



A STUDY ON HABITS AND PREFERENCES OF CUSTOMERS TOWARDS SHOPPING AT MODERN RETAIL STORES

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Abstract

Indian retail industry is one of the most vibrant ones across the globe. It offers innumerable opportunities to enterprising businessmen. Since the age of mom-and-pop stores (Kirana stores as called in India), traditional retail in India has gave way to modern retail formats, which improved shopping experiences of customers to new heights. On the other hand, the new-age customers have started embracing new retail formats as a welcoming sign to modern retailers. At this point, it is found essential to discover the general habits and preferences of customers towards shopping at modern retail stores. The study covers shopping mall customers in a tier-2 city in Andhra Pradesh. Using systematic sampling method 120 customers were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The paper discusses the findings of the study and makes suggestions for modern retailers.

Keywords: *Customers, habits, preferences and retail.*

1. Introduction

Indian retail encompasses a singular collection of various formats. On one hand it has a great number of mom-and-pop stores offering personalized services like credit facility and home delivery and on the other, it is being complemented by modern retail stores that offer outstanding shopping experience to its customers. The concept of shopping has transformed over a decade in terms of business format and customer buying behavior revolutionizing the industry. Modern retailing has dominated Indian retail industry in the form of huge shopping centers, multi-storied shopping malls and themed shopping complexes that provide shopping, food and entertainment all under one roof. This coupled with evolution of new-age customers not just from metros and Tier-1 cities but also from Tier-2 and 3 towns, rise in their aspirations and purchasing capacity brought in new opportunities for modern retail marketers. As marketers in metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad etc. mature, retailers are moving in to non-metros. Despite the current inflationary environment, tier-2 and 3 towns such as Allahabad, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Nellore, Trivandrum, Vijayawada etc. are showing strong momentum with improved demand appetite. In terms of market size, it will grow from US \$ 5.7 billion today to over US\$ 80 billion in value by 2026.¹ In this milieu, it is considered important to study the shopping habits and preferences of customers towards modern retailing.

1.1 Customer Habits and Preferences

Understanding retail industry means understanding its customers. Customers' shopping habits and preferences largely defines and determines the growth of retail industry in any market. Customer habits are defined as "an individual's or group's normal purchases."² It is the products that a particular customer usually buy and the places where he buys them.³ Buying habits are the tendencies customers have when purchasing products and services.⁴ Whereas customer preferences are defined as what type of product an individual customer likes or dislikes.⁵ They are defined as the subjective (individual) tastes, as measured by utility, of various bundles of goods⁶

In recent times, India has witnessed a sea change in customer preference, which created new prospects for modern retailers to innovate new business ideas and introduce new product offerings with creative marketing strategies to grab the untapped potential in tier-2 and 3 towns as well apart from establishing themselves in metros. From street-vendors to cart-riders to traditional mom-and-pop stores, the new-age customer is fancying new-look and modern retail formats, from local and regional brands to national and international brands, from being

¹ <http://www.indiaretailing.com/2014/09/17/retail/why-should-a-retailer-move-to-tier-ii-iii-cities/>

² <https://financial-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Buying+Habits>

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/buying-habits>

⁴ <https://thrivehive.com/why-do-customers-buy-how-to-identify-customer-buying-habits/>

⁵ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/customer-preference>

⁶ <http://www.usi.edu/business/cashel/331/consumer.pdf>

conservative to aspirational. Western retailing trends in brick-and-mortar formats have entered into the Indian retail landscape, in the form of sprawling shopping centers, multi-storied shopping malls and the huge shopping destinations that offer shopping, food and entertainment all under one roof. E-commerce, m-commerce have started finding acceptance from all over in India.

2. Review of Literature

To gain better understanding on the subject and to critically evaluate the study, a thorough review of various literature is carried out and the key excerpts are given under.

