

Consumer's Perception towards Modern Retailing in Food and Grocery Sector

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Introduction

Perception is the process, by which an individual selects, organises and interprets stimuli into meaningful and coherent picture of the world and understood as how people see the world around them (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). The increase in the per capita disposable income, exposure to global information and life style, urbanization, and the prevalence of nuclear family structure ensured a rapid evolution in the food purchase behaviour of Indian consumers resulting in the growth and acceptance of modern retail formats. The modern retailers are spread across formats like supermarkets, hypermarkets, cash and carry stores and convenience stores.

Retail trade is primarily divided into two segments- Organized and Un-organized/ traditional retailing. Any retail outlet chain that is professionally managed, having organized supply chain management and centralized quality control and sourcing is termed as organized retailing. Unorganized retail outlet is run locally by the owner or the caretaker of the shop. The street end kirana stores enjoyed a bonding with the customer whereas the modern retail format owing to its size and the stock of wide range of merchandise has started becoming popular with customers.

This paper takes a look at the factors that customers perceive to influence the purchasing behaviour of shoppers in the modern retail outlets. A modern retail store's atmosphere should affect the shoppers' mood/emotions and willingness to visit. This will also influence the consumers' judgments towards the quality of the store. Various factors like store layout, atmospherics, accessibility, time convenience, product assortment, pricing and promotions, product quality, clientele and total shopping experience were identified to find out if they influence the overall purchase behaviour of customers.

Atmospherics of the store refers to the design of an environment via visual communications, lightings, colours, music and scent to stimulate customers' perceptual and emotional responses and ultimately to affect their purchase behaviour (Kotler, 1973 and Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). A store layout means how products are displayed together to create adjacencies of use. It should entice customers to move around the store to purchase more merchandise than they have originally planned. Time convenience can be explained as the average time spent per shopping trip at a retail setup. It includes the time required for selecting the products, paying for purchase, getting the delivery of the orders and check out. Working hour's convenience can be defined as the timings in the day when a particular store remains open for customers to make purchases. Price of a particular item can be explained as economic value advantage that a customer perceives to have acquired by purchasing that item from any store. Sales promotions are the sales incentives extended by the retailers to customers for an increase in off-take of a particular product. Technically regular availability of merchandise is called fill-rate. A high fill rate means that in-store merchandise availability increases resulting in fewer stock-outs (Levy and Weitz, 2004). Clientele is based on the premise that consumers tend to patronize stores where persons similar to them are perceived to be shopping.

Review of Literature

. Ramanathan and Hari. (2011) observed that changes in the demographic system of consumers, and the awareness of quality conscious consumption, consumers preferred to buy different products both from the organized and unorganized retailers. Joseph, Soundararajan, Gupta and Sahu. (2008)

found that with the emergence of organized outlets consumers gained the availability of better quality products, lower prices, one stop shopping, choice of additional brands and products, family shopping and fresh stocks. Ali, Kapoor and Moorthy (2010) indicated that consumers shopping behaviour was influenced by their income and educational level while gender and age had no significant impact on their behaviour. Singh.A.K and Agarwal.P (2012) stated that grocery shopper's consider quality to be the most important factor followed by price, locality, range of products and parking. Zeithaml (1988) discussed that from the consumer's perspective, price is what is given or sacrificed to obtain a product. Becker (1965) acknowledged that monetary price is not the only sacrifice consumers make to obtain products but included time costs, search costs (energy), and psychic costs (effort) which either explicitly or implicitly involves the consumer's perception of sacrifice. According to the Food Marketing Institute (1985 and 1986), less price-conscious consumers will find value in store proximity, ready to serve food products and home delivery, because time and effort are perceived as more costly also the supermarket shoppers have cited fast checkout as more important than low prices in selecting grocery stores. Howard (1989) identified the three key dimensions of a retail store image as convenience of the store location, the price of its products and the information it provides and the information it provides about its products. Woodside et al (1992) focused on seven attributes, viz, food prices, quality of meat, quality of produce, selection of foods, personnel, checkout speed, and location convenience.

