about who should contact whom first: sales assistant of a customer or vice versa. As it was mentioned in chapter 6.1, representatives from cultures which score high on power distance dimension, such as Russian and Japanese cultures, are typically looking for guidance from shop assistants. Correspondingly, respondents from Russia and Japan have bigger extent of agreement with statement 9. In contrast, representatives of low power distance cultures, such as Finland, American and British cultures, score this statement with bigger disagreement. Statistical testing showed that there is a dependency between customers' cultural orientation and the extent to which he/she agrees or disagrees with statement 9.

Next graph 19 is dedicated to the statement which measures whether customer service offered in FineFood shops meets customers' expectations about high-quality service provider.
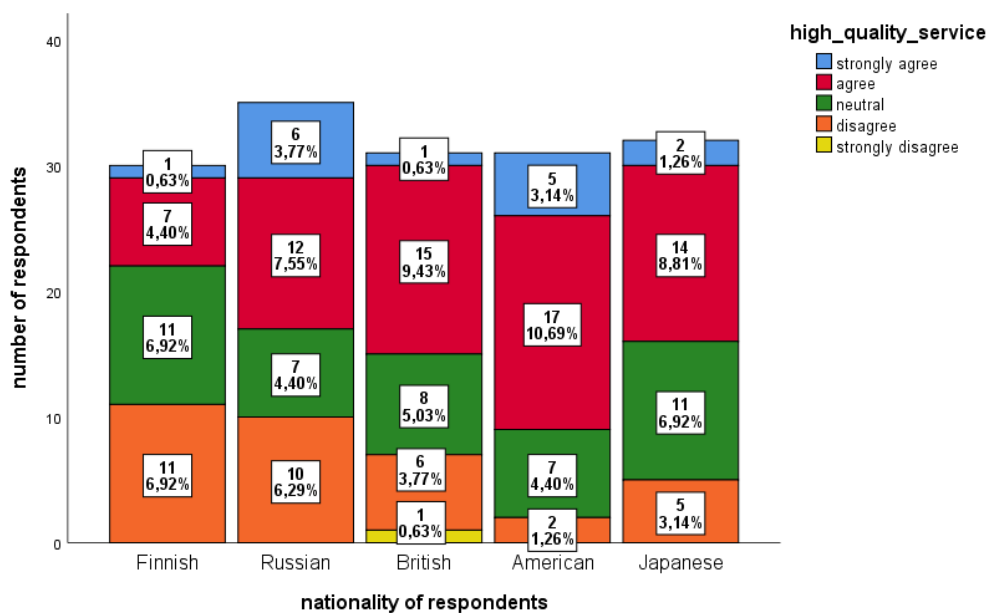
Graph 19. Rating of expectations about FineFood shops as a high-quality service provider

According to Chi-Square test, variables named "culture" and "high-quality service" are not depended on each other. It means that respondents' nationality does not affect on how he/she evaluated statement 10.

Without doubt, it should be mentioned that results are positive from all representatives of selected cultures. However, it is important to understand that by showing the level of agreement/disagreement concerning this statement, some customers

compared their best customer service experience with that customer service they were offered at FineFood shops. To prove that point, comparison of answers on question 8 and statement 10 can be done. First, Graph 19 displays that only one Finnish customer, six Russians, one British, five Americans and two Japanese strongly agree with the statement that customer service at FineFood shops meet their overall expectations about high-quality service provider. However, graph 17 shows that 3 Finnish customers, 18 Russian, 15 British, 16 Americans and 15 Japanese evaluate customer service at FineFood shops as "excellent".

