

# Customer Experience Management in Indian Retailing Sector – An Empirical Study of Select Retail Formats in Andhra Pradesh, India

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**Abstract** - Many customers make a decision regarding where to shop based on their attitude toward a mix of stores, the shopping centre environment and the entertaining shopping experience. The shopping motives of the customers can be divided into three categories: product oriented, experiential oriented and a combination of both. The last category occurs when the shopper seeks to satisfy a purchase need as well as enjoy a pleasurable recreational experience (Ibrahim 2002). All the retail customers above the age of 18 years who shop at the various organised retail outlets present in the Vijayawada were considered for the study. Respondent for the study is the person who does shopping in supermarket/hypermarket within the limits of the Vijayawada city. The geographical scope of the study is confined to Vijayawada– which is one of the most vibrant markets in Andhra Pradesh.

**Keywords:** *Customer Experience Management (CEM), Indian Retailing Sector, Retail Formats*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Survival in today's economic climate and competitive retail environment requires more than just low prices and innovative products. To compete effectively, businesses must focus on the customer's shopping experience. To manage a customer's experience, retailers should understand what "customer experience" actually means. Customer experience includes every point of contact at which the customer interacts with the business, product, or service. Customer experience management represents a business strategy designed to manage the customer experience. It represents a strategy that results in a win-win value exchange between the retailer and its customers. Several strategies are identified to deliver a superior customer experience which results in higher customer satisfaction, more frequent shopping visits, larger wallet shares, and higher profits (Grewal et al 2009).

The phrase 'positive customer experience' has become a slogan for companies large and small in their never-ending efforts to attract and retain business. The reason is obvious: a positive customer experience is a marketplace differential for any company seeking to distinguish itself from competitors. Carbone and Haeckel (1994) have pointed out that the traditional product/service value proposition is no longer adequate for reaching customers or creating differentiation and have suggested that businesses must elevate the customers' experience to the prominence they give to products and services, thereby,

creating a seamless total experience in which products and services are the elements. Organizations need to develop competencies in creating and managing great customer experiences that leave lasting impressions on customer's mind. Managing each customer's experience is perhaps the most important ingredient in building customer loyalty (Crosby and Johnson 2007).

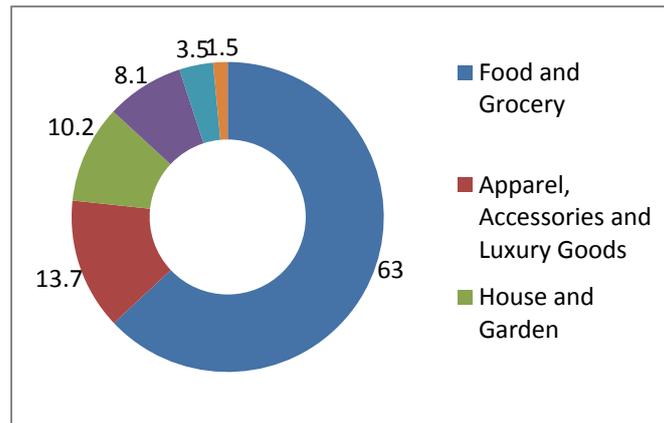
### 1.1. RETAIL INDUSTRY: AN OVERVIEW

The global retailing industry had total revenue of \$10,526.1 billion in 2010, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.3% for the period spanning 2006-2010. The food and grocery segment was the most lucrative segment in 2010, with total revenue of \$6,630.2 billion which is equivalent to 63% of the industry value. The performance of the industry is estimated to accelerate, with an anticipated CAGR of 4.6% for the five year period: 2010-2015 which is expected to drive the industry to a value of \$13,206.3 billion by the end of 2015. The global retailing industry grew by 3.9% in 2010 to reach a value of \$10,526.1 billion. The compound annual growth rate of the industry in the period 2006-10 was 4.3%. Retailing has played a major role in the global economy. In developed markets, retailing is one of the most prominent industries. In 2008, the US retail sector contributed 31% to the GDP at current market prices. In developed economies, organized retail has a 75-80% share in total retail as compared with developing economies, where unorganized retail has a dominant share. In 2008,

the slowdown in the global economy and credit crunch led

to decreased consumer spending.

**Figure 1.1 Global retailing industry segmentation**



The global retailing industry is heavily fragmented despite the presence of large international players. There are a large number of buyers present in the global retailing industry, which reduces their power. However, the recent economic downturn has seen more consumers seeking value for money which puts pressure on retailers to deliver branded products at low cost. The leading incumbents within this industry group are Wal-Mart, Carrefour SA, Metro AG and Tesco, who together hold only 6.8% of the total industry value. Thus the industry is heavily fragmented with a large number of players present. The advent of online retailing means that players can now distribute products more easily, reaching more people. However, it also means that there are greater opportunities for new companies to enter into this industry. This puts further pressure on players. Furthermore, buyers are not constricted by switching costs. Overall, competition is strong within the retail industry.

### 1.2. INDIAN RETAIL INDUSTRY

India's retail market is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10 per cent to US\$ 1.6 trillion by 2026 from US\$ 641 billion in 2016. While the overall retail market is expected to grow at 12 per cent per annum, modern trade would expand twice as fast at 20 per cent per annum and traditional trade at 10 per cent. Indian retail market is divided into "Organised Retail Market" which is valued at \$60 billion which is only 9 per cent of the total sector and "Unorganized Retail Market" constitutes the rest 91 per cent of the sector. India's Business to Business (B2B) e-commerce market is expected to reach US\$ 700 billion by 2020. Online retail is expected to be at par with the physical stores in the next five years. India's total potential of Business to Consumer (B2C) is estimated to be US\$ 26 billion, of which \$3 billion can be achieved in the next three years from 16 product categories, according to a study by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT).

### 1.3. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

In order to achieve long-term financial benefits, companies must design and deliver a service that satisfies customers so that they have a positive experience during the service encounter (Lovelock et al 2004). Many customers make a decision regarding where to shop based on their attitude toward a mix of stores, the shopping centre environment and the entertaining shopping experience. The shopping motives of the customers can be divided into three categories: product oriented, experiential oriented and a combination of both. The last category occurs when the shopper seeks to satisfy a purchase need as well as enjoy a pleasurable recreational experience (Ibrahim 2002). Managers need to recognise the importance of creating value for their customers in the form of experiences (Berry et al 2002). Offering products or services alone is not enough. Organisation must provide their customers with satisfactory experience. Gilmore and Pine (2002) agree by saying that the way for a company to reach its customers is through creating a memorable experience for them. It is said that companies should be urged to create market experiences by creating places (real or virtual) where they can try out offerings as they indulge themselves in the experience.

## II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Competition is very strong in the retail environment in India due to the presence of number of players and also due to the stiff competition from the unorganized sector. Hence, it is necessary to differentiate oneself from the rest of the players. Therefore, it is necessary to find out through literature review the various determinants of customer experience which can act as strategic differentiators. Customer experience is a recent phenomenon in India and there are not much studies focusing on this and it remains a fairly an underexplored area. Organised retailing is gaining a lot of importance since many large players are keen to setup their footprints in India. This study can make a significant contribution to understand customer experience in the Indian context. The purpose of the study is to understand the determinants of

customer experience for the various retail formats namely supermarket, department store, hypermarket, mall, specialty store and branded store. The intense competition among the retailers offers a wide array of choices for the customer and hence there arises a need for studying the determinants of customer experience through which the retailer can provide a superior customer experience thereby differentiating them self from the competitors. Obtaining and sustaining a competitive advantage in retailing, specifically in Indian retail environment today sets the challenge to determine one thing that will differentiate one retailer from another. Retail establishments worldwide are trying to find that sustainable competitive advantage and it currently seems possible by strategically focusing on customer experience and the various determinants.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To measure the experience of the customers at the supermarkets and hypermarkets
2. To identify the set of determinants which the customer consider as the most important contributors to experience.
3. To find out whether there is any significant difference in the determinants of customer's experience in supermarket and hypermarket.

### IV. METHODOLOGY & MEASUREMENT

**4.1. Sampling method** This study is descriptive in nature. All the retail customers above the age of 18 years who shop at the various organised retail outlets present in the Vijayawada were considered for the study. Respondent for the study is the person who does shopping in supermarket/hypermarket within the limits of the Vijayawada city. The geographical scope of the study is confined to Vijayawada– which is one of the most vibrant markets in Andhra Pradesh. The city was chosen as it had almost all major store formats which make the environment suitable for testing the model. Convenience sampling a method of non probability sampling was used for this particular study.

#### 4.2. Measurement

The survey questionnaire consists of two parts: part-A and part-B. The part-A consists of questions connected to

respondent's socio-economic, demographic profile. The responses are measured using nominal scales. The second part-B consists of items for customer experience and also for each dimension of the determinants. All items are measured on 5-point Likert scale (5 —strongly agree to 1 —strongly disagree). All the measurement items were adapted from the existing scales to measure the constructs proposed in the model. Pre testing of the questionnaire was done before the final survey (n=50). The internal consistency of the instrument was tested through reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha. All reliability results were in the range 0.70 to 0.92 which exceeds 0.70 limit of acceptability. The main survey was carried out with 500 respondents and 418 questionnaires were found to be valid of which 256 belonged to the supermarket category and 162 belonged to the hypermarket category.

#### 4.3. Analysis

The collected data were coded in an SAS spreadsheet and a simple statistical analysis such as frequency distribution and percentage was carried out along with multiple regression models. Linear regression using the enter method was used. Significance tests and  $\beta$  estimates were used to evaluate the magnitude and direction of the effect(s) of each of the determinants and the customer experience for both supermarket and hypermarket. Large tolerance values and variance inflation factors were observed, indicating no issues with multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 2006).

### V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table-1 provides a comparison of sample characteristics for supermarket and hypermarket. On examination of the respondents (n=418) indicated a majority of females (61.7% for supermarket and 54.9% for hypermarket) compared to males (38.3% for supermarket and 45.1% for hypermarket). In the case of supermarket a majority of respondents' age were in the range of 19 to 29 years (31.2%). In the case of hypermarket respondents age were in the range of 19 to 29 years (25.9%) followed by 30 to 39 years (33.3%), 24.1 percent indicating age between 40 and 49, 13 percent indicating age between 50 and 59 and 3.7 percent indicating ages greater than 60.

Table – 1: Sample characteristics

Variable	Level	Supermarket		Hypermarket	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	98	38.3	73	45.1
	Female	158	61.7	89	54.9
	TOTAL	256	100.0	162	100.0
Age	19-29 years	80	31.2	42	25.9
	30-39 years	75	29.3	54	33.3
	40-49 years	57	22.3	39	24.1
	50-59 years	30	11.7	21	13.0

	<b>Above 60 years</b>	14	5.5	6	3.7
	<b>TOTAL</b>	256	100.0	162	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Married</b>	179	69.9	112	69.1
	<b>Unmarried</b>	75	29.3	45	27.8
	<b>Others</b>	2	0.8	5	3.1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	256	100.0	162	100.0
<b>Monthly Income (In Rupees)</b>	<b>Less than 10000</b>	33	12.9	16	9.9
	<b>10001-20000</b>	52	20.3	26	16.0
	<b>20001-30000</b>	53	20.7	36	22.2
	<b>30001-40000</b>	48	18.8	22	13.6
	<b>40001-50000</b>	29	11.3	29	17.9
	<b>More than 50000</b>	41	16.0	33	20.4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	256	100.0	162	100.0
<b>Education</b>	<b>High School</b>	11	4.3	7	4.3
	<b>Diploma</b>	19	7.4	17	10.5
	<b>Graduate</b>	163	63.7	89	54.9
	<b>Post Graduate and above</b>	63	24.6	49	30.2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	256	100.0	162	100.0

The marital status of the respondents of supermarket and hypermarket shows that a majority of the respondents are married.

The income levels across the sample for supermarket can be seen that 12.9 percent of respondents indicate monthly household incomes less than 10000 rupees, 20.3 percent indicating incomes between 10000 and 20000, 20.7 percent indicating incomes between 20000 and 30000, 18.8 percent indicating incomes between 30000 and 40000, 11.3 percent indicating incomes between 40000 and 50000 and finally 16 percent indicating incomes greater than 50000. The income levels across the sample for hypermarket can be seen that 9.9 percent of respondents indicate monthly household incomes less than 10000 rupees, 16 percent indicating incomes between 10000 and 20000, 22.2 percent indicating incomes between 20000 and 30000, 13.6 percent indicating incomes between 30000 and 40000, 17.9 percent indicating incomes between 40000 and 50000 and finally 20.4 percent indicating incomes greater than 50000. Approximately in the case of supermarket, 4.3 percent of the respondents have completed high school, 7.4 percent have completed their diploma, 63.7 percent were graduates and 24.6 percent respondents hold a postgraduate degree or above. Approximately in the case of hypermarket, 4.3 percent of the respondents have completed high school,

10.5 percent have completed their diploma, 54.9 percent are graduates and 30.2 percent respondents hold a postgraduate degree or above.

### 5.1. Determinants and customer experience

The effects of the various determinants namely social environment, service interface; retail atmosphere, assortment, price, retail brand, previous customer experience and experience in the alternate channels were examined using linear regression. The resulting regression models for the dependent variable (customer experience) produced significant results including distinct predictors at varying alpha levels. The overall regression model for supermarket yielded a significant statistic ( $F=51.972$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) with previous customer experience ( $\beta=0.276$ ,  $t=5.041$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), atmosphere ( $\beta=0.320$ ,  $t=5.274$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), price ( $\beta=0.147$ ,  $t=2.080$ ,  $p<0.039$ ), social environment ( $\beta=0.175$ ,  $t=2.750$ ,  $p<0.006$ ) and experience in alternate channels ( $\beta=0.112$ ,  $t=1.991$ ,  $p<0.048$ ) as significant predictors. The overall regression model for hypermarket yielded a significant statistic ( $F=47.334$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) with previous customer experience ( $\beta=0.404$ ,  $t=6.695$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), assortment ( $\beta=0.191$ ,  $t=2.114$ ,  $p<0.036$ ), social environment ( $\beta=0.277$ ,  $t=4.078$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) and experience in alternate channels ( $\beta=0.121$ ,  $t=1.960$ ,  $p<0.052$ ) as significant predictors.

**Table – 2: Predictor effects and  $\beta$  estimates for determinants on customer experience**

Model / Predictor Variable	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	SE	$\beta$		
<b>Supermarket</b>					
<b>Constant</b>	0.477	0.230		2.078	0.039
<b>Past Experience</b>	0.261	0.052	0.276	5.041	0.000
<b>Atmosphere</b>	0.306	0.058	0.320	5.274	0.000

Assortment	-0.038	0.066	-0.040	-0.576	0.565
Price	0.135	0.065	0.147	2.080	0.039
Service interface	-0.054	0.063	-0.057	-0.853	0.395
Social environment	0.156	0.057	0.175	2.750	0.006
Retail brand	0.013	0.084	0.013	0.161	0.872
Alternate channel experience	0.091	0.046	0.112	1.991	0.048
<b>Hypermarket</b>					
Constant	0.036	0.252		0.143	0.887
Past Experience	0.398	0.060	0.404	6.695	0.000
Atmosphere	0.072	0.057	0.082	1.248	0.214
Assortment	0.194	0.092	0.191	2.114	0.036
Price	-0.011	0.094	-0.010	-0.118	0.906
Service interface	-0.037	0.076	-0.037	-0.487	0.627
Social environment	0.254	0.062	0.277	4.078	0.000
Retail brand	-0.005	0.100	-0.005	-0.051	0.959
Alternate channel experience	0.101	0.076	0.121	1.960	0.046

### 5.2. Discussions

From the demographic profiling of the customers it can be seen that for both the retail formats are visited by a majority of females roughly about 62% in case of supermarket. A relatively younger population seems to be patronizing these organised retail formats and there is significantly lesser patronage among the older customers. Roughly about 70% of the people visiting both the formats are married. Customers who visit supermarkets and hypermarkets belong to the middle income group of rupees 20000 to 30000 per month. Most of the customers are also highly educated with the number of graduates outnumbering the other categories. The regression model and its related  $\beta$  estimates indicate that in case of supermarket previous experience, atmosphere, price, social environment and alternate channel experience play a major role in creating a superior customer experience. In the case of hypermarket past experience, assortment, social environment and alternate channel experience play a major role in creating a superior customer experience? In both the formats the previous experience has a significant role in determining customer experience which clearly reiterates the fact that over a period of interactions the customers learn more about a particular attribute and they become more efficient users of it and that efficiency directly may affect the level of satisfaction they experience (Mittal et al., 1999). Therefore customer experience is significantly shaped or reiterated in the minds of the customer every time he comes in contact with the system and this makes it necessary for the retailer to provide a positive experience every time the customer comes in contact with the retail format.

In the case of supermarket atmosphere plays a significant role since the customer may feel that he has solely selected this format over the other local stores due to the fact that the space is designed more appropriately with facilities such as proper lighting, design, layout and music which may naturally lend a pleasant experience and this

atmosphere has a huge impact on customer experience in the supermarket customer. The significant influence of design cues on the shopping experience costs underscores the need for retailers to give careful consideration to store design features. These features have a great potential to influence the shopping experience and store patronage behaviour of shoppers/customers (Baker et al., 2002). In both the formats social environment plays a prominent role and this stresses the need for retailers to closely look into the components of social environment namely crowding, influence of friends/peers, the influence of parents and also that of the fellow customers. Previous studies have shown that the presence of co-customers can make or ruin the experience of the other customers. There are many studies showing that customers may affect one another indirectly by being part of the environment or more directly through specific interaction incidents (Baker, 1987; Bitner, 1992). Such an interactive incident may be an upside experience, or more likely a distressing experience. Therefore, fellow customers will be influenced by the perception of these customer-to-customer interaction incidents. Hence the retailer should make it a point to attract likeminded customers so that the experience of every customer is enriched. This would create a positive influence in the minds of the customer and enable them to further act as ambassadors by positive word of mouth. The retailer can thus take charge by attracting similar customers.

The demographic profile shows that the customers of both the formats are relatively younger, well educated, with a good income at their disposal, this clearly paves the way for their exposure to the other alternate ways of shopping, namely the internet for gathering information and also for shopping. The results clearly show that alternate channel shopping experience is a significant determinant in the case of and hypermarket. This emphasises the need for the retailer to significantly increase their offering through the internet to capture more customers and also to provide a

better online experience. This is necessary since the experience of the customers in this channel directly influences the in store experience. In India the level of internet usage is gradually increasing and it is necessary to focus on the rapidly growing importance of online shopping experience. Multichannel retailers stand to capture the most value from the internet because of the advantages of having an existing brand, marketing leverage, merchandising skills, multiple points of customer contact and distribution expertise (Hutchinson,2001). Multichannel retailing fosters long term loyalty by providing customers with shopping options for their convenience and ultimately long term business success (Dholakia, zhao, Dholakia, 2005).

Another determinant which significantly contributes to the customer experience in supermarket. It can be seen that the customers look forward to such deals. Various features such as club cards, frequent shopper programs and loyalty coupons and the other promotional deals are actively looked upon by the customers and hence the retailers should concentrate on these deals and differentiate themselves from the other retailers. Store loyalty programs that encourage repeat visits become barriers to switching (Dholakia, zhao, Dholakia, 2005). As many major services firms (supermarkets, department stores, car rentals, hotels, airlines, insurance, etc.) launched similar loyalty programs, many customers participate in multiple loyalty programs offered by different firms within the same industry. Consequently, it is more difficult for firms to compete for larger —share of wallet from their customers unless they can establish deeper relationship with their key customers (Wirtz et al., 2007). Assortment of goods actively contributes to the overall experience in hypermarkets. On comparison with the supermarket customers expect a wider range of products of several brands and better quality. The hypermarkets also store their own store brands along with several popular brands which gives a lot of choice to the customers. The customer experience is better shaped by a wide variety of choices.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study provides a comprehensive knowledge about the determinants of the customer experience for supermarkets and hypermarkets. This helps the managers to design appropriate strategies to attract and retain customers by providing a superior experience. Information about the demographics of customers for each format would reveal areas for offering customized marketing programmes. Past experience, social environment and alternate channel experience are the significant predictors for both the supermarket as well as hypermarket. In addition atmosphere and price act as significant predictors for supermarket whereas in case of hypermarkets assortment plays a significant role. It is suggested that the retailers take note of the significant predictors while developing retail format strategies. Given the absence of published academic

literature relating to customer experience in retailing in India, this study may serve as the starting point for future studies in this particular area of concern.

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