Dimensions of Service Quality in Apparel Retailing: A Case From National Capital Region

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Abstract

Delivering high quality of services is the basic strategy to face the dynamic and volatile competition in retailing. In retail setting, especially retail stores which are a blend of product and service, retail managers are likely to have more impact on service quality than on product quality. This research has identified the dimensions of service quality in apparel retailing. To identify the dimensions, exploratory factor analysis has been used to analyze the data collected from 424 active apparel customers. The results of the study indicate that RSQS is not a generic scale as eight dimensions emerged in Indian organised retail. "Convenience" was the most influencing factor followed by Promises, Policy, Helpfulness, Appearance, Problem Solving, Doing-it-Right and Inspiring Confidence. Also, the effect of demographic characteristics on various service quality dimensions was identified.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Retail is a USD 320 billion dollar industry, which is growing at CAGR of 5% (Thathoo and Kacheria, 2005). In the 9th annual Global Retail Development Index (2010) of 30 emerging markets, India voted as the third most attractive destination for investment (www.ibef.org/industry/retail.aspx).

Business Monitor International (BMI) forecasted that the total retail sales in India will grow to US$ 785.12 billion by 2015 from US$ 395.96 billion in 2011 (www. ibef. org/industry/retail.aspx). According to PricewaterhouseCoopers retail sales in India would grow at an average of four per cent between 2010 and 2014 and jump to US$ 900 billionby2014 (http://articles. economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-02-3/news/28431090_1_retail-sales-retail-sector-multinational-retailers). BMI predicts that over the forecasted period (2011-2015), tremendous growth (i.e. US$ 27.67 billion by 2015) is expected in Mass grocery retail (MGR) sales in India.

Furthermore, according to a report titled "The Great Indian Bazaar: Organised Retail Comes of Age in India" organised retail in India is expected to reach US$ 450 billion by 2015. In other words, the share of organised retail will grow from 5 per cent (in 2008) to 14-18 per cent (in 2015) (www.ibef.org/industry/retail.aspx). Whereas the share of organised retail in the total retail is 65 per cent in the US, 55 per cent in Malaysia and 10 per cent in China (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-02-3/news/28431090_1_retail-sales-retail-sector-multinational-retailers). The expected growth rate of organised retail in urban India is 50 percent as per estimates made by ASSOCHAM. Further, rural organized retail in India is forecasted to grow over 10 percent by 2013. (http://smetimes.tradeindia.com/smetimes/news/top-stories/2010/Jun/25/organized-retail-sector-to-grow-over-10-by-2013.17926.html).

India's urban population is 360 million and will reach 508 million by 2020 (http:// indianretailsector. com / news /modern-retail-to-grow-by-7-7-lacs-crore-by-fy-16/). With an estimation of more than 400 million shoppers, organized retailers' target customers are more than that of the entire United States (Thathoo and Kacheria, 2005). Thus, the retailers have to learn to cater to a larger percentage of the population. The geographical coverage is equally important for retailers. Enormous market potential exists in India that even during the peak recession; Indian retailers witnessed growth rates between 2-16 per cent. Thus, to grasp the urban India, national retailers have to make their mark in 120 cities and towns, presence in top 30 cities will not be enough (http://indianretailsector.com/news/modern-retail-to-grow-by-7-7-lacs-crore-by-fy-16/).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Retail Service Quality

Gronroos (1983) elaborate service quality as both technical and functional, the first signifies what the customer gets and the latter how the customer receives the service. Service quality is a consumer attitude which reflects the perceived overall superiority and excellence in the process and outcome of a service provider (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Offering service quality in retailing is somewhat distinct from any other product/service environment (Gagliano and Hathcote, 1994; Finn and Lamb, 1991). In retail outlets, which are a blend of product and service, managers are likely to have more impact on service quality than on product quality (Dabholkar et al., 1996). That is the reason why retailers are focussing on the delivery of superior service quality to accomplish differential advantage (Dotson and Patton, 1992; Berry, 1986) over competitors.

McKenzie (2006) found that how consumers perceive retail service quality is a relevant construct for examination as every consumer wants to exert their own shopping sense. Retail service quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction (Suwannapirom and Lertputtarak, 2008), customer loyalty (Wong and Sohal, 2006), repurchase intentions, word of mouth communication (Nadiri and Tumer, 2009) and trust (Wong and Sohal, 2006). Service quality related factors such as being consistently courteous to customers, knowledge to answer customers' enquires, and handling customer complaints assist in the establishment of higher levels of trust (Wong and Sohal, 2006).

