

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF SERVICES OFFERED BY THE SALES PERSONNEL IN ORGANIZED RETAIL MARKETS IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the study is to enable the sales personnel to undertake a self-assessment of the quality of services offered by them in the organized retail markets in Kerala. During the pilot study, it was found that almost all the sales personnel whom the researcher contacted were willing to cooperate with the self-assessment exercise required of them. Accordingly, facts and figures were collected from 90 sales personnel from private stores Supplyco and Consumer fed. Their responses were assessed through the SERVQUAL scale. The findings indicate that except in respect of promotional services such as parking facilities in all other aspects the quality of services is found to be more or less same according to the study. Satisfaction of the customer could be obtained only by providing high quality services. For this the staff has to be made quality-conscious in all dealings through systematic training by business management experts.

KEYWORDS: SERVQUAL, Organized Retail Super Markets, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Retailing is an emerging field of study because of its positive impacts on the economy, its complex functions in the distribution of goods and its dynamic nature. The retailer must learn how best he could serve the customer while earning a fair profit. It is not just the sale of tangible goods through a store, but it also includes service aspect, location of the store, its ambience, assortment of goods, layout and so on.

SERVICE QUALITY

The service quality provided to the customers has become focus of many organizations in a competitive environment. Gronroos (1984) has defined the concept, 'service quality' as a perceived judgement whereby customers compare their prior expectations of a service with their perceptions of the service that they actually received. Quality in service is associated with cost (Crosby, 1979), profitability (Buzzell and Gale, 1991), customer satisfaction (Boltan and Drew, 1991), customer retention (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990), and behavioral intention and positive word of mouth (Anderson and Zeithmal, 1984).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Manjunath Sand Cynthia Menezes Prabhu (2011) has conducted a study to measure the retail service quality of supermarkets in Bangalore with the aim of identifying components of retail service quality. The study revealed that the service quality consists of four factors namely service personnel, physical aspects, policy and reliability. Among the factors, service personnel have the strongest influence and the physical aspect has the least significant in determining retail service quality.

Surajit Ghosh Dastidar and Biplab Datta (2009) tried to assess whether the consumer's demographics have any influence on their exploratory tendencies. The findings of the study indicate that younger consumers have a comparatively greater tendency towards curiosity-motivated behavior. The results of this study also indicate that it may not be worthwhile to reduce perceived risks for products where purchase decisions are more likely to be taken by males. These findings have significant implications for marketers in placing appropriate marketing emphasis specific to the demographic segments.

Deepika Jhamb and Ravi Kiran (2012) the findings revealed that consumer's choice for modern retail formats vary on the basis of their increase in income level. Young consumers are more influenced to shop from modern retail formats as compared to older ones. Consumers prefer modern retail format due to its significant product attributes like improved quality, variety of brands and assortment of merchandise and store attribute like parking facility, trained sale personnel and complete security.

Kumar R and Barani G (2012) they examine the levels of service quality that have significant effect on customer satisfaction in organized retailing in Bangalore City. The study showed that the tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, credibility, accessibility, and customer knowledge are positively related to customer satisfaction. The study has shed light on the importance of four variables namely improving quality in areas of reliability, customer knowledge, credibility and tangibles in order to continually increase the level of customer satisfaction. Management of the retail shops should give utmost importance to the improvement in customer satisfaction so that it can withstand competition from other shops.

Monika Talreja MSand Dhiraj Jain (2013) the study shows that customers like to buy vegetables and fruits from air-conditioned super markets because of their quality products but due to high prices, they prefer to buy these kinds of products either from the mobile vegetable sellers or from the sabgi market. The study further reveals that proximity is a major comparative advantage of unorganized outlets. In short, customers prefer to buy certain products from the organized and other products from the unorganized retailers.

