

Perception of Indian Consumers at Traditional Stores and Shopping Malls

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A b s t r a c t

Consumer behaviour is the most vital element in a rapidly changing retail business environment. This study attempted to examine the significant difference of product, salesman behaviour and service attributes on consumer choice for traditional stores and shopping malls. A structured questionnaire has been developed for collecting the primary data from 400 respondents. The samples selected for this study are the consumers having access to traditional stores and shopping malls in Guwahati city from 31 GMC Wards under the Guwahati Municipal Corporation using a random sampling method. In this study, the reliability of the scale and validity were measured using Cronbach's alpha. The overall Cronbach's alpha value obtained is 0.9, which shows the high reliability of the scale and thereby, it is valid to use this scale for further analysis. The use of the z-test revealed that the overall product, salesman behaviour and service attributes on consumers' choice of traditional stores and shopping malls are significant.

Keywords: Indian Retail, Consumer Perception, Traditional Stores, Shopping malls

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1. Introduction:

In the 1880s, the retailing system took the shape of mom-and-pop stores, which were family-owned small stores and independent businesses. These stores were plentiful with low merchandise, popularly known as *Kirana*/mom and pop shops or traditional stores. The establishment of these stores was mainly to cater to the needs of the local people. It took a pretty long time to shape the retail sector into today's modern system. Shopping malls have emerged as a relaxation destination where consumers visit not only for shopping but for amusement, leisure, fun, interest and enjoyment. So, a retailer has to understand the consumer perception and enhance the image of his stores to succeed in this business. The first few companies to come up with modern retail chains were Bombay Dyeing, Titan etc. Over time, many entrants moved on from manufacturing to pure retailing. The demand at present has been gradually increasing by leaps and bounds. A young working population, rising living standard, nuclear families in urban areas, rise in income, high literacy rate, and increasing working-women population are the growth drivers of the modern retail sector in India. (Saxena, 2005).

According to the Global Retail Development Index report, Indian retailing has scored the second position with a population of 1.37 billion, GDP per capita of \$7,874, and total retail sales of \$1,202 billion in the 2019 Global Retail Development Index. India's retail market is expected to reach \$1.4 trillion by 2021 and grow at 18 per cent in the next five years (Kearney, 2019). India is one of the fastest-growing retail markets in the world, with 139.26 crores of people.

The Indian retail sector has marked an impressive and tremendous growth being the second-largest consumer market and seventh-largest retail market worldwide (Müller, 2011). Presently, the Indian retail industry scenario has changed immensely and is very much dynamic and varied. The expansion of the modern retail sector to single-brand and multi-brand retail has improved a good situation, which has fascinated many foreign players to promote their brand name into India. Indian retail industry has anticipated a rise to \$1.3 trillion by 2020 from \$672 billion in 2017 (Urs, 2018). According to the India

Brand Equity Foundation report, in single-brand retail and multi-brand retail, a cent per cent and 51 per cent respectively have been approved for foreign direct investment. A large scale of international brands entered the Indian markets (IBEF 2019).

Malls came into existence during the 1980s in America as a popular destination for shopping and recreation (Kowinski, 1985). A shopping mall is defined as a group of establishments that is planned, developed, managed and owned as a single unit (Armstrong, 2002). The malls have entered India with a motive of offering convenient shopping, entertainment and food under one roof (Rao, 2018). The main reason for the growth of shopping malls in India is the fast-growing middle class with higher discretionary income, the habits of Indian consumers for a new shopping experience, influence of media and marketing communications resulting in changing lifestyle and perception of consumers on shopping (Garg, 2015). Nowadays, consumers visit shopping malls not only to buy goods and avail services but also for entertainment. This change has made retailers' jobs more challenging to attract and retain consumers and satisfy their needs and wants. Thus, shopping malls are growing at a fast pace.

Guwahati is emerging as the fastest developing city and the commercial hub in the entire North East Region where maximum development of shopping malls, the organized format of retailing has been recorded. The city, commonly known as "The Gateway of North East India", has been providing enormous opportunities for modern retailers and is said to have good commercial prospects. Shopping malls are coming up all over the city, thus flourishing in the region. HUB is the first shopping mall in Guwahati, which was opened in 2003 located on the main GS Road, near Bhangagarh. It has spread over 25000 sq. ft and started its journey 18 years back with a vision to provide a whole new shopping experience. At one point of time, the HUB was also a favourite destination for 7D cinema, which is now closed due to the current pandemic situation. Central Mall is another one-stop destination shopping mall located in Zoo Road with a promise to change the fashion benchmark of the city forever. It offers more than 500 domestic and international brands to customers, established in 2019.

