Consumers Preference of Retail Store Attributes: A Case Study of Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The share of organised retail in total retail market in India is growing. Many domestic and global players have already entered in this sector. Due to intense competition in this field, it is important to focus on retaining existing consumers. Working out strategies in this direction requires a thorough understanding of the preferences of the consumers on the attributes that are considered of much significance. The present paper attempts to analyze the consumers' preferences of the specific attributes of retail stores in the selected 5 cities of Punjab. Factor analysis has been used in identifying the main factors. The factors identified include availability & variety, ambience, service, price, advertisement, prestige, and quality.

Keywords: Retailing, Ambience, Service, Price, Advertisement, Prestige, and Quality.

Introduction

There have been paradigm shifts in shopping patterns and retailing practices across different countries. The consumer psyche, needs and expectations have transformed over the last few decades in India from *Hattis* and *haats* to *haute couture* and from mela culture to mall culture. Now shoppers look for brands which speak out their personalities, identities and attitudes and at the same time seek greater value in what they purchase. These transformations are natural for a society, which is becoming increasingly globalized. Progress in the retail sector is logical extension of ongoing economic and market reforms in an emerging economy like India. Consumerism is fast becoming a way of life.

Retailing is a set of business activities that add value to the products and services sold to consumers for their personal and family use. These value-added activities include providing assortments, breaking bulk, holding inventory, and providing services. As such retailing is the last link that connects the individual consumer with the manufacturing and distribution chain[1].

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) specifies that the retail trade sector comprises establishments primarily engaged in retailing merchandise, generally without transformation, and rendering services incidental to the sale of merchandise[2].

Retailing thus, may be understood as the final step in the distribution of merchandise, for consumption by end users. In the complex world of trade today, retail would include not only goods but also services that may be provided to the consumer. In an age where consumer is the king and marketers are focusing on customer delight, retail may be redefined in the first point of customer contact.

For the purpose of research the organised and unorganised sectors of retail have been defined. According to the National Accounts Statistics of India the 'unorganized sector' includes units whose activity is not regulated by any statue or legal provision, and/or those which do not maintain regular accounts[3]. In the context of the retail sector, it could therefore be said to cover those forms of trade which sell an assortment of products and services ranging from fruits and vegetables to shoe repair. These products or services may be sold or offered out of fixed or mobile locations and the number of people employed could range between 10-20 people. Thus the neighbourhood

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kirana, the *paanwala*, the cobbler, the vegetables, fruit vendor, etc. would be termed as the unorganized sector. The primary purpose in defining the scope of the unorganized sector is to understand the formats or the forms of trade that would be understood as unorganized and, therefore, to further the understanding of the term 'organized'.

Organized retail can be defined as any organized form of retail or wholesale activity (both food and non-food under multiple formats), which is typically a multi-outlet chain of stores or distribution centres run by professional management[4].

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Every business has its distinctive way of organising the activities that are involved in delivering its products and services to the end customer. In retail parlance, it is termed as retail format. Retail format can be termed as a combination of various elements of retail mix, to offer value to the target customers. It is the interface between retailers and the customers. It makes customers visit the store to obtain goods and services and desired value[5]. It is also defined like the business models of retailers. The importance of retail formats can be gauged from the fact that most of the retail organisations equate them with Strategic Business Units and can have separate operational infrastructure and organisational set-up for them.

Indian Retail Market

The retail sector in India is highly fragmented and consists mostly of owner-run "Mom and Pop" outlets. The entire sector is dominated by small retailers consisting of local Kirana shops, general stores, footwear and apparel shops, hand-cart hawkers and pavement vendors. These together form the "unorganised retail" or "traditional retail". According to the Investment Commission of India (ICI) estimates, there are over 15 million such "Mom and Pop" retail outlets in the country.

In terms of total retail sales, one can find a wide range of estimates and this definitely reflects lack of sound official government data. Investment Commission of India had estimated Indian retail sales figure at US $262 billion for 2006, although market estimates ranged from US $200 billion to as high as US $386 billion for that year. According to ASSOCHAM retail report, the Indian retail market increased from $300 billion in 2009 to $410 billion in 2010. However the organised retail is still account for mere 5 %($13 million) of the overall retail market in India. Various agencies have made efforts to project the growth rate of the total retail market till 2013 and the figures hover around 13-15.5 percent.