Even though service quality leads to competitive advantage but surveys have confirmed that retailers renders an inadequate level of customer service. A 1987 Washington Post survey highlighted that nearly half of all shoppers in the Washington area opined that store service was mediocre and diminishing (Mayer and Morin, 1987). Shoppers perceived that long queues, personnel with little product knowledge, unavailability of advertised goods and discourteous salesmen were the examples of poor services (Mayer and Morin, 1987) offered by retailers.

Measuring Retail Service Quality

Service quality is inherently intangible and far more difficult to measure in comparison to goods quality (Kandampully, 1997; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Some of the commonly used techniques of measuring service quality are SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), critical incident technique (Bitner et al., 1990), SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1994),

and RSQS (Dabholkar et al., 1996). SERVQUAL is a multi-item instrument for quantifying the service expectation-perception gap using the five generic dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1998). Cronin and Taylor (1992) argued that expectation (E) component of SERVQUAL be discarded and instead performance (P) component alone be used. They advocated a scale known as 'SERVPERF', which is an improvement over SERVQUAL.

Dabholkar et al. (1996) used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to develop a five-dimensional scale measuring retail service quality (RSQS). The multi-item scale composed of five dimensions, of which three dimensions comprises two sub-dimensions each. Originated from and similar to SERVQUAL, RSQS is a performance-based measure of retail service quality.

In a replication of their study Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996) observed RSQS dimensions and sub-dimensions to be valid in the US. Researchers report highly encouraging results for the RSQS applicability in different retail outlets (Nadiri and Tumer, 2009; Leen et al., 2004). But on the same side, researchers reported non-universality of service quality dimensions across industries or across countries (Torlak et al., 2010; Ravichandran et al., 2008; Nhat and Hau, 2007; Parikh, 2006; Kaul, 2005; Mehta et al., 2000).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.To identify the key factors influencing the customer's perceptions of service quality in apparel retail sector.

2.To study the effect of demographic variables on various service quality dimensions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Design

The population comprised retail shoppers as defined in similar studies (Kaul, 2005) and garments shoppers of shopping malls is taken as the sample unit. The samples were selected from NCR (Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida-Greater Noida, Ghazibad, and Faridabad) because it accounts for the highest market share in retail spending in the entire northern belt (website: http://online. wsj. com /public /resources/documents/indiaretail_q12010.pdf).

Sample size has an effect on how the sample findings accurately represent the population (Burns & Bush, 2010). To ensure required sample size trained research assistants targeted 525 retail shoppers.

At the time of study there were 51 malls in NCR. On the basis of Simple Random Sampling 15 shopping mall were selected and out of each shopping mall 35 respondents were selected on the basis of Judgemental Sampling. Thus

the total number of respondents came out to 525. Out of the 525 respondents, 424 questionnaires were received at a response rate of 80.76 per cent, which is acceptable (Miller, 1991).

Design Of Survey Instrument

The primary data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire. Attempts were made to collect data at different days and at different times of the day. The questionnaire was administered prior, during and after the patronising. Like, questionnaires were distributed when shoppers were waiting in a queue at cash counter. Some shoppers were approached when they were taking their refreshments after they had finished their shopping. Data collection is more meaningful when the responses are taken from customers in the store after the shopping is completed (Boshoff & Terblanche, 1997; Dabholkar et al., 1996).

RSQS cannot be employed in Indian retail environment without minor changes (Kaul, 2005). Kaul (2005) highlighted that two items of RSQS were not relevant in Indian retail appertained to "telephonic interaction with customers" and "store's own credit cards". That is why the researcher carried out the survey with 26 statements of RSQS (Kaul, 2005) and one statement measuring the overall perception of service quality.

DATA ANALYSIS

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) has been applied on the 26 statements measuring service quality of apparel retailers. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure for sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity are performed to ensure the suitability of data for factor analysis (Pallant, 2007). Table 1 demonstrates the SPSS output of data for factor analysis.

From the Table 1, it can be seen that KMO value was acceptable, as its value found to be 0.661 which is indicative of a data set considered to be highly desirable for factor analysis (Kim and Mueller, 1978; Kaiser and Rice, 1974). Bartlett's test results also show that the values are significant and thus acceptable.

The perceived retail service quality items were individually subjected using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization using SPSS 16.0. The communalities value derived for 26 statements were relatively large (greater than 0.5), suggesting that the data set was appropriate (Stewart, 1981) for further analysis.

