Customer Satisfaction Indices: A Study of Organized Retail Stores in the Tri-city

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Abstract:

The world of retailing is currently undergoing a rapid transition, with both customers and retail stores responding to changing market scenarios and customer preferences (Goyal & Aggarwal: 2009). In today's IT enabled world, traditional retailing formats are facing strong competition from the fast emerging retail experiences offered by online and digital retailers (Bhattacharya, 2001). More than ever before, customer satisfaction has become the defining feature that helps traditional retailers sustain and still grow.

Customer satisfaction continues to remain a primary and powerful tool by which the retailer can ensure that clients return to their stores even in a climate of extreme transition and change as IT enabled retail makes massive inroads into the traditional retail segment and categories. Novel strategies, more responsible, responsive and enhanced service and greater returns on every rupee spent are some of the strategies that are being utilized by retail outlets to retain customers.

This study, conducted across a large sample in the Tri-city comprising Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula aims to determine the success of the strategies being employed by the big organized retail outlets and the degree of customer satisfaction that these retail organizations are able to achieve. The study also identifies areas and indices that the organized retail outlets need to develop and improve to enhance their customer satisfaction scores in the future.

Keywords: Retail, Organised Retail, Customer satisfaction, Tricity, competition

Introduction

Retailing can be explained as business activity that primarily involves selling products and services to consumers directly for their personal, family or household usage (Berman and Evans, 2001). Traditionally, businesses have tended to focus on one financial metric as the determinant of all strategy and plans. This variable is also considered the indicator of success. The bottom-line or the profit margin has long been the financial indicator that has guided all business decisions and policies (Wong, Sohal, A & Amrik: 2003).

In a changing world, the profit margin can no longer be considered the be-all and end all of business strategy. As competition increases to unprecedented levels in the retail space, with more responsive and customer friendly business models such as hypermarkets and superstores making deep inroads into not only towns, but also small cities and rural markets, the rules of the game have changed drastically (Rigby, 2011). With the retail business becoming more competitive as hypermarkets and supermarkets invade the traditional retail space, retailers are now offering more freebies, value additions and enhanced services to the consumers.

Recent research has shown that retail companies are losing majority of customers on average in five years (Rigby, 2011). The causes for these are not far to seek as new strategies, attractive discounts, better services and enhanced customer focus becomes the cornerstones of retail amid cutthroat competition. (Fernandes et al.,2000). Customer satisfaction is the one tool that retailers have in measuring the degree of the customers' satisfaction in real time, analyzing their expectations for the mid and long term and devising novel effective retention strategies for the future.

Customer satisfaction is not just another variable now. It is an inalienable and critical part of not just the branding, sales and marketing strategy, but the crux of the business that guides all decisions. This has now become essential for survival as differentiation from the competition, brand value more than mere advertising or marketing and on the ground visible and effective improvements that help businesses retain clients and also boost sales. (Ramaswamy and Namakumari, (2002).

Price Water Coopers, in a study in 2018 concluded that bad customer service experiences are driving people away faster and conclusively than ever before. Retail businesses need to realize that clients can walk away from a beloved brand after just one bad experience in an era where they have unlimited choices to opt from. In the United States, 59% of the customers walk away from a well established brand they have been loyal to after multiple bad experiences. In Latin America, this percentage is even higher as 49% of the customers were found willing to walk away from a brand after just *one* bad experience.

In India, this scenario is fast getting replicated as customers venture beyond the traditional neighborhood stores and experience organized retail. The task of retaining customer in traditional retail formats is made even more challenging by the presence of online retail which is mushrooming at a fast pace. As more and more customers become tech savvy and online global giants such as Amazon, Ikea, Walmart etc make rapid inroads into the Indian Retail space, clients are taking full ademerging online platforms.

The current study aims to delve into the components of retail customer experience and explore the impact of such indices on customer satisfaction as a core for any retail business survival. This study can potentially help the retailer identify factors that induce customer satisfaction and loyalty in the long run.