Dean Martin C (2011) it is an inquiry on the performance of government, co-operative and private retail outlets on the key variables that constitute consumer satisfaction and identify the major problems and challenges experienced by these outlets. The study reveals that the co-operative stores and the Supplyco are in financial difficulties. The Government, cooperative and the private sectors are trying to satisfy the same groups of consumers. At the same time, it is found, that these three formats have their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Viju Mon TP (2014) In respect of holding the price levels of essentials it is interesting to see how the consumers feel about the price line and availability. The central values of the factor variables arrived on the basis of number of variables included in respective factors are meant by their standard values. To test the responses of customers,

following alternative hypotheses are generated accordingly. There is difference between observed mean of factor variables in the level of customer satisfaction from standard values.

Ajai Krishnan G (2014) The study through light on crucial factor that customers are attracted towards organized on the retail outlets due to choice of selection, cost, branded products, in-house parking, comfort, pollution free air conditioned shopping ambience discounts, attractive promotions, tidy and pleasant atmosphere. The knowledge about above factors is very useful for the retailers to formulate new strategies to attract more customers. It is also stated that facilities to entertainment and promotional offers will further help to attract more customers to the shop.

Koshy CJ (2014) this is to assess the effectiveness of the services provided by distributors in terms of responsiveness, reliability, empathy, assurance and tangibles. It was found that the overall perception about the service quality of distributors is quite high. Distributors are making use of all available resources and focusing on building long-term relationship with the retailers. Retailers are highly satisfied to the quality of the products, time, availability of products, billing facility and the customer services of the distributors.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Review of literature indicates that a good number of studies have been done from the point of view of customers and their perceptions of the quality of services offered by the stores. This is only one side of the process namely buying, and the focus is on the satisfaction derived by the buyer. Obviously, there is the flipside. Very often the sales personnel, who deliver the service, may not be aware of its quality or lack of it. Many of them do not have the much-needed empathy in transactions. Therefore, this study focuses on the sales personnel to undertake a serious self -assessment of the quality of the service, knowingly or unknowingly generated by them in the transactions. Logically, this is necessary because the buyer and seller are the two primary stake holders in the process.

OBJECTIVES

- To enable the sales personnel to make a self-assessment of the quality of services offered by them to the customers.
- To study the customers' behaviour experienced by the employees in the super markets.
- To suggest appropriate behaviour norms and guidelines for rendering services up to the
- Satisfaction of the customers.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out as a survey with a structured interview schedule incorporating the parameters of the SERVQUAL scale tested through a pilot study. In order to understand the view points of the sales personnel regarding the quality of services knowingly or unknowingly rendered by them to the customers (self-assessment) 90 sales personnel were randomly selected (simple random sampling) - 30 each from the outlets of Private, Consumer fed, and Supply co.

ANALYSIS

The Likert Scale question were grouped into three, based on the quartile value. Accordingly, the effect of any means score lower than 3 is low, the effect of mean score between 3 and 4 is moderate and the effect is high if the mean score is more than 4. The total sample selected for the present study is 90. Other appropriate test were conducted.

Satisfying Aspects in Work

The table given below indicates the satisfying aspects in their work as sales persons.

Table 1: Satisfying Aspects in Work

		Frequency	Rank
Satisfying aspects in work	Acquaintance with people	10	5
	Doing job with other people	17	3
	Job is a status	26	1
	Knowledge about more products	11	4
	Mingling with other people	24	2

(Source:-Primary Data)

Dissatisfying Aspects in Work

The table given below indicates the dissatisfying aspects in their work as sales persons.

Table 2: Dissatisfying Aspects in Work

		Frequency	Rank
Dissatisfying aspects in work	Long working hours	20	3
	Poor quality of goods	23	2
	Risk of selling expired goods	29	1

Impressions about the Customer

The sales personnel's understanding of the customers and their priorities regarding the product are examined. It is observed that 76 (Rank 1) employees opined that customers are concerned with quality of the products. While 52 (Rank 2) hold the opinion that the customers are concerned about quality. About 48 (Rank 3) stated that there are customers who are primarily concerned with price. But there are customers who are concerned with both quality and price according to 31 sales personnel (Rank 4).