With Principal Component analysis eight factors were obtained depending on Eigen values and variance explained. The eight factor solution accounted for 73.492 percent of the variance, which exceeds the 60 percent threshold commonly used in social sciences to establish satisfaction with the solution (Hair et al., 1995).

Table 1: KMO And Barlett's Test

	KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.661	
Barlett's Test of Shpericity	Approx. Chi-Squar	892.890
	Degree of Freedom	325
	Sig	.000

Table 2: Factor Extraction Results Of Service Quality

Measurements Scale

DIMENSION	FACTOR LOADING	CRONBACH ALPHA
Factor1: Helpfulness (Eigen Value=7.063; % of variance = 14.905)		0.839
14. Customers feel safe in their transactions with this Outlet.	0.677	
15. Employees give prompt service to customers.	0.836	
16. Employees tell customers exactly when services will be performed.	0.898	
17. Employees are never too busy to respond to customer's requests.	0.677	
18. Outlet gives customers individual attention.	0.797	
19. Employees are consistently courteous with customers.	0.771	
Factor 2: Policy (Eigen Value=3.542; % of variance = 11.862)		0.726
24. Plenty of convenient parking for customers.	0.779	
25. Outlet has operating hours convenient for all their customers.	0.615	
26. Outlet accepts all major credit cards	0.713	
Factor 3: Appearance (Eigen Value=1.802; % of variance =9.520)		0.756
1. Outlet has modern-looking equipment and fixtures/racks.	0.707	
2. Outlet and its physical facilities are clean, convenient & visually attractive.	0.758	
3. Materials associated with the Outlet's service are visually appealing.	0.581	
4. Store has clean, attractive, and convenient physical facilities.	0.592	
Factor 4: Inspiring Confidence (Eigen Value=1.603; % of variance =8.648)		0.678
12. Employees have the knowledge to answer customer's questions.	0.734	
13. Behaviour of employees instils confidence in customers.	0.763	

Factor 5: Problem Solving (Eigen Value=1.547; % of variance =7.901)		0.720
20. Outlet willingly handles returns and exchanges.	0.785	
21. When a customer has a problem, the Outlet shows a sincere interest in solving it.	0.498	
22. Employees are able to handle customer complaints directly and immediately.	0.519	
23. Outlet offers high quality merchandise.	0.599	
Factor 6: Promises (Eigen Value=1.274; % of variance =7.151)		0.770
7. When the Outlet promises to do something by a certain times, it will do so.	0.655	
8. Outlet provides the services at the time it promises to do so.	0.754	
Factor 7: Doing-it-right (Eigen Value=1.206; % of variance =6.995)		0.749
10. Outlet has merchandise available when the customers want it.	0.714	
11. Outlet insists on error-free sales transactions and records.	0.682	
Factor 8: Convenience (Eigen Value=1.071; % of variance =6.509)		0.798
5. Layout of the Outlet makes it easier for customers to find what they need.	0.482	
6. Layout of the Outlet makes it easier for customers to move around in the Outlet.	0.699	
9. Outlet performs the service right the first time.	0.533	

Relative Importance Of Service Quality Dimensions

In order to determine the relative importance of service quality dimensions, they were subjected to multiple regression analysis (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). Nadiri and Tumer (2009); Seth et al. (2008); Akbaba (2006); Mehta et al. (2000) had also used regression analysis to test the relationship between overall service quality against the service quality dimensions.

It was observed that the overall regression model was significant (F=151.237, p<0.00). It is parallel to the findings of Nadiri and Tumer (2009); Siu & Cheung (2001); Mehta et al. (2000) that the relationship between service quality and overall service quality in a retail setting was significant. In terms of the relationship between individual dimensions and overall service quality, the adjusted R^2 = 0.74 was statistically significant.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results For Relative Importance Of Service Quality Dimensions

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	ADJUSTED R2 / Sig	STANDARD BETA	Sig T	ORDER OF IMPORTNCE
HELPFULNES		0.093	0.000	4
POLICY		0.100	0.000	3
APPEARANCE		0.085	0.000	5
INSPIRING CONFIDENCE	.740 / 0.000	0.062	0.000	8
PROBLEM SOLVING		0.076	0.012	6
PROMISES		0.124	0.001	2
DOING-IT-RIGHT		0.071	0.000	7
CONVENIENCE		0.836	0.010	1

The standardised beta coefficients provided the relative importance (Table 3). The dimension with the largest coefficient represents the most important dimension in terms of its influence on overall quality perceptions. Apparel customers tend to make service quality judgements based on these eight dimensions in order of importance. For the customers, "Convenience" was the most important factor. It could be explained by the fact that the pace of life is very fast in India. So, they prefer such an outlet whose physical layout makes it easier to move around and search what they want in the minimum time slot.