Next it was important to measure whether people agree with the fact that their cultural backgrounds affect the way they evaluate customer service. Graph 20 represents the following results:
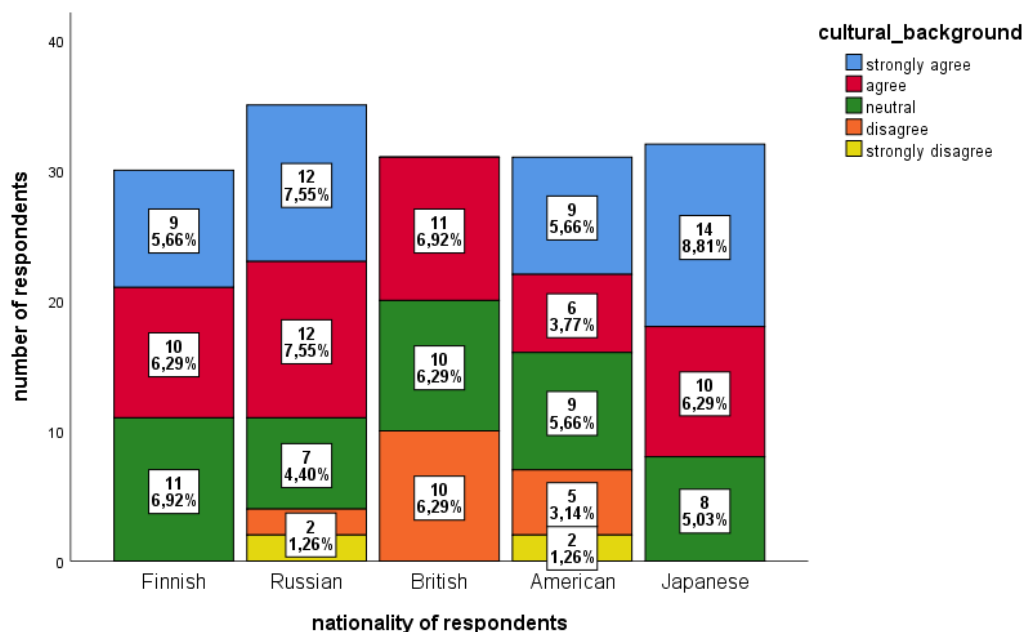
Graph 20. Rating of effect of cultural background on evaluation process

In fact, many respondents do not recognize the effect of their national culture on the way they evaluate customer service. Apparently, many research participants have a neutral attitude towards this statement. According to given comments, it can be explained by the fact that some people have never thought about those affective relationships. Statistical testing displays that there is a dependency between respondents' nationalities and their opinion about whether or not a cultural background affects on a way of evaluating customer service.

Statement 12 was built in order to understand if customers believe that they could get better customer service if sales assistant knew some important characteristics of customers' national culture.
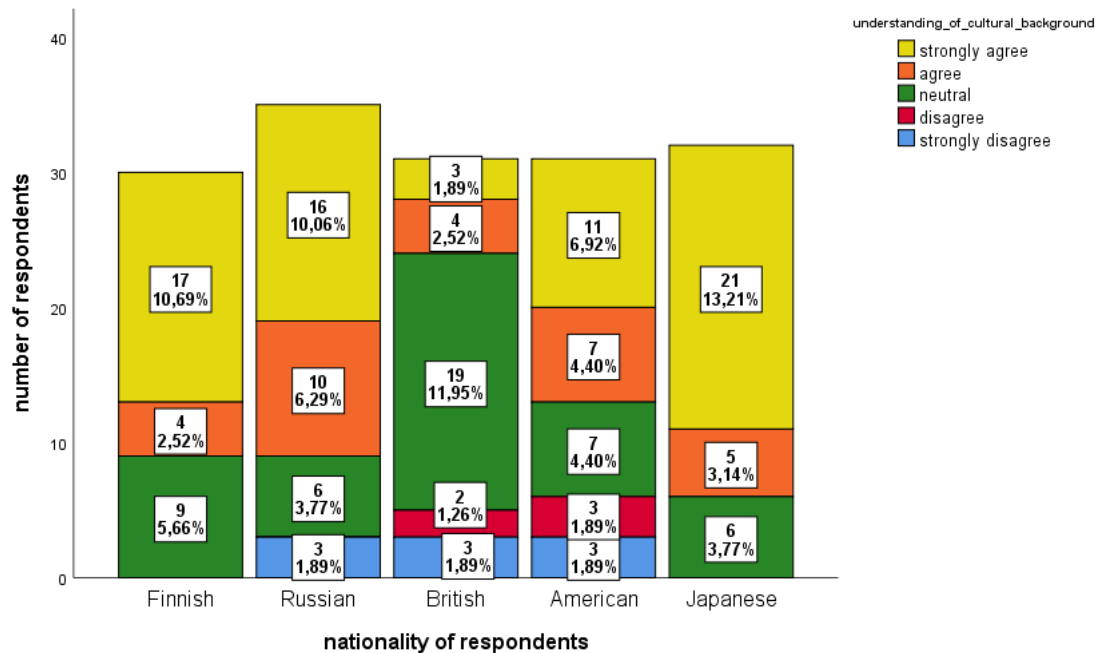

