

# Factors Influencing Retail Service Quality At Supermarkets In Thai Nguyen Province

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**Abstract:** *This study examines factors influencing the retail service quality of supermarkets in the Thai Nguyen province using RSQS model of Dabholkar et al. (1996). The research is based on the opinions of 277 customers who visited and shopped at 20 supermarkets in the Thai Nguyen province. Retail Service Quality (RSQ) at supermarkets in the Thai Nguyen province is selected as the dependent variable, with Physical Aspects, Reliability, Personal Interaction, Problem Solving, and Policy chosen as independent variables. The study conducted reliability tests of the measures using Cronbach's Alpha, performed exploratory factor analysis (EFA), examined correlations using Pearson's test, and conducted regression analysis. The results indicate that all five groups of factors, including Physical Aspects, Reliability, Personal Interaction, Problem Solving, and Policy, have a significant impact and positive relationships with the dependent variable of retail service quality (RSQ) at supermarkets in the Thai Nguyen province.*

**Keywords:** *service quality, retail, retail service quality, supermarket.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A supermarket is a modern retail business, either general or specialized, with a diverse range of goods and products, ensuring quality. It meets standards regarding business area, technical equipment, managerial expertise, and organizational structure, providing refined and convenient service methods to satisfy customers' shopping needs. Over the past years, consumers have become accustomed to shopping at supermarkets, appreciating their advantages. This trend has contributed to the rapid development of supermarket systems in Vietnam overall and specifically in the Thai Nguyen province.

According to the Department of Industry and Trade of Thai Nguyen province, as of the end of 2022, there are 20 supermarkets in the province, with the highest concentration in the city of Thai Nguyen, hosting 13 supermarkets. The remaining supermarkets are distributed in Song Cong city, Pho Yen city, Phu Binh district, Dai Tu district, and Vo Nhai district. The average business area of supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province is approximately 3,978 square meters, with an average business capital of 79.5 billion VND. Most supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province belong to the third-tier category (14 out of 20), conducting comprehensive business with a business area of 500 square meters or more and offering a product range of over 4,000 items.

However, due to Thai Nguyen being a mountainous midland province, in addition to the general shopping preferences of consumers, the residents of Thai Nguyen also exhibit specific characteristics in their shopping habits due to the local context. Many people in Thai Nguyen still prefer markets, grocery stores, and specialty shops because they are more convenient to access, offer lower prices, and involve long-standing relationships with familiar vendors. As of the end of 2022, there are 140 traditional markets in Thai Nguyen province, more than seven times the number of supermarkets in the province. Furthermore, with the current trend of professionalizing shopping habits, customers are increasingly making careful considerations in their purchasing decisions and demanding higher quality of services. Therefore, in order to retain existing customers and attract new ones, to enhance competitiveness with traditional markets, supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province need to focus on further improving service quality to increase customer satisfaction.