Objectives

- ✓ To study the consumer perception towards modern retailing across time convenience, atmospherics, accessibility, product assortment, price and promotions, clientele, product quality, store layout and shopping experience factors.

Research Methodology

Descriptive research design has been adopted for the study. The population of the study involved consumers of selected modern retail stores in Puducherry. The selected modern retail shops in Puducherry include Nilgris, More, Spencers Daily and Pothys Super Store. Random sampling was used to select the sample stores and then customers were chosen by convenience sampling through mall intercept method. 225 respondents from these stores were administered a structured questionnaire based on five point scale. However, only 200 respondents filled the questionnaire correctly and these 200 samples were considered appropriate for further analysis.

To collect primary data a structured questionnaire was developed. The first part included statements to collect the demographic data of respondent while the second part dealt with the attributes that the consumer perceived about the modern retail store. The data collected was entered into SPSS 16.0 and result were analyzed and interpreted through non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test to find the main objectives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 Mean and Standard deviation of factors of modern retailing by gender

| Modern retailing dimensions | Mean & SD | Gender | | Kruskal Wallis | P Value |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| | | Male (126) | Female (74) | | |
| Time Convenience | Mean | 3.67 | 3.84 | 3.83 | 0.05* |
| | S.D | .60 | .66 | | |
| Accessibility | Mean | 3.52 | 3.44 | .38 | 0.53 |
| | S.D | .81 | 1.11 | | |
| Atmospherics | Mean | 3.68 | 4.00 | 19.24 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .52 | .66 | | |
| Product Assortment | Mean | 3.93 | 3.87 | .43 | 0.50 |
| | S.D | .57 | .57 | | |
| Quality | Mean | 3.64 | 3.70 | .02 | 0.87 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|------|-------------|------|----------|
| | S.D | .74 | .89 | | |
| Price and Promotion | Mean | 3.62 | 3.88 | 9.7 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .55 | .59 | | |
| Store Layout | Mean | 3.57 | 3.59 | .21 | 0.64 |
| | S.D | .63 | .87 | | |
| Clientele | Mean | 3.63 | 3.67 | 1.21 | 0.27 |
| | S.D | .51 | .63 | | |
| Shopping Experience | Mean | 3.56 | 3.72 | 6.96 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .53 | .59 | | |

Primary data computed * Five percent significant ** One percent significant

From the above table it is inferred from P value that there is significant difference at one percent level based on gender across retail parameters such as atmospherics, price and promotion and shopping experience whereas time convenience is significant at 5 percent level. It is observed that female respondents perceive better feelings on time convenience, atmospherics, price and promotion and shopping experience and perceive a lower feeling towards accessibility and product assortment compared to male respondents. The mean value indicates that the female respondents perceive a higher influence on the stores that are less crowded and the stores which offer seasonal discounts, multiple counters for billing. In contrast male respondents are influenced by the accessibility and product assortment offered by the store.

Noble, Griffith & Adjei (2006) identified gender to significantly influence shopping motives. Kotler (1973) also proposed that atmospherics is an important part of retail marketing strategy. Fischer & Arnold (1990) suggested that women are more involved than men in the shopping activity and the difference between men and women about expectation, want, need, life-style etc. reflect their consumption behaviour.

From table it is seen that Atmospherics, Price and Promotion and shopping experience has a more profound influence on female respondents compared to male respondents. In present day employed women have more exposure in turn raising the bar on their expectation towards atmospherics and price/promotion and in trying to cherish shopping as a pleasurable experience than feeling it as a mundane activity.

Table 2 Mean and Standard deviation of factors of modern retailing by marital status