2. Review of Literature:

The selection of the research topic was based on the current retail scenario in society. In the last two decades, there has been a significant growth of shopping malls. According to Bloch (1995), product design is an important parameter as it attracts the consumer, communicates to them, and adds value to the product. The result derived from the study mentioned that the durability of the product under product design attribute influences the consumer psychology and response in-store selection. Foscht (2007) stated that tidiness and cleanliness are highly correlated with the perception of consumers that gives them satisfaction in time spent on shopping. Pires (2008) assessed quality perception in terms of product dimensions, namely colour and shapes. Chestnut (1978) examines brand loyalty and sales with customer satisfaction. The study posits that brand plays a pivotal role in influencing the consumer to select retail stores after globalization. Cameron (1994) studied the perception of consumers on the appearance of products; he mentioned that the perception of consumers differs for locally made and overseas made products. Higher the locally made products are perceived to be quality, affordable price, technology-based and superior, the lower is the preference for the overseas made product. Therefore, consumers rate countries of origin only after perceiving the product quality and price. Kadyan (2013) pointed out twenty-seven items under six retail attributes to examine the influence on consumer selection of traditional and small garment retail stores. The retail attribute product criterion includes cloth style, colour, wide choice, and fabric varieties; product performance includes fashionable, comfort, easy fabric care, durability, cloth safety, and ease of maintenance. Also, the price consists of a comfortable pricing range, economical pricing, discounts, and credit cards; promotions include advertisements, social values, and seasonal offers. In addition to that, the quality of the product, fabric quality, colour, and fabric artistry; the quality of retailer service includes retailer reputation, brand stock, retail store image, convenience in shopping, location, salesmanship, and ambiances parking facility. Therefore, using factor analysis, the findings revealed from the study have been found that the five retail attributes influence the overall perception of consumers in-store choice formats.

Lowe (2015) describes how innovative a new product is to consumers and how the innovativeness of a product influences the consumer to buy a new product from the retail stores. The researcher has constructed consumer perceived innovativeness (CPI) to understand the cause and consequence of innovative products. Hence, innovative products are an essential attribute of product criteria that influence consumers' purchase intention in retail stores.

Frankwick (2003) stated that salespersons play a role in building healthy communication, trust, and loyalty between consumers and businesses. The strong personality of salespersons can encourage the consumers to give positive feedback and earn profit by the business through increasing sales. Being sensitive to the consumers has a strong relationship with the consumer's perception of buying behaviour. Boshoff (2004) put forward that purchase intentions are influenced by salesperson behaviour responsiveness, assurance, and empathy attributes. Lennon (2005) posits the importance of measuring the effects of customers' dress on the friendliness of salespeople and promptness of service. The study suggested that the salespeople need the training to be friendly with the customers irrespective of the customers' dress. However, retailers should make the salespeople alert and conscious of the behaviour of customers' in delivering the service. Kulshrestha (2009) determined the impact of salesperson behaviour on the emotions and response of the consumers. The researcher stated that the consumer's psychology gets strongly influenced by the positive behaviour of the salesperson. Hence, the study's findings revealed that the salesperson's behaviour during the sales interactions affects consumer perception, emotions and response. Medrano (2016) aimed to know what consumers value the most in terms of salesperson behaviour. The researcher has stressed the importance of personal attention and also stated that it varies across industries. The findings revealed that personal attention had been the primary factor in motivating consumer preference in selecting local streets. However, the individual attention factor is not relevant for consumers who prefer shopping malls. Prendergast (2014) concluded that salespersons' behaviour's trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and knowledge attributes have a more significant effect on consumers' purchase intention.

Laurent, (1985) has identified that the service and ambience attribute influences consumers' choice for retail stores. Consumer perceptions on price, overall quality and value are considered as pivotal determinants of buying behaviour and store selection. This study recommended that service delivery reflects the whole service quality of the retail industry. Increasing demand of consumers' expectations has bound the retail industry to look upon the service quality in a pleasant manner that they are positively related to satisfaction. In the early days, the customers perceived the services in terms of their quality, and the satisfaction has been measured with respect to overall experiences (Zeithaml, 1988). Another study done by Plooy (2012) found that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are the five main drivers of perceived levels of service quality among consumers at grocery retail outlets.

