

Original Article

Customer Satisfaction towards Local Retail Stores

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ABSTRACT: *Customer satisfaction plays an important role in the success and growth of local retail stores. Today local businesses have realized the importance to keep customers and handle competition by understanding their needs and expectations. This study investigates customer satisfaction with local stores and provides information on what components affect how customers experience shopping. The research covers the main elements like product quality, price and pricing perceptions on products availability of a given customer service store environment convenience in terms with overall satisfaction. The study used data that were primarily collected through a structured questionnaire which had been circulated among customers frequently shopping in local stores. Body: Quantitative Methods were applied to study the perception of customer and satisfaction rate. The results show that customers prefer local stores due to the accessibility, personalized attention and quicker services offered by them along with a stronger customer-seller relationship. These elements create a combination of trust and convenience, which leads to repeat purchases. Local shops, on the other hand, struggle against huge chain stores and e-commerce marketplaces that will typically offer a broader product range and more appealing discounts. This study reveals that the quality of product, price competitiveness, availability of goods and great customer service enjoy a considerable role in enhancing customer satisfaction. Targeting these arenas will allow local store owners to improve overall sales and foster customer loyalty. The results of this research offer useful input to local retailers that wish to improve customer satisfaction, and thus secure the long-term growth in a highly competitive retail environment.*

KEYWORDS: *Satisfaction, Local Stores, Consumer Behavior, Retail Service Quality, Customer Loyalty, Shopping Experience.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction has become an essential factor in determining the success and growth of businesses in the retail sector. As a result of the burgeoning competition in today's market place, customers are presented with all kinds of shopping options: local stores, supermarkets and grocery chains to regional shopping malls or online. Consequently, it is model concentration for organisations to gain insight into the needs of arrangement consumers and design solutions that fulfil consumer expectations. Customer satisfaction means how happy your customers are with their overall shopping experience. Happy Customers are Denser/Return more often to purchase again and suggest the business to others. Thus, if satisfying customers leads to repeat business or any other positive outcome in the course of running a company over time.

Consumer use of local stores remains a vital part of daily life. Such stores are mostly found in residential locations and offer accessibility to basic commodities. If local stores do help to provide a more personalized experience when compared with large retail chains. Store owners and employees, on the other hand, interact continuously with customers helping them understand individual needs. Due to the close association, customers build up a sense of trust and form a bond with that store & so remain loyal.

Customer Satisfaction is a construct which has been on the mind of researchers and business professionals for many years now. It is well regarded as a critical measure of customer loyalty and business success. There are many factors that affect customer satisfaction, such as product quality, prices and charges for services/products provided by the company to customers (i.e. Price), service of products supplied to them in time also affects Customer Satisfaction so good delivery promise/store environment or employee behavior would help improve customer satisfaction level The customers analyse these factors every time when they go for shopping. Customers are more satisfied when a store meets or exceeds their expectations. On the other hand, lousy service or inferior products and prices can disappoint customers causing them to leave for a competitor.

Technological advancements and changing consumer lifestyles have transformed the retail industry. With the rise of e-commerce and digital channels, online shopping has changed how people buy goods. Customers can compare products, read reviews and order from home nowadays. As a result, it has become even more competitive for local retailers. Yet local stores persist because of the convenience, immediate product availability and personal interaction. Whether that holds true is open to debate, but plenty of consumers appreciate the human touch and swift service that local stores often offer.

Personalized customer service is one of the main advantages that local stores offer. Since shopkeepers often have personal relationships with their customers, they can offer one-on-one service and customized recommendations. Being Respectful of

Customers and Providing Support When Necessary These experiences help shape the nice part of a shopping experience while also playing an integral role in customer satisfaction.

Also, local stores are accompanied by various services like home delivery, payment in flexible terms and credit facilities.