"Promises" appeared at second important place which is related to the trustworthiness of the retailers. Thus, the customers are focused towards those organised retailers who are providing the services at the committed time and executing the work like alterations and repairs at the foretold time. "Policy" of the retailer is also influencing the overall service quality. This validates the results of Siu and Cheung (2001) who reported "Policy" as the third most important dimension in the overall evaluation of service quality.

The dimension "Helpfulness" appeared at the fourth place which is a bouquet of services like safe transactions; courteous behaviour of employees; employees informing customers when services will be performed and employees are never too busy in responding to the requests of shoppers.

"Appearance" factor assumed the fifth place in overall rating of service quality. This was consistent with a study conducted by Dabholkar et al. (1996) in which the physical aspects of the store were widely acknowledged as essential determinants of the shopping experience. "Problem Solving" emerged at the sixth place in terms of importance. This factor is a portfolio of diversified services like employees handling customer complaints immediately; employees taking sincere interest in solving the shopper's problem.

To some extent "Doing-it-Right" was also influencing the overall service quality. Doing-it-right is aggregation of services like availability of merchandise when the customers want it and insisting on error-free sales transactions. "Inspiring Confidence" assumed the eighth place in the hierarchy of perceived overall service quality. This implies that the knowledge and cool behaviour of the employees instils confidence in customers and push the overall service quality.

Table 4: Effect Of Demographics On Retail Service Quality Dimensions

SQ DC	AGE	GENDER	MARITAL STATUS	MONTHLY INCOME	FREQUENY OF VISIT OUTLET
HELPFULNESS	.376	.528	.137	.855	.735
POLICY	.427	.976	.722	.589	.524
APPEARANCE	.323	.405	.374	.873	.489
CONFIDENCE	.869	.307	.457	.914	.930
PROBLEM SOLVING	.044	.479	.005	.468	.528
PROMISES	.809	.131	.668	.151	.009
DOING-IT-RIGHT	.746	.035	.619	.065	.283
CONVENIENCE	.318	.121	.738	.504	.296

The results can be summarized as regression equation given below:

Overall service quality as perceived by customers = 3.729 + .868 (Convenience) + .128 (Promises) + .104 (Policy) + .096 (Helpfulness) + .089 (Appearance) + .079 (Problem Solving) + .073 (Doing-It-Right) + .067 (Inspiring Confidence)

Service Quality Dimensions And Demographic Characteristics

While evaluating service quality in non-professional services like retailing, there is a need to examine the demographic characteristics of customers (Webster, 1989). In this study, Analysis of Variance had been used to determine whether the service quality factors were influenced by the demographics.

Data analysis points to the existence of four significant associations which are as follows: (i) between age and Problem Solving (ii) between gender and Doing-it-Right (iii) between marital status and Problem Solving and (iv) between frequency of visiting outlet and Promises. Post hoc analysis using LSD method was applied to analyse these relationships in greater detail.

Post hoc analysis revealed that respondents of age group "35-45" differ significantly from the age group "15-25". Respondents of age group "35-45" were more mature & responsible. They were not as enthusiastic as of "15-25"

age group. They sensed that whenever a problem was encountered it must be sorted out in a short while. On the other side, respondents of age group "15-25" were free birds who like to spend their time in leisure activities. So they can wait and visit the outlet again for figuring out of their problems.

Respondents visiting outlets on monthly and quarterly basis were found to be differing significantly from weekly visitors. Positive mean difference indicated that monthly and quarterly visitors gave more importance to Promises. Weekly visitors often hang out in the outlet; they can collect their merchandise in their next visit so the non-fulfilment of promises will not influence them much as compared to monthly and quarterly visitors.

Post hoc analysis couldn't be conducted in case of gender and marital status as there were only two groups. So, mean scores were taken for these two cases. Mean score of "males" for Doing-it-Right (-0.09389) was significantly lower than the female score (.11130). Females are a little bit impatient because of their tight schedule. Due to this they always want that their work should be done in one shot. That is why females give more importance to availability of merchandise in the outlet and error-free transactions.Positive mean score indicated that married respondents gave more importance to Problem Solving. Married respondents had to devote more time to their family than bachelors. That's why they preferred an outlet which handle their problems with sincere efforts and willingly handled returns and exchanges.