Pookulangara (2006) stated that consumers' preference for more shopping malls has increased. The study's objective was to examine the effects of retail attributes on consumers' purchase intentions towards shopping malls and utilized a Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interview (CATI) for data collection from 500 samples. The study's findings revealed that consumers visit shopping malls due to access to a variety of items and convenience-related attributes. Sun (2009) has conducted an original survey from 128 respondents to understand the importance of innovativeness and differentiated products heading to an increase or decrease in consumers' perception. The findings revealed that the Indian consumer gives more weightage to intrinsic factors than extrinsic factors in their decision-making process.

The attributes identified from previous research suggest that all the attributes are not commonly important in affecting consumers' perception in retail stores. The importance of the retail attribute may vary from store to store depending upon the need and demand of the consumer. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the perceptions of consumers visiting traditional stores and shopping malls from the consumers perspective. Thereafter, the study suggests that retailers strategize their decisions based on these attributes to enhance the footfalls in their stores. They should satisfy the consumers to develop store loyalty among themselves.

3. Methodology of the Study:

There has been a sufficient literature review existing on consumer perception and buying behaviour in the Indian context. However, this study has attempted to examine the store choice attributes on consumer choice for traditional stores (TS) and shopping malls (SM) in Guwahati City. For data collection, the sampling unit for the study comprises all the individual buyers residing in 31 GMC Wards under the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC). The researcher has precisely estimated to take 400 sizes of the sample using the 'Taro Yamane' formula. The data has been collected with the help of a structured questionnaire from consumers (N=400) using a random sampling method. The questionnaire contained a total set of seventeen attributes of the product, salesman behaviour and service attributes related to the consumer choice for TS and SM. This study measured the scale's reliability and validity using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). From table 1, the overall Cronbach's alpha value obtained is 0.9, which shows the high reliability of the scale and thereby, it is valid to use this scale for further analysis. Hence, it is also worth stating that Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.6 and above has been considered good for research in social sciences (Bougie, 2010). The findings of the present study have also been validated with the help of a hypothesis to test the significant difference in the mean value of different attributes of traditional stores and shopping mall images.

Note: This study has used the Taro Yamane formula (Fig 1) to figure out the appropriate sample size, keeping into consideration the total Ward Household population, which was written as

$$n = \frac{229,716}{1+229,716 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 400$$

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The present study attempts to analyze the significant difference of store choice attributes on consumer choice for TS and SM using the z test at a 5% significance level. But, before that, the normal distribution of each variable under the mentioned attributes has been checked using Skewness and

Kurtosis. Table 2 shows the Skewness values within the range of (-1) to (+1) and Kurtosis values within the range of (-3) to (+3), as suggested by Hair et al. (2003), indicating an acceptable range for analyzing the z-test.

Product Attributes

To prove; whether there is any significant difference between product attributes and consumer choice for TS and SM, the following hypothesis has been developed:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in product attributes and consumer choice for TS and SM.

The consumer's overall perception from table 3 states that the mean score of TS is smaller than the SM (26.04 < 26.81). It means that the consumer preference for SM is more as compared to TS. Since the *p-value* is 0.013, which is less than 0.05, the study indicates a significant difference in consumer perceived products attribute and selection for TS and SM. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis.

Quality, affordable price, variety, packaging, colour and uniqueness are the attributes of a product that significantly differ in consumer choice for TS and SM. However, this finding is similar to the previous study (Gonçalves, 2008) that the choice for store formats depends upon the product attributes. *The product's price* depends on consumer involvement in buying the goods and services from TS and SM. Product depth and product width in terms of *variety* are very much high in TS and SM. As a result, consumers may feel comfortable making a comparison amid the different products available therein.

On the other hand, the products' manufacturing and expiry date' have no significant difference in selection for TS and SM. However, this result is commensurate with the previous literature review (Bloch, 1995) that consumers opt for a need-based choice and durability of products that are not always associated with manufacturing and expiry date. It implies that the consumers do not seek information about the manufacturing and expiry date of durable products such as bicycles, refrigerators etc. They are more concerned regarding the manufacturer's warranty or guarantee of the products and seek quality services during purchase and post-purchase behaviour.