Review of Literature

A review of Literature is necessary to understand the various dimensions of the research that has already been done by various scholars on the subject in recent times.

Reddy, Suresh Jakka. (2013) in his path breaking book "Customer Satisfaction in Organized Retailing: A practical book to know Customer Satisfaction factors in the retail sector" has outlined the gap between the perceptions and expectations of the customers and the actual products that are delivered to them. The book has been written from the perspective of the Indian customer and offers insights on how to bridge the gap between customer expectations and actual experience. For the purpose the author surveyed 1200 customers from three retail shopping malls in Hyderabad and analyzed the data through various tools. He found that the Indian consumer has become much more aware and exacting now with high expectations which retailers must exceed or at least meet in order to retain customer loyalty.

Dr. S. Rosita et al, (2014) carried out research in India to understand the customer perceptions and satisfaction in organized retail. In their study carried about 6 years ago, they found that the expansion of organized retail formats to be rapid and impactful. As foreign companies and global corporate hone in on India as one of the biggest global markets, insightful market research and data analysis is the need of the hour. As demographics, lifestyles and purchasing power undergoes fast changes, customer satisfaction and retention hinges on detailed analysis. This study found that Indian consumers and customers gave a lot of importance to factors such as quality of the merchandise, physical surroundings, promotional schemes and personnel interaction. In addition to the service, the Indian consumer also is concerned about after sale service, entertainment and security arrangement.

Rao, Ajit and Chandra, Subhash (2013) in their 180 page book titled The Little Book of Big Customer Satisfaction Measurement, use their expertise as being senior management and strategic thinkers working in top positions in an Anaytics firm, The Neilson Company, to pinpoint the various methods and tools that can help retailers gauge and improve their customer satisfaction results. The authors have explained how the various tools of qualitative research can be utilized to understand customer needs and evolve methodologies to meet and exceed client expectations.

Statement of the Problem

The retail landscape is undergoing constant change and correction. Customer retention is increasingly getting more dependent on forming a deeper understanding of what customers are seeking from in-store experiences. With immense competition emerging from new spaces such as online retail, in-store retailers have to constantly keep engaging with their current customers, so as to keep closely attuned to their needs and wants.

Further, it is essential to take feedback and pointers of the pain points which the customers feel, so to remove these at the earliest. The strategies for the future can also be devised after taking adequate feedback about the current situation and perceived challenges (Coughlan, Anderson, Stern and El-Ansary, 2001). The various elements and attributes that add up to create a satisfying shopping and retail experience for the clients are essential to generate more sales, and retain customer engagement &loyalty (Kline, R.B 2005). Region, climate and cultural practices also have a role to play in dictating customer behavior in a certain geography (Mulky and Nargundkar 2003), as they have different demographic features. In order to determine the affiliations, wants, needs, expectations of the residents of the Tri-city, a detailed study was essential.

Objective of the Study

The major objectives of the study:

1. To ascertain if the customers in the Tri-city are satisfied with the organized retail outlets.
2. To determine the major factors which play a role in customer satisfaction.
3. To ascertain the specific indices that affect customer satisfaction the most.

Research Methodology and Design

The Tri-city refers to the Union Territory and combined capital of Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh and the adjoining cities of Mohali in Punjab and Panchkula in Haryana. Collectively, these three cities form a homogenous and compact urban metropolis that is referred to as the Tri-city.

This study is based on Primary data that has been painstakingly collected across the Tri-City. The respondents were randomly selected and approached inside the hypermarket and supermarket retail stores. Primary data was collected by interviewing select respondents to provide detailed responses to a questionnaire with both closed and open ended questions, and demographic details.

Secondary data was collected from various sources that include books, journals, newspaper articles and trade reports etc. Simple random sampling was carried out on a sample of 200 customers in retail stores.The data was analyzed and statistically tested to ascertain the viability of the statements.

Hypothesis of the study

H1: The goods available in the stores are not adequate.
H2: The Store is not easily assessable and approachable.