Price is another key factor that influences customer satisfaction. Most consumers expect the product to be at a reasonable price and provide decent value for money. While mom and pop shops may not always have discounts competitive to big box stores or online shopping venues, they make up for it with convenience. Buyers generally anticipate the amount of time and energy they save by procuring stock from close-by retailers. Thus, satisfaction is dependent on price and the overall value perceived in an episode of shopping.

Customer perception is shaped as much by product quality and availability, Local stores should keep up with the stock in-sufficient amount and quality products as per required by customers. Customers tend to be satisfied when products are available and have the required quality levels. However, failing to meet certain customer expectations can prompt negative judgments and hinder retention. Stock shortages supply chain problems or better choices in the product assortment with lower quality goods damage buyer perception. Thus, local merchants need to be on top of their inventory management and quality control practices.

The physical environment of a store is also an important part of what keeps customers happy. A clean, organized and aesthetic store makes a good impression. Shopping will also be easier. Things like appropriate lighting, tidy product arrangements and a non-stressed environment enhance the whole end-user experience. Additionally, the courteous and helpful staff of some employees can have a direct effect on customer perceptions. Also, friendly employees who respond quickly to the needs of customers enhance a good image for your store and encourage them to return.

There are clear benefits of customer satisfaction to local retailers. Usually, a comfortable customer for the next one is its loyal customers, who will be buying things from the same store after some time. They also tend to recommend the store more often to family, friends and neighbors. This can create a word-of-mouth push for more customers and help enhance the store's reputation in the community. The other factor is that loyal customers create recurring revenue, thereby underpinning the ongoing stability of the business.

This study focuses on local stores' customer satisfaction and the conditions causing such behaviour in terms of being perceived as a necessity or induced purchasing sexual efforts. This is important research for understanding how customers assess the different aspects of local stores and their product quality, pricing, customer service, convenience and overall shopping experience. It is anticipated that the identified outcomes provide local store owners with insights to enhance their services and build relationships between customers, thus increasing competitiveness in the future retail landscape.

Conclusion: Customer satisfaction is one of the most important factors in local retail business success. Given that customer expectations are ever-changing, local stores will need to back up these promises with good products, fair pricing and service as well as a comforting shopping experience. Focusing on the customer and improving online shopping will allow your local store to create lasting relationships with customers, which brings resiliency in a competitive market.

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Over the past decades, retail has transformed massively with the emergence of supermarkets and shopping malls along with online platforms. This is strongly pulling players to local retail stores that customers might expect. Customer satisfaction has become the cornerstone of longevity for any local retail store, as it helps them attract customers and retain their support.

Customers still prefer shopping from local retail stores because of their convenience, accessibility and personalized services. But today's customers are looking for a bit more than convenience. They expect quality products, fair prices, amiable and fast service, product diversity as well as a meaningful shopping experience. If these expectations fail to be fulfilled, shoppers will opt for supermarkets, malls or online stores instead.

Even if customer satisfaction can lead to sustained growth of local retail businesses, the majority of retailers do not know what customers think about their products and services. We need to know about the factors impacting customer satisfaction and preferences of customers, and how they shop? This study is far more important since it aims at analyzing customer satisfaction of local retail stores and its drivers. The results of this study will improve local retailers' services, create a competitive advantage by better customer relations and relationship marketing with the growing potential of customers in new retail conditions.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To discover how happy customers are with the products and services offered by your local retail outlets.

- To determine the key factors that affect customer satisfaction, such as product quality, price/selling margin, service quality, store location and availability of items.
- Based on this information, answer the questions that arise from studying customers' preferences, buying habits and shopping behavior when purchasing from local retail stores.
- To evaluate the quality and efficiency of customer service in local retail stores.
- To investigate the impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty and repurchase interest towards local retail shops.
- To make practical suggestions and recommendations that could assist local retail stores in increasing customer satisfaction for their overall business.