Salesman behaviour

To prove; whether there is a significant difference between consumer perceived behaviour of salesman and selection for TS and SM, the following hypothesis has been presented:

Ho2: There is no significant difference in consumer perceived salesman behaviour and selection for TS and SM.

The overall perception from table 4 states that the mean score of TS is larger than the SM; (26.33 < 25.78). Since the *p-value* is less than 0.05, the study has proved a significant difference in consumer perceived salesman behaviours and choice of TS and SM. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis.

Trustworthiness, friendliness, attractiveness, experience, and knowledge are the attributes of salesman behaviour that significantly differ in consumer selection for TS and SM. However, strong behavioural traits of salesman encourage the trust, communication, and loyalty of consumers and decision-making processes in choosing retail stores. On the other hand, *individual salesman attention* and *prompt service* attributes have no significant difference in consumer choice for TS and SM. Demand-driven goods and services encourage consumer selection of TS and SM, which is not always associated with the salesman's attention and prompt service attributes.

Service Attributes

To prove; whether there is any significant difference between service attributes and consumer choice for TS and SM, the following hypothesis has been developed:

Ho3: There is no significant difference in service attributes and consumer choice for TS and SM

From table 5, the overall perception states that the mean score of TS is smaller than the SM; (18.46 < 19.592). Since the *p-value* is less than 0.05, the present study proves a significant difference in consumer perceived service attributes and choice of TS and SM. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis. The result is consistent with the previous study (Frankwick, 2003), as the author has pointed out that there is an increased demand from consumers for

more service in the retail stores. Consumers usually do not criticize at the store but rather complain about the service received to friends, family and other people in their influential group. Furthermore, any dissatisfied consumers may have the propensity to switch to other retail stores.

It was found in the previous review of literature that a study done by (Krapfel 1988) showed that service attributes have a significant difference in perception towards store choice. The increasing demand for consumers' expectations has bound the retailers to pleasantly look upon the service attributes.

Hence, from figure 2, we can say that consumers' preference for a shopping mall is more than TS in terms of product and service attributes. Whereas consumers prefer traditional stores more because of the salesman behaviour.

5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research:

In the light of the changing retail structure in India, especially when the demand for shopping malls has been rapidly increasing due to the working population, rising living standard and rise in income, the generalization of findings cannot be assumed with limited sample size and geographical location. Consumers from other geographical locations may have different perceptions and choices for retail formats. The limitations can be concentrated in the future by conducting more studies in other geographic areas where the gist is picking up due to the dynamic retail system.

6. Conclusion:

Retailing in Guwahati is experiencing a transformation. Shopping malls have made an appearance as a major source of consumers buyouts. In these modern days, consumers have the propensity to visit shopping malls not only to buy goods and services but also for entertainment guided by additional factors like relaxation and enjoyment. The results revealed how the overall consumer choice for SM is more compared to TS regarding product and service attributes. Whereas, in the case of salesman behaviour, it has been observed that the consumers prefer to visit traditional stores in comparison to shopping malls.

This keeps them satisfied in visiting the regular and known store for buying the goods and services.

However, it could be reasonable to conclude that the shopping malls in Guwahati have immense opportunities to grow along with the traditional stores because of the increasing consumer's perception and expectation for deriving different types of products with good quality. Consumer's visit must be made memorable so that it develops a loyalty factor. The shopping mall maintains close contact and has a regular feedback mechanism to check the level of satisfaction in relation to the products and services offered by the mall. These efforts have increased the shopping mall standards, thereby changing the whole approach of mall management.

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1. Taro Yamane Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where, n = Number of sample size

N = Population size

e = level of precision

Based on the statistical formula, when the size of the population is more than 1,00,000, a 95% confidence level and $\pm 5\%$ precision is desired.