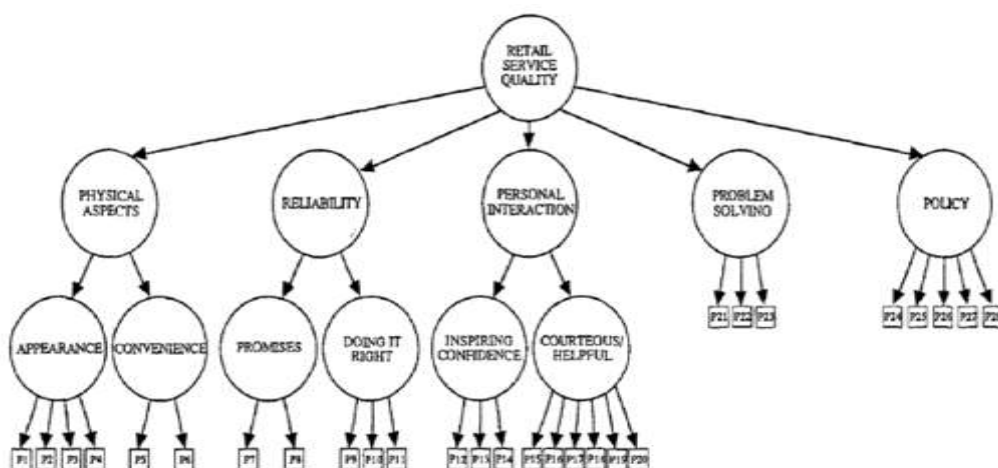
The characteristic of service quality is evaluated through customer perceptions. Due to different cultural environments, consumers in each country may have different perceptions and feelings about the service quality in each type of service (Malhotra et al., 2005). To develop an accurate and effective service development strategy, supermarket managers need to identify the factors that contribute to the service quality perceived and evaluated by customers. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the factors influencing service quality and the degree of influence of each factor on the service quality of supermarkets in the Thai Nguyen province. This aims to provide recommendations for policies that help supermarket managers in the Thai Nguyen province enhance customer service quality and competitiveness in the retail market.

**II. RESEARCH MODEL**

There are various approaches to service quality, Lehtinen et al. (1982) argue that service quality should be evaluated on two dimensions: i) the process of service delivery and ii) the outcome of the service. Gronroos (1984) also presents two components assessed on two dimensions: technical quality (what the customer receives) and functional quality (the actual service provided). Leonard L. Berry et al. (1985), through qualitative research, indicate that consumer perceptions of service quality result from a comparison between their expectations of the service received beforehand and the actual service experience. If those expectations are met, service quality is perceived as satisfactory; if not met, it is considered dissatisfactory; and if exceeded, it is deemed very satisfactory.

According to the widely recognized and utilized research by Parasuraman and colleagues (1985), service quality is the difference between consumers' expectations of service and their perceptions of the service outcome. Parasuraman and colleagues (1985) conceptualized the structure of service quality through five components, specifically reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. This concept ultimately led to the development of a measurement scale called SERVQUAL, which has since been widely used in various service industries.

Despite the widespread application and usage of the SERVQUAL scale in service quality research, it has been criticized for being too generic and is suggested to be modified for different services (Dabholkar et al., 1996). Gogliano and Hathecote (1994), as well as Mehta et al. (2000), argue that service quality in retail differs from service quality in other product and service industries. Gaur et al. (2006) attributes this distinction to the unique nature of service quality in the retail environment, where retailers operate services based on tangible products (providing both products and services). Mehta et al. (2000) point out that the differences arise due to the specific characteristics of the retail sector, requiring a different approach to measuring service quality. In retail, when evaluating quality, both product quality and service quality need to be considered. Dabholkar and colleagues (1996) developed the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS), later commonly referred to as the RSQS model. RSQS comprises five components: Physical aspects, Reliability, Personal interaction, Problem-solving, and Policies. It has been widely used by researchers to measure the service quality of retail stores such as supermarkets, shopping centers, grocery stores, etc. For instance, Siu and Cheung (2001) applied RSQS in their study of shopping mall chains in Hong Kong. J. Xiao and J. Chernetskaya (2010) used RSQS to measure retail service quality at sports stores in Helsinki Stadium, Finland, and Musasa and Tlapana (2023) identified the importance of retail service quality aspects on shopping frequency in Durban, Africa, by applying the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS). Subsequent studies evaluating the applicability of the retail service quality assessment model have shown encouraging results. Mehta et al. (2000) acknowledged that the components of the retail service quality scale are more suitable for retail environments with a higher emphasis on goods than services, such as supermarkets. This suggests that the RSQS is considered reliable and appropriate for the retail industry, given the mixed nature of retail business involving both products and services. Therefore, this study aims to assess the service quality of supermarkets in the province of Thai Nguyen using the RSQS model.