Graph 21. Rating of effect of cultural background understanding on better customer service activities

Graph 21 illustrates respondents' level of agreement/disagreement with statement 12 from the questionnaire. Russian, Finnish and Japanese customers agree with that statement more than representatives of British and American cultures. Some comments were given by survey participants which could explain that: people claimed that American and British cultures are less heterogeneous and wildly spread and known. Also, they believe that it might be a reason why cultural aspects of American and British cultures are more familiar to sales representatives of FineFood shops. Corresponding to dependency, Chi-Square test shows that variables named "nationality" and "understanding of cultural background" are strongly depended on each other, which means that representatives of case cultures agreed or disagreed differently with statement 12.

Comparison of opinions on statements 11 and 12 displayed interesting results. According to graph 20, 9 Finnish respondents, 12 Russian, none of British, 9 Americans and 14 Japanese ones strongly agree with the statement that cultural background affects the way they evaluate customer service. Apparently, graph

21 shows that actually much more research participants strongly agree with statement that sales assistant(s) could provide better customer service if he/she had an understanding about their national culture: 17 Finnish customers, 16 Russian, 3 British, 11 American and 21 Japanese ones strongly agree with statement 12. This can be explained by the fact that people do not consider cultural background an influencer on their evaluation process. However, they believe that the more sales assistants know about national cultures and their differences, the better customer service they can provide.

Graph 22 illustrates respondents' opinion on statement 13. It goes without saying that the results are strongly affected by the fact that there were different levels of busyness at the shops at different parts of days. Due to that, some customers were forced to wait longer because of queues which cannot be affected or changed by sales assistants. It can be seen from the graph that almost 50% of research participant disagree with that statement. According to Chi-Square test, there is a correlation between customers' nationalities and their level of disagreement/agreement with statement about waiting time.
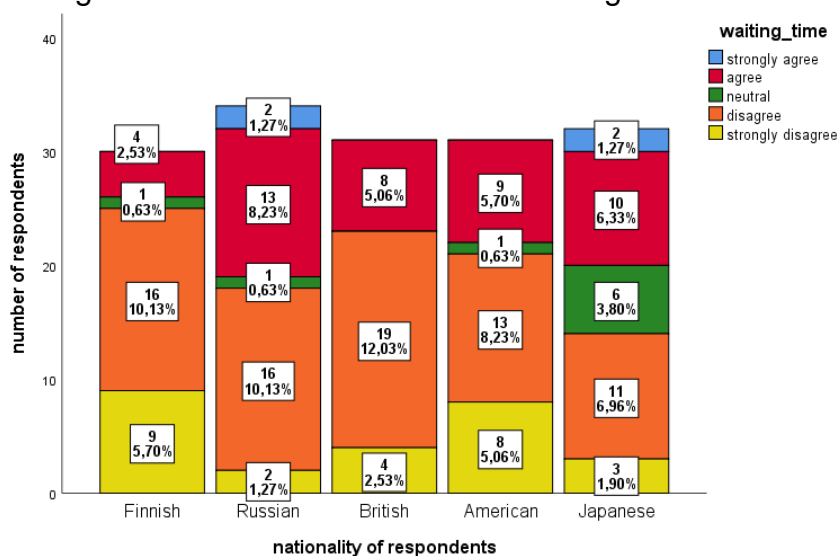
Graph 22. Rating of long waiting time

