

Quality in Retail: A Qualitative Study of Construct Domain and Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

Retailing is old but organized retailing is new. Organized retailing has received a new impetus with the announcement of opening up of multi-brand retail in India. Unlike the past when quality took a back seat, now quality is likely to assume center stage in determining the success. The relationship between quality, competitive superiority and business success is well documented. Quality in retail context, especially in India, has not been explored. This study reports the finding of an initial qualitative investigation aimed at seeking answer to the question as to what quality really means to a shopper in India and what are its constituent dimensions. It was found that retail service quality domain consists of seven dimensions: convenience, customer services, policy, merchandise, salespeople, physical facilities and store layout. These aspects of service are important for customers and hence can be leveraged into developing competitive superiority.

Key words: Retail Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Quality Measurement, Retail Sector

I. Introduction

Quality is important. It plays a critical role in determining market and consumer based outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty and margin. With the opening up of the sector to foreign investments and the arrival of organized domestic chains, the competition among retail players is beginning to heat up. Intra and inter format competition is likely to intensify. In this context quality in retail setting is likely to emerge as a powerful weapon of competition. Retail quality comprises of quality of goods and services in combination (Kandampully, 1997). The service quality in retailing determines its performance to a great extent and many times service quality directly influences the product quality. Service quality in retailing affects the overall customers' shopping experience and therefore it should be strategically imbibed into the organization's retail plans and practices.

II. Retail Service Quality: Rationale For Research

Retail is latest to experience the effects of globalization, liberalization and modernization. From being unorganized and scattered, Indian retail sector is moving towards organization and sophistication. Although the organized retail constitutes a small percentage of the total retail, this sector is poised to grow in future. Shopping along with buying is emerging as one of the important customer orientations. In order to work out effective strategies to win customers, the knowledge of consumer behaviour is essential for the retail stores (Sinha et al, 2002). With the retail industry undergoing transformation, the challenge is to explore what quality means and what does it constitute for customers. Strategies developed without a solid understanding of quality construct are likely to be ineffective and wasteful.

The service quality plays a pivotal role in assisting retailers interpret customer needs accurately and achieve desired business results (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012). With respect to India, the research on retail service quality received attention recently. Studies are few and even fewer are of good quality (Mittal and Mittal, 2008). Organized retail being a recent phenomenon has not been explored much in India as compared to foreign countries (Lather and Kaur, 2006). While the past has been characterized by paucity of literature, research interest in this area is growing. Given the transformation of the retail sector, research is needed to establish the domain knowledge of retail service quality construct and designing of a valid retail quality measure. In this background the present study aims to fill this gap. It makes an attempt to explore what quality really means for retail consumers and what are its underlying dimensions.

III. Methodology

The objective guiding this study was to gain fundamental understanding of quality construct in retail context. What actually happens when customers approach and evaluate retail firms? Accordingly the method of research employed for this purpose was exploratory. The investigation of this type is necessary in apprehending and establishing the construct domain. As a first step, an exhaustive literature review was carried out to chronicle the perspectives adopted and articulated on the subject in previous attempts. For this purpose, literature appearing on the subject was collected and analyzed for a period of five decades starting with seventies. The care was exercised to include all important journals within the ambit of this exploration. This secondary investigation has yielded insights on two major aspects of retail quality: how the quality construct has evolved over the period of time and

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what are the points of convergence and divergence in the way quality in retail is viewed by different thinkers.

The investigation based on secondary review of literature was followed by primary search involving depth probes. A sample of fifty frequent shoppers was selected using mall intercepts for the probe. The sample respondents were asked to describe in a free flowing manner what was important to them in a retail environment. They were asked to reveal their both overt and covert concerns which guided their preference or avoidance of a shopping destination. The purpose here was to discover aspects which constitute their evaluative points of reference in assessing retail service. Besides their own voluntary disclosure the respondents were given prompts in order such that none of their quality concerns were left out. These interviews were recorded and later tabulated to develop a list of factors that constitute retail service quality. This process was similar to the one followed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in the development of service quality scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988). On the whole this process led to accumulation of a total of 73 aspects or concerns statements which were content analyzed. A panel of five experts further checked the aspects for overlap and repetition to arrive at a final list of 68 aspects that is perceived to constitute quality in retail context.

IV. Retail Service Quality Framework

In a competitive environment it is imperative for firms to identify aspects of the offer which could give them competitive edge. In order to achieve its ultimate objective of winning, retail businesses can choose from two critical approaches, the store attribute approach and the store image approach (Kandampully, 1997).