**Figure 1. RSQS model**  
 Source: Pratibha A. Dabholkar et al (1996)

Dabholkar and colleagues (1996) developed the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS). Based on qualitative research, service theory, and the SERVQUAL scale, RSQS consists of 28 variables, including 17

variables from SERVQUAL and 11 variables developed through qualitative research.

According to Dabholkar and colleagues (1996), the structure of retail service quality is hierarchical and includes five fundamental dimensions (Figure 1).

The detail explanations of the dimensions are:

1. Physical aspects – includes functional elements like layout, comfort and privacy and aesthetic elements such as the architecture, color, materials and style of the store.

2. Reliability – a combination of keeping promises and performing services right.

3. Personal interaction – the service personnel being courteous, helpful, inspiring confidence and trust in customers.

4. Problem-solving – the handling of returns and exchanges as well as complaints.

5. General Policy – a set of strategies, procedures, and guiding principles which the store operates under such rules as high-quality merchandise, convenient operating hours, availability of parking spaces and payment options.

Based on the theoretical foundation and the scale of factors influencing Retail Service Quality (RSQ) by Dabholkar et al. (1996), the research team applied and constructed a scale for the factors influencing RSQ in supermarkets in Thai Nguyen, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. The scales of RSQS**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Sub-dimension</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Symbol</b>
Physical aspects (6 items)	Appearance (4 items)	The store has modern looking equipment and fixtures	PH1
		The physical facilities at this store (such as fixtures and fittings) are visually appealing	PH2
		Materials associated with the store 's service (such as shopping bags, catalogues or statements) are visually appealing	PH3
		This store has cleaned, attractive, and convenient public areas (restrooms, fitting rooms)	PH4
	Convenience (2 items)	The store layout at this store makes it easy for customersto find what they need	PH5
		The store layout at this store makes it easy for customersto move around in the store	PH6
Reliability (5 items)	Promises (2 items)	When this store promises to do something by a certain time, it will do so	RE1
		This store provides its services at the time it promises to do so	RE2
	Doing it right (3 items)	This store performs the service right the first time	RE3
		This store has merchandise available when the customers want it	RE4
		This store insists on error-free sales transactions and records	RE5
Personal interaction (9 items)	Inspiring Confidence (3 items)	Employees in this store have the knowledge to answer customer's questions	PI1
		The behaviour of employees in this store instils confidence in customers	PI2
		Customers feel safe in their transactions with this store	PI3
	Courteousness/helpfulness (6 items)	Employees in this store give prompt service to customers	PI4
		Employees in this store tell customers exactly when services will be performed	PI5
		Employees in this store are never too busy to respond to customer's requests	PI6
		This store gives customers individual attention	PI7
		Employees in this store are consistently	PI8

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Item	Symbol
Problemsolving (3 items)	None	courteous with customers	PI9
		Employees of this store treat customers courteously on the telephone	
		This store willingly handles returns and exchanges	PR1
		When a customer has a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it	PR2
		Employees in this store can handle customer complaints directly and immediately	PR3
Policy (5 items)	None	This store offers high quality merchandise	PO1
		This store provides plenty of convenient parking for customers	PO2
		This store has operating hours convenient for all its customers	PO3
		This store accepts most major credit cards	PO4
		This store offers its own credit cards	PO5

*Source: Synperthied by author*

**Hypotheses:**

H1: The higher the customer perception on the Physical Aspects scale, the higher the Retail Service Quality (RSQ) of supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province, and vice versa.

H2: The higher the customer perception on the Reliability scale, the higher the RSQ of supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province, and vice versa.

H3: The higher the customer perception on the Personal Interaction scale, the higher the RSQ of supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province, and vice versa.

H4: The higher the customer perception on the Problem-Solving scale, the higher the RSQ of supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province, and vice versa.

H5: The higher the customer perception on the Policy scale, the higher the RSQ of supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province, and vice versa.

