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CUSTOMER GAP ANALYSIS IN ORGANISED RETAILING – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Retailing is the most active and attractive sector of last decade. While the retailing industry itself has been present since ages in our country, it is only the recent past that it has witnessed so much dynamism. The emergence of retailing in India has more to do with the increased purchasing power of buyers, especially post-liberalization, increase in product variety, and increase in economies of scale, with the aid of modern supply and distributions solution. The study was made randomly on the customers who carried trolley with them to shop goods as they are believed to be the true customers of retail outlet. It is aimed at studying the Gap between customers' expectation and their perception with regard to retail sector. It covers factors such as product quality, price, internal environment, staff, awareness, location and transparency in transaction. Seventy respondents were interviewed with the questionnaire to collect primary data required for the research. The duration was limited for 45 days. Initially questionnaire was tested for reliability by using alpha test. There were fifteen statements to be responded by the respondent for expected and actual perception of organized retailing. Statements like, retailers are conveniently located, organised retailers are well known store in Mangalore, product display is very attractive, there is error free sale, and there is transparency in the transaction did not show any significant difference in mean scoring pattern of perceived and actual. But other ten statements revealed significant difference in mean scoring pattern. Major finding: perception towards product quality, fair price, variety of products, ambience and convenience at retail outlet (selection of product to bill counter) is high than actually obtained.

KEYWORDS

customer gap analysis, organised retailing.

INTRODUCTION

Indian retailing today is at an interesting crossroads. The retail sales are at the highest point in history and new technologies are improving retail productivity. Though there are many opportunities to start a new retail business, retailers are facing numerous challenges.

Retail in India is still at a very early stage. Most retail firms are companies from other industries that are now entering the retail sector on account of its amazing potential. There are only a handful of companies with a retail background. One such company is Nilgiri's from Bangalore that started as a dairy and incorporated other areas in its business with great success. Their achievement has led to the arrival of numerous other players, most with the backing of large groups, but usually not with a retail background. Most new entrants to the India retail scene are real estate groups who see their access to and knowledge of land, location and construction as prime factors for entering the market.

New retail stores have traditionally started operations in cities like Mumbai and Delhi where there has been an existing base of metropolitan consumers with ready cash and global tastes. The new perspective to this trend is that new entrants to the retail scenario should first enter smaller cities rather than focusing entirely on the metro's. Spending power in India is not concentrated any more in just the 4 metros (Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata). Smaller but upcoming cities like Chandigarh, Coimbatore, Pune, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Trivandrum, Cochin, Ludhiana, Simla etc will fast be catching up to the metro's in their spending capacity.

Cities in south India have taken to the supermarket style of shopping very eagerly and so far the maximum number of organized grocery and department stores are in Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad. The north has a long way to go to come up to par. International stores now prefer to gauge the reaction of the public in these cities before investing heavily in a nation-wide expansion. Milou, the Swiss children's wear retailer, recently opened up its first store in Chennai, bypassing Delhi and Mumbai.

In the past decade, international companies entering India (Levi's, Pepe, Tommy Hilfiger, Marks and Spencer, Mango) have generally offered moderately priced to expensive items. They have aimed for the upper-middle and rich classes of Indian society. These are consumers who travel abroad often and can buy these items overseas quite easily. Instead, international companies should be focusing on the lower and lower-middle classes of India. This is where the real potential is, the aspirational class of consumers who want to lead a better lives and believe in education, hard work and absorb knowledge from every possible angle. The phenomenal success of Big Bazaar, Pantaloon's version of Wal-Mart, is proof that there is enormous potential in providing products and services to this class of consumers.

MAJOR RETAILERS IN INDIA

- Pantaloon
- Trent, Westside, Star India Bazaar, World of Titan Show Rooms, Tanishq, Chroma and landmark – Tata Groups.
- RPG Group
- Reliance
- Aditya Birla Group
- Vivek Limited Retail Formats

- Pyramid Retail-Formats
- Nilgiris' supermarket chain
- Lifestyle International
- Subhiksha supermarket
- Trinethra- Formats
- Vishal Retail Group

RETAIL FORMATS IN INDIA

Mom-and-pop stores: they are family owned business catering to small sections; they are individually handled retail outlets and have a personal touch.

Departmental stores: are general retail merchandisers offering quality products and services.

Convenience stores: are located in residential areas with slightly higher prices goods due to the convenience offered.