The basic framework governing retail management practices during 50's and 60's revolved around the marketing mix attributes of product, price and location. The quality was then restricted to merchandise quality and availability, price variations and conveniences in terms of location. These stores attributes however ceased to act as differentiators as they were easily replicated. Researchers found that previous approaches to retail quality are now incapable of yielding good business results. This gave rise to store image construct as a vehicle to develop differentiation during the seventies. Store image consisted of tangible and intangible aspects related to a store. It was in 80's when researchers started streamlining the concept of quality in services. It was felt that services falling outside the core product had substantial powers to assign retailers the strength to stand among competitors and even create a niche for themselves (Berry, 1986; Hummel and Savitt, 1988; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990).

V. Retail Service Quality Measurement: Domain Evolution

Analyzing why consumers purchase at particular retail outlets, Martineau (1958) studied the force behind the successful and leading retailers. He called this force as store personality or image which is made up of tangible

and intangible attributes. Identifying the inadequacies of researches to comprehend retail store image appropriately, the use of behavioural approach and unstructured instruments was advocated for recognizing store image (Kunkel and Berry, 1968). While Lindquist (1974) coincided with literature on the multi attribute nature of store image, Doyle and Fenwick (1975) considered individual differential scaling technique as the suitable algorithm for investigating the construct of store image. Bearden (1977) highlighted the importance of store image concept in customers' assessment of retail stores. Kasulis and Lusch (1981) highlighted the importance of the store image construct that when modified by retail stores, store image has the capability of altering customers' perceptions towards the same store attributes. Applied measures of store image were advocated on being more practicable as these scales aimed at the variables under control of managers (Reardon et al., 1995).

Structured scales were advocated for assessing store image for their ability to explain variance significantly (Chowdhury et al., 1998). Samli et al. (1998) reinforced the notion of GAP analysis (Parasuraman et al., 1991) by emphasizing the need for congruency between management and customers' perceptions of store image (named as differential congruence). Store image attributes were postulated as the antecedents affecting consumers' perceptions stimulus to the response of preference for stores (Thang and Tan, 2003). A model for retailers was presented by Paulins and Geistfeld (2003) to test whether customers' desires are adequately met by store attributes and analyzed customers' perceptions. Shopping motives were found to be important in understanding the heterogeneous consumer behaviour (Morschett et al., 2005).

After the early researchers such as Martineau(1958) and Lindquist (1974), who highlighted the significance of store image as the reason behind the success of retailers especially in developed countries, researchers (Wong and Lu, 2001; Ceribeli and Merlo, 2012) showed keen interest in evaluating the performance of global retailer. They attempted to explore the variations in consumers' perceptions in different countries. The construct of store image has also been utilized to assess inter-group competition among chain stores (Stewart and Hood, 1983). Wong and Lu (2001) explored the image of joint venture shopping centers (the only approved form of direct foreign investment in Chinese retail) as perceived by consumers. In response to the growing importance and expansion of supermarkets in Brazil, Ceribeli and Merlo (2012) identified the different parameters used by various consumer sections coming from contrasting demographics for store selection. Expectations and importance of store characteristics of the retail formats such as discount stores and category killers were analyzed as they gained significance and prominence in the American market (Gable et al., 2008). On similar lines, Alhemoud (2008) explored the relation between patronage behaviour and store choice.

Recognizing the positive effect of store image on store choice and patronage decisions, research studies used store image for assessing the retailer's effectiveness (Yoo and Chang, 2005; Perumal, 2005). In order to investigate poor performance of global retailers like Wal-Mart, Costco Wholesale and Carrefour in Korean market, Yoo and Chang (2005) attributed the reason of their failure to the differences in Korean consumers' perceptions of shopping behaviour. Perumal (2005) conducted research in Malaysian retail setting to assess the impact of store image of new format store on patronage behaviour. During the eighties, retail stores faltered in meeting customers' expectations on aspects such waiting time, lack of knowledgeable and friendly salespeople and lack of variety (Gagliano and Hathcote, 1994). Thereafter, the research got focused on the concept of service quality.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) through their exploratory investigation for the service industries developed the most widely acclaimed scale related to services popularly known as SERVQUAL. It was criticized for its inability to capture the construct's assessment in all type of service industries and in all cultures (Carman, 1990; Babakus and Boller, 1992; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1993, 1994), thereby, suggesting adaptation of the scale in accordance with the service being studied. As compared to product quality or price, retailers were more inclined towards service quality realizing its importance in influencing customers' quality perceptions (Sweeney et al., 1997). Lack of high service quality levels was found to affect the image of retailers on the internet too (Janda

et al., 2002). Service quality as a strategy was advocated to be used in times of retail crisis in Singapore experiencing stiff competition (Mehta et al., 2000). (Dabholkar, et al., 1996) evaluated the SERVQUAL in retail settings and finding it inappropriate for the retail sector suggested a specific service quality scale designed for the retail sector. They proposed the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) to help retailers identify service areas of improvement.