2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the level of customer satisfaction for products and services provided by local retail stores?
- What are the key variables affecting customers' shopping experience at local retail stores?
- Four: How do product quality, pricing and availability affect customer satisfaction?
- How is service rated by customers for local retail stores by the customers?
- Now, what do customers who visit local shop categories such as retail stores typically buy?
- Have location and store accessibility become important factors for customers to shop?
- Why is customer satisfaction crucial for driving customer loyalty and repeat purchases?
- Will customers eventually return to shopping at brick-and-mortar stores, so that they may have the opportunity to spend their money with you on a local level in order to recommend your establishment amongst family and friends?
- What are the challenges or customer problems that customers face while shopping during local retail stores?
- How can local retail stores make sure their customers are happy and come back for more?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. KOTLER AND KELLER (2016) – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Kotler and Keller stated that customer satisfaction is one of the most important factors for the success of any business. They said that customers are happy whenever a product or service meets or exceeds their expectations. The authors write that firms need to understand customer needs and offer beneficial products, solutions or services in response. They also revealed that happy customers are more likely not only to return but also to recommend the business, and this is what helps retailers with their long-term growth.

3.2. ARMSTRONG AND KOTLER (2020) – IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER VALUE

Based on Armstrong and Kotler, value creation leads to strong long-term customer relationships. Edit | Sell It Step Back In performance by factors such as quality, price, convenience, and general shopping experience, customers judge products or services. Companies that have a recurring better value are 20-50% more likely to increase customer acquisition, satisfaction and loyalty.

3.3. ZEITHAML, BITNER, AND GREMLER (2018) – SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler service quality creates customer satisfaction. Their study found that customers want consistent and efficient services when they interact with a business. Customer perceptions are influenced by factors such as the behavior of staff, service time and communication and response. The conclusion of the research was that companies giving such service will lead to better customer retention and relationship building.

3.4. LEVY, WEITZ, AND GREWAL (2019) – RETAILING MANAGEMENT AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Impact of retail management and consumer behavior (Levy, Weitz & Grewal). According to their research, store location, product variety and pricing policies, as well as store atmosphere and convenience, are major factors behind customers' shopping decisions. The authors of the paper further recommended that retailers periodically reevaluate customer preferences and modify strategies to reflect ongoing shifts in market dynamics as well as consumer expectations.

3.5. OLIVER (2015) – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Oliver focused on the link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Researchers found that customers who had a positive shopping experience were more likely to return and make further purchases from the same retailer. It also revealed that brand loyalty leads to more sales, mouth-to-mouth advertising and long-term profits for a business. Thus, keeping customers happy will drive more business in the long run.

3.6. PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML, AND BERRY (1988) – SERVQUAL MODEL

The important SERVQUAL model is the type introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) to measure service quality. The model is made up of five important dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. As they said in their research, the improvement of these dimensions should yield significantly increased customer satisfaction. Today, it is regarded as a seminal resource for firms looking to enhance service quality and customer experiences.

3.7. GUPTA AND GUPTA (2021) – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN RETAIL STORES

Gupta and Gupta examined the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty toward retail stores. The results revealed that consumers were influenced by product quality, low prices for the products offered, availability of goods or services and customer service. The study found that more business with loyal customers and greater customer retention of retailers would happen by meeting the right expectations from shoppers, carrying on a shopping experience characterized by making purchases in full.

4. RESEARCH GAP

While the volume of research on customer satisfaction with respect to the retail sector is massive, the majority focuses only on supermarkets/shopping malls/organized retail shops and online shopping behaviour. These studies predominantly study aspects like quality, price, service and customer experience variables leading to loyalty. On the other hand, customer satisfaction related to local stores, which are still significant in the daily needs of consumers and hence little attention is often overlooked.

So why are local stores different than large retailers? They are characterized by personalised service, closer customer relationships, greater convenience and immediate availability of products. Even though they possess unique potential attributes, conceptualizes that how these factors influence customer satisfaction and loyalty in smaller retail stores remains relatively unexplored. Also, consumer preferences, technical developments and acceptance of online shopping have immensely changed how people behave while shopping recently. As a result, the results from prior studies may not fully represent what customers of local stores now expect and experience.