The last statement from a questionnaire was meant to measure the level of cus-tomers' confident about making money transaction(s) at case shops. Graph 23 displays the following results:
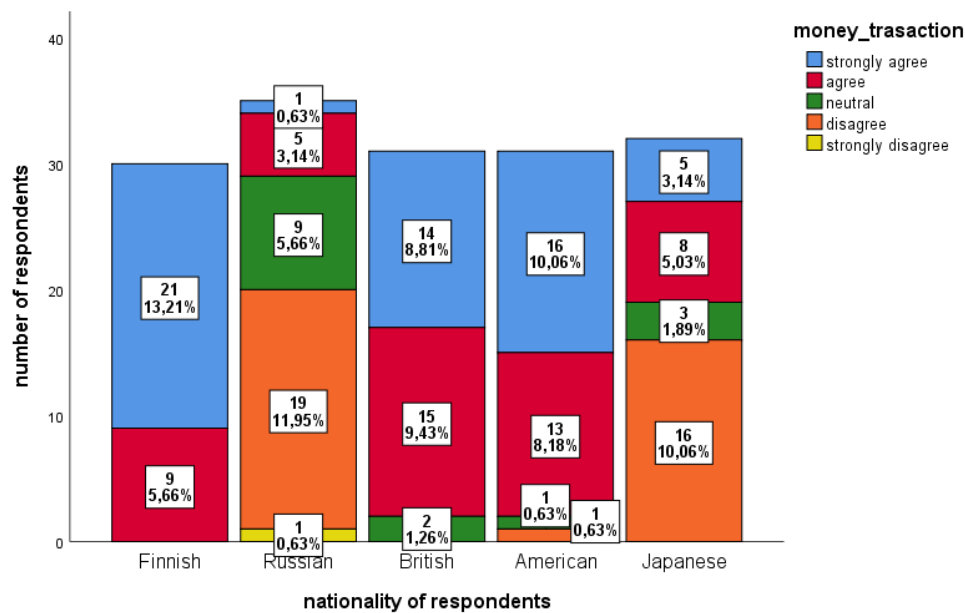
Graph 23. Ratings of safety of money transactions

According to analysis done in chapter 6.1, people who are representatives of high uncertainty avoidance cultures such as Russians and Japanese participants, have weaker tolerance towards any kind of risks, e.g. financial ones. Oppositely, representatives of uncertainty accepting cultures such as Americans and British are more likely to be risk-takers and do not see a payment as a risky process. Statistical testing shows that customers' nationalities and their opinion on safety of money transaction are depended on each other.

7 Conclusions

Customer service is a huge influencer on a company's reputation and profitability and every organization tends to provide the best-quality service to its customers. However, it is crucial to understand that the issue of service quality is relative, meaning that something which is acceptable and highly valued by one customer can be absolutely inappropriate to another one. Certainly, there is no ultimate way for companies to have a level of service quality which could satisfy each customer.

Customer satisfaction is the best indicator to show how well customer service is provided. In order to satisfy customers, it is essential for any companies to know not only customers' expectations about sold products but what kind of expectations customers have about provided customer service. Understanding of what customers are expecting from company and exceeding those expectations are extremely hard tasks.

Nowadays, it is a challenge for organizations to satisfy all customers by applying the same techniques as their behavior is heterogeneous. Due to immigration and globalization, sales people are dealing with customers with different cultural backgrounds constantly. It goes without saying that culture shapes people's behavior and influences on a way customers perceive and evaluate customer service. That is why it creates an importance of understanding those cultural differences to be able to provide high-quality customer service to any customer.

This thesis focused on combining the importance of three key concepts which are customer service, customer satisfaction and culture. The purpose of the study was to find out if customers perceive and evaluate customer service differently depending on their cultural orientation. The thesis was aimed to clarify what kind of service expectations customers have and if those expectations are different and depend on customers' cultural background. In order to attain that goal, research questions were built and answered by theoretical overviews and empirical findings.

The following research question and sub-questions were formed to support an objective:

- How do representatives of different cultural groups perceive and evaluate customer service?
- What kind of cultural differences can be identified based on theoretical reviews and answers given by research participants?
- How those differences can be explained?

Literature review and research results helped to answer those questions. First, as for the main research question, it was found out that it is clear that represent-

atives of different cultural groups perceive and evaluate customer service differently. Next, analyses of empirical findings and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory showed that such cultural differences can be identified as:

- differences in evaluation of friendliness
- differences in perception of clean and neat professional look
- differences in evaluation of sales assistants' professionalism
- differences in perception about individual attention from sales assistants
- differences in evaluation of customer service at case shops in general
- differences in understanding who should make a first step: customer or sale representative
- differences in evaluation of what is a high-quality service provider
- differences in perception of waiting time
- differences in perception of transactional safety.