Amidst price similarities and product homogeneity, service quality helps retailers to create a unique image in consumers' mind and thereby establish a strong retail brand (Swobada et al., 2007). Witnessing the remarkable growth of retail sector in CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) country like Kazakhstan, Das et al. (2010) investigated the dimensions of service quality that could contribute towards expanding customer base. Viewing service quality as a strategy to differentiate, the validity and reliability of RSQS was assessed for Malaysian retail (Leen and Ramayah, 2011). The swift retail progress was attributed as the primary factor contributing towards world's sustainable economic development (To et al., 2012). With a background of fierce competition in China's retail among domestic and global retailers and identification of service quality as a compelling force, To et al. (2012) checked the adequacy of SERVQUAL and RSQS but found an adapted scale more suitable. A chronological development of literature pertaining to retail studies is presented in Table I.

Table I
Retail Studies Chronological Review

Study	Dimensions/Items Proposed	Study	Dimensions/Items Proposed
Martineau, 1958 (department stores, U.S.A.)	Layout and architecture Symbols and colours Advertising Sales personnel	Wong and Sohal, 2003 (departmental chain store, Australia)	Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy Tangibles
Fisk, 1961	Locational convenience Merchandise suitability Value for price Sales effort and store services Congeniality of store Post transaction satisfaction	Thang and Tang, 2003 (department stores, Singapore)	Merchandising Store atmosphere In-store service Accessibility Reputation Promotion Facilities Post transaction service
Kunkel and Berry, 1968 (department stores, Arizona)	Price of merchandise Quality of merchandise Assortment of merchandise Fashion of merchandise Sales personnel Locational convenience Other convenience factors Services Sales promotions Advertising Store atmosphere Reputation on adjustments	Paulins and Geistfeld, 2003 (apparel –specialty, department, discount stores, U.S.A.)	Type of clothing desired in stock Outside store preference Shopping hours Advertising

Lindquist, 1974	Merchandise Service Clientele Physical facilities Convenience Promotion Store atmosphere Institutional factors Post transaction satisfaction	Morschett et al., 2005 (grocery stores, Germany)	Store design Orderliness Service Quality of assortment One-stop shopping Variety of assortment Price
Doyle and Fenwick, 1975 (grocery chains, England)	Quality Price Product variety Store location One-stop shopping Advertising General appearance of store Convenience	Yoo and Chang, 2005 (department and discount stores, Korea)	Quality Price Assortment Promotion Advertisement Convenience of shopping Convenience of location Store facilities Salesperson service Credit service Store brand Store atmosphere
Bearden, 1977 (downtown v/s. outlying shopping centers, Alabama)	Price level Quality of merchandise Selection Atmosphere Location Parking facilities Friendliness of salespeople	Perumal, 2005 (supermarkets, Malaysia)	Store convenience Conducive atmosphere Value price Employee service Product assortments
Kasulis and Lusch, 1981 (department and discount stores, Oklahoma)	Prices as compared to other stores Sale prices attractiveness Employees courteousness Employees knowledge Number of store employees Employees friendliness Store decor attractiveness Finding items Checkout Moving through store Store location convenience Store parking adequacy	Ma and Niehm, 2006 (apparel stores-department, discount, specialty, U.S.A.)	Personal attention Reliability Tangibles Convenience
Stewart and Hood, 1983 (retail chains, U.K.)	Physical characteristics of store Product range Customer services Prices	Swobada et al., 2007, (grocery, textiles, DIY, electronics and furniture stores, Germany)	Service Value/price Assortment Advertising Store design
Carman, 1990 (tire store, U.S.A)	Tangibles Reliability Responsive Security Courtesy Access	Gable, Topol, Lala and Fiorito, 2008 (category killers and discount stores, U.S.A.)	Low price Convenient location Variety of merchandise categories Wide assortment of merchandise within a category Continuity of supply Personal service Well-known brands