Another major gap in extant literature is the inadequate research into how product quality, price high or low, service quality, store environment and employee behaviour play roles collaboratively in customer satisfaction. Requires a focus on local store customers again.

Therefore, the present study strives to address this gap by analyzing customer satisfaction towards local stores and also identifying key contributors to customers' perception, consumer shopping experience, as well as purchasing decision making. The study will be beneficial for local retailers in understanding customer satisfaction and enhancing customer loyalty.

5. OBJECTIVES

To find out the extent to which customers are happy with goods and services provided by local businesses.

- To find the key drivers of customer satisfaction such as product quality, pricing and customer service.
- To analyze the views and experiences of consumers about their local stores when they are shopping.
- To analyze the impact of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty on repeat buying behavior.
- The aim is to give them practical suggestions that can help local store owners maximise customer satisfaction and, in turn, lead businesses.

6. HYPOTHESIS

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): The factors affecting local stores do not significantly affect customer satisfaction.
- H_1 : The quality of service impacts customer satisfaction in local brick and mortar stores
- H_2 : Increased Product Quality In Local Markets Enhances Customer Satisfaction.
- H_3 : Fair and reasonable prices positively influence customer satisfaction.
- H_4 : The more satisfied the customer is, the higher their loyalty and repeat purchasing behavior in local stores.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is the most important segment of a research study as it provides us with an organized and systematic way to collect, analyze and interpret data. It assists the researchers in gathering precise and dependable information to meet study objectives. The present research has been developed to study customer satisfaction towards local retail stores and various factors influencing customers' shopping experience. The following issues are related to the quality of a product, price, service department and store location for products marketed in this study; basic fundamentals are substantiated. The study intends to explore customers' perceptions and expectations from local retail stores using an appropriate research methodology.

7.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Based on the study conducted, it utilizes a descriptive research design that is best for understanding customers' perceptions, attitudes and satisfaction. The Qualitative research describes a scenario that gives an overall picture and does not influence the way any response from the respondents. This allows the researcher to obtain in-depth detail about consumer behavior, habits as they pertain to shopping for products and services rendered by local retailers, among other things like dressing sense or product preference.

Data has been collected from customers by means of a survey method. An organised questionnaire was developed and administered among the respondents to get their opinions regarding various aspects of local retail stores. The survey responses were later collated and analysed to make some recommendations.

7.3. SOURCES OF DATA

7.3.1. PRIMARY DATA

Primary data is fresh or directly collected from the respondents for a specific purpose of study. In this study, primary data was collected by using a structured questionnaire for customers who frequently shop at retail stores in neighborhoods. The questionnaire contained questions concerning product quality, price, convenience of stores and customer service in those respective stores.

7.3.2. SECONDARY DATA

The research is based on secondary data obtained from published and unpublished sources in order to help conduct the study and construct a theoretical foundation for this investigation. These sources include:

- Retail and marketing management books
- Research journals and academic articles
- Newspapers and magazines
- Company reports and publications
- Websites and online databases
- Homologous studies regarding customer satisfaction in retailing

7.3.3. TOOLS USED FOR ANALYSIS

The tools used to analyze and interpret the collected data were:

- Percentage Analysis
- Tabular Presentation
- Bar Charts and Pie Charts
- Descriptive Statistical Techniques
- Comparative and Interpretative Analysis

These tools were useful in visualizing the data simply and easily, allowing trends based on patterns or customer opinions too.