| Modern retailing dimensions | Mean & SD | Marital Status | | Kruskal Wallis | P value |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|----------|
| | | Unmarried (103) | Married (97) | | |
| Time Convenience | Mean | 3.79 | 3.67 | 1.38 | 0.23 |
| | S.D | .56 | .69 | | |
| Accessibility | Mean | 3.55 | 3.43 | .00 | 0.95 |
| | S.D | .80 | 1.06 | | |
| Atmospherics | Mean | 3.78 | 3.82 | 1.06 | 0.30 |
| | S.D | .55 | .64 | | |
| Product Assortment | Mean | 4.01 | 3.80 | 8.16 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .59 | .52 | | |
| Quality | Mean | 3.77 | 3.55 | 3.35 | 0.06 |
| | S.D | .77 | .82 | | |
| Price and Promotion | Mean | 3.62 | 3.82 | 5.49 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .53 | .61 | | |
| Store Layout | Mean | 3.66 | 3.49 | 1.91 | 0.16 |
| | S.D | .68 | .77 | | |
| Clientele | Mean | 3.73 | 3.54 | 5.81 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .53 | .57 | | |
| Shopping Experience | Mean | 3.66 | 3.58 | .79 | 0.37 |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|--|--|
| | S.D | .52 | .59 | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|--|--|

Primary data computed * Five percent significant ** One percent significant

The mean value indicates that unmarried respondents are highly influenced by the stores' atmospherics, time convenience factors, accessibility, product quality, store layout, matching clientele and shopping experience than married respondents. There is significant difference at one percent level based on marital status across factors such as product assortment, price/ promotion and matching clientele Aggarwal's (2000) found that an Indian housewife is reluctant to go further than the nearest kirana for items of daily use. Unmarried respondents cherish the presence of matching clientele and are also attracted by promotion and the depth of product available. The larger time at the disposal of unmarried respondents create in them a desire to make shopping more an experience and hence perceive better feelings on the factors of modern retailing

Table 3 Mean and Standard deviation of factors of modern retailing by employment status

| Modern retailing dimensions | Mean & SD | Employment Status | | Kruskal Wallis | P Value |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------|
| | | Self Employed (160) | Spouse employed (40) | | |
| Time Convenience | Mean | 3.77 | 3.56 | 2.69 | 0.10 |
| | S.D | .60 | .72 | | |
| Accessibility | Mean | 3.53 | 3.35 | .07 | 0.78 |
| | S.D | .85 | 1.22 | | |
| Atmospherics | Mean | 3.82 | 3.74 | .51 | 0.47 |
| | S.D | .59 | .61 | | |
| Product Assortment | Mean | 3.97 | 3.65 | 10.13 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .54 | .62 | | |
| Quality | Mean | 3.73 | 3.40 | 7.37 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .76 | .90 | | |
| Price and Promotion | Mean | 3.68 | 3.86 | 1.27 | 0.26 |
| | S.D | .56 | .63 | | |
| Store Layout | Mean | 3.65 | 3.29 | 5.78 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .67 | .87 | | |
| Clientele | Mean | 3.62 | 3.72 | .08 | 0.77 |
| | S.D | .58 | .41 | | |
| Shopping Experience | Mean | 3.64 | 3.53 | .05 | 0.81 |
| | S.D | .48 | .78 | | |

Primary data computed * Five percent significant ** One percent significant

The above table shows that there is significant difference between modern retailing dimensions and the employment status of the consumer. The obtained P values show that product assortment, quality and store layout are significant at 1 percent level. This indicates that employed respondents are highly influenced by the stores' product assortment and quality and the store layout. The mean value indicates that respondents with only spousal employment are influenced by the price and promotion offered by the store.

Kavita (2012) revealed that many of today's consumers have less time to spend despite the growth in income and that consumers look for value and convenience. Anirban Sengupta observed that consumers today are shopping more during each of their shopping visits, a reflection of being "Time-poor" but "money-rich". Unemployed respondents have less disposable income compared to employed respondents. Thus unemployed respondents concentrate more on price/promotions than employed respondents who prefer product assortment, product quality and store layout.