Finn and lamb, 1991 (various retail stores, U.S.)	Tangibles Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy	Lee-Ross, 2008 (retail clusters, North Queensland)	Tangibles Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy
Guiry, Hutchinson, Weitz, 1992 (retail store)	Personal service Merchandise assortment Store transaction reliability Employee availability Tangibles Store service reliability Pricing policy	Alhemoud, 2008 (supermarkets, Kuwait, U.A.E.)	Product Personnel Accessibility Promotion
Gagliano and Hathcote, 1994(apparel specialty stores, U.S.A.)	Personal attention Tangibles Reliability Convenience	Clottey et al., 2008 (large apparel store, U.S.)	Reliability Assurance Empathy Responsiveness
Reardon et al., 1995 (department store chain, U.K.)	Merchandise Atmosphere Value Service Clientele Convenient	Nadiri and Tumer, 2009 (largest retail chain stores, Northern Cyprus)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal interaction Problem solvingPolicy
Sweeney, Soutar and Johnson, 1997 (electronic appliances stores, Australia)	Functional service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsiveness • Empathy • Courtesy Technical service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence 	Torlak, Uz Kurt and Ozmen, 2010 (supermarkets and discount stores, Turkey)	Personal interaction Reliability Physical aspects Store policies
Boshoff and Terblanche, 1997 (department stores, specialty stores & hypermarkets, South Africa)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal interaction Problem solving Policy	Das et al., 2010 (department stores, discount stores and supermarkets, Kazakhstan)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal interaction Problem solving Policy
Samli et al., 1998 (national store, United States)	Sales people Service policies Assortment/selection Layout Attractiveness Price Convenience Quality of product Store most improved Community involvement	Leen and Ramayah, 2011(apparel specialty stores, Malaysia)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal interaction Problem solving Policy
Chowdhury et al., 1998 (grocery retail chain, southwest United States)	Product quality Atmosphere Employee Selection Convenience Price/value	Plooy, Jager and Zyl, 2012(informal grocery stores, Gauteng, South Africa)	Tangibility Servicescape Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy

Mehta, Lalwani and Han, 2000 (supermarket v/s. electronics goods retailer, Singapore)	Service personnel Physical aspects Merchandise Confidence Parking	Ceribeli and Merlo, 2012 (supermarkets, Brazil)	Relationship between customers & employees Store environment Assortment & convenience Supermarket image Monetary aspect & communication Parking Flow of customers in store Level of customer service Own brands & other store
Siu and Cheung, 2001 (multi-national department store chain, HongKong)	Personal interaction Policy Physical appearance Promises Problem solving Convenience	Martinelli and Balboni, 2012 (Supermarkets, Italy)	Policies Physical aspects Personal interaction Reliability
Wong and Lu, 2001 (joint venture shopping centers, China)	Location Merchandise Service Popularity Facilities Sales and incentives	Kimani et al., 2012 (supermarkets & convenience shops, Kenya)	Supermarkets · Reliability · Responsiveness · Empathy · Tangibles Convenience shops · Tangibles · Responsiveness · Reliability
Vazquez et al., 2001 (supermarkets, Spain)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal interaction Policies	To et al., 2012 (modern retail stores, Macao, China)	Interaction & trustworthiness · Reliability · Interaction Store environment Understanding the consumers Policy
Kim and Jin, 2002 (discount stores, US and Korea)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal attention		

VI. Retail Service Quality Studies: Indian Perspective

India as a developing economy has a major share of untapped organized retail market (Jayawardhena and Farrell, 2011). Research in retail needs to be continuous to adapt the dynamic forces operating in the market leading to frequent changes in customers' desires and shopping patterns. Retail studies in India would assist retailers in devising marketing mix strategies based on customer perceptions. Researchers should assess the suitability of western methods of service quality measurement in Indian context. Realizing the strategic importance of service quality, Kaul (2007) contended the need for suitable measures of service quality pertaining to Indian retail. Service quality can be employed as an effective strategy by the organized retailers to achieve competitive positions (Tanwar et al., 2012). The need to provide quality services in rural and semi-urban areas should be reflected upon by retailers to gain from the potential available in such

markets (Sinha et al., 2011). Identifying the service deficiencies in the rapidly growing Indian retail segment of food and grocery stores with highest customer spending on food, researchers (Zameer and Mukherjee, 2011; Bhaskar and Shekhar, 2011) acknowledged the utility of service quality factors in improving their service levels.