H3: The store doesn't provides prompt customer services
H4: The store doesn't provides enough coupons and membership cards

Limitations of the Study

1. The Study was conducted only at organized retail outlets in the Tri-city
2. The Survey was confined to the limits of the Tri-city that includes area of Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

Analysis

Bain and Company, the top global market research firm, has already predicted that rapid innovation, absolute scale and customer data analytics are the new norms for retail success.

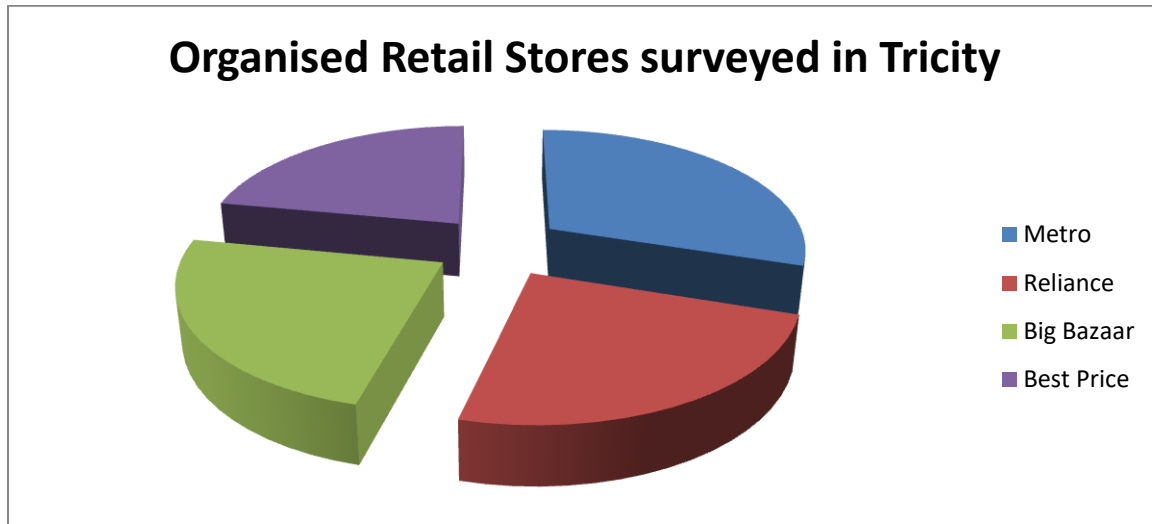**Market share of the organized Retail Stores surveyed in Tri-city**

Table 1

Market share of the Organized Retail Stores surveyed in Tri-city

S no	Retail Store	Customers	Valid %age	Cumulative %age
1	**Metro**	60	30%	30%
2	**Reliance Supermart**	48	24%	54%
3	**Big Bazaar**	48	24%	78%
4	**Best Price**	44	22%	100%
		200	100%	

Source: Original primary data gathered by the researcher

Inference of Table 1

In recent years, organized retail in India has seen an unprecedented boom. There has been a rapid inroad made, not only in the metropolises such as Delhi NCR, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai, but also in Tier 2 cities such as the Chandigarh. From the above table, it becomes clear that organized retail chains with a pan India presence such as the

four surveyed in the present study have been well established in the Tri-city. Many have been present here for almost a decade now, and have had ample time and opportunity to attract and retain customer loyalty. As clear from the table, the retail chains which were surveyed for this study included Metro, which had the largest number of 60 customers. Reliance Supermart and Big Bazaar, both multi utility stores had 48 customers each out of the 200 surveyed and Best Price as the fourth with 44 customers.

Customer Satisfaction Indices

The four indices on which the customer satisfaction was surveyed in a study of 200 customers across the Tri-city who frequently visited the organized retail outlets were adequate goods availability, store's accessibility, customer service and provision of membership and coupons.