Table 4 Mean and Standard deviation of factors of modern retailing by mode of conveyance

| Modern retailing dimensions | Mean & SD | Shopping Conveyance | | Kruskal Wallis | P Value |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------|----------------|---------|
| | | Two wheeler (174) | Car (26) | | |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| Time Convenience | Mean | 3.71 | 3.89 | 1.86 | 0.17 |
| | S.D | .61 | .75 | | |
| Accessibility | Mean | 3.47 | 3.59 | 0.26 | 0.60 |
| | S.D | .94 | .90 | | |
| Atmospherics | Mean | 3.75 | 4.13 | 10.85 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | .61 | .40 | | |
| Product Assortment | Mean | 3.87 | 4.02 | 1.31 | 0.25 |
| | S.D | .58 | .43 | | |
| Quality | Mean | 3.61 | 4.05 | 6.73 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | .80 | .65 | | |
| Price and Promotion | Mean | 3.72 | 3.69 | 0.14 | 0.70 |
| | S.D | .55 | .79 | | |
| Store Layout | Mean | 3.53 | 3.88 | 4.34 | 0.05 * |
| | S.D | .72 | .69 | | |
| Clientele | Mean | 3.62 | 3.78 | 1.38 | 0.24 |
| | S.D | .56 | .45 | | |
| Shopping Experience | Mean | 3.61 | 3.65 | .01 | 0.89 |
| | S.D | .54 | .67 | | |

Primary data computed * Five percent significant ** One percent significant

The above table indicates that there is significant difference between modern retailing dimensions and the consumer's mode of conveyance. The obtained P values show that consumers who come to shop by car are influenced by the store's atmospherics, product quality and store layout at 1 percent level. The mean value indicates that consumers who come to shop by two wheeler are influenced by the price and promotion offered by the store. Mulky (2005) stated that only a small proportion of India's population owns self-transportation vehicles. It is found that respondents who come to shop by two-wheeler perceive a higher influence on proper humidification arrangements in the modern retail store. Lack of public transport systems, overcrowding and high commute times, roads that are often chocked with traffic, make it difficult for commuters to travel long distance thus making them shop at nearby stores rather shopping at modern retail outlets that are located far away.

Table 5 Mean and Standard deviation of factors of modern retailing by shopping frequency

| Modern retailing dimensions | Mean & SD | Frequency of shopping | | | | Kruskal Wallis | P Value |
|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| | | More than once a week (88) | Once a week (56) | Once a fortnight (8) | Once a month (48) | | |
| Time Convenience | Mean | 3.62 | 4.01 | 3.97 | 3.58 | 16.77 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | .64 | .56 | .46 | .60 | | |
| Accessibility | Mean | 3.29 | 3.90 | 3.87 | 3.32 | 2.55 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | 1.10 | .63 | .23 | .81 | | |
| Atmospherics | Mean | 3.73 | 3.90 | 3.87 | 3.80 | 5.43 | 0.14 |
| | S.D | .19 | .65 | .23 | .58 | | |
| Product Assortment | Mean | 3.83 | 4.12 | 3.41 | 3.88 | 9.20 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | .47 | .57 | .23 | .62 | | |
| Quality | Mean | 3.73 | 3.73 | 3.00 | 3.59 | 9.02 | 0.05 * |
| | S.D | .75 | .78 | .00 | .93 | | |
| Price and Promotion | Mean | 3.70 | 3.82 | 4.28 | 3.53 | 13.08 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | .52 | .52 | .45 | .69 | | |
| Store Layout | Mean | 3.49 | 3.83 | 3.12 | 3.52 | 15.56 | < 0.001 ** |
| | S.D | .77 | .72 | .35 | .63 | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|------|------|-------------|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| Clientele | Mean | 3.61 | 3.74 | 2.52 | 3.78 | 20.51 | <0.001** |
| | S.D | .48 | .55 | .60 | .47 | | |
| Shopping Experience | Mean | 3.58 | 3.71 | 3.87 | 3.53 | 5.02 | 0.17 |
| | S.D | .47 | .52 | .26 | .74 | | |

Primary data computed * Five percent significant ** One percent significant

From the above table it is found that there is significant difference between modern retailing dimensions and shopping frequency of the consumers. The P values show that consumers who shop more than once a week are influenced by the product quality which is significant at 5 percent level. Consumers who shop once a week perceive higher feelings towards time convenience, accessibility, atmospherics, product assortment, product quality and store layout which is significant at 1 percent and 5 percent level respectively. Consumers who shop once a fortnight are influenced by the price and promotions offered by the store and have a better shopping experience which is significant at 1 percent level. Consumers who rarely shop prefer stores that match their clientele which is significant at 1 percent level. The mean values show that respondents who shop once a month perceive a higher influence on product assortment and quality. Respondents who shop once a once a week perceive a higher influence on brand assortments, store layout, prominent displays option of comparing the products and crowd less shopping experience.