Table II lists the various studies conducted in the domain of retail service quality. A study of the objective, methodology and finding of these studies reveals that many of these investigations have either used SERVQUAL (Jain, 2010; Khare et al., 2010; Naik et al., 2010; Dhume, 2012) or RSQS (Kaul, 2007; Parikh, 2006, Manjunath and Prabhu, 2011; Bhaskar and Shekhar, 2011; Ramakrishnan and Ravindran, 2012; Tanwar et al., 2012) with most of them adapting and modifying the scales to suit the cultural needs. This explains that Indian consumers' perceptions of service quality differ from shoppers of US or other countries.

Table II
Retail Studies in India: Chronological Review

Study	Dimensions/Items Proposed	Study	Dimensions/Items Proposed
Sinha, Banerjee and Uniyal, 2002 (multiple formats, Ahemdabad)	Convenience Merchandise Ambience Service Patronized Referral Others	Mittal, Arora and Prashar, 2011 (organized retail stores, Punjab)	Availability and variety Service Ambience Discounts and price Quality of products Promotion
Kaul, 2007 (apparel stores, Bangalore)	Physical aspects Personal interaction Problem solving Policy	Manjunath and Prabhu, 2011 (supermarkets, Bangalore)	Service personnel Physical aspects Policy R eliability
Parikh, 2006 (multiformat stores, Gujarat & surrounding states)	Physical aspects Reliability Personal interaction Problem solving Policy	Kushwaha and Gupta, 2011 (organized retail, Delhi and NCR)	Credit facilities Home delivery Servicing and repair Complaint redressal Parking facility Packaging Goods return facility Display facility Discount display Special facility to senior citizen
Lather and Kaur, 2006 (apparel stores, Delhi and NCR)	Price merchandise Quality merchandise Assortment of merchandise Sales personnel Advertising Service Other convenience services	Bhaskar and Shekhar, 2011 (apparel stores, Hyderabad)	Personal interaction Reliability Policy Physical aspects Problem solving
Mittal and Mittal, 2008 (apparel stores, Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad)	Loyalty drivers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merchandise mix • Sales promotions • Value/price • Recommendation/relationship Shopping experience enhancers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation/advertisements • Temperature • Return/guarantee • Ambient conditions 	Zameer and Mukherjee, 2011 (food and grocery retail, Delhi and NCR)	Kirana stores Product choice Customized convenience Dissonance reducing measures Parking convenience Location convenience Modern stores Product choice Store management Value added services Dissonance reducing measures CRM activities
Goswami and Mishra, 2009 (food and grocery segment, Kolkata, Mumbai, Jamshedpur and Nagpur)	Store cleanliness, store offers & product quality Store brands, family grocery shopping & parking facilities Hedonic shopping Location Specific day shopping Home shopping Multi-store shopping Planned shopping	Ramakrishnan and Ravindran, 2012 (departmental stores v/s hypermarket, Coimbatore)	Departmental store <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers' problem solving ability • Employees' service ability- Personal interaction • Customer convenience • Store interior & layout Hypermarket <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping promises • Creating trust • Employees' involvement

	In-store convenience Helpful & trustworthy salespeople Travel convenience Unplanned purchase		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring quality • Physical evidence
Jain, 2010 (hypermarket and department stores, Delhi)	Customer service Brand value Variety or merchandise displayed Convenience Quality Ambience Ad promos Discounts	Dhume, 2012 (apparel specialty stores, Mumbai)	Personal attention Problem solving Reliability Tangibles Convenience
Khare et al., 2010 (grocery stores, northern India)	Tangibles Reliability Assurance Responsiveness Empathy	Tanwar, Kaushik and Kaushik, 2012(organized food sector, Delhi and Ghaziabad)	Appearance Problem solving and policy Convenience Interaction quality Reliability Personal attention Inspiring confidence
Ghosh, Tripathi and Kumar, 2010(organized retail outlets, Tier II and tier III cities)	Convenience & merchandise mix Store atmospherics Services	Jhamb and Kiran, 2012 (malls, hypermarkets/ supermarkets. Specialty stores, Punjab-Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ludhiana)	Ambience Location Security Promotions Dressing room Cleanliness Children play area Parking facility Convenient hours Trained sales personnel
Naik, Gantasala and Prabhakar, 2010 (hypermarkets, supermarkets and department stores, Hyderabad)	Tangibles Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy	Mohanty, 2012 (traditional v/s modern retail formats, Balasore, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Puri, Odisha)	Convenience Merchandise Brand Service
Goel and Dewan, 2011(organized retail stores, Punjab)	Availability and variety Service Ambience Discounts and price Quality of products Promotion		

VII. Retail Service Quality- Study of Customer Perspective

Despite the strategic importance of service quality, Indian retailers do not have an appropriate instrument to measure it. (Kaul, 2007). Although scales such as SERVQUAL and RSQS originally developed in western countries have been adapted in Indian context, but still the diagnostic applicability of such scales is limited. In order to plug this gap, an exploratory research was conducted through individual depth-probe interviews with 50 retail consumers, with approximately 70 per cent of consumers falling within 18-25 age category. This was done because this group is considered to be the most active shopper group in modern retail format. Understanding customer perceptions about what constitutes retail service quality is prerequisite for the development

of a scale for the construct. These insights can provide implications for delivering and managing service quality as with the growth of organized retail in India, retailers must be able to comprehend the expectations of customers effectively.