**III. METHODOLOGY**

Secondary data is collected based on reports from the Department of Industry and Trade of Thai Nguyen province until 2022. Primary information is gathered through direct customer survey questionnaires.

The analysis method utilized in this study is the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) method. According to Hair et al. (2010), it is recommended to use a minimum sample size of 50 for EFA, preferably 100, and the observation-to-variable ratio should be 5:1 or, ideally, 10:1. The research model consists of 5 groups of independent variables with 28 items; therefore, the minimum required sample size is  $5 \times 28 = 140$  samples. The research team developed a survey based on the selected research model and conducted customer surveys in 20 supermarkets within the Thai Nguyen province. The research team distributed surveys directly and conveniently to 400 customers (20 customers surveyed per supermarket) who visited the supermarkets at different times on survey days, right at the entrance of the supermarkets. The survey period extended from November 2023 to December 2023. The results obtained were 277 valid responses.

The questionnaire structure is divided into two parts, A and B. Part A includes customer information such as name, gender, age, educational level, and the frequency of shopping at the supermarket. Part B comprises the survey content on Retail Service Quality (RSQS) at the supermarket, with customer survey questions designed based on the Retail Service Quality Scale by Dabholkar et al. (1996), as presented in Table 1. All assessments are conducted using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies “Strongly Disagree” and 5 represents “Strongly Agree”.

The study utilized the statistical software SPSS 22.0 for descriptive statistical analysis, conducting steps such as reliability analysis, correlation analysis, factor analysis, regression analysis, and hypothesis testing based on the questionnaire constructed with 5 independent variables (Physical aspects, Reliability, Personal interaction, Problem solving, Policy) influencing the dependent variable, which is Retail Service Quality (RSQS) at supermarkets within the Thai Nguyen province.

**IV. FINDINGS**

**Descriptive statistics**

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics**

Category		Qty	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	34	12,27
	Female	243	87,73
Age	Under 20	11	3,97
	From 20 – under 40	187	67,51
	From 40 – under 60	63	22,74
	From 60	16	5,78
Education level	High school	22	7,94
	Intermediate college	86	31,05
	Bachelor	159	57,4
	Master	10	3,61
Frequency of shopping at the supermarket	daily	76	27,44
	Several times/weeks	123	44,4
	Several times/months	71	25,63
	Several times/years	7	2,53

*Source: Calculated from the author's survey data*

The sample consists of 277 respondents, including 34 males (12.27%) and 243 females (87.73%). The age group from 20 to 40 years old is the highest (187 individuals, 67.51%), while the lowest is the age group under 20 years old (11 individuals, 3.97%). Regarding education, 159 individuals have a university degree (57.4%), and the rest have high school, vocational school, or college degrees. In terms of shopping frequency at supermarkets, 76 individuals (27.44%) shop daily, while 123 individuals (44.4%) shop several times a week, indicating a positive trend for supermarkets in the Thai Nguyen province.

**Testing the reliability of the scales using Cronbach's Alpha**

The reliability of the scale was assessed through the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and the correlation coefficient between variables and the total (item-total correlation). The measurement instruments in the research concept are considered reliable when the variable-total correlation coefficient is equal to or greater than 0.3, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are equal to or greater than 0.6. Measurement instruments that do not meet these reliability criteria will be excluded from the study.

**Table 3. Testing the reliability of the scale**

Variables	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Total variable correlation coefficient
Physicalaspects (PH)	6	0,85	0,614
Reliability (RE)	5	0,85	0,647
Personal interaction (PI)	9	0,748	0,433
Problemsolving (PR)	3	0,851	0,648
Policy (PO)	5	0,862	0,606

*Source: Calculated from the author's survey data*

The results in Table 3 indicate that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients > 0.7, and the variable-total correlation coefficients are all > 0.3. Therefore, all variables meet the reliability criteria and are suitable for further Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) analysis.

**Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**

To assess the appropriateness of the model with real data, the study utilizes the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure. Kaiser (1974) suggested that the KMO value should be 0.5 or higher ( $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$ ). The Bartlett's test is used to examine whether correlations exist among variables included in the Exploratory Factor

Analysis (EFA). According to Hair et al. (2009), a statistically significant Bartlett's Test (sig Bartlett's Test < 0.05) indicates that the observed variables are correlated with each other in the factor.

The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for 28 observed independent variables representing 5 independent factors have a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient of 0.819 and a significance level (Sig. = .000) for Bartlett's Test of 5%, confirming the suitability of the data for this study. The total variance explained is 70.265%, which is greater than 50%, indicating that the 5 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 collectively explain 70.265% of the data variability. The results of the rotation matrix show that the 28 observed variables are grouped into 5 factors, with 25 observed variables having factor loadings greater than 0.5. Three variables, PO5, RE3, and RE5, have factor loadings less than 0.5 and are therefore excluded from the model.

After excluding PO5, RE3, and RE5 from the model, the research team conducted a second round of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for 25 observed independent variables representing 5 independent factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient is 0.832, and the significance level (Sig. = .000) for Bartlett's Test is 5%, confirming the appropriateness of the data for this study. The total variance explained is 71.145%, which is greater than 50%, indicating that the 5 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 collectively explain 71.145% of the data variability.

**Table 4: Rotated component matrix**

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
PH1	,797				
PH2	,736				
PH3	,732				
PH4	,731				
PH5	,699				
PH6	,841				
RE1		,806			
RE2		,794			
RE4		,845			
PI1			,778		
PI2			,770		
PI3			,702		
PI4			,751		
PI5			,735		
PI6			,694		
PI7			,628		
PI8			,625		
PI9			,718		
PR1				,718	
PR2				,700	
PR3				,682	
PO1					,814
PO2					,747
PO3					,713
PO4					,679

*Source: Calculated from the author's survey data*

The results of the rotation matrix in Table 4 indicate that the 25 observed variables are grouped into 5

factors. All observed variables have factor loadings greater than 0.5, and there are no variables below this threshold.

**Correlation coefficient matrix**

To examine the correlation between the independent variables, namely Physical Aspects (PH), Reliability (RE), Personal Interaction (PI), Problem-solving (PR), Policy (PO), and the dependent variable Retail Service Quality in supermarkets (RSQ), this study employs the Pearson correlation test.

**Table 5: Pearson correlation analysis**

		RSQ	PH	RE	PI	PR	PO
RSQ	Pearson Correlation	1	,372**	,487**	,454**	,467**	,505**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
PH	Pearson Correlation	,372**	1	,364**	,416**	,488**	,247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000
RE	Pearson Correlation	,487**	,364**	1	,419**	,245**	,255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,002	,000	,004
PI	Pearson Correlation	,454**	,416**	,419**	1	,454**	,416**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,002		,000	,005
PR	Pearson Correlation	,467**	,488**	,245**	,454**	1	,419**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000
PO	Pearson Correlation	,505**	,247**	,255**	,416**	,419**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,004	,005	,000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Source: Calculated from the author's survey data*

When examining the correlation between the independent variables, the Pearson correlation analysis table shows correlation coefficients (sig. coefficients) between the independent variables all equal to .000, which is less than 0.05. This implies that all five independent variables in the proposed model are correlated with the dependent variable. Additionally, the Pearson correlation coefficients between the independent variables are all less than 0.7. Therefore, the conditions are not sufficient to conclude whether multicollinearity may occur among the variables (according to Carsten F. Dormann et al., 2013), indicating that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables in the model.