Irudaya Rajan (2006)⁷ explaining the changing economic conditions of Indian, stated that according to the population report, there are 192 million families in India, of which around 6 million families collectively have annual earnings of about INR 2,15,000. Further, 75 million households have yearly income that ranges from INR 45,000 to INR 2,15,000. The author opined that Indian could manage to pay more on entertainment, food and beverages and nightlife, as they started to receive high packages. Ramanathan V and Hari K (2008)⁸ examined the structural changes in Indian retail market from organized to unorganized. They expressed that nearly 20 million middle class families in the rural India have the same purchasing power as their metropolitan counterparts. The researchers have identified that there are rich as well as poor people residing both in urban and rural India. In this context, the authors suggest that it would be wise to set up organized retail outlets in rural areas of the country. Petr C. Verhoer, Kannan P.K., Jeffrey Inman J. (2015)⁹ opined that retail has witnessed a sea change in the last decade. The change was lead by the introduction of online, mobile and social platforms. Last decade has seen multi-channel retailing, whereas today it is omni-channel retailing. Omni-channel retailing has taken a wide perspective on various channels and how consumers are influenced and move from one channel to another in product search and purchasing process. The paper discussed the same, conceptually and was later supported by research on multi-channel retailing.

Elenora Pantano, Harry Timmermans (2014)¹⁰ in their paper "What is Smart for retailing?" expressed that last decade has witnessed greater interest in the concept of smart cities from researchers and policy makers as well, however no much attention has been paid to find the extent to which retailing may be considered under the smart city planning. The authors also expressed that retailing in fact has capacity to radically innovate using several available technology. As application of advanced technology comes well under smart city concept, policy makers may consider modern retailing as an enabler for smart city phenomenon. The authors identified the factors to be considered smart for retailing on the lines of application of smart technology and challenges retail may face in adopting smart technology. E. Eser Telci, Ceyda maden and Deniz Kantur (2011)¹¹ worked on the theory of cognitive dissonance which focuses on developing knowledge on the key psychological processes that takes in individuals' minds. The theory particularly concentrates on the relationships among cognitions that are components of knowledge that people posses about their behavior, attitudes, perception, beliefs, feelings or environment. The major objective of the paper was to develop the literature further on cognitive dissonance by identifying the undiscovered areas and lead the way for further conceptual and empirical research. Finding gaps and recommending for further scholarly investigation are also believed to make a good contribution to the efforts made in rekindling interest on the concept and to improve its ability to generalize the findings, using greater application of the knowledge. Anand and Sinha¹² mentioned that even though there is a great change in Indian retail industry in terms of emergence of new formats, only 5% of the whole retail market was occupied by organized retail. Unorganized retail which comprises of open market, sandy, street shops and grocery shops are the chief subsectors in the Indian retail sector. The authors also identified that customers are also changing their preferences and priorities in tune with retail formats. Dick and Divert¹³ reported that the marketers need to raise the loyalty among consumers as it leads to success of the firm. Hence, marketers must understand every aspect of consumers in order to their tastes and preferences. Consumer preferences and requirements are dependent on certain factors in connect to consumer attitude and behavior.

⁷ Irudaya Rajan S., Population Ageing and Health in India. Background Paper Series 1, Center for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes, Mumbai, 2006.

⁸ Ramanathan V. and Hari K., —Structural changes in Indian Retail market: From Unorganized to Organized, Indian Journal of Marketing, December, pp-34- 40, 2008.

⁹ Pater C. Verhoer, Kannan P.K., Jeffrey Inman J. (2015), "From Multi-Channel retailing to Omni-Channel retailing: Introduction to the Special Issue on Multi-Channel Retailing", Journal of retailing, Vol. 91, Issue 2, pp174-181.

¹⁰ Eleonora Pantano, Harry Timmermans (2014), "What is Smart for Retailing?", Procedia Environmental Sciences, Vol 22 pp101-107

¹¹ Eser Telci E, Ceyda Maden et.al (2011), "The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance: A Marketing and Management Perspective", Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Vol 24, pp378-386.