Table III below lists the factors that were found to have significant influence on the assessment of retail service quality. The listed dimensions reveal the various attributes related to a retail store perceived significant by customers. Although all the items derived should be paid attention to by the retailers but a simple analysis based on the frequency reveals that some aspects of service are widely considered to be important than the others. Intuitively these customer concerns must be attended to by the retail firms forming an integral part of the quality programme.

Table III
Significant Dimensions

	Retail service quality items	Frequency
1.	Easy and quick billing	30
2.	Expert advice and guidance by customer profiling	21
3.	Availability of product varieties	17
4.	Personalized attention to shoppers	14
5.	Trained & friendly salesperson availability	14
6.	Easy movement in the store	12
7.	Proper parking facilities	11
8.	Provision of facilities like water, restrooms and medical facilities.	11
9.	Good ambience	11
10.	Facility of seating arrangement/ lounges	10
11.	Availability of ample trial rooms	10
12.	Systematic and spacious display of items)	10
13.	Helping, non-intruding salesman	10
14.	Polite and pleasant workforce	8
15.	On-time customer services	8
16.	Organized store layout	7
17.	Listening to customers and satisfying their needs as per taste and preferences	7
18.	Customization of products	6
19.	Healthy salesperson-customer interaction	5
20.	Proper signage and maps for locating stores	5
21.	Availability of self-payment option	5
22.	Problem solving attitude of salespeople	4
23.	Maintaining freshness of packaged food	4
24.	Effective crowd management	3
25.	Product availability in least time and cost	3
26.	Satisfied and motivated salesforce	3
27.	Relationship building	3
28.	Fixed price shops	3
29.	Offering a range of products	3
30.	Anchor as well as non anchor stores(medium and high end stores)	3
31.	Homely / healthy environment	3
32.	Proper positioning of retail shops	3
33.	Availability of entertainment avenues	3
34.	Obtaining customer feedback	3
35.	Updated records for pricing	3
36.	Providing clear and readable printouts	3
37.	Different counters for less products	2
38.	No overpricing	2
39.	Offering quality products	2
40.	Making showrooms vibrant	2
41.	Offering up-to-date and current trends	2

42.	Helpdesk facility	2
43.	Salesperson giving complete information to customers	2
44.	Effective post-purchase services	2
45.	Ensuring proper security (especially small items)	2
46.	Proper display of schemes and offers	2
47.	Place for light snacks	2
48.	Exterior visual merchandising	2
49.	Price tags to each product	2
50.	Festivals and weekend discounts	2
51.	Door step delivery	2
52.	Assistance in parking lots	2
53.	Proper music	2
54.	Others	20

Among other things, it emerges that the desire of having quick and efficient billing services is the topmost aspect from customers' perspective. Majority of the consumers felt that the modern retail formats lack in their services when it comes to billing part; consumers have to stand in long queues making shopping a painful experience rather than an enjoyable one. This reflects ineffective crowd management by the retailers and ends the shopping experience of the customers with dissatisfaction. Customers suggested installing automatic billing machines to reduce billing inconveniences. Quick checkout was cited as one of the important areas of service quality (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012) and efficient checkout asserted as one of shopping experience enhancer (Zameer and Mukherjee, 2011). Ghosh et al.(2010) recommended the usage of different technologies to ensure quick billing in today's fast paced world.

Second important aspect that Indian consumers expect from retail stores' service is assisting shoppers by providing complete information and suggestions related to products and services so as to instill confidence in customers (it can also induce buying behaviour). Personal interaction has been found as one of the significant dimension affecting customer loyalty (Das et al., 2010; To et al., 2012). In context of apparel specialty stores, salesperson guidance was observed as being desired among the service quality dimensions by most customers (Dhume, 2012).