Handling Complaints

Table 3: Handling Complaints

	Items	Frequency	Rank
Handling complaints about service quality	Offer remedies	73	1
	Advise to ignore	39	4
	Manager deals with it directly	67	2
	Manager informs the higher authorities	55	3

(Source:-Primary Data)

It is found that 73 respondents (Rank 1) themselves offer remedial measures when they receive complaints whereas 67 stated that the store managers directly handle the complaints of the customer's (Rank 2). According to 55 respondents, the managers would pass them on to the higher authorities for redressal (Rank 3). 39 respondents stated that

they would advise the customers to ignore the complaints (Rank 4).

Assessment of Service Quality as Per Servqual Scale

Facilities in the Super Markets

The sales personnel, themselves have assessed the facilities – such as atmospheric facilities, dependability in services, promptness in services, credibility in services and promotional services. It is found that in respect of atmospheric facilities in the stores, there is no difference among the Private, Supplyco and Consumerfed outlets. The same can be stated about dependability in services. In respect of promptness in services, all the types of shops are more or less same. But in the matter of ‘speedy check out services’, the private sector is superior to others. Likewise, the assessment of the respondents regarding the credibility aspect of the services indicate that they are satisfied except in respect of parking facilities offered by Consumerfed. Regarding promotional services the private sector outlets are better than the rest.

Findings on Self-Evaluation by Sales Personnel

- There is no significant difference among the employees of different super markets on atmospheric facilities. That is, all the staff in Private, Supplyco and Consumerfed has similar opinion regarding atmospheric facilities and they find that the facilities provided are poor.
- There is no significant difference among the employees of different super markets on dependability in services. That is, all the staff in Private, Supplyco and Consumerfed has similar opinion regarding dependability in services and they find that the services provided are poor.
- There is significant difference among the employees of different super markets regarding promptness in services.
- There is no significant difference among the employees of different super markets regarding credibility in services except in the case of parking facility. That is, when compared, Private sector provides convenient parking facility followed by Consumerfed and then Supplyco.
- There is no significant difference among the employees of different super markets regarding promotional services except in the case of providing broad choice of brands within each product category. That is, when compared, Private sector provides broad choice followed by Consumerfed. Supplyco provide the least.
- There is no significant difference regarding the customers’ behaviour while shopping according to the opinion of employees based on the category of super markets in Kerala but there is significant difference in the opinion that, ‘ the behaviour of majority of the customers is satisfactory’.
- There is significant association between the experience of the staff and his/her knowledge about goods. This implies experience and knowledge about goods are dependent to each other.
- There is significant association between the experience of the staff and the training he/she has undergone. This implies experience of the staff and undergone training is dependent to each other.
- There is significant association between the category of super market he/she works and the training undergone. This implies category of super market he/she works and the training undergone are dependent to each other. Private sector provides more training compared to other super markets.

- There is significant association between job category and training undergone. This implies job category and training undergone are dependent to each other.
- There is significant association between job category and practice of training lessons. This implies designation of job and practice of training lessons are dependent to each other.
- There is significant association between the category of super markets and practice of training lessons. This implies category of super markets and practice of training lessons are dependent

SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the findings of the study, an attempt is made here to develop category-specific suggestions for improving and sustaining appropriate behaviour-norms for the staff for rendering services up to the satisfaction of the customers.