Table 5: Post Hoc Analysis

(I)	(J)	(I - J) Mean Difference	Sig
	AGE		
35-45	15-25	.34554925*	.011
	25-35	.12416398	.395
	More than 45	.19224472	.568
Frequency Of Visiting Outlet			
Monthly	Weekly	.37464972	.001
	Quarterly	.02867888	.822
	Half Yearly	.21283029	.236
Quarterly	Weekly	.34597084	.012
	Monthly	-.02867888	.822
	Half Yearly	.18415141	.340

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 6: Dercriptive of Mean

GENDER	MEAN of DOING-IT-RIGHT	MARITAL STATUS	MEAN OF PROBLEM SOLVING
Male	-0.09389	Unmarried	-0.12135
Female	0.11130	Married	0.15380
Total	0.00000	Total	0.0000000

CONCLUSION

The present study focused on identifying service quality dimensions in retailing. Exploratory Factor Analysis was run and eight dimensions of retail service quality emerged. It reconfirms that RSQS is not a generic scale (Torlak et al., 2010; Ravichandran et al., 2008; Nhat and Hau, 2007; Kaul, 2005; Kim and Jin, 2001). The findings of the RSQS in India is not in harmony with the previous researchers Nadiri and

Tumer (2009); Leen et al. (2004); Boshoff and Terblanche (1997); Dabholkar et al. (1996) findings.

The study highlighted the relative importance of service quality attributes and revealed that not all the dimensions contribute in equal quantum to the customers' perceptions of service quality in Indian retail context. The research showed that among the eight service quality dimensions, "Convenience" was the best predictor, followed by

Promises, Policy, Helpfulness, Appearance, Problem Solving, Doing-it-Right and Inspiring Confidence.

Significant differences were found in the dimensions of "Problem Solving" according to the age of respondents. The finding was analogous to the research studies forwarded by Nadiri and Tumer (2009); Foucault & Scheufele (2002) and Siu & Cheung (2001) who demonstrated that there were differences in shopping behaviour when it involves age.

Foucault & Scheufele (2002) and Siu and Cheung (2001) confirmed that there were differences in shopping behaviour when it involves gender. In line with this finding, gender differences appeared in the dimension of "Doing-it-Right".

Gagliano & Hathcote (1994) observed that married respondents differ significantly from single respondents on service quality dimensions. In the present study also, bachelors differed significantly from married respondents on the basis of "Problem Solving".

Apart from this, no significant differences were obtained on the basis of income level. The results were parallel to the results displayed by Yaghi (2010). On the other side, Nadiri and Tumer (2009); Siu and Cheung (2001) and Gagliano & Hathcote (1994) found an association between monthly income and service quality dimensions.

Monthly and quarterly outlet visitors gave more value to "Promises" made by apparel retailers than those who often visit the outlet. The finding was in line with the findings of Kaushik (2009) who found an association between frequency of travel and service quality dimension in aviation industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sureshchander et al. (2001) aroused the question of whether service quality scales such as the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF address the 'critical aspects of customer perceived service quality' in India (Kaul, 2005). An instrument that is implemented in the West will not fit Asian markets without alterations (Cui, Lewis & Park, 2003). In this regard, a great need is felt especially for global retailers to carefully re-think before exercising their existing perspectives on service quality gained in other countries to Indian apparel consumers.

The superior performance on the most important dimension, "Convenience" may be helpful in providing enhanced quality of services while the performance on the less important dimension "Inspiring Confidence" may not significantly impact customer's perception of retail service quality. This would enable the organised retailers to focus their valuable resources in the areas of importance i.e.

"Convenience". Looking at this individual dimension, it is suggested that the layout of the apparel outlet be sketched in a fashion that shoppers can comfortably and leisurely hang out. The zoning of the garments should be done in such a manner that in the first sight customers will catch what they are looking for.

Apparel retailers wishing to enhance their perceived service quality are needed to assure that:

1. Physical facilities are clean, tidy, modern-looking and attractive.

2. Store layout is architecture in a convenient manner that enables the customers to find what they need and to move around with ease.

3. Services are delivered reliably by fulfilling all promises made to customers.

4. Doing things right the first time without mistakes and having the merchandise available when the customers want it.

5. Store employees instill confidence in the customers at all times during their personal interaction with the customers.

6. Outlet salespeople are courteous, helpful, knowledgeable with the ability to give prompt service to customers (Leen et al., 2004).

7. Prompt and professional problem-solving methods including a proper system of returns and exchanges (Christo & Terblanche, 1997).

8. Their store policy is responsive to customer needs such as convenient operating hours, ample parking spaces, and credit payment options (Leen et al., 2004).

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