At the third number is the aspect of retail related to the availability of product assortment. Variety is one of the essentials for shopping consumers as they look for a range of products to select from. Consumers prefer going to those retail stores which offer a wide collection of products to satisfy the individual differences among customers. "Customers looking for a product should have more options to choose from"- customers quoted during the survey. Researchers have suggested the importance of merchandise for discount stores, category killer stores as well as supermarkets (Paulins and Geistfeld, 2003, Gable et al., 2008; Alhemoud, 2008). Indian consumer's preference for traditional kirana stores could be diverted

towards modern formats through the availability of wide assortment of products making up for the diverse monthly needs of consumers (Zameer and Mukherjee, 2011). Researchers have cited availability and variety of products as one of the most significant factor affecting customers' perceptions (Sinha et al, 2002; Mittal et al., 2011; Jhamb and Kiran, 2012; Dhume, 2012). For grocery items, consumers were found to accord highest preference to the variety (Goel and Dewan, 2011). Cultivation of patronage behaviour depends upon the brand and range of merchandise available, merchandising being the most critical service quality dimension (Mohanty, 2012).

Personalized attention to customers also figures as an important parameter. Consumers felt that they experienced the feeling of being left in the crowd when not attended properly. Many of the consumers highlighted "personal attention" as the winning edge of traditional retailers over modern formats. Kim and Jin (2001) found in their study that American customers' perceptions on service quality dimension of 'Personal attention' were the highest. The intangible attributes of service quality are valued more as compared to tangibles by Indian consumers and currently personalized attention provides competitive edge to traditional retailers over modern stores (Khare et al., 2010). High customers' expectations were found with respect to 'personal attention' as customized services tend to provide psychological satisfaction to customers (Dhume, 2012).

Last in the top five frequency store attributes is the accessibility of efficient and amiable workforce. This reflects the human element of the retail store. Consumers cited that a warm and cordial atmosphere created by "empathetic, polite salespeople" of the retail stores can go a long way in establishing healthy relationship with customers. Salesperson mannerism matters a lot. The modern retail stores tend to be more mechanistic and technology oriented leaving no space for emotions. Parasuraman et al., (1991) postulated that customers rely on the service staff for problem solving and therefore staff behaviour plays a significant role in retail services. Impressive services imparted through capable and friendly

staff can facilitate maintenance of long term customer relationships (Wong and Sohal, 2003; Swobada et al., 2007). Staff training was advocated for better customer management (Nadiri and Tumer, 2009). Khare et al. (2010) suggested that retailer's behaviour is critical to the service quality perceptions. Manjunath and Prabhu (2011) recommended improvising employees' performance; service personnel being the most critical dimension. Human factors play an important role in the formation of Indian consumers' service quality perceptions (Ramakrishnan and Ravindran, 2012). 'Sales personnel staff' was perceived most significantly by consumers in the study by Lather and Kaur (2006). Right conduct and sympathetic attitude

of store staff guarantees loyal customer behaviour (Ghosh et al., 2010).

VIII. Retail Service Quality Dimensions

The items extracted from customer interviews were content analyzed and classified into different categories on the basis of content convergence. This process is akin to the process adopted in factor analysis but at the current stage of research this was done by using judgment of researcher and experts. These expressed customer concerns are assumed to be the external manifestation of some internal or hidden service delivery aspect. The identified dimensions are listed in Table IV.

Table IV
Retail Service Quality Dimensions

convenience	customer services	policy	merchandise	salespeople	physical facilities	store layout
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick and error-free billing. • Proper parking facilities with assistance. • Facility of seating arrangement / lounges. • Proper signage and maps for locating stores. • Availability of self-payment option. • Providing clear and readable printouts. • Quick counters for less products. • Proper display of schemes and offers. • Convenient store timing. • Storage counters for Heavy shoppers. • Provision of website for stores. • Clear announcements. • Availability of handbags. • Availability of carts of different sizes. • Price displays unambiguity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert advice and guidance by customer profiling. • Personalized attention to shoppers. • On-time customer services. • Customization of products. • Relationship building. • Obtaining customer feedback. • Helpdesk facility. • Effective post-purchase care. • Making shopping an enjoyable experience. • Updated stocks available. • IT support services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective crowd management • Fixed price shops. • Anchor as well as non anchor stores (medium and high end stores). • Proper positioning of retail shops. • Updated records for pricing. • No overpricing. • Ensuring proper security (especially small items). • Festivals and weekend discounts. • Make credit facility available. • Encourage use of plastic money. • Billing to be consistent with promotional offers. • Door step delivery. • Exchange facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of product varieties. • Maintaining freshness of packaged food. • Product availability in least time and cost. • Offering a range of products. • Offering quality products. • Offering upto date and current trends. • Provision of festival/occasional stuff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained & knowledgeable salesperson availability. • Helping, non-intruding salesman. • Efficient, polite, friendly and pleasant workforce. • Healthy salesperson-customer interaction. • Problem solving attitude of salespeople. • Satisfied and motivated salesforce. • Salesperson giving complete information to customers. • Trained people at billing counters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good ambience • Provision of facilities like water, restrooms and medical facilities. • Homely / healthy environment. • Availability of ample trial rooms. • Availability of entertainment avenues. • Place for snacking. • Proper music. • Maintaining hygiene. • Arrangement for kids play area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy movement in the store. • Systematic and spacious display of items. • Organized store layout. • Vibrant showrooms . • Digital displays