The customers ranked their satisfaction with these aspects on a 5 point likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

1) **Assessing the goods availability at the stores.**

	Frequency	Valid % age	Cumulative %age
Strongly agree	55	27.5%	27.5%
Agree	47	23.5%	51%
Neither agree nor disagree	25	12.5%	63.5%
Disagree	69	34.5%	98%
Strongly disagree	4	2%	100%
Grand Total	200	100%	

Source: Primary data collected by Researcher

The availability of goods and the choices available as desired is a crucial criteria in customer satisfaction. Customers must feel that they have adequate choices and the product will be available without delay and be delivered on time as promised (Coughlan, et al, 2001). The immediacy and vast scale of organized retail stores such as Reliance Megamart, Big Bazaar, Best price and Metro is one of the biggest attractions of these stores. The results showed that customers were overall satisfied with the goods availability wherein 27.5% of the customers strongly agreed that there were adequate goods available in the store and 23.5% percent agreed to this statement. 34,5% customers felt that the store did have adequate goods and choices available and only 2% strongly disagreed that there were adequate goods available. 12.5% were non-committal in their response. The response to this statement indicates that majority of customers are satisfied with this parameter.

Series 1
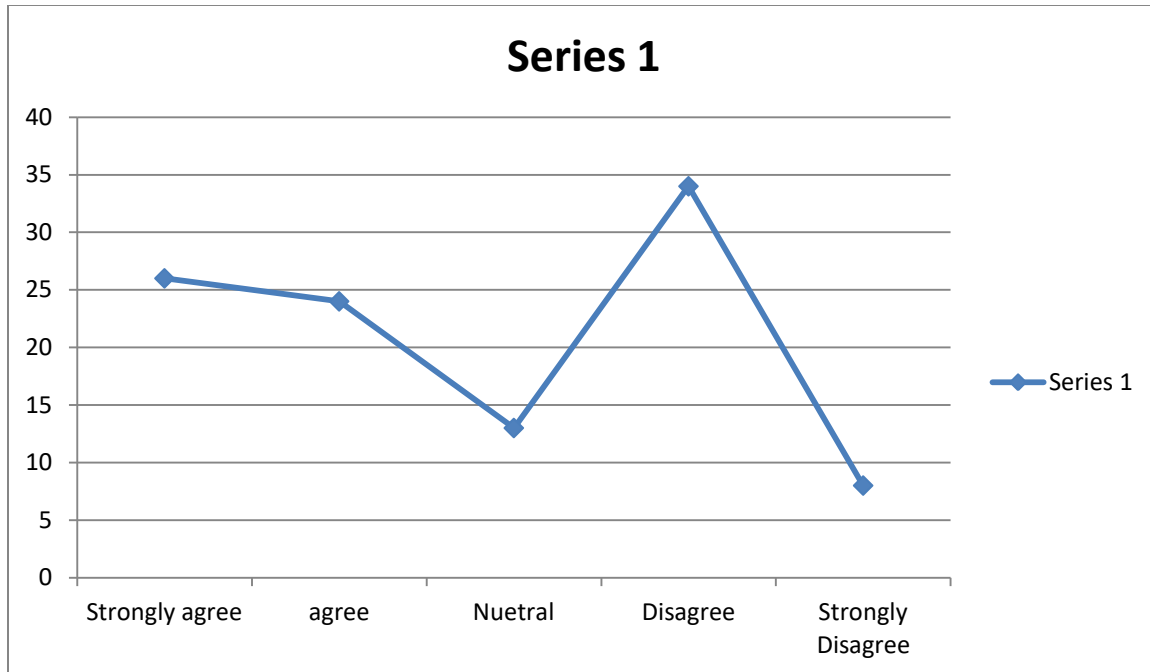
One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Goods Availability	200	3.400	1.2681	.0897