Tang et al (2001) articulated a perceived utility framework for explaining store choice which tests on consumers' perceived utility. This is associated with the shopping trip which can be divided into fixed and variable components. The fixed benefits include the ease of shopping derived from habitual experience at a store (example, knowledge of store layout and product shelf location) and the value attached to service quality (example, parking space, cleanliness, friendliness). A large assortment facilitates "one stop shopping" which eliminates consumers' need to make separate trips to other stores. The fixed costs are driven by the time and effort involved in reaching the store. Beside expected prices and store specific discounts, price image is also driven by store specific habitual category experience.

Findings

- Female respondents perceive better feelings on time convenience, atmospherics, price/promotion and shopping experience and perceive a lower feeling towards accessibility and product assortment compared to male respondents
- Unmarried respondents perceive higher feelings towards the store's product assortment and matching clientele.
- Married respondents and unemployed respondents are influenced by the price and promotions offered by the store.
- Employed respondents prefer stores that have a good store layout a variety of product assortment and of good quality.
- The respondents who come to shop by car perceive a better feeling towards the store's atmospherics, product quality and store layout.
- The respondents who come shopping by car are also influenced by the store's time convenience, accessibility and matching clientele.
- Respondents who shop once a week perceive to have higher feelings towards extended store timings, store accessibility, store atmospherics, wide range of product lines, product quality and well organized store layout.
- Respondents who shop once a fortnight have higher feelings towards price/promotions offered by the store.
- Respondents who shop more than once a week have high feelings towards store that offer quality products and respondents who shop once a month have high feelings towards matching clientele.

Suggestions

Retailers should look at ways to improve time convenience of customers. This can be done by having extra bill counters, bill swipe facility, specific counter for less than five products billing etc. They should stock products like cut vegetables, ready to cook items that will ease the work of women at home

A major drawback in shopping experience of modern retailing is the absence of human interface which is more prominent in the street end kirana store. Modern retailers should have staff who are helpful to customers in enabling them to locate the products.

Atmospherics has been observed as a major factor to influence customers. Modern retailers should provide proper humidification facilities and use the right choice of colour and music which all adds to the shopping experience perceived by customers

Modern retailers should give importance to store location as accessibility has been perceived as important by customers. Shops should have proper parking facilities and should be easily approachable. The stores should stock a wide variety of merchandise. The items should be properly handled and stored in proper places. The items should be stacked properly enabling customers to choose their needed products easily

Retailers should have a proper pricing policy and should be able to provide promotions to attract customers. When pricing is right there will be quick turn over of products. This ensures that products do not stagnate and the shop keeps stocking new products. The retailers should sell products that are far safe from the best before dates for those products.

Conclusion

The study identified time convenience, accessibility, store atmospherics, product assortment, product quality, price/promotion, store layout, clientele and shopping experience as factors that influence retail shopping behaviour of respondents. In present day customers have multiple options to choose from modern retail outlets to neighbourhood shops. Majority of the consumers are visiting organized formats for variety, easy availability, cleanliness, parking etc. Unlike female respondents, male shoppers prefer modern retail outlets for its ease in accessibility and product assortment whereas female shoppers prefer stores for their good atmospherics, low price and attractive sales promotions. Also spousal influence plays a major role in selecting the store in case of low price. Customers who are employed were found to be more attracted towards organized retailing for its wide range of product assortment, product quality and convenient store layout. Today's retail customers have ever more demanding expectations of value, choice, availability and accessibility of products and services. The other reality of the retail landscape is the current economic climate which is creating consumers who are happy to wait for special deep discount promotions to make their purchases. The increasing consumer demands are driving significant strategic decisions around new channels, new business models, new operations and new communication. Retailers should ensure that these factors are taken care of while providing the retail experience to customers. Further studies can be carried out by taking shops across different geographical location and involving more number of retailers.

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