7.3.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like all research, this study has its limitations. The following limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting these findings:

- May not be indicative of all customers in different regions since the study is only for a particular area
- The results reflect the opinion and perception of respondents, which may differ from person to person.
- When the LMF learned of our study, they offered to conduct a survey for their broader network (to increase the sample size), but only in so far as time and funds permitted.
- Towards the end, how true and clear-headed they are while responding to the questionnaire plays a pivotal role in the veracity of results.
- The research only examines local retail stores rather than customer satisfaction levels with supermarkets, shopping malls or online retail markets.
- Although customers may have rated their experience highly at one point, future changes in customer preference or market conditions might inevitably affect levels of satisfaction and purchasing behavior.

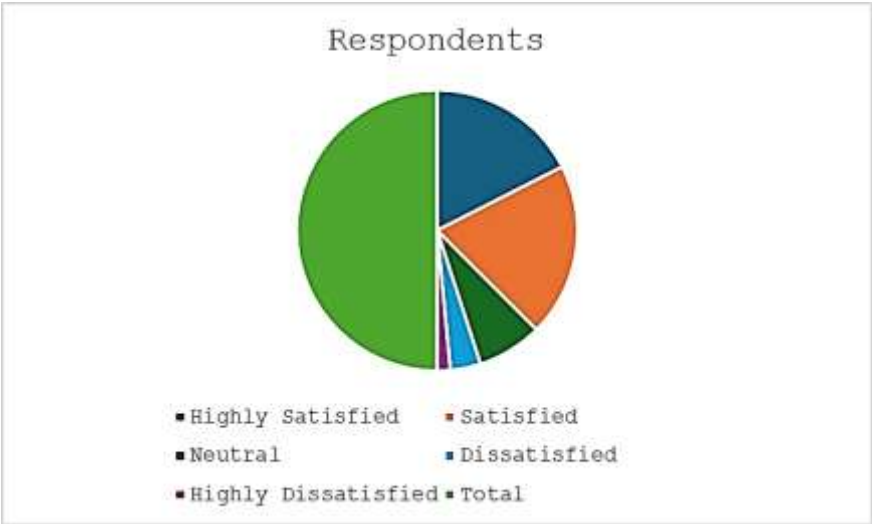


FIGURE 1 Overall Customer Satisfaction

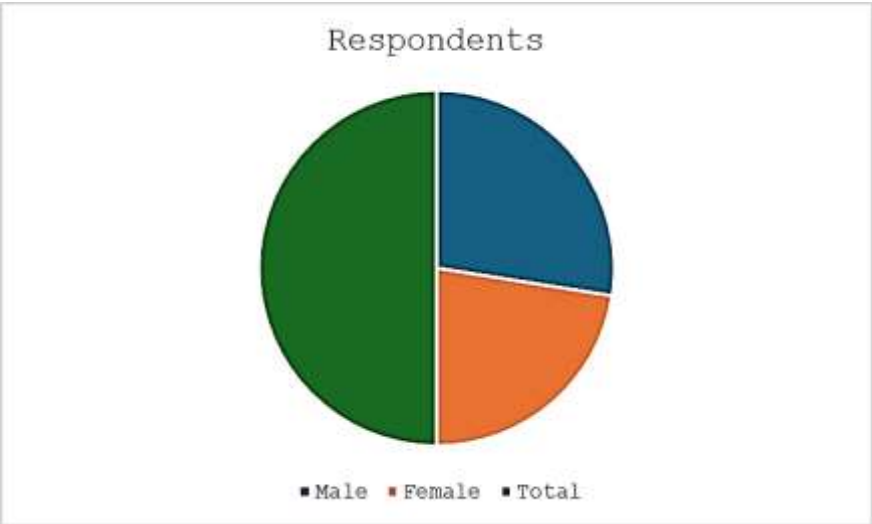


FIGURE 2 Gender of Respondents

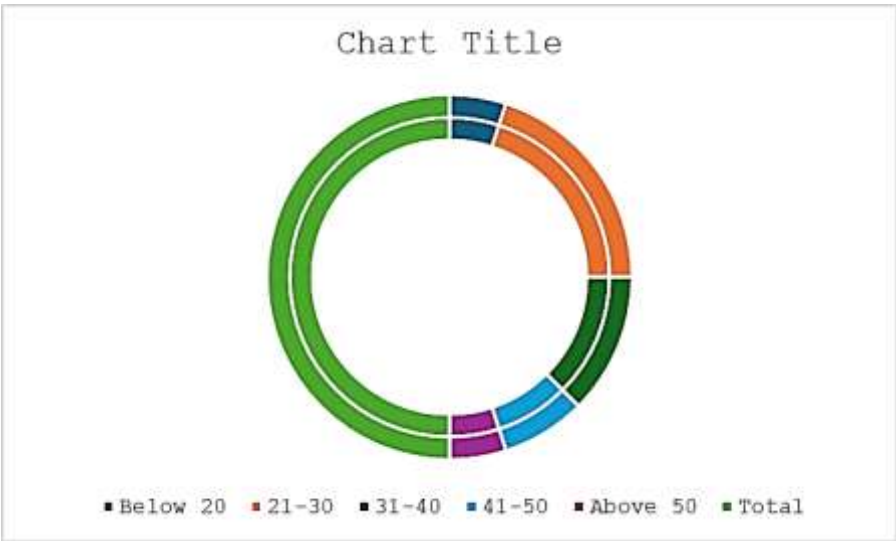


FIGURE 3 Age Distribution