- Appropriate behaviour from an employee can emerge only if his work motivation is pretty high and his job satisfaction also is, at least, above the average. The findings of the study indicate that the sales personnel in the retail store are a dissatisfied lot because of subsistence wage (Rs. 350 to 400 per day) and denial of permanency in the job. No wonder, there are frequent complaints from the customers about the quality of service rendered at the buying and the selling process. The solution is obvious. The associations such as the local Chamber of Commerce and the Vyapari Vyavasaya Ekopana Samithi should understand the gravity of the problem of these personnel in the stores of their members and officially take early steps to solve their problems-especially the present low wages and perks so that they become motivated to render their service spontaneously with the expected quality.
- It seems that the impact of training already given to the sales personnel has declined to some extent among those store personnel interviewed for the study. In fact, most of them need refresher training programmes to make them vibrant in the delivery of services. On the basis of the findings of the study, a module has been suggested for training. The concept of business, profit and loss, marketing, quality in service, psychology of customers of different types, trends in retailing business, communication and its importance in the sales process, courtesy, etiquettes, knowledge of various brands and the characteristics of each brand, the need for empathy in dealings, post-purchase dissonance and redressal, presentation and discussion of case studies, role plays, buying and selling and business games.
- An appropriate performance appraisal system for the sales personnel and the store managers could be developed with the help of experts with practical experience. It should be introduced only after discussion with the staff and with their consent. An incentive for better performance is a must.
- **Consumerfed:** Among the three types of organized retail stores, the outlets of Consumerfed are found to be far behind the private stores in terms of SERVQUAL indicators of quality in service. The attention of the higher authorities of the institution is drawn to this finding. The findings of the customers indicate that the services offered by the co-operative stores are quite unsatisfactory in terms of the quality parameters. Regarding atmospheric facility, the frontage of the shop is not attractive and pleasing to the eye. This means, there is much scope for improvement to catch up with the attractiveness of the private stores. Regarding the store layout, majority of the outlets do not have enough space for customers to move around. Since most of the shops

are in rented buildings, it is almost impossible to find additional space. Since the merchandise are arranged in a layout without any consideration for the customers to identify with ease the commodities required, there is need for redesigning the layout. Because of these defects, the visual appealing of the materials arranged is very poor. Unlike in the private sector outlets in the malls or hyper markets, in Consumerfed stores there is no arrangement for entertainment, food court, waiting hall, modern looking equipment and fixtures to attract and satisfy the present-customers. If the business of Consumerfed is to be increased, there is need for all these facilities and amenities since the retail market is becoming more and more competitive day by day. Regarding dependability in service, the findings are that there are deficiencies in billing, providing complaint-free services, delay in delivery, and thereby creating doubts about the trust-worthiness of the transactions. Likewise, promptness in service is also not maintained. Issues related to the quality of the products are not resolved quickly with empathy. The same can be said about its credibility in service. Often, it is found that the employees are not courteous and fail in winning the confidence of the customers regarding the quality of the products. Even in respect of promotional aspects, the management does not take steps to provide wide range of products and trendy merchandise.

- **Supply co:** The findings indicate that the services of Supplyco is comparatively better in respect of dependability but just average in respect of atmospheric facility, promptness and promotional services and low in credibility. It is observed during visits for data collection that the Supplyco stores attracts long queue of customers by providing highly subsidized essential items such as rice, sugar, black gram and coconut oil. Other products are also available just like the private super markets. The fundamental limitation of Supplyco is that its outlets are set up in rented buildings which lack enough space required by a typical store and its interior lay out is unfit for modern trendy business: lack of space for customers to move around freely and choose the products they want and other facilities such as entertainment, food court, parking and so on. If business has to prosper, all these deficiencies have to be rectified.
- **Stores in the Private Sector:** Among the different types of retail stores, the private sector is to be considered as the trend setter. The modern malls and the hyper markets with all sorts of facilities are indicators of its vibrant nature. Comparatively assessing the facilities, they are far ahead of the stores set up by public sector. The quality of service expressed by the store personnel is not only the impact of the training they have undergone but also due to the close and effective supervision of the store management. However, there is scope for and need for modern gadgets which would facilitate the day today transactions and save the valuable time of time-conscious customers. One of the persistent limitations of the stores is the limited space and the internal design of the rooms of rented buildings in which many of the stores are set up which cannot be easily redesigned to suit the requirements of modern stores. However, there are some stores owned by the proprietors and designed according to the modern trends with all the paraphernalia that would please the modern customers.

CONCLUSIONS

The store personnel, in general, are friendly to the customers and are aware of the importance satisfying them through reasonably good quality of service. With well- defined and relevant training modules their attitude and skills in imparting quality in service to the modern customers could be enhanced. However, their work motivation has to be

calibrated through fair wages, job security and perks as per the various labour laws and a little more.

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