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## CUSTOMERS PERCEPTION AND CHANGING WAVES IN INDIAN RETAILING: A CASE STUDY OF BELAGAVI, KARNATAKA STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*Nothing is permanent in the world, only change is permanent. In this current changing business scenario, retail industry has witnessed major revolution and global attention. The Indian retail industry is the largest and attractive in the world and accounts over 10% of the country's GDP and 8% of total employment. In the background of changing retail trends, understanding customers perceptions, building relationship and retaining customers has been identified as major source of competitive advantage. So the present paper attempts to bring three critical areas in retailing: Customers perceptions, CRM and Changing waves in retailing. A survey was conducted in Belgaum, Karnataka by serving questionnaires to 75 respondents. Five product and twelve store attributes were measured using Liker's five point scale and final score has been calculated using weighted ranking method. Research identified the major opportunities and challenges in retailing and indicates that product, quality, variety, customer relationship and service were given highest preference.*

### KEYWORDS

Retailing, Customers perceptions, CRM.

### INTRODUCTION

Nothing is permanent in the world, only change is permanent. In this current changing business scenario, retail industry has witnessed major revolution and global attention. In this current changing business scenario, retail industry has witnessed major revolution and global attention in recent times due to liberalization, globalization and privatization. The presence of retailing industry is far centuries old but the consolidation & growth of the industry has started only in the recent times. India has been ranked the third most attractive nation for retail investment.

The Indian retail industry is one of the largest in the world and expected to grow annually at high rate. The retail sector boosts India's GDP and employment opportunities to the nation's work force. In the background of changing times retail is trying to adapt Indian customer mind. Therefore understanding Indian customers perception became biggest challenge and very crucial in designing retail strategies. Building relationships with customers and retaining customer loyalty has been identified as a major source of competitive advantage within the retailing sector (Chang & Tu, 2005). So retail managers need to identify the significance of CRM as a complex tool in influencing customers perception and decision making. So, the study attempts to bring three critical areas in retailing i.e. Customer perceptions on retail attributes, Effect of customers' perception on CRM and Changing Indian retail sector with changing times.

A survey of 75 respondents was conducted in Belgaum, Karnataka to obtain responses of shoppers on a structured questionnaire based on the above 3 areas. Five variables were identified under product attributes and 12 variables were identified under store and retail attributes on the basis of review of related studies in the past in order to identify important factors that effect customer's perception in choosing a particular store. Majority of the questions are close-ended, in order to maintain accuracy & to facilitate data analysis. Data was analyzed using Likert's five – point scale and final results thus obtained has been calculated using weighted ranking method.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was focused on the following broad objectives:

1. To understand the concept of CRM and its application to the Indian retail stores.
2. To understand customers perceptions and evaluate the key retail attributes and their effect on CRM.
3. To identify and evaluate the changing waves and challenges in Indian retailing in 21st- century.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study is focused on understanding customer perceptions. The study identified the key retail attributes and their effect on relationship marketing in the retail sector. Since the Indian retail sector is in consolidation & growth stage, the study also identified the various challenges in Indian retail sector. To attain these objectives a survey of 75 respondents had been carried out in Belgaum, Karnataka using convenience sampling method. The key retail attributes were measured using Likert's five point scale from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. The final results thus obtained have been calculated using weighted ranking method. In order to identify the changes and challenges in retail industry a thorough study of literature on Indian retail industry has been carried out.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The present study is mainly focused only in Belgaum, Karnataka.
2. India is a land of diversity so the sample results may not be a representative of entire population.
3. The information collected is from the memory of the respondents.
4. Time and money are the major constraints of the study.