Shopping malls: the biggest form of retail in India, malls offers customers a mix of all types of products and services including entertainment and food under a single roof.

Hypermarkets/supermarkets: large self-servicing outlets offering products from a variety of categories.

E-trailers: are retailers providing online buying and selling of products and services.

Discount stores: these are factory outlets that give discount on the MRP.

Vending: it is a relatively new entry, in the retail sector. Here beverages, snacks and other small items can be bought via vending machine.

Category killers: small specialty stores that offer a variety of categories. They are known as category killers as they focus on specific categories, such as electronics and sporting goods. This is also known as Multi Brand Outlets or MBO's.

Specialty stores: are retail chains dealing in specific categories and provide deep assortment. Mumbai's Crossword Book Store and RPG's Music World is a couple of examples.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The sale of goods or commodities in small quantities directly to consumers. Retail is the sale of goods to end users, not for resale, but for use and consumption by the purchaser. The retail transaction is at the end of the supply chain. Manufacturers sell large quantities of products to retailers, and retailers sell small quantities of those products to consumers. The retail industry is divided into organised and unorganised sectors. Organised retailing refers to trading activities undertaken by licensed retailers, that is, those who are registered for sales tax, income tax, etc. These include the corporate-backed hypermarkets and retail chains, and also the privately owned large retail businesses. Unorganised retailing, on the other hand, refers to the traditional formats of low-cost retailing, for example, the local kirana shops, owner manned general stores, paan/beeidshops, convenience stores, hand cart and pavement vendors, etc(Mohan., et. al.)

According to the 8th Annual Global Retail Development Index (GRDI) of AT Kearney, India retail industry is the most promising emerging market for investment. In 2007, the retail trade in India had a share of 8-10% in the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the country. In 2009, it rose to 12%. It is also expected to reach 22% by 2010.

According to a report by Northbride Capita, the India retail industry is expected to grow to US\$ 700 billion by 2010. By the same time, the organized sector will be 20% of the total market share. It can be mentioned here that, the share of organized sector in 2007 was 7.5% of the total retail market.

According to the Icrier report, the retail business in India is estimated to grow at 13% from \$322 billion in 2006-07 to \$590 billion in 2011-12. The unorganized retail sector is expected to grow at about 10% per annum with sales expected to rise from \$ 309 billion in 2006-07 to \$ 496 billion in 2011-12.

Customer gap is the gap between the expected level of service or product to that of perceived service or product. These problems in service sectors generally arise because deficiency of human resource, non - availability of the expect products or service, lack of trained employees, inappropriate customer mix, difficulty in controlling quality and consistency and other such issues.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Organised retailers sometimes do not make much of profit as they fail to understand its customers. Knowing the customers better enables the retailers to develop and execute plans which mutually benefit the company and the customer. Providing goods and services with customer as focus ensures higher customer satisfaction level with repeat visits and purchases.

The study is undertaken to analyze the customer gap and if found to bridge the gap with the suggestions. The study was made randomly on the customers who carried trolley with them to shop goods as they are believed to be the true customers. It is aimed at studying the Gap between customers' expectation and their perception with regard to organized retailing. It covers factors such as product quality, price, internal environment, staff, awareness, location and transparency in transaction. Seventy respondents were interviewed with the questionnaire to collect primary data required for the research. The duration was limited for 45 days.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"Customer Gap Analysis in Organised Retailing – A Empirical Study" is undertaken to know the variations between the customer expectations and customer perceptions (actual). The study relates to overall products and services rendered by organized retail outlets at Mangalore city, Karnataka. The study is to identify if any gap exists between customers' expectations and their perceptions. The findings of the study will suggest measures to increase its efficiency and effectiveness by bridging the gap (if any) with strategies aligned with customers' expectations.

OBJECTIVES

- "To analyse the gap between the customer expectations and customer perception in organised retail sector in Mangalore city, Karnataka.
- To analyze the customers view points and expectation from organised retailers.
- To understand the current satisfaction level with the organised retailers products and related services

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The survey is related with fact finding study which requires expert and imaginative planning, careful analysis and rational interpretation of the findings, so the design for the study is Descriptive Study.

DATA COLLECTION

Both primary and secondary data are used to study. In this study, primary data are gathered from face to face interaction with the respondents through questionnaire. For the study, main sources of secondary data are company website and related articles. Both internal and external sources are used for the study.