**Regression analysis**

The results in Table 6 show a significance level (Sig) of 0.000, indicating the existence of a regression model, where the independent variables have a linear relationship with the dependent variable. Additionally, the adjusted R-squared (R2) is 0.613, suggesting that the independent variables in the model can explain 61.3% of the variance in the dependent variable. In other words, changes in the evaluation of retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province are influenced by the factors considered. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for the independent variables is all less than 3, indicating that the data does not violate the assumption of multicollinearity. The Durbin-Watson coefficient is 1.982, falling within the range of 1.5 to 2.5, suggesting that the results do not violate the assumption of first-order serial correlation (Yahua Qiao, 2011). Furthermore, the model diagnostic test results indicate no heteroscedasticity. Therefore, the model is deemed appropriate for the actual research data.

**Table 6: Model Summary**

Variable	Standardized coefficient (Beta)	t-value	P-value	VIF
Const	0,046	0,584	0,560	
Physicalaspects (PH)	0,355	6,956	0,000	1,818
Reliability (RE)	0,321	6,085	0,000	1,838
Personal interaction (PI)	0,332	6,867	0,000	1,810
Problemsolving (PR)	0,343	7,737	0,000	1,8010
Policy (PO)	0,387	0,432	0,000	1,890

a. Dependent Variable: RSQ

N	277
R square	0,721
R <sup>2</sup> adjust square	0,613
Sig F	0,000
F-value	24,645
Durbin-Watson	1,982

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Source: Calculated from the author's survey data

All regression model variables, including PH, RE, PI, PR, and PO, are statistically significant at the 1% level or with a 99% confidence level. They all have positive signs, indicating a positive relationship with the dependent variable RSQ. The values of the standardized regression coefficients reveal the importance of each factor in influencing the evaluation of retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province.

$$RSQ = 0,046 + 0,355*PH + 0,321*RE + 0,332*PI + 0,343*PR + 0,387*PO$$

Policy (PO) has the most significant impact on the evaluation of retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province. Holding other factors in the model constant, if the Policy factor increases by 1 unit, the retail service quality evaluation will increase by 0.387 units.

Next is the Physical Aspects (PH) factor, which also has a substantial impact on the evaluation of retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province. Holding other factors in the model constant, if the Physical Aspects factor increases by 1 unit, the retail service quality evaluation will increase by 0.355 units.

Problem-solving (PR) also contributes to the increase in the evaluation of retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province. Holding other factors in the model constant, if the Problem-solving factor increases by 1 unit, the retail service quality evaluation will increase by 0.343 units.

Under the condition that other factors in the model are held constant, if the Personal Interaction (PI) factor increases by 1 unit, the retail service quality evaluation at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province will increase by 0.332 units.

If the Reliability (RE) factor increases by 1 unit under the condition that other factors in the model are held constant, the retail service quality evaluation at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province will increase by 0.321 units.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study utilized the RSQS model proposed by Dabholkar and colleagues (1996) to assess the factors influencing retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen province. The results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on 277 valid surveys revealed five groups of factors affecting retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen, namely Policy, Physical Aspects, Problem-solving, Personal Interaction, and Reliability.

Based on the research findings, the authors suggest several solutions to enhance retail service quality at supermarkets in Thai Nguyen, aiming to improve competitiveness and foster development in the future. Some of the proposed solutions include:

Ensuring that the products displayed in supermarkets are consistently of high quality. The input verification system of supermarkets needs to be further perfected in terms of functionality and the task of selecting quality products for display. Supermarkets should establish partnerships with suppliers and manufacturers, both domestic and international, to secure high-quality products at reduced costs for display in the stores.

Secondly, further enhance the service provided by supermarket staff to customers. Each staff member should act as a guide, delivering efficient and attentive service to customers. To achieve this, regular training sessions and workshops should be organized to educate staff on professional skills, knowledge, and the necessary customer service skills.

Thirdly, increase investments in infrastructure, particularly by expanding the space to create room for displays and a comfortable environment for customers visiting the supermarket.

Fourthly, refine the complaint policy to be convenient and prompt for customers in cases of complaints related to product returns or payments.

Fifthly, diversify the range of products in the supermarket, especially local products with good quality, such as (OCCOP), at reasonable prices.

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