2. Overall Mean Score of Selection for TS and SM:

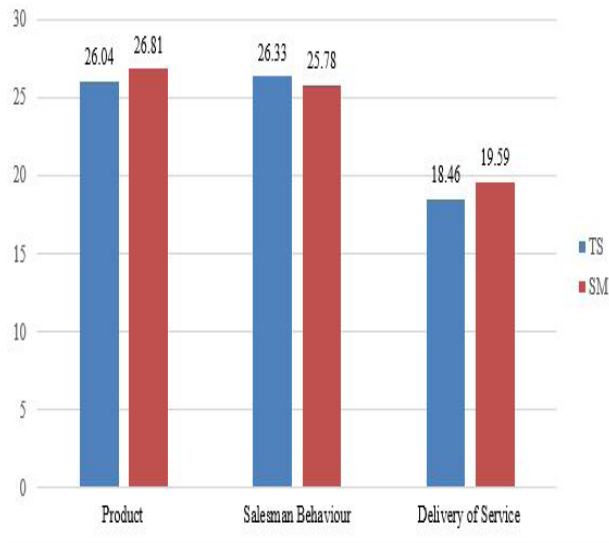


Fig 2: Overall Mean Score of Selection for TS and SM

3. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test:

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Retail Attributes	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Overall Attributes	82	0.9
Product	14	0.7
Salesman Behaviours	14	0.7
Service	10	0.6

Note: Items mentioned are doubling here for both TS and SM

4. Skewness and Kurtosis for Retail Attributes:

Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis for Retail Attributes

Retail Attributes	Retail Stores	Skewness	Kurtosis
Product	TS	-0.140	-0.303
	SM	-0.361	-0.553
Salesman Behaviour	TS	-0.435	-0.286
	SM	-0.271	-0.793
Service	TS	-0.281	-0.345
	SM	-0.212	.007

Source: Compiled from primary data

5. Product Attributes and Consumer Choice for TS and SM:

Table 3: Product Attributes and Consumer Choice for TS and SM

Product Attribute	Retail Store	Mean	Std. Deviation	z-test	p value	Result
Quality	TS	4.30	.872	-2.12	.034	Significant
	SM	4.18	.893			
Affordable price	TS	4.11	.681	-11.68	.000	Significant
	SM	3.26	1.122			
Variety	TS	4.14	.865	-5.84	.000	Significant
	SM	4.50	.633			
Packaging	TS	2.94	1.434	-9.47	.000	Significant
	SM	3.88	.986			
Colour	TS	3.65	1.005	-12.95	.000	Significant
	SM	2.66	1.059			
Manufacturing and expiry date	TS	4.17	.886	-.370	.712	Insignificant
	SM	4.19	.885			
Uniqueness	TS	2.72	1.060	-16.82	.000	Significant
	SM	4.14	.853			
Overall Perception	TS	26.04	3.253	-2.50	.013	Significant
	SM	26.81	3.531			

Source: Compiled from primary data

6. Behaviour of Salesman and Consumer Choice for TS and SM:

Table 4: Behaviour of Salesman and Consumer Choice for TS and SM

Behaviour Attribute of Sales Person		Mean	Std. Deviation	z-test	P value	Result
Individual Attention	TS	3.80	1.089	-1.161	0.246	Insignificant
	SM	3.90	0.993			
Trustworthiness	TS	3.81	0.897	-2.961	0.003	Significant
	SM	3.99	0.809			
Friendliness	TS	3.68	0.877	-4.799	0.000	Significant
	SM	3.41	0.541			
Attractiveness	TS	3.58	0.587	-2.824	0.005	Significant
	SM	3.74	0.661			
Experienced	TS	3.85	0.787	-10.396	0.000	Significant
	SM	3.16	0.910			
Prompt Service	TS	3.72	0.965	-0.207	0.836	Insignificant
	SM	3.78	0.682			
Knowledge	TS	3.87	0.840	-1.959	0.050	Significant
	SM	3.81	0.672			
Overall Perception	TS	26.33	3.493	-4.308	0.000	Significant
	SM	25.78	2.170			

Source: Compiled from primary data

7. Service Attributes and Consumer Choice for TS and SM:

Table 5: Service Attributes and Consumer Choice for TS and SM

Service Attribute	Retail Stores	Mean	Std. Deviation	z-test	P value	Result
Extended Store Hours	TS	4.03	.833	-8.367	.000	Significant
	SM	4.48	.704			
Quick Billing	TS	4.30	.751	-17.318	.000	Significant
	SM	2.69	1.230			
Handling Queries	TS	3.72	.701	-10.613	.000	Significant
	SM	4.26	.712			
Home Delivery	TS	3.14	.885	-19.248	.000	Significant
	SM	4.56	.677			
Easy Exchange	TS	3.26	1.108	-4.437	.000	Significant
	SM	3.60	1.042			
Overall Perception	TS	18.46	2.372	-6.763	.000	Significant
	SM	19.592	2.7849			

Source: Compiled from primary data

