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A STUDY ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTION OF SERVICE  
QUALITY IN CLOTHING RETAIL INDUSTRY WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO TIRUCHIRAPPALLI TOWN



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**ABSTRACT**

The competitive nature of the industry is forcing clothing retail stores to concentrate on differentiation in order to gain competitive advantage over opposition in order to retain existing customers, attract new customers, and ultimately increase their chances of long-term survival.

Considering the competitive environment, there is a need for a retailing strategy that differentiates one clothing store from another. This can be achieved through the delivery of high service quality. Moreover, fashion consumers today are savvier, better informed, more sophisticated and discriminating that they expect service quality (e.g. helpful and courteous

salespeople, convenient store layout etc) apart from the quality of merchandise purchased. The practice of excellent service quality has been proven to lead to increased customer satisfaction and significantly indicate the effectiveness of the retailers' performance. This study aims to determine consumer perceptions of service quality of large clothing retailers.

ery purchase, payment was done

**KEYWORDS :** *customer satisfaction, service quality, attractive store room, retail marketing.*

**I. INTRODUCTION :**

As the local retailing industry continues to experience tremendous expansion, one observation is clearly evident: the rapid growth in the number of apparel or clothing specialty stores. The retail environment is changing very rapidly in our days. It is characterized by intensifying competition from both domestic and foreign companies, a spate of mergers and acquisitions, and more sophisticated and demanding customers who have greater expectations related to their consumption experiences.

Due to cut throat competitions retailers need to seek their competitive advantage and know how to attract and retains the customers. Competitive advantage means to improve quality of the services and products. In marketing strategies has mentioned the quality services and products were the key mantra for successful business. In retail clothing industry provides high quality products and quality service to the customers.

Service quality is “a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service”. Service quality has received a great deal of attention to practitioners, managers and researchers over the past few decades, due to its strong impact on business performance, lower costs, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability. A number of studies indicate that the provision of service quality is the most basic retailing strategy for retailers to create competitive advantage and to enhance their customers’ shopping experience.

According to Dabholkar et al. (1996), retail service quality had a hierarchical factor structure which comprised of five basic dimensions. The five dimensions proposed were:

1. Physical aspects – includes functional elements like layout, comfort and privacy and also aesthetic elements such as the architecture, colour, materials and style of the store.
2. Reliability – a combination of keeping promises and performing services right.
3. Personal interaction – the service personnel being courteous, helpful, inspiring confidence and trust in customers.
4. Problem-solving – the handling of returns and exchanges as well as complaints.
5. Policy – a set of strategies, procedures and guiding principles which the store operates under such as high quality merchandise, convenient operating hours, availability of parking spaces and payment options.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dabholkar et al. (1996) who developed and empirically validated a scale to measure retail service quality distinctively. In developing the instrument, the researchers conducted a triangulation of research techniques involving interviews with several retail customers, in-depth interviews with six customers and a qualitative study that monitored the thought process of three customers during an actual shopping experience. These three differing methods combined with a review of service quality related literature and some modification to the original SERVQUAL scale produced a hierarchical factor structure scale

Solomon and Rabolt (2004) found that a sales assistant’s characteristics such as knowledge and personality determine store image, which, in turn will affect the consumer’s choice of store. It is therefore, extremely important for clothing retailers to have competent employees who are capable of performing their duties. Results indicate that a majority of respondents (60%) agreed that the clothing retailer has knowledgeable employees who give prompt service, while 24% of respondents disagreed with the statement. All ethnic groups, apart from Blacks, were in agreement with the statement. The results from Black respondents were inconclusive, with 50% of respondents agreeing, and 50% disagreeing with the statement. One could assume that Blacks have a higher expectation with regard to knowledgeable of employees or promptness of service.

Hu and Jasper (2006) found that highly personalized service provision has a positive impact on the consumer’s perception of store image. Furthermore, the sales assistant’s characteristics such as knowledge and personality, together with store location and merchandise suitability, also determine store image, which, in turn, affect the consumer’s choice of store.

Michon et al. (2008), it was found that malls focus increasingly on clothing, and emphasize female clothing. Male and female consumers differ particularly, since males tend to make a purchase more quickly, while females require a substantial amount of time to make a decision.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Due to the competitiveness of India’s clothing retail industry and the increase in the value

consciousness of consumers, retailers should search for ways to optimize the value that they provide to their customers. The competitive nature of the industry is forcing clothing retail stores to concentrate on differentiation in order to gain competitive advantage over opposition in order to retain existing customers, attract new customers, and ultimately increase their chances of long-term survival.

Considering the competitive environment, there is a need for a retailing strategy that differentiates one clothing store from another. This can be achieved through the delivery of high service quality. Moreover, fashion consumers today are savvier, better informed, more sophisticated and discriminating that they expect service quality (e.g. helpful and courteous salespeople, convenient store layout etc) apart from the quality of merchandise purchased. The practice of excellent service quality has been proven to lead to increased customer satisfaction and significantly indicate the effectiveness of the retailers' performance. This study aims to determine consumer perceptions of service quality of large clothing retailers.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The researcher has coined the following objectives for this research

- 1.To find customer perception about service quality in clothing retailers.
- 2.To know the factors influencing service quality in clothing retailing industry.
- 3.To give suitable suggestions to improve the service quality and competitive advantage of the retailers.