Further research can compare consumers using different retail formats & different retail attributes.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The product attributes like quality, price, variety, assortment and value drive the customers to the store (Gwin and Gwin, 2003) Sinha and Banerjee's (2004) study in India indicate that store convenience and customer services positively influence consumers store choices, whilst, entertainment, parking and ambience facilities had a negative influence on consumer choice. Indian consumers were also found to be price sensitive and quality conscious (Tuli and Mookerjee, 2004). Choo, Jung and Pysarchik, (2004) note that Indian consumers attitude towards new products are changing significantly and this can increase their intention to shop in new retail formats such as supermarkets. Consumers have a perception of low overall prices of those stores that offer a small discount over large number of items (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2008). The overall perceptions of customers about the retail store are a result of product attributes and store attributes. Consumer perceptions of store attributes are influenced by retail format, type of the products, cultural value, shopping intention and customer base (Paulins & Giestfield, 2003). Customers perception on product attributes vary according to product nature and socio economic nature of the consumer (Uusitalo, 2001). Previous research has identified store attributes as a multi-dimensional construct including location of store, nature and quality of stocks, in-store promotions, sales personnel, physical attributes, convenience of store, atmospherics and loyalty cards that influences consumer behaviour (Miranda, Konya and Havrila 2005). Reactional shoppers look for high quality with variety and services and other shoppers are concerned about convenience and cost (Bellener, Robertson

and Greenberg). Consumers evaluate alternative stores on set of attributes depending on their individual preferences would patronize the best store (Tripathi & Sinha, 2006). Product attributes are often continues in nature (Viswanathan & Childers, 1999). Location plays an important role in the success or failure of the outlet (Mendes and Themido, 2004). Developing close sales person customer relationship could give a key differential advantage (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000). Thus, product attributes such as quality, price, and availability of new products, variety are important constructs within the Indian context. Promotional offers and discounts are effective tools for encouraging consumers to buy more (Shi, Ka-man & Gerald, 2005). According to Duncan 2005, consumer motive is defined as internal impulses when simulated initiate some type of response. Therefore, from the above literature the study identifies customer service, quality, ambience, location and convenience of the store, price, value, promotional offers & discounts, sales personnel, speed, variety, parking facilities, advertising and availability of new products, information as the key retail attributes that effect customer's perception on relationship marketing in Indian retail store context. The goal of customer experience management is to move customers from satisfied to loyal and then loyal to advocate. The concept of customer experience management is almost a mirror image of CRM. It says that every time a company a customer interacts, the customer learns something about the company. Depending upon what is learned from each experience customers may alter their behaviour in the ways that affect their individual profitability.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Retailing in 21st century witnessed levels of market velocity and volatility that demands completely new approach to market and retail intelligence. The information that retailer would need to understand the diversity of retailing is demographic trends. Respondents are asked to respond on seven demographic factors which are Age, gender, Martial status, family -size, education, occupation and income.

It is depicted from table. 1 that, out of 75 respondents 59.33% are male and 40.67% are females. The study includes different age groups, out of which 42.67% of them belong to 25-35 years and 36 % of them are below 25 years, 14.67% of them belong to age group 35-50 and only 6.67% of the respondents belong to age group 51 and above. From this statistics it is clear that most of them are young people mainly up to the age of 35 years. Qualification wise 34.67% are post-graduates, 30% are graduates and 25.33% are under graduates and rest 10% are below matriculation. Martial status of 63.33% respondents was married and rest 36.67 % is unmarried. People from Service sector ranked high in participation with 36.67% and 26.67% are professionals, 22.6 % are students, 8 % of them are businessmen and 5.33% are from other background. Coming to family size 45.33% are living with family of size 4 to 6 and 41.33% of them are below 4 members. Annual income of 36.67% of the respondents was from 25,000 to 50,000, 27.33% earn above 50,000 and 20% of them earn below 10,000 and rest of them earn 10,000 to 25,000 per month.

**TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS**

Demographic Factors	Particulars	Frequency (n = 75)	100%
Age	Below 25	27	36.00%
	25-35	32	42.67%
	35-50	11	14.67%
	51 and above	5	6.67%
Gender	Male	44	59.33%
	Female	31	40.67%
Education	Matriculation and below	8	10.00%
	Under Graduate	19	25.33%
	Graduate	22	30.00%
	Post Graduate	26	34.67%
Martial status	Unmarried	28	36.67%
	Married	47	63.33%
Family Size	Below 4 members	31	41.33%
	4 to 6	34	45.33%
	More than 6	10	13.33%
Occupation	Student	17	22.67%
	Business	6	8.00%
	Professional	20	26.67%
	Service	28	36.67%
	Others	4	5.33%
Annual Income	Rs.10,000 and below	15	20.00%
	Rs.10,000 to Rs.25,000	12	16.00%
	Rs.25,000 to Rs.50,000	27	36.67%
	Rs.50,000 and above	21	27.33%