¹² Anand K.S. and Sinha P.K., Store format, choice in an evolving market: role of affect cognition and involvement. International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research, 19(5), pp. 505- 534, 2009.

¹³ Divett M., Crittenden N. and Henderson R., Actively influencing consumer loyalty, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 20 No.2, p.109, 2003.

3. Objectives of the Study

In the above backdrop, the study aims at gaining more practical insights on changing retail landscape with the following objectives.

1. To study the habits of customers towards shopping at modern retail stores.
2. To find out the preferences of customers towards shopping at modern retail store
3. To determine the factors influencing their preferences.
4. To elicit the opinion of customers towards their preferred retail store.

4. Scope of the Study

The inferences from the study are based on the responses given by the customers in a specific area. This study is helpful in getting insights on shopping habits and preferences of middle and higher socio-economic group of customers of shopping mall in Nellore. A few of the findings may be deviating towards retail stores present in the mall at the time of survey as the survey was carried out in the premises of the mall. It may not fully reflect the habits and preferences of customers as the responses of the participants of the survey might be biased.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study is based on both primary data and secondary data. The primary data was collected through structured questionnaire for which samples of 120 respondents were selected for this study. The collected samples using convenient sampling method was validated and took it for further analysis. Secondary data is also collected from database sites and articles. The collected data was analyzed with the suitable tools like Chi-square with the following assumptions made on the onset of the study.

H1: There is no significant difference between gender and frequency of shopping

H2: There is no significant difference between income and benefits sought from the store

H3: There is no significant difference between level of education and opinion on store

5.2 Research Approach

Survey method is used for collecting data from customers at various retail outlets and showrooms at a shopping mall. Respondents were requested to respond to various questions and the responses were recorded in the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained both open and close-ended questions in a structured format.

5.3 Sampling Technique

Systematic sampling (a probability sampling method) technique is used to pick 120 shoppers at MGB Mall in Nellore. The members of the sample selected were requested to participate in the survey voluntarily.

5.4 Data Analysis

For the purpose of analysis and interpretation, only the primary data is used. However, for conclusion and recommendations both primary and secondary data along with the information obtained from observation is used. The data collected from these sources were analyzed using various tools like percentage analysis, Chi-square test and cross table analysis.

5.5 Tools

Frequencies and cross tabulation have been calculated for the responses of the respondents. Chi-square test was conducted on the data to test the significance of the hypotheses.

6. Analysis and Interpretation

6.1 Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Male	Female		
	79 (65.8)	41 (34.0)		
Age	18-25	26-35	36-45	Above 45
	19 (15.8)	32 (26.6)	56 (46.5)	13 (10.8)
Education	Below graduation	Graduation	Post-graduation	
	22 (18.3)	56 (46.5)	42 (50.4)	
Monthly Individual Income (in INR)	Below 10000	11,000-25,000	Above 25,000	
	49 (40.7)	37(30.7)	34 (28.3)	

Figures in brackets represent percentage values of the corresponding numbers

6.1.1 Interpretation

From the above table, it can be inferred that male took active participation in the survey comprising around 66% of the total respondents. This represents the dominance of male over female in shopping at modern retail stores. On further classification based on the age group, adults (36-45) dominated the survey who constitute around 46% of the respondents. Next comes young adults (26-35) with 26.6% and youth (18-25) with 15.8%. Elders (Above 45) represent low with just 10.8%. This signifies that adults and young adults are active shoppers than youngsters and elders. Most of the respondents (50.4%) are post-graduates. Graduates comprises 46.5% and the rest (18.3%) are non-graduates. This specifies that most of the shoppers are well educated. However, the monthly individual income of a considerable number of the respondents (40.7%) is below INR 10,000 whereas, around 30% of them earn between INR 11,000 and 25,000. Considerably low number of respondents (21.6%) earn between INR 26,000 and 40,000. A minuscule 6.6% get above INR 40,000. This denotes that a good majority of the respondents belong to middle SEC (socio-economic class) and higher SEC represent low in the survey.