In line with India's economic growth, the retail sector in this country is not only expanding but also modernizing. This new trend began during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Indian retail sector has caught the world's imagination in the last few years. It topped the list of most attractive retail destinations for consecutively three years from 2004-2007, ranked second in 2008 and again ranked first in 2009. India in on third position in 2010 Global Retail Development Index (GRDI) developed by A. T. Kearney[6]. Table 1 illustrates position of India from 2005-2010 in GRDI index.

Table 1. Changing Position of India in GRDI index from 2005-2010

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
GRDI Rank	1st	1st	1st	2nd	1st	3rd

Source: http://www.atkearney.com/ index. php/ Publications/at-kearneys- global-retail-development-index.html

In the midst of the unorganised retail sector's strong dominance, some of the major industrial houses have entered into this sector and have announced ambitious future expansion plans. Transnational corporations have also joined hands with big Indian companies to set up retail chains. India's Bharti group joined hands with Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer and Tata group tied up with the UK based Tesco, the world's third largest retail group. Table 2 illustrates the expansion plans of major retails in India.

In this scenario, the firms have to work on what attracts consumers and what will make them not shift their choice towards competitors. Working out strategies in this direction requires a thorough understanding of the preferences of the consumers on the attributes that are considered of much significance. The small cities are becoming the hub of retail activity, the requirement and perception of the consumer, i.e., what they perceive about the attributes of a store in their mind, their preferences and satisfaction drivers may be different than that of major cities and metros. The organized retail segment is tapping the small cities as a potential because of the rising income levels in these cities. Studying the preferences of consumers in these cities then can be exploratory in developing appropriate and customized marketing strategies for these consumers. The present study is an attempt in this direction. This study focuses on analyzing the consumer's preferences of the specific attributes of retail stores in various cities of Punjab.

Table 2. Expansion Plans of Major Retails in India

Companies	Exiting number of stores	Number of stores planned to open	Time span
Pantaloon Retail India Limited	1000 stores in 71 cities	25-30 stores	By the end of 2012
Shopper's Stop	27 stores	15 stores	3 years
Spencer's	250 stores in 50 cities	30 stores	2011-2012
Infinite Retail "Croma"	32 stores	100 stores	Next 3 years
"Reliance" Retail	1000 stores in 86 cities		
"Vishal" Retail	171 stores in 100 cities	40 stores	By 2012
"Easy day"	25 stores	75-100 stores	Next 3 years
Marks & "Spencers"	15 stores	10 stores	Next 5 years
"Tommy Hilfiger"	14 stand-alone stores and 16 shop-in-shop stores	50 stores	Next 5 years
"Bharti Walmart" 'Best Price'	2 stores	15 stores	By 2012.

Source:http://www.assocham.org/arb/afp/2009/AFP_Prospects_in_Indian_Retail_Sector_Dec2009.pdf

Review of Literature

Literature review is focussed on parameters or attributes that affect evaluation of store by consumers. Several attributes have been identified in the retail and marketing literature as reasons for store patronage and choice.

Martineau (1958) categorized store attributes into two main categories: functional and psychological. The functional category includes attributes such as location, assortment of products and store layout. The psychological category represents the feelings generated by the functional elements of the store. The former category has gained more attention in the subsequent research into store choice than the latter.

Paulins & Geistfeld (2003) examined consumer perceptions of retail store attributes for a set of particular stores to determine their effect on store preference. Respondents rated 13 stores. Four variables were found to affect store preference using forward stepwise logistic regression: type of clothing desired in stock, outside store appearance, shopping hours, and advertising. Significance of the effect of store attributes on store preference varied by store type. In addition, associations between customer perception of store attributes, education and age were observed.

In their study of department stores in Arizona, Kunkel and Berry (1968) proposed a twelve-factor scheme which includes price of merchandise, quality, assortment, fashion of merchandises, sales personnel, sales promotion, advertising, store atmosphere, locational accessibility, service, reputation on adjustments and other accessibility factors. In a subsequent study, Berry (1969) identified three general factors that predominantly influenced consumer's store choice regardless of store type: namely, quality and variety of merchandise, sales staff, and store atmosphere.

A prominent and widely-cited work on the topic of store image was that of Lindquist (1974). Based on a review of 19 research articles, he synthesized the framework of these studies into a set of nine groups: merchandise, service, clientele, physical facilities, promotion, accessibility, and store atmosphere, institutional and post-transaction satisfaction.

Doyle & Fenwick (1975) proposed that price, product variety, one-stop shopping, quality, location of the store, advertisement, general appearance of the store and convenience are some of major attributes looked upon by the consumers while evaluating a grocery store.

Bearden (1977) distinguished seven attributes as potentially significant for store patronage: price, quality of merchandise, assortment, atmosphere, location, parking facilities and friendly staff.

Arnold et al. (1983) extended the accessibility attribute to the ease of mobility through the store and fast checkout.

Mason, Mayer, & Ezell (1994) proposed that reasonable prices in a retail store induce customer satisfaction as well as building customer loyalty. In the retailing sector, the store having reasonable prices will often capture a large market share.

Hasty and Reardon (1997) classified store attributes into three general categories: accessibility (e.g., location, layout, appearance, and knowledgeable staff), facilitation of sales (e.g., low-priced specials, promotional offers and methods of payments accepted) and auxiliary attributes (e.g., play areas for children and food court).

Wong & Sohal, (2003) compared the relationship between dimensions of service quality and customer loyalty in a retail chain departmental store located in a city to that of a country. The results showed that service quality is positively associated with customer loyalty, and that the most significant predictor of customer loyalty in the city retail district is empathy, while the most significant predictor of customer loyalty in the country retail district is tangibles.

Solgaard and Hansen (2003) identified several store attributes that were considered important for the consumer's evaluation of stores. These attributes include merchandise, assortment, merchandise quality, personnel, store layout, accessibility, cleanliness and atmosphere.

Spiller Bolten and Kennerknecht (2006) identify service and product quality as main determinants of customer satisfaction. They propose that customers consider freshness of fruits and vegetables` as the quality of whole assortment.

Objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to identify the factors affecting consumer preference related to shopping at organised retail store.

Research Methodology

The following research methodology has been used in order to achieve the objectives:

Research instrument

A questionnaire was developed on the basis of the foregoing review of the literature. The questionnaire consisted of 29 closed ended questions was framed after discussion with consumers regarding their preferences of store attributes for food & grocery shopping. In order to study the agreement of consumers for various store attribute an agreement scale was formed comprising of five-point ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). A preliminary evaluation and refinement of the questionnaire was done of a panel of experts. The panel comprised two educationists in Business Administration and two individuals highly involved in organised retailing. The participants on the panel reviewed the questionnaire for content, wording and readability. Based on their suggestions, 7 items were removed from the questionnaire and some rewording to a couple of the remaining items was made. The final version of the data collection instrument consisted of two parts: Part I included details of demographic characteristics of the respondents (age, gender, level of education, employment, marital status, children, nationality and monthly income) and Part II contained a set of questions to obtain the level of agreement and disagreement to statement related to shopping at organised retail stores.

Data collection

Since there was no sampling frame for the data collection, convenience sampling was used for data collection. The data was collected outside the major retail outlets, where the respondents were consumers who had completed their shopping in an organized retail store and willing to respond to the questions. The data has been collected from five urban cities of Punjab i.e. Amritsar, Patiala, Mohali, Jalandhar and Ludhiana. According to the Images-CII report entitled "Retailing in Punjab 2010 and Beyond" major retail players already have a presence in these cities and many players are targeting to enter these cities. The consumers who have just shopped at a retail outlet can express their preference related to the store better than the household consumers. The survey was conducted at selected organized retail stores in selected cities of Punjab (see Table 3).

Sample size

The target population of the study included customers who prefer to shop at organised retail stores in Punjab. A sampling frame from which a random sample could be drawn was unavailable. However, an accidental sampling method was chosen to serve the purpose of data collection (Alhemoud (2008), Spiller et al. (2006), Malai & Pitsuwan (2002)). 50 organized retail stores were selected in five selected cities for data collection. 100 consumers were interviewed from sampled organized outlet adopting the convenience sampling procedure in each selected

Table 3. Location of Stores Selected for Data Collection.

	Conveni ence Stores	Reliance Fresh (super market)	MORE (super market)	Easy day (super market)	Amartex (hyper market)	Big bazaar (hyper market)	Vishal mega mart (hyper market)
Amritsar	3 stores	3 stores 35/13 LIC Building The Mall Amritsar Ranjit avenue	1store Airport Road Address : Plot No 203-B, Guru Amar Dass Avenue, C-Block Near Bank Of Maharashtra - 143001 Tel : 0183-6450399	3 stores Majitha Road Amritsar. Surjit Place Amritsar Swarna Place Amritsar	No store	No store	1 store Sco. 126/ 127, District Shopping Center, Ranjit Avenue Amritsar
Jalandhar	3 stores	5 stores Locations: Urban Estate, Phase IB-IV, Gazigulla Road, Gopal Nagar, Jalandhar, Urban Estate,	1store GK Tower, Opp. HMV College, Maqsudan Road 144008	1 store Police lines road	No store	No store	1 store Vishal Mega Mart, Shakti Tower, Near Swani Motor, B.M.C. Chowk,

Table 3. (Contd.)

	Conveni ence Stores	Reliance Fresh (super market)	MORE (super market)	Easy day (super market)	Amartex (hyper market)	Big bazaar (hyper market)	Vishal mega mart (hyper market)
		Phase II Gujral Nagar Amritsar bye pass					Jalandhar
Mohali	1 stores	2 stores Reliance Fresh Phase-10 Reliance fresh Phase 5	1 store SCO 101-102, Phase XI - 160062	No store B-35, Ind. Area, Phase-III,	1store Ground Floor, Paras Down town DSquare. *Zirakpur*	One store	No store
Patiala	2 stores	3stores Gail No. 16 Guru Nanak Nagar Tafazalpura Gurbax Colony Patiala 147001 Dhaliwal complex Shop No. 3 4 A & 4 B Leela Bhavan Patiala Opposite	3 stores State Bank, Bhadson Road - 147001 Puda Market, SCF 9-10, Urban Estate-2 147001 Adjoining O.B.C Bank, Opposite Y.P.S School 147001	3 stores Bhadson Road Patiala Choti Baradari Patiala Leela Bhavan Patiala	1store Leela Bhawan Market, Bhupindra Road	No store	1 store Arjun Complex, Near Hamkunt Petrol Pump, Sirhind Road, Patiala-147001
Ludhiana	1 stores	2 stores Samrat Hotel Domoria Pul Road, Ludhiana Urban Estate Dugri, Ludhiana	2 stores Aarti Chowk Nr Vardhaman Mills, Sector 32, Aarti Chowk, Chandigarh Road	3 stores Dugri, Urban Estate Model town extension	1store 773, Bharat Nagar Chowk, Opp. Tel. Exchange, Ludhiana	1 store The Souk Mall, Near Hotel Amaltas, Quardian Village, G T Rd, Ludhiana - 141008	2 stores 2435 Maharaj Nagar, Euphoria Tower, Firozpur Road, Sco 4,5,6, Chandigarh Road, Urban Estate, Sec-32, Ludhiana
Total	Conv-enience stores=10	Supermarkets = 30			Hypermarkets=10		

urban city of Punjab. Over 500 consumers were interviewed at the selected stores in 5 selected cities. Of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 25 were excluded for reasons of inconsistencies in responses and incompleteness of answers.

Statistical Analyses

The 475 usable questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software version 14.0. Frequencies were used to generate a profile of the key demographic characteristics of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were utilized to calculate the mean and standard error scores. An exploratory factor analysis was used to uncover the underlying factors which affect consumer preference.

Results and Analysis

Demographics characteristics

The number of male respondents in the survey were 52% and 48% were female respondents. Most of the respondents visiting an organized retail outlet were graduates and had educational qualifications above it. Among them 36 percent of the respondents were post-graduates, 23 percent had professional degree and 34 percent were graduates and the remaining 7% were undergraduates.

Most of the respondents were self-employed/unemployed or belong to other professions (36%); whereas, the other respondents were from varied professions such as civil services (14.7%), educational (15.5%), medical (23.8%), financial services (10%). It can be observed from this data that most respondents belong to tertiary sector and very few to manufacturing sectors.

As reflected in our survey most respondents had income in the range of Rs. 3 to 8 lakhs p.a (56%) and the remaining 44% were having income more than Rs.8 lakhs p.a. This indicates that the respondents are mostly of the higher middle income group or middle income group and from the service class. There are 183 (38.5%) respondents in the age group of 18-25,

100 (21%) respondents in the age group of 26-35 years and remaining 192 respondents (40.5%) were above 36 years of age. This indicates that most of the respondents were youth.

Factor analysis

As the first step, the suitability of the data collected for using factor analysis was thoroughly checked. The sample is greater than 100 as mentioned above. The proportion of the respondents and the variables used in is more than 5:1 (475 respondents and 22 variables).

Prior to running the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity were performed. The generated score of KMO was .77, reasonably supporting the appropriateness of using factor analysis to explore the underlying structure of supermarket image. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant ($p<$ .000), rejecting the null hypothesis that the 22 important attributes are uncorrelated in the population. Using principal components with varimax rotation, only attributes with factor loadings of .5 or greater on a factor were regarded as significant. The factor analysis generated four factors explaining 63.7% of the variability in the original data. The Cronbach's alphas, which measure the internal consistency of each of the identified factors, fell within an acceptable range (> 0.7)

The communalities are presented in Table 4. Communalities represent the proportion of the variance in the original variables that is accounted for by the factor solution. The factor solution should explain at least half of each original variable's variance, so the communality value for each variable should be 0.50 or higher. As can be seen from the table all the variables used have a communality higher than 0.50.

Table 4. Communalities

	Item	Extraction
V1	No out of stock	0.503
V2	Variety of grocery items	0.585
V3	Products are easy to locate	0.573
V4	Under one roof	0.505
V5	Good music and soothing colours on walls	0.549
V6	Sales people are helpful	0.582
V7	Sufficient lighting	0.518
V8	Neighborhood	0.529
V9	Clean and free from clutter	0.594

Table 4 contd.

	Item	Extraction
V10	Open till late hours	0.603
V11	Advertise regularly	0.584
V12	Many billing counters	0.571
V13	Fair price	0.683
V14	Matter of pride	0.624
V15	Good quality	0.665
V16	Many brands are available	0.557
V17	Displays are attractive	0.565
V18	Return or replacement policy	0.551
V19	Billing system is reliable	0.662
V20	Trolleys and baskets are available	0.609
V21	Maximum choices	0.646

Extraction method: Principle Component Analysis

Table 5 gives the 5 extracted factors that explain 56 percent of the total variations. The rotated matrix and the description of factors extracted from factor analysis are given in Tables 6 and 7 respectively.

The most significant factor that determines the retail outlet preference is the shopping availability and variety of products. This is the most important factor looked at by the consumers according to the results of factor analysis. The consumers prefer that retail store should have large variety of brands for grocery items. Availability of items even in late hours is also important.

The second factor can be called the "services". The consumers prefer stores that offers free home

Table 5. Extracted factors

Com ponent	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumu lative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumu lative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumu lative %
1	5.14	23.36	23.36	5.14	23.36	23.36	2.80	12.75	12.75
2	2.36	10.75	34.11	2.36	10.75	34.11	2.28	10.38	23.14
3	1.35	6.13	40.24	1.35	6.13	40.24	2.04	9.29	32.42
4	1.23	5.57	45.82	1.28	5.57	45.82	1.93	8.76	41.18
5	1.03	4.58	55.48	1.01	4.581	55.48	1.50	6.84	55.48
6	0.93	4.23	59.71						
7	0.88	3.10	63.71						
8	0.82	3.73	67.44						
9	0.75	3.43	70.87						
10	0.73	3.33	74.19						
11	0.71	3.23	77.41						
12	0.67	3.04	80.45						
13	0.64	2.90	83.36						
14	0. 60	2.73	86.09						
15	0.56	2.56	88.66						
16	0.54	2.49	91.16						
17	0.48	2.495	91.16						
18	0.48	1.89	97.22						
19	0.43	1.96	95.33						
20	0.34	1.55	98.77						
21	0.27	1.23	100.00						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6. Rotated Matrix

Component	1	2	3	4	5	6
Products are never out of stock	0.688					
Variety of grocery items	0.606					
Many brands are available	0.693					
Store offers maximum choices	0.529					
Everything you need under one roof	0.536					
Not over crowed			0.586			
Good layout			0.654			
Displays are attractive			0.577			
Clean and free from clutter			0.643			
Good music and soothing colours			0.559			
Advertise regularly		0.560				
Recommended by friends		0.663				
Home delivery						0.552
Many salespeople						0.673
Comfortable air conditioned environment						0.764
Return or replacement policy						0.779
Trolleys and baskets are available						0.594
Many billing counters for a faster check out						0.5667
Competitive price				0.854		
Discounts				0.560		
Stock good quality items					0.845	
Fresh groceries					0.665	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: "Varimax with Kaiser Normalization".

Table 7. Factors Extracted from Factor Analysis

Factor description	Variables included
Availability and variety	Products are never out of stock, variety of grocery items are available, many brands are available, everything you need is under one roof
Service	Many sales people, comfortable, air conditioned environment, return or replacement policy, trolleys and baskets are available, many billing counters for a faster check out
Ambience	Not over crowed, Good layout, displays are attractive, clean and free from clutter, good music and soothing colours
Discounts and price	Discount offers, competitive pricing
Quality of items	Freshness, good quality
Promotion	Advertisement, recommendation

delivery. They prefer stores with many sales executives to help. Other factors like sufficient parking space, availability of baskets and trolleys and fast check out are equally important for consumers.

The third most important factor is "ambience" of store. Consumers prefer shopping at stores which are not over crowded and where products are easy to locate. They prefer stores which are clean with attractive displays and have sufficient lighting.

The fourth most important factor is the "discounts" and "fair prices". People do look into savings on their total billing at the end of shopping. The consumers would like to be informed in advance about the discounts and special offers so that they can get the best buy.

The fifth factor is "quality of food" and "grocery items". They prefer stores which stock fresh and good quality items.

The sixth factor which is important for consumers is "promotion of stores". Consumer prefers stores recommended by their friends and relatives. They like to visit stores which are being advertised by newspaper/television/ radio regularly.

Conclusion

The study focused on finding out the major attributes of the retail stores as perceived by the consumers in Punjab. The methodology adopted was a structured questionnaire and the analysis was done using "principal component method".

The study shows that there are six major factors that consumers prefer as far as the retail stores are concerned. These factors include availability & variety, service, ambience, discounts & price, quality of products, and promotion.

The knowledge of these factors is very useful to retailers and the strategists to plan the policy and formulate strategies accordingly for customer retention and improving loyalty towards their store. The changing consumer need can be understood and plans be accordingly implemented.

The consumers are more inclined to get an experience of their shopping. Purchasing what they require is the drive for coming to retail store, but in the process they want a wonderful overall shopping experience. This may be mainly to relieve them from the day-to-day stressful life. The consumers do not want the shopping also to be another pain. The shopping place should be convenient, a place where they can relax and lay their hands on whatever they want. These retail outlets should focus on improving their service focusing on improving the convenience of the consumers. They should try to attract new consumers and also retain the existing ones by adopting promotional offers, adding value to their shopping experience and overcoming their shortcomings on these attributes.

Footnotes :

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