**METHODOLOGY**

It explains what type of research design was used, and why. It also clarifies why the research was conducted from a quantitative perspective. This study includes the clothing retailers in Tiruchirappalli town. The whole population of the Tiruchirappalli District constitutes the Universe of the study. The researcher has selected 200 samples by adopting convenience sampling.

This sampling of the research includes the textile retail store are Saratha's silks, Sri Thaila silks, Chennai Silks, Ahamad brothers silks. The samples selected from these four retail stores and each store 50 samples selected in randomly.

**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Table – 1

<b>Customer perception of physical aspects</b>	<b>Highly Satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Highly Dissatisfied</b>
Lift and escalator facilities	72(36%)	86(43%)	07(3.5%)	15(7.5%)	20(10%)
An arrangement garments and show room facilities.	99(49.5%)	76(38%)	14(7%)	03(1.5%)	07(3.5%)
Equipments and billing gadgets used by retail store help for reduce time.	71(35.5%)	73(36.5%)	23(11.5%)	16(8%)	17(8.5%)
AC facilities and sanitary facilities	68(34%)	79(39.5%)	29(14.5%)	11(5.5%)	13(6.5%)

The above table – 1 displays data relate service quality in retail clothing industry, especially for service quality dimension in physical aspects. 79 percent of the respondents are satisfied the lift and escalator facilities. 87.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “arrangement of garments and show room facilities”. 72 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “Equipments and billing gadgets used by retail stores help for reduce time”. 73.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “AC facilities and sanitary facilities of the retail stores”.

It is understood that majority number of respondents having high level of satisfaction in service quality dimension of physical aspects.

Table – 2

<b>Customer perception of Personal Interactions</b>	<b>Highly Satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Highly Dissatisfied</b>
Sales men willingness to help the customers	86(43%)	69(34.5%)	32(16%)	9(4.5%)	4(2%)
Sales man describes all information related to products and services	77(38.5%)	68(34%)	26(13%)	24(12%)	5(2.5%)
All the employees of the retail textile stores are helping the customers	83(41.5%)	70(35%)	19(9.5%)	22(11%)	6(3%)
Sales man of each section, they have knowledge about the products like cotton cloths, silk, pattu sarees and etc	67(33.5%)	73(36.5%)	26(13%)	25(12.5%)	9(4.5%)

The above table – 2 shows that perception of customers in service quality dimension of personal interaction. 77.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “sales men willingness to help the customers”. 72.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the “sales man describes all information related to products and services”. 76.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement “all the employees of the retail textile stores are helping the customers”. 70 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement “

It is understood that majority of the respondents are having high level of satisfaction in service quality dimension in retail clothing stores.

Table – 3

<b>Customer perception of Problem solving</b>	<b>Highly Satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Highly Dissatisfied</b>
Customer complaints are accepted and responded by the management	53(26.5%)	48(24%)	36(18%)	43(21.5%)	20(10%)
Defects in products can be replaced by the product or services.	41(20.5%)	37(18.5%)	31(15.5%)	51(25.5%)	40(20%)
Sales men small mistakes regretted by the management.	59(29.5%)	63(31.5%)	27(13.5%)	44(22%)	7(3.5%)
Mistakes in billing can be resolved in few minutes.	68(34%)	72(36%)	18(9%)	37(18.5%)	5(2.5%)

The above table – 3 displays that perception of customers in service quality of retailing dimension of problem solving. 50.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “Customer complaints are accepted and responded by the management”. 45.5 percent of the respondents are dissatisfied the statement “Defects in products can be replaced by the product or services”. 61 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement “Sales men small mistakes regretted by the management”. 70 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement “Mistakes in billing can be resolved in few minutes”.

It is understood that majority of the respondents are satisfied the service quality dimension in problem solving, except the statement of “Defects in products can be replaced by the product or services”.

Table -4

<b>Customer perception of Policy</b>	<b>Highly Satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Highly Dissatisfied</b>
Quality of products and services they offered	81(40.5%)	76(38%)	17(8.5%)	18(9%)	8(4%)
Working hours of clothing retail stores are convenient to the customers	84(42%)	78(39%)	15(12.5%)	13(6.5%)	10(5%)
Payment options are satisfied by the customers	91(45.5%)	87(43.5%)	12(6%)	6(3%)	4(2%)
Parking facilities are good and appreciable.	71(35.5%)	78(36%)	18(9%)	13(6.5%)	20(10%)

The above table – 4 displays that perception of customers in service quality of retailing dimension of Policy. 78.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that the statement of “Quality of products and services they offered”. 81 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “Working hours of clothing retail stores are convenient to the customers”. 89 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “Payment options are satisfied by the customers”. 71.5

percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of "Parking facilities are good and appreciable". It is understood that majority of the respondents are having high level of satisfaction in service quality dimension of policy in retail clothing stores.

Table - 5

Customer perception of reliability	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
The products quality is very good	83(41.5%)	92(46%)	1(0.5%)	21(10.5%)	4(2%)
If any defects the products price should be repaid.	63(31.5%)	57(28.5%)	27(13.5%)	29(14.5%)	24(12%)
Discounts and offers are believable.	73(36.5%)	86(43%)	11(5.5%)	17(8.5%)	13(6.5%)
Additional carry bags, big size bags are good and appreciable.	57(28.5%)	68(34%)	17(8.5%)	38(19%)	20(10%)

The above table – 5 displays that perception of customers in service quality of retailing dimension of reliability. 87.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that "The products quality is very good". 60 percent of the respondents are satisfied that "If any defects the products price should be repaid". 79.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that "Discounts and offers are believable". 62.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that "Additional carry bags, big size bags are good and appreciable".

It is understood that majority of the respondents are having high level of satisfaction in service quality dimension of reliability in retail clothing stores.

Various dimensions of service quality

Various dimensions of service quality	Low	High	Min	Max.	Median	S.D	Mean	Mean Rank
Physical aspects	66(33%)	134(67%)	9	20	16.00	3.212	15.88	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Personal Interactions	81(40.5%)	119(59.5%)	11	19	16.00	1.949	15.89	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Problem solving	115(57.5%)	85(42.5%)	9	19	13.00	2.041	13.71	5 <sup>th</sup>
Policy	77(38.5%)	123(61.5%)	4	19	17.00	2.823	16.20	1 <sup>st</sup>
Reliability	116(58%)	84(42%)	11	18	14.50	2.406	15.15	4 <sup>th</sup>
Overall service quality	86(43%)	114(57%)	55	92	79.00	9.941	76.83	-

The above table reveals overall statistics calculation in dimension of service quality. Organizational policy dimension is got first rank in the service quality dimension analysis and its mean



value 16.20, median 17.00, standard deviation 2.823. Personal interaction dimension got second rank in the dimension analysis and its mean value 15.89, median 16.00, standard deviation 1.949. Physical aspects dimension got third rank in the dimension analysis and its mean value 15.88, median 16.00, standard deviation 3.212. Reliability dimension got fourth rank in the dimension analysis and its mean value 15.15, median 14.50, standard deviation 2.406. Problem solving dimension got fifth rank in the dimension analysis and its mean value 13.71, median 13.00, standard deviation 2.041.

Inter Correlations matrix

	Mean	S.D	Physical aspects	Personal Interactions	Problem solving	Policy	Reliability	Overall service quality
Physical aspects	15.88	3.212	1	.746(**)	.646(*)	.407(*)	.729(**)	.894(**)
Personal Interactions	15.89	1.949	.746(*)	1	.611(*)	.651(*)	.637(**)	.902(**)
Problem solving	13.72	2.041	.646(*)	.611(*)	1	.307(*)	.535(**)	.750(**)
Policy	16.20	2.823	.407(*)	.651(*)	.307(*)	1	.261(**)	.669(**)
Reliability	15.15	2.406	.729(**)	.637(**)	.535(**)	.261(**)	1	.786(**)
Overall service quality	76.83	9.941	.894(**)	.902(**)	.750(**)	.669(**)	.786(**)	1
<b>n</b>			<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>
<i>** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level</i>								

FINDINGS:

- 79 percent of the respondents are satisfied the lift and escalator facilities.
- 87.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “arrangement of garments and show room facilities”.
- 72 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “Equipments and billing gadgets used by retail stores help for reduce time”.
- 73.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied the statement of “AC facilities and sanitary facilities of the retail stores”.
- 87.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that “ The products quality is very good”.
- 60 percent of the respondents are satisfied that “ If any defects the products price should be repaid”.
- 79.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that “ Discounts and offers are believable”. 62.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied that “Additional carry bags, big size bags are good and appreciable”.

SUGGESTIONS:

The researcher suggested that large clothing retailers should invest in their employees to equip them with the knowledge and skills to deliver high levels of customer service. This could be done through training programs. It is suggested that all customers should be treated correctly, and that sufficient attention should be paid to all customers.

It is advised that retailers should ensure high quality clothing by implementing quality control procedures, and by making sure that they import or buy merchandise from trustworthy sources.

Parking is normally not determined by the clothing store, but clothing stores should choose strategic locations, and convenient parking facilities should be considered prior to opening a new store.

#### CONCLUSION:

Service quality has become a significant subject as a result of increasingly demanding consumers. The provision of service quality has many benefits for an organization, one of which is that it can create a competitive advantage in a highly competitive industry. Even though it became evident that consumers are satisfied with existing levels of service quality delivered by large clothing retailers within the Tiruchirappalli town area, it should remain an aspect that retailers should continuously focus on in order to stay competitive.

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