6.2 General Shopping Habits of Customers

How often do you shop at modern retail stores?	Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely
	63 (52.3)	25 (20.8)	11 (9.2)	21 (17.5)
Which modern retail hypermarket store do you usually shop at?	Big Bazaar	Reliance	More	Others
	47 (39.2)	45 (37.5)	17 (14.2)	11 (9.2)
How much time do you usually spend at the store?	Less than 30 minutes	1 hour	2 hours	More than 2 hours
	37 (30.8)	62 (51.7)	19 (15.9)	2 (1.7)
What is your usual nature of visit to these stores?	Planned	Unplanned	Time-pass	Urgency
	47 (39.2)	12 (10.0)	56 (46.7)	5 (4.2)

Figures in brackets represent percentage values of the corresponding numbers

6.2.1. Interpretation

The above table unearths the general shopping habits of customers. It is found that majority of the respondents (52.3%) always shop at modern retail stores. Also, a considerable number of them (17.5%) rarely shop at these type of stores, which signifies that the modern retail has yet to get acceptance from a significant number of customers in market. Most of the respondents stated that they shop more at Big Bazaar and Reliance the two leading big retail chains. Most of the shoppers (51.7%) spend 1 hour on an average on shopping at these stores whereas, only a few of them (1.7%) spend more than 2 hours inside the stores, which may mean that shopping to most of them is an ordeal and not fun or entertaining. Around half of the respondents (46.7) are not serious shoppers. Only 39.2% of them make prior plans to shop at these stores. This points out that retailers must promote well to attract and convince the customers to shop at these stores.

6.3 Shopping Preferences of Customers

What is the most appropriate reason for shopping at modern retail stores	Saves money	Quality products	Fun shopping	One-stop shop	Status	Varieties
	25 (20.8)	28 (23.2)	8 (6.7)	32 (26.6)	12 (9.9)	15 (12.5)
What do you mostly buy at these store?	Fruits & Vegetables	Groceries	Packaged-food	Personal-care items	Apparels	CDE
	9 (7.5)	28 (23.3)	37 (30.8)	26 (21.7)	18 (15.0)	2 (1.7)
What benefits do you get shopping at these store?	Saves time	Saves money	Fun Experience	Varieties	Status	Window-shopping
	25 (20.8)	23 (19.2)	21 (17.5)	21 (17.5)	23 (19.2)	7 (5.8)
What is your opinion on your favorite store?	Conveniently located	Offers modern amenities	Has trained staff	Satisfied all my needs	Offers right ambience	Affordable pricing
	11 (9.2)	24 (20.0)	7 (5.8)	42 (35.0)	24 (20.0)	12 (10.0)

6.3.1 Interpretation

Most popular reasons for customers to shop at modern retail stores include one-stop shopping facility (20.8%), quality products (23.25) and time-saving (20.8%). Shopping is fun only to a very small portion (6.7%) of them while only 9.9% of them agreed that it's like a feeling of status shopping at these stores. Packaged-food (30.8%), groceries (23.3%) and personal-care products (21.7%) are the mostly bought items at these stores whereas, apparels (15%), fruits & vegetables (7.5%) and consumer durables & electronics (1.7%) lag behind their shopping list. Coming to the benefits the derived from shopping at modern retail stores, factors like time-saving (20.8%), money-saving (19.2%), status (19.2%), fun-experience (17.5%) and varieties of merchandise (17.5%) stood ahead in list while window-shopping is mentioned only by a few (5.8%). This signifies that the new-age shoppers don't just restrict themselves for window-shopping unlike in the previous days. When asked about their opinion on their favorite retail store, a considerable amount of the respondents (35%) agreed that all their needs are satisfied in the store, a few opined that the store provide good ambience and amenities equally (20%). Only 10% of the respondents agreed that the prices are affordable. Similarly, only around 10% of them opined that the store is conveniently located to them whereas, only a few (5.8%) agreed that the store has trained staff.

6.3.2. Chi-Square Test

Gender and Frequency of Shopping

Is there any Relation between Gender of the respondents and Shopping Habits of Customers?

Ho: Gender and frequency of shopping are not dependent

H1: Gender and frequency of shopping are dependent

		Frequency				
		Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Total
Gender	Male	43	18	9	9	79
	Female	20	7	2	12	41
	Total	63	25	11	21	120

Degree of freedom (df) = 3,

Level of Significance = 5%

Critical Value = 7.815 (from table)

		Expected Values				
		Frequency				
		Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Total
Gender	Male	41.5	8.5	7.2	13.8	79
	Female	21.5	8.5	3.8	7.2	41
	Total	63	25	11	21	120

Contingency Table				
O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
43	41.5	1.5	2.25	0.1
18	8.5	9.5	90.25	10.6
9	7.2	1.8	3.24	0.5
9	13.8	-4.8	23.04	1.7
20	21.5	-1.5	2.25	0.1
7	8.5	-1.5	2.25	0.3
2	3.8	-1.8	3.24	0.9
12	7.2	4.8	23.04	3.2
				17.2

Chi-square calculated = 17.2

Chi-square from table = 7.815

Since, calculated value of Chi-square is higher than table value, Ho is rejected.

Inference:

Gender of the respondents and the frequency of shopping at modern retail stores are dependent.

Income and Benefits Sought:

Is there any Relation between Income of the respondents and Benefits Sought from shopping at modern retail stores?

Ho: Income and benefits sought are not dependent

H1: Income and benefits sought are not dependent

		Benefits Sought						Total
		ST	SM	FE	V	S	WS	
Income	Below 10,000	12	9	8	7	11	2	49
	11,000-25,000	8	2	10	8	7	2	37
	Above 25,000	5	12	3	6	5	3	34
	Total	25	23	21	21	23	7	120

Degree of freedom (df) = 10,

Level of Significance = 5%

Critical Value = 18.301 (from table)

		Expected Values						Total
		ST	SM	FE	V	S	WS	
Income	Below 10,000	10.2	9.39	8.58	8.58	9.39	2.86	49
	11,000-25,000	7.71	7.09	6.48	6.48	7.09	2.16	37
	Above 25,000	7.08	6.52	5.95	5.95	6.52	1.98	34
	Total	25	23	21	21	23	7	120

Contingency Table				
O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
12	10.2	1.8	3.2	0.3
9	9.39	-0.4	0.2	0.0
8	8.58	-0.6	0.3	0.0
7	8.58	-1.6	2.5	0.3
11	9.39	1.61	2.6	0.3
2	2.86	-0.9	0.7	0.3
8	7.71	0.29	0.1	0.0
2	7.09	-5.1	25.9	3.7
10	6.48	3.52	12.4	1.9
8	6.48	1.52	2.3	0.4
7	7.09	-0.1	0.0	0.0
2	2.16	-0.2	0.0	0.0
5	7.08	-2.1	4.3	0.6
12	6.52	5.48	30.0	4.6
3	5.95	-3	8.7	1.5
6	5.95	0.05	0.0	0.0
5	6.52	-1.5	2.3	0.4
3	1.98	1.02	1.0	0.5
				14.7

Chi-square calculated = 14.7

Chi-square from table = 18.301

Since, calculated value of Chi-square is lower than table value, Ho is accepted.

Inference

Income of the respondents and the benefits sought by them from shopping at modern retail stores are not dependent.

Level of Education and Opinion on Store:

Is there any Relation between Level of education of the respondents and their opinion on their favorite store??

Ho: Level of education and opinion on store are not dependent

H1: Level of education and opinion on store are not dependent

		Opinion on Store						
		CL	OMA	HTS	SAMN	ORA	AP	Total
Education	Below Graduation	2	4	2	6	6	2	22
	Graduation	5	12	2	21	7	9	56
	Above Graduation	4	8	3	15	11	1	42
	Total	11	24	7	42	24	12	120

Degree of freedom (df) = 10,

Level of Significance = 5%

Critical Value = 18.301 (from table)

		Expected Values						
		Opinion on Store						
		CL	OMA	HTS	SAMN	ORA	AP	Total
Education	Below Graduation	2.0	4.4	1.3	7.7	4.4	2.2	22
	Graduation	5.1	11.2	3.3	19.6	11.2	5.6	56
	Above Graduation	3.9	8.4	2.5	14.7	8.4	4.2	42
	Total	11	24	7	42	24	12	120

Contingency Table				
O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
2	2	0	0.0	0.0
4	4.4	-0.4	0.2	0.0
2	1.3	0.7	0.5	0.4
6	7.7	-1.7	2.9	0.4
6	4.4	1.6	2.6	0.6
2	2.2	-0.2	0.0	0.0
5	5.1	-0.1	0.0	0.0
12	11.2	0.8	0.6	0.1
2	3.3	-1.3	1.7	0.5
21	19.6	1.4	2.0	0.1
7	11.2	-4.2	17.6	1.6
9	5.6	3.4	11.6	2.1
4	3.9	0.1	0.0	0.0
8	8.4	-0.4	0.2	0.0
3	2.5	0.5	0.3	0.1
15	14.7	0.3	0.1	0.0
11	8.4	2.6	6.8	0.8
1	4.2	-3.2	10.2	2.4
				9.1

Chi-square calculated = 9.1

Chi-square from table = 18.301

Since, calculated value of Chi-square is lower than table value, H_0 is accepted.

Inference

Education of the respondents and the opinion on their preferred store are not dependent.

7. Findings

- 1) Around half of the respondents i.e., 52.3% regularly shop at modern retail stores and around 20% visit rarely.
- 2) Big Bazaar (39.2%) and Reliance Retail (37.5%) are the most visited stores.
- 3) 80% of the shoppers spend between 30 minutes to 1 hour in store.
- 4) Only 53% of the shoppers actively engage in shopping; rest (46.7%) are just time-passers.
- 5) Most appealing reason for shopping at modern retail stores are one-stop shopping facility (26.6%), availability of quality products (23.2%) and scope for saving money (20.8%).
- 6) Packaged-food (30.8%), groceries (23.3%) and personal-care products are popular among the shoppers in these stores.
- 7) With just 1.7% of responses, consumer durables and electronics (CDE) stood as least bought product category at modern retail stores
- 8) Saving-time (20.8%), saving-money (19.2%) and status (19.2%) are the top three benefits respondents get at these stores.
- 9) Only 5.8% of the respondents are window-shoppers
- 10) 35% shoppers agreed that all their needs are met shopping at these stores.
- 11) Only 10% of the respondents agreed that the prices of products at these stores are affordable to them.
- 12) Only around 6% respondents opined that the store has trained staff.

8. Conclusion

Modern retail stores gradually entered deep into tier-2 and tier-3 town of India. Customers in these places gradually if not instantly, started preferring these stores over traditional mom-and-pop stores. These modern retail stores are thriving on their quality product offerings, money-saving and varieties of merchandise to customers on these small towns. In addition, their sheer ability to satisfy all the needs of shoppers, modern amenities and enticing shopping ambience made these stores right choice to a major chunk of customers. However, there is more to go for these retailers in terms of better customer experience and interaction which improves loyalty among shoppers. With the passing of time, if competition catches it would be difficult for these stores to get along in the market, unless they create a differentiation appeal and gain customer loyalty.

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