One-Sample Test

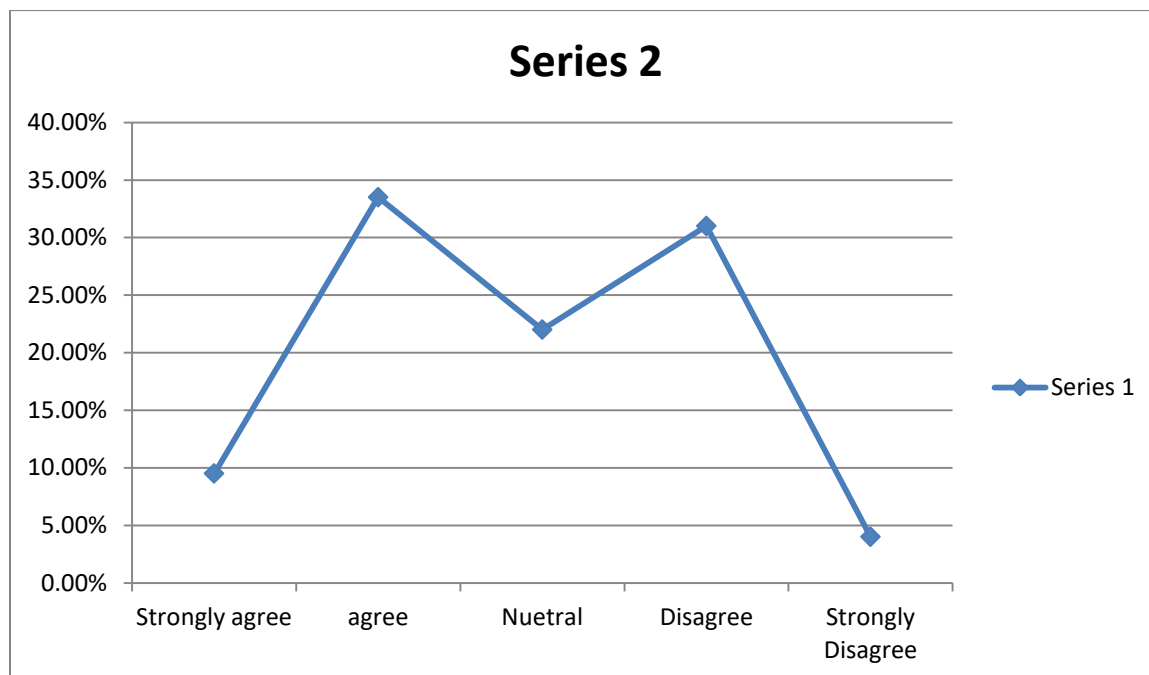|	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Goods Availability	4.461	199	.000	.4000	.223	.577

The t value came out to be 4.461which is statistically significant at .05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis stands rejected and we can conclude that consumers are satisfied about the adequate availability of the goods at the retail stores. The mean score is 3.4 shows a higher level of satisfaction.

2) Assessing the store's approachability and accessibility

	Frequency	Valid % age	Cumulative %age
Strongly agree	19	9.5%	9.5%
Agree	67	33.5%	43%
Neither agree nor disagree	44	22%	65%
Disagree	62	31%	96%
Strongly disagree	8	4%	100
Grand Total	200	100	

Source: Primary data collected by Researcher

At a time when the increasing traffic snarls make even grocery shopping and parking a hassle, the approach road and ease of access of a retail destination can make or break the customer satisfaction response (Dabas, Sternquist & Mahi, 2012). In response to the statement that the store is easily available and accessible, only 9.5% customers agreed strongly. 33.5% agreed and 22% were non-committal in their response, 35% customers were of the view that the approach was difficult and store was not accessible (with 31% of customers disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed). This means that these customers would have switched to another retail store in the proximity that might be more easily accessible and approachable (Radhakrishnan 2003). However, on the whole, the customers seem to be satisfied with the approach and accessibility of the stores.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Store Accessibility	200	3.135	1.0829	.0766