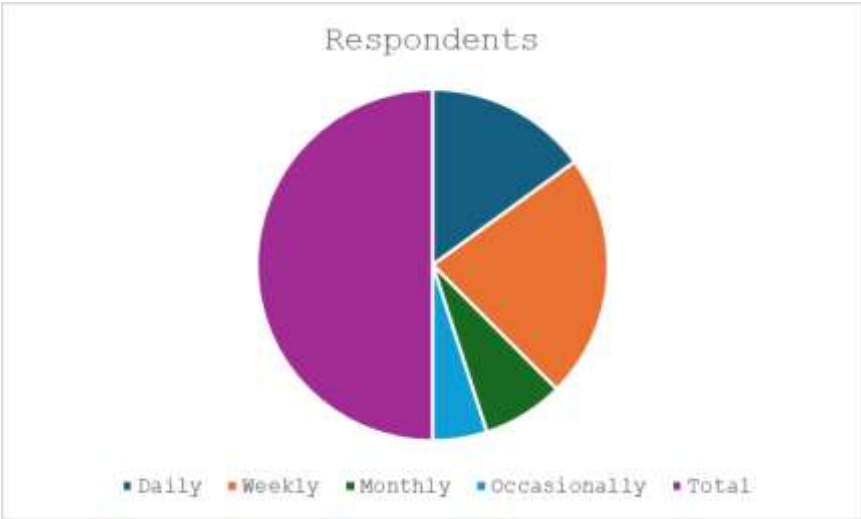


FIGURE 4 Frequency of Visiting Local Retail Stores

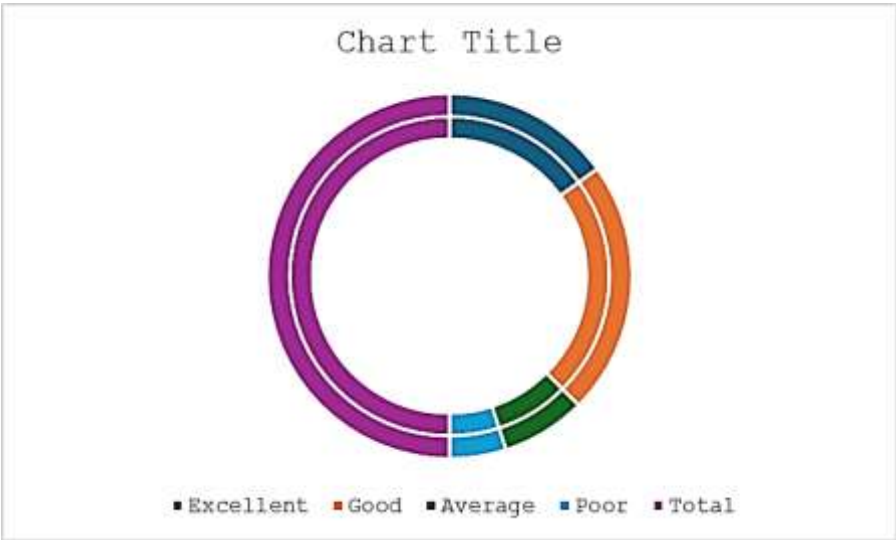


FIGURE 5 Main Reason for Choosing Local Retail Stores

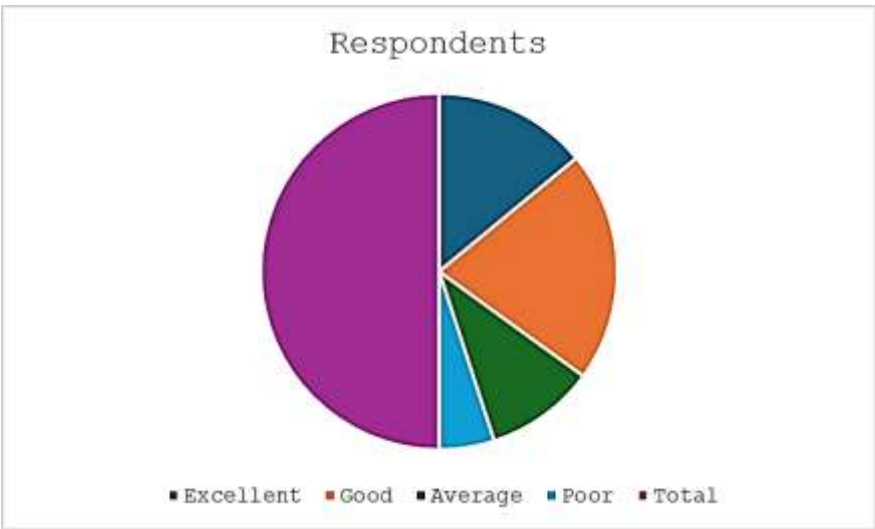


FIGURE 6 Customer Service Rating

7.4. KEY FINDINGS

- Three-quarters of customers are happy with high street retailers.
- Local stores are the first choice because of convenience.

- You are better at product quality and customer service.
- That said, 82% of respondents would recommend local retail stores to someone else.
- A typical customer frequents local retail stores once a week.
- The age group of between 21 –30 years likely forms the largest share of customers

8. FINDINGS

The study found that most customers are happy with the products and services offered by local stores. Their contentment stemmed mainly from the convenience of shopping in their vicinity and that buying daily necessities had become easier for them.

- Product quality, good price and excellent service were dubbed the three major driving factors for customer satisfaction; the said stores attracted customers who came to buy quality good at a reasonable price.
- Most of the respondents were positive about their experience while shopping in local stores. They valued the personal interaction and friendliness of shop owners and employees.
- Findings have shown that satisfied consumers will repeatedly return to the same store and recommend it. This indicates that customer satisfaction is directly proportional to customer loyalty.
- The customers suggested having more emphasis put on improving customer satisfaction by increasing variety, stock and competitive prices at the local stores.
- Home delivery, flexible payment methods and credit services were seen as valuable to enhance the overall shopping experience.
- Supermarkets and nominal online shopping portals are a great deal now, but still there is no denying the fact that many people continue sticking to local stores because of their convenience, personal touch and customer relationships.
- A tidy and organized store environment positively affects customer perceptions and increases the comfort of shopping.
- In terms of customer satisfaction, employee and store owner behavior has been important. The service was nice and helpful, and made us go back to the shop.
- In general, the results show that customer satisfaction is critical for convenience store businesses to ensure customers do not switch grocery stores, enhance their loyalty and leverage support from consumers, which would result in further business growth of the local company.

9. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to focus on customer satisfaction concerning retail outlets in the local market, which is essential for perceiving customers' needs and preferences along with expectations following an unexpected turn in the retail sector. While shopping during the pandemic shifted largely online, local retail stores still remain an important part of consumers' lives, offering convenience and easy access to products with personalized attention. Supermarkets, shopping malls and online shopping are in vogue, but localized retail shops still continue to be popular with customers thanks to them being closer to the community, thereby making it easier for them to get a more personalized experience while they shop. The results of the research reveal that customer satisfaction is a function of all major driving factors like product quality, price, availability of products, which includes the right season and clothing line, etc., store location at the shopping point for easy approachability and lastly customer service in-store, namely cash counter speed, checkout experience, as well as overall shopping experience. People go to local retail stores because they are easier to reach and more comfortable. Customers also place a high value on personal contact with the store owner or employee, and this is indispensable for creating an excellent shopping experience along with solidifying customer trust.

The study indicates that product quality is one of the top determinants for customer satisfaction. It is natural for customers to expect local retailers to offer them quality and dependable products that meet their needs. Likewise, fair and reasonable prices are paramount to attract customers as well as retain them. For stores that provide value for money and have a good consumer experience, shoppers are more likely to return. The accessibility of the product also plays an important role, since people prefer a store where they can get every single item that is required without any delay or inconvenience. Some other important things they found out are customer service. Quick responses, polite staff and kind behavior with customers make a huge impact on customer retention because the associate is engaging at times to enhance their approach in solving a client issue. When customers are treated with respect and their need for attention is met when they require help, it is something. So it will be better for local retailers to work on their service standards, which can help you connect with the customer, thereby leading to repeat purchases. The study also points to the importance of location and convenience. Often customers prefer the local place to be because it includes everything you need in one location and saves time getting there instead of driving to a big shopping centre. An organized and delightful store space allows you to better engage with customers, improve their satisfaction and encourage customers to visit again.

Moreover, this study demonstrates the strong correlation of customer satisfaction with loyalty. Happy customers will return to the store, re-order and promote it further. Moreover, positive referrals from customers will be a good way for local retailers to bring in new clients and grow their reputation. In contrast, not giving customers the spiritual and practical buying experience that they crave means a loss of business and revenue from them switching stores. The research also highlights some challenges that customers encounter in local retail stores while shopping. Problems such as narrow range of products, seasonal stock-outs, outdated infrastructure in some locations and sporadic service delivery can present themselves. Attention to the problems mentioned above does go a long way in enhancing overall customer experience. Retailers must ask for feedback from the customers and work on it.

Analysis of the Results: It can be concluded through analysis that local retail stores have great chances to flourish and become successful only by working on customer satisfaction. Together with a focus on product quality, competitive pricing and continued availability of products at low prices meaning avoiding stock-out situations and good performance in customer service- retailers can ramp up their loyalty factor among customers along with an improved business scorecard. Modern technologies, including digital payment methods, inventory management tools and customer relationship management practices, can also help retailers grow efficiency in managing their entire supply chains to meet consumer expectations better. In addition, local retailers must keep a finger on the pulse of ever-changing customer preferences and market trends. Being aware of consumer tendencies and adjusting to the new expectations will be beneficial for them to know how they can continue competing in retail. If you trust someone, they can build long-standing relationships by reaching out with reliable service and identifying customer needs through personalized services, which will lead to sustainable business growth and success.

In conclusion, satisfaction is the primary indicator of success for local retail stores according to this study. Satisfied customers not only help to achieve higher sales and profits but also contribute a lot to building the business image through loyalty or word-of-mouth. Hence, local retailers should continuously raise the bar for their products and services as well as their shopping environment in order to meet the expectations of their customers and achieve long-term success in a more competitive landscape.

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