Source: Based on survey conducted by the researcher

Analysis suggests that majority of respondents are males. Majority of respondents are young people under 35 years, maximum no of respondents were post graduates, majority of the respondents are married (63.3%), majority of the respondents are dominated by customer whose family size was 4 to 6. Analysis also indicates that maximum number of customers belongs to service sector and majority of the customers are earning income Rs.25000 to 50,000 per month.

**TABLE 2: SHOPPING PREFERENCE OF RESPONDENTS**

Sl. No.	Preference	Frequency	100%
1	Wholesalers	9	12.00%
2	Retail outlets	61	81.33%
3	Distributor	4	5.33%
4	Others	1	1.33%

Source: Based on survey conducted by the researcher

The value of service can be measured only through experience and perception of the customers. This experience is ultimately got from the place where the consumers shop their products. To succeed and win in this environment, the focus should be on customers buying experience. So the information thus analyzed from Table: 2 indicate that majority of the respondents prefer to shop from retailers (81.33%) and the reason mainly being the total experience which they derive from the retail store.

**TABLE 3: MODE OF PAYMENT**

Sl. No.	Mode of Payment	No. of Respondents	100%
1	Credit / Debit Card	49	65.33%
2	Cash	24	32.67%
3	Others	2	2.00%

Source: Based on survey conducted by the researcher



From the above Table 3: analysis indicates that majority of the respondents(65.33%) prefer to pay by credit/debit cards and only few respondents (32.67%) prefer to purchase on cash and 2% respondents prefer to pay through other modes.

TABLE 4: EFFECT OF PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES ON CRM

Product Attributes	Not Imp. 1	Least Imp.2	Somewhat Imp. 3	Very Imp.4	Extremely Imp. 5	Position Weights	Rank
Product	0	0	5	33	37	332	1
Price	0	3	9	29	34	319	2
Variety	2	3	20	26	24	292	5
Quality	0	0	18	26	31	313	3
Availability	1	4	18	24	28	299	4

Source: Based on survey conducted by the researcher

The success of the retailer depends upon how consumers perceive about the product attributes Therefore the retailers need to identify the various influences that lead up to a purchase not just the store where the purchase was made. So considering these influences the study measured five variables under product attributes namely, product, price, variety, quality, availability and also analyzed the factors which effect consumers in purchase decision. The respondents were asked to rate the various factors in order of their preference. Analysis from the above table indicates that originality of the product was given highest preference followed by price, product quality, product availability and product variety. So the above analysis indicates that Indian customers are more price sensitive and give more preference to originality of the product.

TABLE 5: CUSTOMERS PERCEPTIONS ON RETAILING AND STORE ATTRIBUTES

Sl. No.	Description	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Position Weights	Ranks
1	You prefer to buy from the retail store that delivers more value	6	15	12	25	17	257	5
2	you like to shop from the retail store that has good ambience	22	6	14	24	9	217	10
3	Location and convenience always affects your purchase decision	2	5	23	29	16	277	3
4	Retailers always provides better information than wholesalers	17	7	15	26	10	230	9
5	You prefer to purchase from the retail store that maintains good customer relationship	5	15	13	26	16	258	4
6	You prefer to shop from the retail store that provides good promotional offers and discounts	2	4	19	26	24	291	2
7	Sales personnel always drives you to a particular store	15	6	16	27	11	238	8
8	Advertising always influence your purchase decision	28	7	12	22	6	196	11
9	You prefer to shop from the retail store that provides good parking facilities	12	8	15	28	12	245	7
10	You prefer to shop from the retail store that provides best customer service	5	1	8	31	30	305	1
11	Retailers are always good in understanding customers perceptions	6	18	12	25	14	248	6
12	Speed of delivery always affects your purchase decision.	10	12	12	27	14	248	6