An application of available service quality framework as given in the available researches and as per customers' perceptions and expert opinions, lead to the identification of a set of seven categories comprising retail service quality: convenience, customer services, policy, merchandise, salespeople, physical facilities and store layout.

IX. Retail Service Quality Scale

Recognizing the nature of retail as a mix of goods and services, initially, retail stores were assessed on the basis of functional and psychological attributes (Martineau, 1958), stores were also assessed using store image as a multi-attribute construct comprising of tangible and intangible elements (Lindquist, 1974). With the concept of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988) leading to the measurement scale "SERVQUAL", retailer's effectiveness was investigated through five dimensions- tangibles, empathy, reliability, assurance and responsiveness. While tangibles correspond to the product or other physical attributes; empathy, reliability, assurance and empathy referred to the non-product attributes.

Gagliano and Hathcote (1994) divided factors related to retail stores as 'Store service' (variety, quality, dependability of service) and 'Sales service' (prompt and individual service attention). 'Store service' reflected the attributes related to assortment and were more functional in nature while 'sales service' represented the experiential attributes related to the customer's experience in the store. In response to the inadequacies of SERVQUAL, Dabholkar et al., 96 developed "RSQS" specifically for the retail sector, RSQS dimensions drew a lot from SERVQUAL, and resulted in five dimensions- physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving and policy. Sweeney et al., (1997) categorized store attributes as functional (responsiveness, empathy, courtesy) and technical (competence). Samli et al., (1998) added that in addition to the conventional dimensions related to retail stores such as salespeople, service policies, assortment, layout, prices, convenience, attractive and quality; unconventional dimensions such as "store most improved" and "community involvement" should be included. Relationship between customers and employees was named as the 'Personal Factor' and others as 'Extrinsic Factors' (Ceribeli and Merlo, 2012). RSQS and SERVQUAL scales were combined to develop a new scale-'ReServqual'(To et al., 2012). Corresponding to the previous studies; the dimensions of retail service quality reflecting the perceptions of consumers in India explored in the present study consist of rational attributes including physical facilities, merchandise, store layout and policy, and emotional attributes covering convenience, customer services and salespeople.

X. Concluding Remarks and Future Research

Creating satisfied customers is the ultimate of any business enterprise. This requires adoption of quality approach in business operations. Although quality in general is an extensively researched area in services marketing and researches have also attempted to explore

quality in retail context, however, differences in consumer behavior prevent generalization of finding across borders. This study was undertaken to explore how service quality construct has developed chronologically and what content differences have been introduced therein. The second motivation guiding this study was to explore retail service quality domain and its constituent dimensions employing exploratory research design. This is essential for developing a retail service quality measure appropriate for an emerging market like India.

The exploratory investigation into aspects that consumers hold important in a retail setting lead to the development of over seventy critical areas of concerns. The concerns so found were grouped into seven service dimensions on the basis of relatedness. The internal consistency between these items was verified with help of marketing experts and retail professionals. The grouping of customer concerns led to the identification of seven categories. These pertain to: convenience, customer services, policy, merchandise, sales people, physical facilities and store layout. These aspects are perceived to be important by customers. The implication that flows from this that a retail firm cannot afford to ignore these aspects of service delivery. Correct identification and interpretation of service aspects is essential for developing right kind of competencies. Any failure to meet customer expectation on important aspect of service experience is likely to create service failure.

This study reported the first finding of the first qualitative investigation and it is not conclusive in nature. The dimensions pertaining to retail service quality require quantitative verification. The pool of items generated from qualitative research, content analyzed and classified into seven dimensions. This is first initial step in discovering the quality construct domain in the retail context. The outcome of this research is to be taken as a building block for the articulation of retail service quality construct which is essential for the development of an appropriate measure of service quality specifically designed for retail industry in India.

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