

MYSTERY SHOPPING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MARKETING RESEARCH

Pavla Staňková, Marcela Vaculíková

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, quality staff members are a significant competitive advantage. The whole sale process and its successful conclusion are dependent upon the seller's behaviour, their knowledge about a product, their readiness for dealing, appearance and the whole impression. People become an important part for creating stable and long-term relationship. For evaluation of the sales communication process can use mystery shopping method.

Mystery shopping (also called mystery customer research, situation research) is a research method that is based on the principle of so-called secret shopping. Secret shopping is used to find out the level of sale and the readiness of individual shops or their staff members to cope with the arrival of the potential customer or with a telephone call. During the research process there is observed the seller's behaviour and also the time spent waiting, form and the realization of the offer, interior, atmosphere, visage and the neatness of seller and other features which can influence the success of the selling process. [2]

The concept of mystery shopping also appears as a part of the new and more elaborated method, so-called **mystery coaching**. This term is a combination of terms **mystery shopping/calling** (measurement of the care of customers realized through candid camera or telephone tapping) and **coaching** (goal-directed guiding of teams). „The aim of mystery coaching" is according to authors PhDr. A. Řihová and MUDr. M. Kalenda „**concentrated** development of the quality of the care provided to customers that is based on the detailed knowledge of the level of the care and on the estimate of the fields which require changes in the overall approach, in employees' behaviour and competence and in the company's processes and systems." [3]

2. Process of Mystery Shopping

Process of mystery shopping consists of three phases. (fig. 1) First, there is a **preparation of**

the project that is focused on two activities. That is purchaser's activities, which have to be carried out inside the organization before the assignment of the topic to the mystery shopping agency and the activities of the agency - preparation of the research for the purchaser of the project. Purchaser and the agency must closely cooperate on every activity:

- Selection of the agency by the purchaser and the preparation of a supply by the agency. Meeting of representatives from both parties.
- Arrangement and specification of requirements on the conduction of the mystery shopping.
- Specification of a contract, arrangement of the conditions of the mystery shopping conduction, contract signing etc.
- Preparation of a control sheet.
- Selection of inquirers (mystery shoppers).
- Training of mystery shoppers.
- Preparation of the mystery shopper's time plan and a route plan.

Second phase represents **the process of mystery shopping** itself. Secret customers visit or contact a branch office by e-mail of telephone, whereas they behave according to a schedule prepared in advance. Mystery shoppers behave naturally; they can adapt the conversation to their state of mind or their own feeling within the frame of objective research. [4] The process of mystery shopping involves the following activities:

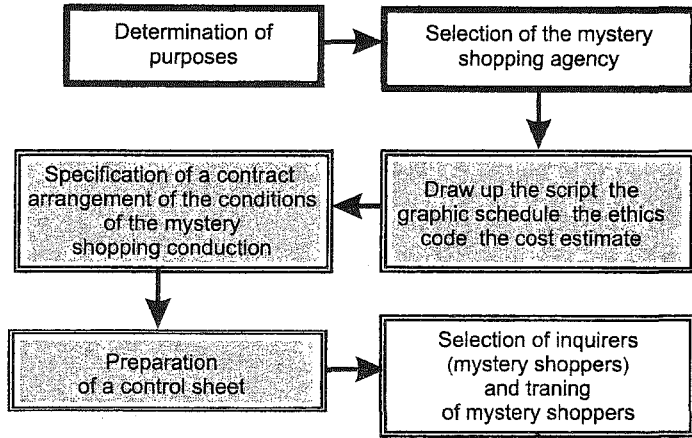
- Visiting chosen brand branch offices according to the given plan.
- Filling out the control sheet by the mystery shopper.

During the third phase - **the evaluation** - the agency draws up a final report with the use of the know-how of the company. In the report there are described obtained facts and stated strong and weak points:

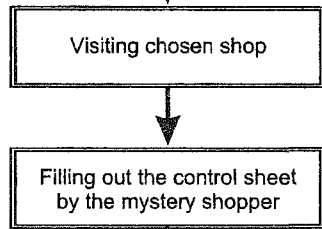
- Handing of the control sheet from the mystery shopper to the responsible staff worker.
- Evaluation of the control sheet by an educated staff member, analysis of the obtained

Fig. 1: Process of Mystery Shopping

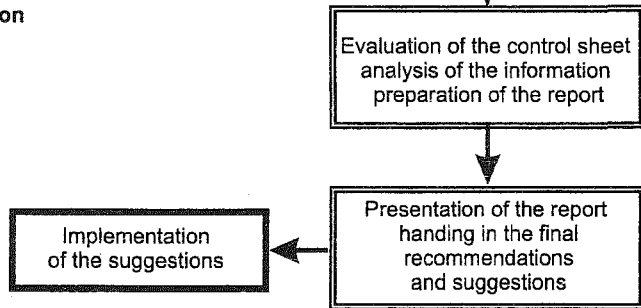
I. A preparation of the project






II. The process of mystery shopping



III. The evaluation



-  Activities of the organization
-  Cooperate between the organization and the agency
-  Activities of the agency

Source: own

information, preparation of the report for the purchaser.

- Presentation of the information gained in the research of the sale process quality, handing in the final recommendations and suggestions.

3. Control Sheet

The control sheet is the basic document for both purchaser and the mystery shopping provider. Through the control sheet we can check in detail the sale process that is focused on the given topic and particular services. Control sheet is a supplementary instrument of evaluation of the mystery shopping which evaluates especially following parameters: [4]

- the first impression, interior, behaviour of staff workers, their neatness and appearance;
- the first contact, addressing, beginning of the communication;
- extent to what customer's needs were found out;
- communicative skills of the seller;
- scope of supply, advantages and discounts provided;
- realization of the selling itself, supplementary sale;
- providing information about after-sales service, contact on the customer service, guarantee periods;
- send-off and acknowledgements.