AREA OF STUDY

The study conducted at organized retail outlets in Mangalore city, Karnataka.

SAMPLE SIZE

Total of 70 respondents were selected for the study. These persons were personally interviewed and questionnaire was given to them. Random sampling method was used for the study.

SAMPLING UNIT

A decision regarding sampling unit is to be taken before selecting samples for the study. Here, the sampling unit is a person in Spar, purchasing bulk items as he/she carries trolley with him/her.

TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

Primary data collected for the purpose of analysis was checked, classified, and tabulated by following the statistical procedures such as Cronbach’s Alpha for the reliability of the tool, descriptive statistical methods like mean, & standard deviation, inferential statistical method like paired sample T-test. The Paired-Samples T- Test procedure compares the means of two variables that represent the same group at different times (e.g. before and after an event). Appropriate statistical analysis was carried on the data collected with Statistical Package for Social Sciences Research (SPSS Version 17.0)

LIMITATIONS

- The personal bias of the individual plays dominant role while responding.
- Time frame and depth of analysis for topic under consideration is a major limitation.
- It will difficult to say that the response of consumer is related to specific statements asked.
- The sampling is based on those who carry trolleys with them.
- Only 70 units of mass population were studied, it may affect the reliability of the study
- It is also seen that certain questionnaires were filled by customers in a hurry.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The data collected in its raw form could not help the investigator in his analysis work and further process .In order to convert this information into meaningful data; the collected information must be coded and tabulated in some general formats. These coding and tabulation helps the analysis to understand easily the relationship between different variables and easily identify the dependent and independent variables. After collection, coding and tabulation, the real task of analyst is the analysis of data. Analysis means finding out the relationship between each variable under study in order to get the result and interpretation.

The statistical tool used here is the SPSS 17.0 version software, thus it shows the statistical difference or no difference between the expected and perceived response. Theoretically (statistically) for certain statements gap may be seen but in practice the gap is found to be negligible. But this negligible gap plays a very vital role in determining customer satisfaction.

TABLE 1: RELIABILITY TEST FOR QUESTIONNAIRE.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA)	
Reliability Coefficients	
Number of cases	70.0
Number of Items	30
Alpha Value	.8970

Reliability analysis allows studying the properties of measurement scales and the items that make them up. The Reliability Analysis procedure calculates a number of commonly used measures of scale reliability and also provides information about the relationships between individual items in the scale. The Cronbach’s Alpha value obtained was .8970 which is said to be reliable. Nunnally (1978) has indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient but lower thresholds are sometimes used in the literature. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. However, there is actually no lower limit to the coefficient. The closer Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: “> .9 – Excellent, > .8 – Good, > .7 – Acceptable, > .6 – Questionable, > .5 – Poor, and < .5 – Unacceptable”

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES IN THE STUDY

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	36 51.4
	Female	34 48.6
Age	18-25	1 1.4
	26 – 30	9 12.9
	31 – 40	39 55.7
	41-50	20 28.6
	Above 50	1 1.4
Occupation	Professional	26 37.1
	Business	9 12.9
	Government service	6 8.6
	Private service	13 18.6
	Retired	1 1.4
	House wife	15 21.4

INTERPRETATION

Gender wise distribution sample shows 51.0% of them were male respondents and 48.6% of them were female respondents. In age wise distribution, majority of sample were between age group of 31-40 years (55.7%), followed by 28.6% from 41-50 years, 12.9% from 26-30 years, 1.4% each from 18-25 and above 50 years age group. Occupation wise distribution of sample revealed that 37.1% of them were professionals, 21.4% of them were house wives, 18.6% were from private sector, 12.9% were indulged in business, 8.6% from government sector and only 1.4% were retired.

TABLE 3: MEAN AND S.D OF EXPECTED AND ACTUAL PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS TOWARDS ALL STATEMENTS WITH RESULTS OF PAIRED SAMPLE T TEST VALUES

Sl. No	Statement	Expected		Actual		Difference	‘t’ value	‘P’ Value
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
1	Products sold are of highest quality	4.66	0.56	4.27	0.76	0.3857	4.558	0.000
2	Price paid is worth	4.64	0.57	4.17	0.95	0.4714	4.659	0.000
3	Varieties of models are available	4.74	0.61	4.41	0.73	0.3286	3.547	0.001
4	Retailers are conveniently located	4.86	0.43	4.77	0.52	0.0857	1.934	0.057
5	Organised retailers are well known store in Mangalore	4.76	0.52	4.71	0.59	0.0429	1.000	0.321
6	Product display is very attractive	4.79	0.45	4.70	0.55	0.0857	1.622	0.109
7	Ambience is attractive	4.83	0.38	4.73	0.45	0.1000	2.165	0.034
8	Arrangement of billing counters is very convenient	4.81	0.46	3.86	1.18	0.9571	6.759	0.000
9	The outlet is spacious	4.90	0.30	4.67	0.72	0.2286	3.095	0.001
10	You always get the product you wanted	4.89	0.36	4.03	0.98	0.8571	6.993	0.000
11	There is error free sale.	4.93	0.26	4.80	0.63	0.1286	1.693	0.220
12	Staffs members at organised retailers have the knowledge to answer your queries	4.84	0.37	4.53	0.68	0.3143	4.197	0.000
13	There is transparency in the transaction	4.91	0.28	4.86	0.43	0.0571	1.425	0.287
14	There is good customer service	4.87	0.38	4.77	0.54	0.1000	1.982	0.056
15	Latest versions of products are available	4.76	0.55	4.40	0.84	0.3571	4.023	0.000

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

For all the fifteen statement paired sample t test was applied, six statement (retailers are conveniently located, organised retailers are well known store in Mangalore, product display is very attractive, there is error free sale, there is transparency in the transaction and there is good customer service) had no significant difference in mean scoring pattern between expected and actual perception, all other statement had difference in mean scores.

There was a significant difference in the expected and actual perception of respondents towards the statement 'Products sold are of highest quality' with t value of 4.558 and P value of .000, the expected quality of product is higher than actually perceived. The expected mean score was higher for Products sold at organised retailers are of highest quality than actual (4.66 and 4.27 respectively). This signifies that, the respondents were had a feeling that the products available at organised retailers are very qualitative but when reached the stores there was decline in their perception towards quality of products available.

For 'Price paid is worth' ($t=4.659$; $P=.000$), significant difference was observed. The mean scores were more for expected perception of respondents towards this statement than actual perception (4.64 and 4.17 respectively). This implies, respondents feel that products and services are charged high when they visit the organised retailers.

For statement 'Varieties of models are available', difference in mean scoring pattern was observed between expected and actual perception with t value of 3.547 significant at .001. The expected mean score was high (4.74) than actual (4.41). The expected varieties of products available at organised retailers are more than the actual.

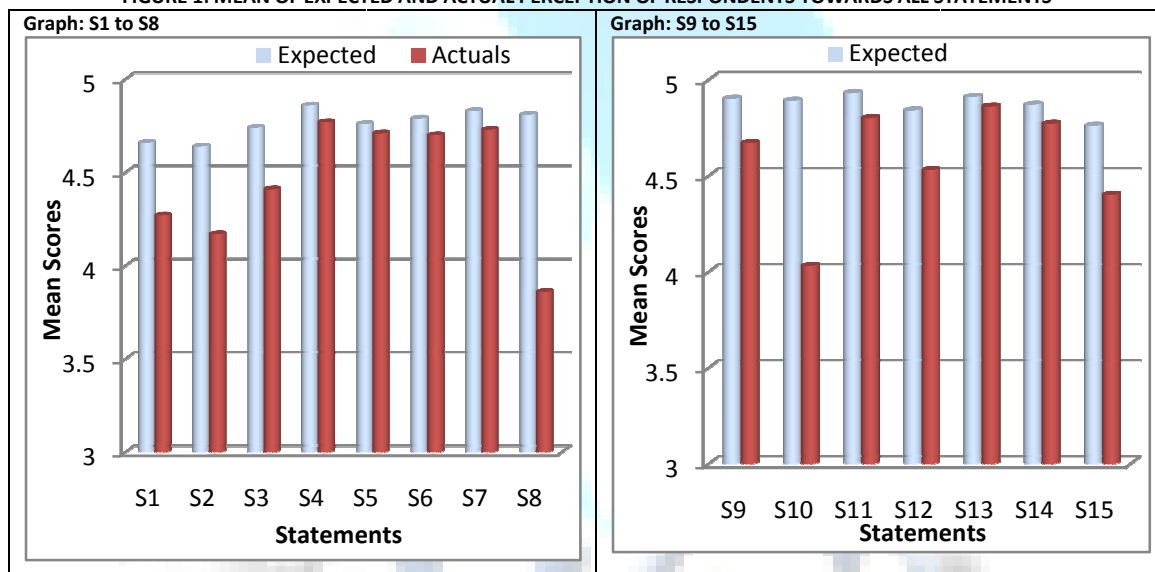
The expectation relating to attractiveness of ambience in organised retailing showed significant difference in mean scoring pattern ($t=2.165$; $P=.034$). The mean scores were high for expected perception than actual (4.83 and 4.73 respectively).

For 'Arrangement of billing counters is very convenient' significant difference was observed with T value of 4.81 and P value .000. The mean score for expected was higher with 4.81 than actual (3.86). This implies that billing counter are not very convenient, may be the customers are made to wait for long duration or some counter are closed.

For 'The outlet is spacious' significant difference was noticed in mean scoring pattern with t value of 3.095 and P value of .001. The expected mean scores are higher than actual or perceived (4.90 and 4.67 respectively). 'You always get the product you wanted' also exhibited significant difference in mean scores ($t=6.993$; $P=.000$). For statement 'staffs members at organised retailers have the knowledge to answer your queries' demonstrated difference in mean scoring ($t=4.197$; $P=.000$). the expected mean scores were higher than actual (4.84 and 4.53 respectively). For 'latest versions of products are available' statement significant difference was observed in mean scoring of expected (4.76) and actual (4.40) with t value of 4.023 and P value of .000.

For 'retailers are conveniently located' no difference was observed in mean scoring between actual and perceived (4.86 and 4.77 respectively) with t value of 1.934 and P value of 0.057. Statement 'organised retailers are well known stores in Mangalore' revealed no significant difference in mean scoring pattern with t value of 1.000 and P value of 0.321. 'Product display is very attractive' also revealed no significant difference in mean scoring pattern ($t=1.622$ and $P=.109$). 'There is error free sales' showed no difference in mean scoring with t value of 1.693 and P value of .220. 'There is transparency in the transaction' also signified no difference in mean scoring with t value of 1.425 and P value of .287. 'There is good customers service' also revealed no significant difference in mean scoring pattern with t value of 1.982 and P value of 0.056. The statement where no significant difference is observed mean the expected products and services matches with the actual received by the customers.

FIGURE 1: MEAN OF EXPECTED AND ACTUAL PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS TOWARDS ALL STATEMENTS



FINDINGS

The customers before coming to organised retail outlet expect that product sold are of highest quality but in reality they are not totally satisfied with product quality. The customers expect that price paid for purchasing product or service at organised retailers is worth (may be due to aesthetics they enjoyed like music, air conditioner, individual attention, parking facility etc.) but, actually after visiting the shop the perception differs. There is a decline in perception level.

As the name organised retailers, the customers expects that variety of model will be present. But actual encounter at retail outlet changed (towards negative side) their perception. Generally at the organised retail outlet the ambience is good and attractive but respondents differ in their opinion after visiting the outlet. Arrangement at bill counter are not very convenient - may be due to long queue, waiting time, space is congested to move the trolley, etc.

The types and variety of product sought is not always found in retail outlets as expected. The staff members at organised retail outlet are not equipped with the necessary knowledge as expected by the customers. This may be due to many organised retailers coming up in the market which reduces the pool of the candidates; lack of training may also be one of reasons. The customer expect latest version of the products to be available at the organised retail outlets but generally they do not find them in the shelves.

CONCLUSION

The main objective was to analyse the gap between the customer expectations and customer perception at organised retailing. The article has helped us to understand the future expectation levels and the understanding the current satisfaction level with the retail products and related services. The objectives set for the study was completely accomplished.

To conclude, it is understood from the research that the performance and overall functioning of retail sector is aligned to give the customer the best of services, coupled with value for their money, and make their weekly shopping an experience to look forward to. The findings given above are to get the business to perfection. Besides the urban market, India's rural market has just started to be seen as a viable option and companies who understand what the rural consumer

wants will grow to incredible heights. The bulk of India's population still live in rural areas and to be able to cater specifically to them will mean generating tremendous amounts of business.

Business, specifically retail business must focus on the most important factor in the Indian mind-set: Value for Money. Indian consumers are ready to pay almost any amount of money for a product or service as long as they feel they are getting good Value for Money. This is often misconstrued as being tight fisted or interested in lower priced and/or lower quality products.

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