Source: Based on survey conducted by the researcher

Increased competition and expansion of retail markets has forced many retailers to rethink their strategies. Competing and winning in a value driven world requires the retailers to develop a comprehensive strategies which involve in understanding customers perceptions on retail attributes. So the study identified twelve factors for measuring store and retail attributes which forms the base in designing retail strategy. The twelve variables are value, ambience, location, sales personnel, information, customer relationship, promotional offers and discounts, speed of delivery, advertising, customer service, parking facilities and finally retailer's ability in understanding customer's perceptions. From the above table:5 analysis indicates that customer service has been given highest preference followed by promotional offers and discounts, purchase decision, customer relationship management and retail store that delivers more value. The research also identified that customers felt that retailers are better in understanding customer's perceptions because they are the persons who are directly in contact with customers. Parking facilities and sales personnel have moderate effect on customers and advertising and ambience has least effect on customers.

## INDIAN RETAIL SECTOR IN 21ST CENTURY

The waves of changes that have transformed the Indian retail industry are:

1. Indian customers shifting from unorganized stores retail format to organized retail formats like supermarkets and malls.
2. LPG was the first wave of change which has revolutionized the Indian retail sector. It means liberalization, privatization and globalization have brought major changes in retailing and assisted the companies for cash and carry trading and wholesale trading. So, various government norms will open up strategic investment opportunity for global retailer to invest in India.
3. CRM is the second wave which now transformed and paved the way for CEM (customer experience management). To withstand the global competition and compete successfully in the 21st century retailers must focus on customer buying experience.
4. Uniqueness of Indian customers and their changing preferences is another wave of Indian retail sector So, the retailers in this 21st century must make continuous efforts in understanding customer's perceptions and must create diversified and innovative retail formats.

## OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIAN RETAILING IN 21ST CENTURY

1. **Productive and Young Working Class:** Increase in young and talented population and also the working women class have created high disposable incomes that lead to higher consumption and thus opened the doors for more opportunities for retailers to flourish.
2. **Revolution in IT and Internet:** Internet revolution and E-tailing are allowing global brand to understand Indian customers mind and influence them even before entering the market. Due to the wide reach of media even in remote markets, consumer's awareness on global brands are increasing and providing better opportunities for global retailers in India.

3. **Untapped Rural Market in India:** Indian rural market offers lots of opportunity for retail sector. So the retailers can exploit the opportunities and tap the Indian rural market with focused attention and strategies.
4. **India-‘A Vibrant Economy’:** Indian retail market is both organized and unorganized and is expected to be growing very fast. Indian economy is expanding opportunities for global retailers through organized retail. India topped the list of emerging markets for retail investment and the fastest growing economies in the world. It means India is definitely a country for healthy investments and provides better opportunities for retailing.

### CHALLENGES TO INDIAN RETAIL SECTOR

The biggest challenge to the Indian retail sector is to concentrate on the wastages in storage as well as in the operations of the existing food supply chains in the country. Also develop a strong back-end support to retailers, which includes...

1. Sustainability
2. Tax structure-because it favors small retail business
3. High costs of real estate
4. Poor infrastructural facilities.
5. Lack of adequate retail research in India.
6. Shortage of trained manpower.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study provides an insight to test the effect of Indian customer's perceptions on retail attributes in the changing business scenario in 21st century. Findings suggest that:

1. Store attributes have least effect on customers compared with product attributes.
2. Customers are more inclined to the retail store that offer better customer services, promotional offers and discounts.
3. Majority of the customers prefer to purchase from retail outlets on cash payment mode. This indicates that there are better opportunities for growth in Indian retail sector.
4. Originality of the product was given highest preference and Indian customers are more price sensitive and quality conscious.
5. Location and customer relationship management are another important factors identified by the customers because they want to reduce the time, energy and other costs involved in shopping from a retail store.

To compete successfully in this 21st century retailer must focus on "customer buying experience". Sustainability of the fittest and fastest in the market is the mantra of today's game plan. So the difference between a successful retailer and a failed one would be in Understanding customer's perceptions, speed in reaching customers, updating with latest trends, ideas, and services and forming long term relations with customers. Therefore the future belongs to the multi-channel retailers which provides all in one roof rather than the single-channel retail stores that offer a network of channels and store formats that are more transparent to customers delivering high value.

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