The control sheet contains a list of criteria, for example appendix 1; each of them can be evaluated by a certain number of points (for example from 0 to 5) and mystery shopper's notes. Moreover, control sheet confirms the performed activities and informs about the questions asked through the sale process. Total amount of points from the visited brand branch office represents the staff quality, level of staff and provided offer and also proves that the services were presented to customer.

4. Advantages and Disadvantages of Mystery Shopping

Advantages of mystery shopping

- provides immediate answers for the questions in the real situation and on the given place;
- every piece of information is analysed by educated staff member (mystery shopper);

- can be used in the wide range of commercial sphere;
- survey can be realized in competitive or comparable shops;
- data can be used for effective development of staff workers;
- mystery shopping leads to increase in customers' contentment, increase in the efficiency of the firm, effectiveness of the process and to the improvement of the company image.

Disadvantages and limitations of mystery shopping

- has to be provided and analysed by educated staff member;
- necessarily, the workers who conduct the research have to strictly follow the principles of ICE/ESOMAR and corresponding legislation concerned with data protection
- must not be carried out for other reasons than research (for example for supervision of the activities of identifiable persons/ individuals that could be used for their possible disciplinary recourse);
- it is not allowed to make an audio or a video record of the mystery shopping process, unless the respondent agrees in advance [1];
- workers are obliged to minimize the violation of the standard activity of the examined subject;
- duration of survey (proceeding of mystery shopping itself) should not exceed the usual length of the selling process.

5. Outline of the Situation of Mystery Shopping Agencies in the Czech Republic

There is The SIMAR association in the Czech Republic, which observes the ethical rules and correctness in development and which also created ethical standards for work in the mystery shopping field. ESOMAR association (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research) is similar to SIMAR association and has the same aims within the frame of the whole world. In addition, some organisations in the Czech Republic are members of ESOMAR association too. Mystery shopping in the Czech Republic is mostly pro-

vided by companies that offer complex services in the field of the market research, public opinion research. There can be mentioned several examples: Kleffnamm a partner ČR, s. r. o., DM Czech s. r. o., Brand Brother s. r. o., United Interactive, NMS - Network Media Service s. r. o., Incoma, s. r. o., Stem/Mark, a. s., GFK Praha, s. r. o., Tomáš Langer, Ppm Czech, s. r. o., etc.

The price list of marketing agencies for mystery shopping (10-minute visit done once per month by one inquirer in two brand branch offices) is in the range between 11 500 CZK and 20 000 CZK. Some agencies charge extra for the presentation of the research - the price meets 5,000 CZK. However, the realisation of regular visits in 45 brand offices in the whole country moves the price notably higher that is between 70,000 CZK and 160,000 CZK per month. There can be some discounts in case of regular visits, usually up to 15% of the suggested price on agreement. Presented price offer of the agencies usually includes the price for the use of the know-how, the mystery shopper's remuneration, indirect costs and the profit of the company. Presented prices can be different from the final prices on agreement, which depends on the requirements and the duration of the whole project.

When selecting an agency it is necessary to observe and consider the agency's history, headquarters and place of business, presentation of the services, promptness and quality of the dealing with demand, personal meetings with the agency representatives and their presentation, references from other clients - possibility of contact, national and international marketing experience, price offer, time plan etc.

6. Conclusion

A mystery shopper poses as a regular customer and visits an establishment (hotel, restaurant, shopping centre, financial institution, telecommunication, administration etc.) for the purpose of evaluating the customer service, presentation, product quality and other specific details as requested by the client. They are given specific instructions to follow when visiting, and they must file a written report - control sheet - after leaving the establishment. Mystery shopping is a serious work. Important decisions are made based on the data of supply. People who make good mystery

shoppers are those who appreciate good service and enjoy being reimbursed for doing what comes naturally.

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Appendix 1: Example of the Control Sheet

Name of outlet		
Address		
Date of visit		
Time of visit		
Subjects of visit		
Code of mystery shopper		
Name of sale assistant		
1. Waiting time	YES	NO
More that 5 min (apologize)		
2. Outside outlet and image		
2. 1 Exterior	+	-
Shop window		
Logo		
Deficiency		
2. 2 Interior		
Image		
Deficiency		
POS and POP materials		
2. 3 Outside sale assistant		
Label, fresh		
Deficiency		
3. Selling process		
3. 1 Welcome		
Optical contact		
Greeting		
Smile		
Deficiency		
3. 2 Detection needs		
.....		
Words (phrase)		
3. 3 Offer of resolution		
....		
Arguments		
3. 4 Other information		
3. 5. More offer of accommodation		
3. 6 Give over POS materials		
3. 7 Ending process (leave)		
Optical contact		
Greeting		
Smile		
4. Own impression and other comments		
TOTAL		

Source: own

ABSTRACT**MYSTERY SHOPPING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MARKETING RESEARCH****Pavla Staňková, Marcela Vaculíková**

The paper deals with a research method called mystery shopping. Mystery shopping is a research method that is based on the principle of so-called secret shopping. During the research there is observed the seller's behaviour and also the time spent waiting, comprehensibility, form and the realization of the offer, interior, atmosphere, visage and the neatness of seller and other features which can influence the success of selling process. Within the first part of our paper is characterized the definition of mystery coaching and mystery shopping, mystery shopping process and individual stages of realization of mystery shopping. Separate chapter contains the control sheet as the basic document for both purchaser and provider of mystery shopping. The second part presented advantages and disadvantages and limitations of mystery shopping and the situation of mystery shopping agencies in the Czech Republic.

Key words: *mystery coaching, mystery shopping, control sheet, agencies*

JEL Classification: *M31*