One-Sample Test

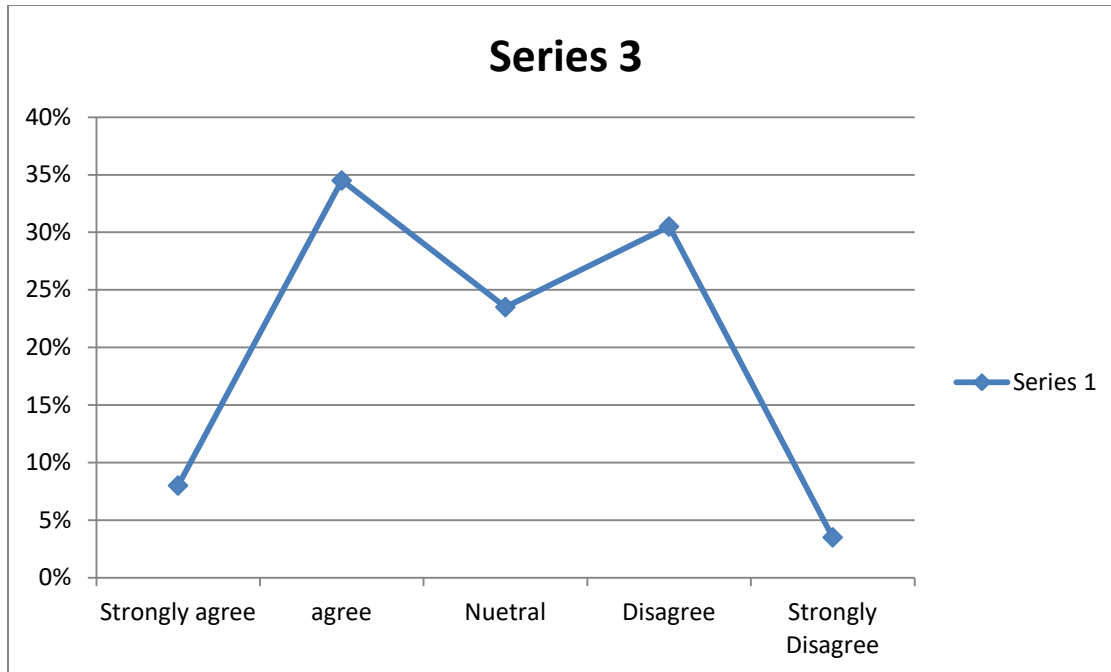|	Test Value = 3					
				Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		Lower	Upper
Store Accessibility	1.763	199	.079	.1350	-.016	.286

The t value came out to be 1.763 which is statistically insignificant at .05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis stands rejected and we can conclude that the consumers are satisfied with respect to accessibility of retail stores. However, there is scope for improvement on this parameter..

3) Assessing the prompt customer services of the store

	Frequency	Valid % age	Cumulative %age
Strongly agree	16	8%	8%
Agree	69	34.5%	42.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	47	23.5%	66%
Disagree	61	30.5%	96.5%
Strongly disagree	7	3.5%	100%
Grand Total	200	100	

Source: Primary data collected by Researcher

Many customer satisfaction studies attest that the emphasis on Prompt customer services is a key denominator in the success of any retail enterprise (Gupta, Chaturvedi, 2008). Service is a very critical component, especially in the Indian retail market (Sharma, 2000). In the context of the present study, it was analyzed by the responses of the respondents that on this statement that the store provides prompt services, the customers were largely satisfied. 4% of the customer strongly agreed with the statement and another 34.5% agreed, which means that a cumulative of 42.5% was satisfied with the service provided. 23.5% neither agreed nor disagreed. 30.5% disagreed that the services were prompt and 3.5% of the customers strongly disagreed with the statement. The graphical depiction of the results is as follows

Series 3

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Consumer Service	200	3.130	1.0481	.0741

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Consumer Service	1.754	199	.081	.1300	-.016	.276

The t value came out to be 1.754 which is statistically insignificant at .05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis stands rejected and we can conclude that consumers are satisfied about the level of consumer services offered by the stores.

4) Assessing provision of coupons and membership cards by the store.