The last sub-question can be answered by referring to that fact that the existence of those defined above cultural differences can be explained by culturally-heterogenous behaviour of customers. However, it should be mentioned that in theory those cultural differences are seen clearly rather than on practice.

One of the most important research conclusions was done while comparing theoretical review on phenomenon with empirical findings. Apparently, theoretically defined cultural differences in perception and evaluation of customer service or in consumer behavior in general are not easily applied to practical findings. In other words, there were slight differences in theoretical explanations of those differences with those ones which were attained practically. However, most of the defined features of national cultures and cultural differences in consumer behaviors coincided with empirical findings.

While making research conclusions, some limitations were defined:

- The study was limited by one company and its customers.
- The number of selected cultural groups was limited by five cultures and only perceptions and expectations of representatives of those cultures were studied.

- There were definitely time limitations which occurred mainly in data-gathering process.
- Personal characteristics of research participants were excluded from the study such as gender and age, which might be a big influencer on people's perception and evaluation processes.
- There is a certain level of subjectivism in cultural analysis due to that fact that both observations and survey conduction was done by researcher herself.
- Cultural analysis was focused on 4-D dimensional model and such Hofstede's dimensions as long/short-term orientation and indulgence/restraint were excluded from the study, thus they could explain some empirical finding as well.

As it was mentioned earlier, the aim of the research was to find out if customers who are representatives of different national cultures receive and evaluate customer service differently. The thesis was not aimed to provide information and recommendations about how to deal with those cultural differences, but just proved the point of their existence. Regarding to future research, the guideline can be created for sales assistants concerning of how to deal with people from different cultures and provide high-quality customer service by eliminating the influence that cultural background has on the processes of perception and evaluation of customer service.

There were certain managerial implications defined while research process. First of all, the importance of studying and understanding cultural backgrounds cannot be ignored by company's managers and employees. Although there is no need for providing comprehensive study materials on cultures, customers' opinions and attitudes should be studied constantly. Those studies of customers' comments and feedback would provide an important information about how customer service is provided to people with different cultural backgrounds, as well as give valuable data for employees about cultural differences in perception and evaluation processes. In addition to that, those studies can be done in terms of periodically overviews on what should be improved in customer service.

Figures

Graphs

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Appendix 1: Survey form

Customer Service Expectations and Evaluation Survey

1.What is your nationality? ⬚

Please, answer the following questions by giving your evaluation using scale from 1-4 where:
1-poor
2-fair
3-good
4-excellent
Please, circle your answer.

2. How would you rate the friendliness of sales assistant(s)?

           1   2   3   4

Comments:

3. How would you rate the professional appearance of sales assistant(s)?

           1   2   3   4

Comments:

4. (If you asked for help from a sales assistant) how would you rate his/her answer?

           1   2   3   4

Comments:

5. How would you rate the professionalism of sales assistant(s)?

           1   2   3   4

Comments:

6. How would you rate the extent to what your needs or wishes were understood?

           1   2   3   4

Comments:

7. How would you rate an individual attention from a sales person towards you?

           1   2   3   4

Comments:

8. Generally, how would you rate customer service you were offered while visiting FineFood shops?

           1   2   3   4

Specify:

Please, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement concerning following statements using scale from 1-5 where:
1-strongly disagree
2-disagree
3-neutral
4-agree
5-strongly agree
Please, circle the right answer.

9. I expect that sales assistants approach me first and offer help.

                    1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

10. Customer service offered by sales assistants of FineFood shop meets my overall expectations about high-quality service provider.

                    1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

11. My cultural background affects on how I evaluate customer service.

                    1   2   3   4   5

Specify:

12. Sales assistant could provide better customer service if he/she understood my cultural background.

                    1   2   3   4   5

Specify:

13. It took long time for me to get customer service.

                    1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

14. I feel safe while making money transaction.

                    1   2   3   4   5

Comments: