

EVALUATING SERVICE DELIVERY PRACTICES IN SUPERMARKETS: A STUDY OF CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS IN NAGPUR CITY

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Abstract:

The current research is an assessment of service delivery practices in supermarkets particularly with reference to consumer perception in Nagpur City. The study takes a descriptive and analytical research design, and the collected primary data will be based on the study of 180 respondents by using a structured questionnaire. The paper discusses the dimensions of service quality that are essential such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy and how they affect customer satisfaction. The results find reliability and tangibility to be the most important factors relating to consumer satisfaction, and empathy and responsiveness should be improved. There is a high positive correlation between quality of service and customer satisfaction which means that improvement in service delivery practices leads to higher customer loyalty. As revealed in the study, operational efficiency and customer-focused methods are significant to the structured retail. It gives insights to the management of the supermarket, which they may utilize to perfect their service strategies and enhance general consumer experiences within a strength-based retailing setting.

Keywords: Service Quality, Supermarkets, Consumer Perception, Customer Satisfaction, Retail Service, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Competition has intensified within the retail industry, especially with the initiation and prevalence of institutionalized retail hierarchy like supermarkets over the last couple of decades. Supermarkets have emerged as a leading medium through which consumers can access their products, products which have a large variety which are complimented with value added services that ensure that the shopping experience is more comfortable to customers. The growth of supermarkets in such urban areas as Nagpur is the result of the changing consumer lifestyle, increasing income levels, and the demand towards convenience, quality, and its efficiency in service provision.

The supermarkets service delivery practice is a broad concept that touches on variety of components such as store organization, interrelation of staffs, billing efficiency, availability of products, store cleanliness, and

technological advancement such as self check out systems. These are dimensions of service, which are important in developing consumer perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty. Service quality (SQ) has traditionally been a subject of much marketing research, including such models as SERVQUAL that focuses on such dimensions as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy as the significant determinants of customer satisfaction.

The SQ is very significant in the context of supermarkets, to be more precise, since retailing is provided as a mix of the tangible goods and the virtual (intangible) services. Shopping is more than just a process where consumers analyze their shopping experience by the level of quality of products and pricing; it also includes the level of efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Research results have shown that, with better SQ, customer satisfaction, repeat customers, and



positive word-of-mouth is likely to be increased, which in turn, increases the competitiveness of retailing companies.

Nagpur is one of the fast growing cities in Maharashtra and has seen a significant development of organized retailing, both local and national chain of supermarket stores. The level of competition is on the rise; therefore, supermarkets are concentrating on the practices of service delivery in order to attract and retain customer service. The perception of consumers in such a scenario will be crucial in determining the gaps in service delivery and how such gaps can be addressed through the need to develop strategies.

Thus, this research is expected to assess service delivery practices within supermarkets within Nagpur city through consumer perceived analysis. The research results should also have a positive impact on both the academic literature and the real practice of retail management by offering an idea of major SQ dimensions affecting customer satisfaction (CS).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The quality of service has been the focal point in retail and marketing research especially in consumer behavior as applied to the supermarket scenario. The SERVQUAL framework invented by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) has provided the basis of quantifying the quality of the service in terms of five fundamental dimensions which include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. This model has been extensively used in retail research to estimate the mismatch in customer expectation and perceptions.

Researchers have modified and generalized conventional SQ theories in the situation of supermarket retailing. The study conducted by Vazquez et al. (2001) revealed that retail SQ in supermarkets has four major dimensions including physical, reliability, personal

interaction and policy factors which made service delivery in retail settings to be a multidimensional environment. On the same note, Siu and Chow (2002) suggested a Retail SQ Scale (RSQS) during which they used the concept of personal interaction, trustworthiness, and store policies basing their idea on the significance of both operational and relationship dimensions of the service provision.

Empirical research has always proved that SQ has a close correlation with CS in supermarkets. De Silva et al. (2022) have discovered that tangibility and reliability as well as empathy dimensions play a significant role in CS, whereas responsiveness and assurance have different effects, which may be specific to a situation. Equally, Slack et al. (2020) noted that empathy is a prevailing factor that affects CS, repurchase intention, and word of anti-store behavior in the retail supermarket.

The existing research also emphasizes the change in manner of service delivery with the invention of technology. Orel and Kara (2014) explored the self check out systems in supermarkets and discovered that customer loyalty and satisfaction under technology greatly depend on the quality of service offered. This means that the current supermarkets are required to combine human- and technology-oriented services to become more customer-focused.

The role of customer perceptions in assessing retail SQ has also been highlighted as a result of recent studies. The study by Noel and Govender (2024) was based on structural equation modeling models aimed at studying the interdependence between SQ and CS and loyalty and came to the conclusion that after receiving a positive impression of services, consumers are more likely to stay with supermarket chains. Also, according to Ntanos et al., other factors, including the variety of products, pricing policy, store setting, and



employee conduct, are major contributors to CS in supermarkets (2024).

Surveys on the quality of services in the supermarket and its analysis in an Indian scenario show the same. The studies carried in Mysore and other cities have shown that quality attributes of CS with the SQ are highly dependent upon aspects like the store ambiance, behaviour of staff and efficiency of billing. Further, research investigating the role of SQ in the retail of food in India indicates that SQ may be more significant to CS than product characteristics and therefore service delivery is strategic in formal retail.

Nonetheless, other studies also indicate that the influence of such factors as price, products quality, and location can sometimes be stronger than the quality of service as determining CS, particularly in price-elastic markets. This implies that there should be a moderated percentage in terms of the retail strategy, where other value drivers like SQ complement each other.

On the whole the literature indicates that it means that supermax practices of service delivery are multidimensional and greatly influence consumer perceptions, consumer satisfaction, and consumer loyalty. Although there is a lot of research in the world, there is relative deficiency of region-specific researches in terms of emerging urban markets such as Nagpur. Through this research, this gap will be filled by offering empirical evidence on the service delivery practices within supermarkets as seen by the consumers in Nagpur city.

Objectives

This research is expected to assess service delivery practices within the Nagpur City supermarkets through analysing consumer perception, defining key quality dimensions of service delivery influencing CS, conducting a relationship among SQ and customer loyalty, and detecting gaps of service delivery with an

overall service effectiveness and consumer experience in supermarkets.

Methodology

The proposed research design is descriptive and analytical, as the researcher will examine supermarkets service delivery practices in Nagpur City. The primary data will be gathered using a structured questionnaire that will be administered to the consumers and backed on secondary data such as journals and reports. Convenience sampling will also be used to select 150-200 respondents and the data will be analyzed using statistical tools to discuss consumer perceptions.

Result and Discussion

The responses obtained on 180 respondents were evaluated to determine how consumers perceived the service delivery practices in the supermarkets in Nagpur City.

Table 1 Mean Score of Service Quality Dimensions

Service Dimension	Mean Score	Rank
Tangibility	4.12	2
Reliability	4.25	1
Responsiveness	3.78	4
Assurance	3.95	3
Empathy	3.62	5

Reliability (4.25) is the highest ranked, meaning that consumers appreciate proper billing, availability of products and standardized services. Tangibility (4.12) is also an excellent score, which indicates the significance of the sight and layout of the store. Empathy (3.62) is the lowest rated and hence customer service through personal touch needs to be enhanced.

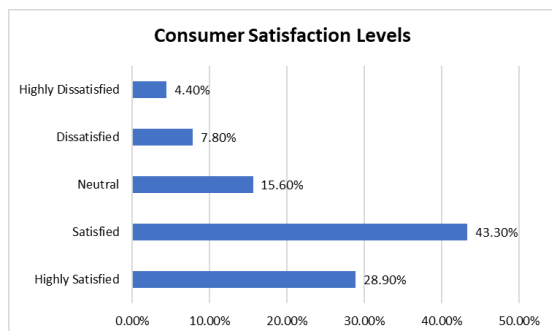


Fig. 1 Consumer Satisfaction Level

The overall customer attitude is positive as a large percentage of the respondents (72.2) are satisfied or highly satisfied with the services offered by supermarkets. Nevertheless, the 12.2% level of dissatisfaction demonstrates the sphere which should be improved.

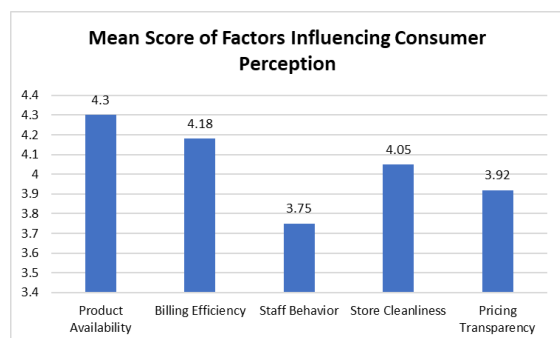


Fig. 2 Factors Influencing perception of consumers

The strongest factor is the availability of the product (4.30) and then billing efficiency (4.18). Behavior of the staff (3.75) is not rated as highly, which specifies the lack of customer contact and responsiveness to the given service.

Table 2 Relationship between Service Quality and Consumer Satisfaction

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Service Quality & Satisfaction	0.68

SQ and CS are strongly associated ($r = 0.68$), which means that perfect services delivery practices will greatly improve the level of consumer satisfaction.

According to the analysis, although the supermarkets of Nagpur City perform well concerning reliability, tangibility, and availability of the products; significant gaps are observed concerning their empathy and responsiveness of the staff. There is high level of consumer satisfaction but, the interaction between employees and customers and personalized services can be improved to empower customer loyalty. The high relationship between the quality of services and satisfaction reaffirms the significance of enhancing service delivery practices in strategy.

DISCUSSION

Supermarket services in Nagpur City are the subject of the study, and the findings are valuable to the current knowledge of the research topic which are the service delivery practices in these supermarkets and their effects on consumer perception and satisfaction. The results of the analysis reveal that the dimensions of SQ play an important role in CS, which corroborate the confirmed theoretical models like SERVQUAL model and Retail SQ model.

The findings demonstrate that the most effective dimension of the SQ is reliability and has the greatest mean core with all variables. This implies that consumers highly value the quality of service delivery, correct billing, and availability of products. This observation corresponds to the previous research (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Vazquez et al., 2001) that have indicated the importance of reliability as a determining factor to perceived satisfaction in the Nagpur scenario, where consumers are becoming value-sensitive, reliability in the service seems to be one of the determinants of satisfaction.

The aspect of tangibility, that is, store layout, cleanliness and visual appeal have also been rated high. This shows that shop proofs of service are essential in the ways in which the consumers think. Customers will be drawn and



kept more in supermarkets whose shelves are well arranged, have hygienic environments and modern infrastructure. This finding is in line with the retail literature that states that the ambiance and physical characteristics of the store play a significant role in determining shopping behavior.

Nevertheless, the comparatively low scores of empathy and responsiveness imply a failure in personified service and response between employees and customers. Customers view that employees in supermarkets are not always keen or careful to address their personal interests. The observation is consistent with various empirical studies that have shown that operational efficiency within supermarkets is usually good, whereas relational aspects of service provision are normally underdeveloped. The absence of a personal approach perhaps will impair the overall customer experience, especially when compared to the smaller retail formats with interpersonal relations being more robust.

The satisfaction levels analysis indicates that most consumers are satisfied, but significant percentage of consumers is neutral, or unsatisfied. This implies that customers are satisfied with the minimum service provision by the supermarkets but the overall service experience can be improved. The high positive correlation ($r = 0.68$) between SQ and CS also supports the argument that the positive change of service delivery practices can directly result in consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

The other significant result is the value of the availability of the product and billing efficiency, which appeared as the biggest factors of the consumer perception. This is indicative of the utilitarianism of shopping at the supermarket in which convenience, saving time and access to products are the main factors of expectations. Meanwhile, the other factors, which are not ranked as high as others, like the staff behavioral tendencies and the

transparent prices are significant factors that influence the perception overall.

Compared to the current literature, the research proves that SQ can be viewed as a multidimensional concept and that the effects depend on the dimensions. Although empathy has been found to be a critical determinant in global studies, the functional dimension in the Nagpur situation indicates that reliability and availability are among the key determinants than the relational dimension. This can be explained by culture and economic reasons, such as time and price sensitivity of the consumers in the cities.

On the whole, the discussion reveals that the Nagpur City supermarkets are doing well in operational service delivery but should be better in the role of interpersonal service. The gaps indicated can be overcome by increasing employee training, becoming more responsive, and becoming more customer-oriented. These are improvements that will not only increase CS, but also customer loyalty in the long run in a very competitive retail market.

Conclusion

The research concludes that the practices applied in service delivery by the supermarkets in Nagpur City have a meaningful influence on the consumer perception and their general satisfaction. The most affecting SQ dimensions among the SQ dimensions include reliability and tangibility which implies that consumers emphasize on consistent service, availability of products and maintenance of store environment. Even though the overall CS level is rather high, the areas of empathy and responsiveness still leave some gaps, which allows stating that better interpersonal service should be enhanced. The correlation that was found to be positive between quality of services and CS ascertains the fact that the improvement of service delivery practices is critical towards intensifying the customer loyalty and competitive evasion in the structured retail sector.



Recommendations

Supermarkets are encouraged to invest on employee training experiences in order to increase their responsiveness, communication skills and diverse customer interaction. There should be a focus on an increase in empathy-oriented services in order to develop a more customer-focused retail space. On top of this, it should continue to ensure that products are stocked at the most opportune time, improved or streamlined billing methods and clear prices. Service efficiency may be enhanced further through the introduction of technology, including payment systems through digital technology, self-service kiosks, and the likes. Southwest Airline should have regular feedback systems on customers that would help in detecting areas lacking in service and continuously intensify service delivery plans, keeping its customers satisfied and its business growing in the long run.

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