	Frequency	Valid %age	Cumulative %age
Strongly agree	81	40.5%	40.5%

Agree	51	25.5%	66%
Neither agree nor disagree	35	17.5%	83.5%
Disagree	33	16.5%	100%
Strongly disagree	0	0%	100%
Grand Total	200	100	

Source: Primary data collected by Researcher

A definite advantage that organized retail has is that the bigger retail stores offer many advantages that also work to retain customers and attract new ones (Ganguli and Kumar, 2008). One of these is the coupons or member shop systems wherein the customer is rewarded every time he buys from the store and builds up a bank of rewards in terms of points which can be redeemed at a future date. In this way, the organized retail is able to retain more and more clients and ensure that they keep coming back multiple times for more goods (Aggarwal, 2000). In this respect, when asked to respond to the statement that the Store provides various coupons and membership cards, 40.5% of the respondents strongly agreed. Another 25.5% agreed while 17.5% remained neutral. Here 33% were in disagreement with the statement, while none strongly disagreed. Hence overall, the satisfaction levels seem to be high for this parametre amongst the residents of the Tricity.
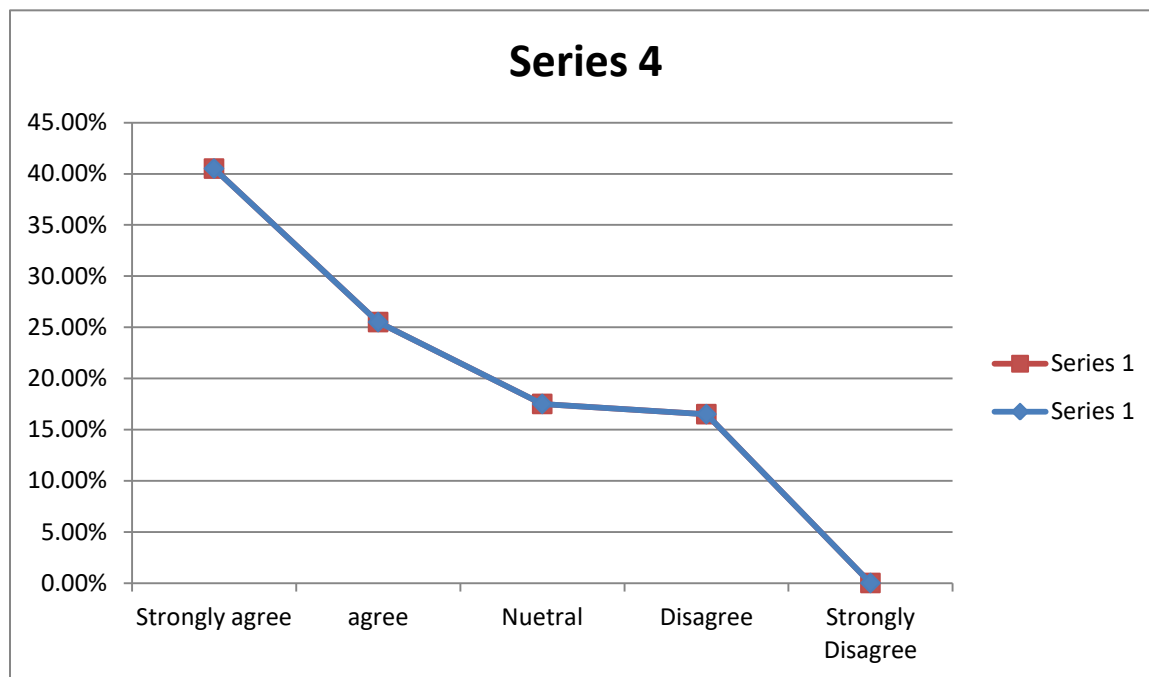
One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cards and Coupons	200	3.900	1.1118	.0786

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Cards and Coupons	11.448	199	.000	.9000	.745	1.055

The t value came out to be 11.448 which is statistically significant. The null hypothesis stands rejected. The observed value of mean came out to be 3.9 which show that the overall the consumers of Tri-city are very satisfied with the kind of coupons and other cards etc provided to the consumers.

Understanding the overall level of Customer satisfaction

Causal Relationship to be tested with four independent variables namely Availability of Goods, Store's accessibility, Consumer Service and Store incentives like coupon and cards.

H0: Customers are not satisfied with the organized retail stores in the tri-city.
HA: Customers are satisfied with the organized retail stores in the tri-city.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Customer Satisfaction	200	3.260	1.0235	.0724

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Customer Satisfaction	3.592	199	.000	.2600	.117	.403

The mean value for overall customer satisfaction came out to be **3.260.** The t value for it was 3.592 which is statistically significant at .05 level of significance. We can conclude that the satisfaction is slightly above the satisfactory stance towards the positive side with a scope for improvement.

Modern organized retail has certainly induced a dynamic new approach to the retail scenario. This has been achieved by opening much more convenient, well stocked, attractively showcased and merchandised and superior

shopping experiences that have lured the consumer from the traditional retail formats which have held sway till now. By opening new format stores that offer convenient, bigger, better and superior shopping experience which is gradually changing the consumer preferences for grocery shopping in local *kirana* stores to organized convenience stores. It is also identified that the factors that influence consumers' preference for supermarkets are add-on benefits, general services and variety in merchandise.

Conclusion

Traditionally, customer satisfaction has been the long cherished and primary goal of all retail businesses. This especially holds true even today where there are numerous retail avenues and novel strategies and schemes competing vigorously not only for the attention, but also for the loyalty and long term engagement of every client.

The interpretation of the data collected shows that the majority of the customers in the Tri-city are quite satisfied with the level of service and kind of products and goods that are offered by the retail organizations operative here. The organized retail brands are some of the biggest in the business, and the level of customer satisfaction was found to be high. When the data was statistically tested, the analysis and interpretation of the data was found to be satisfactory.

The overall level of the customer satisfaction on the basis of the statements in the Tri-city were quite positive which indicates that people as a whole are quite satisfied and happy with the level of goods and services that are offered by the organized retail stores. On the statement that the goods were adequate, the retail store was easily approachable, there was good customer service provided and that the stores provided enough cards and coupons, the majority expressed their satisfaction.

On the premise that there was adequate goods available in the stores, the response was largely satisfactory, while the question of if the approach and accessibility of the store was fine, was found to elicit satisfactory response, with scope for improvement. The prompt and good service was also statistically proved, which means that there is a lot of scope for the organized retail stores to improve on this premise. To the last indice of whether the customers were satisfied with the coupons and cards which were provided by the stores, the response was largely satisfactory again. All four factors were found to play a major role in the overall customer satisfaction.

The two variables which proved to be the most significant in the statistical co-relation of the four indices to the calculation of the overall satisfaction scores were the adequate availability of the goods and the store accessibility.

Based on the results, it can be suggested that the retail organizations will do well to focus more on these two vital parameters. Overall, the statistical average of 3.260 above the mean of 3 indicates above non committal stance which means that the consumers are moderately satisfied overall. Since the response is non committal on two indices, which are approach and accessibility and prompt service. This means that with an improvement in these indices, the overall satisfaction score of the Tri-city consumers can be significantly increased.

The study clearly proves that retail stores of Tri-city have been able to generate a very positive response amongst its customers. However, there is always a lot of scope for improvement to satisfy the customers fully. There is also a word of caution for the traditional retails formats. In the face of increasing competition from other shopping formats such as online shopping platforms, it is very vital for the traditional retail setups to realize the critical position they are in. The brands need to work tirelessly to maintain and improve their rankings on the customer service indices in order to be able to not only attract new customers but also keep the old customers loyal and coming back. (Sinha, Bannerjee, Uniyal, 2002).

The appropriateness of the sales and marketing decisions, identification of the real needs of the clients, timely corrective actions and responsive and flexible sales strategies depends on reliable collection and analysis of customer data (Venugopal,2001). As the customer becomes increasingly the central focus than ever before, customer satisfaction can make or break any retail business that will thrive has already realized this fact. The Organized Retail outlets in the Tri-city can derive important learning and insight from such studies and develop more effective and profitable strategies to ensure improvement in consumer satisfaction indices for the future.

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