Customers Experience in Traditional Retail Stores During Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

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Abstract: **The Indian retail sector is predominantly traditional and continuing the preferred choice of consumers to purchase different products, especially during COVID-19. The dynamics of consumer's behavior leads to different experience from time to time in buying the goods from traditional stores. The reason for conducting the present study is to analyze the consumer's experience into two folds; firstly, to examine the categorical division of demographic attributes of consumers and secondly, the degree of problems that consumers have experienced in buying the goods from different traditional stores during COVID-19. Primary data has collected from 200 respondents through the mode of online data collecting tools such as Google Forms. Statistical tools such as the Percentage Method and Henry Garret Ranking have used for analyzing the data. Thus, the unavailability of goods has been the major problem experienced by the consumers in buying the products from traditional stores during COVID-19.**

Keywords: **Consumer perception, Demographic attributes, Traditional stores, Degree of problems.**

1. Introduction

The happening of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has drastically changed the perception and experience of consumers in their buying behavior globally. As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread in different geographical locations, the frequency of consumer visits to retail stores has decreased. There is a drastic slowdown in the consumption of goods. Consumers are worried more concerning food availability and affordability during the coronavirus pandemic. Presently, consumers are more focused on food availability and food quality. It has now observed that consumers are building the habit of bulk buying the goods and keeping an amount of stock at their home. Consumer involvement in cleaning the product and packaging when they return home from the store has recognized as one of the major concerns (Simpson, 2020).

Customer experience is a holistic perception of their experienced that encompasses the different aspects of a retail business such as the advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use, reliability, after-sale service (Madichie, 2012). Nowadays, customers have an increasing number of preferences towards retail stores than ever before. Customer experience is the element of customer satisfaction that needs to be given utmost importance by the retail business. The greater the delivery of retail offerings, the higher is the positive experience of the customers (Chris, 2007), (J. S. Dixit, 2020). In the present study, customer experience is the response to the offering of the traditional retail stores concerning to fulfillment of their needs. The paper has thrown light on the divergent problems of the customers that they have faced while buying the goods from traditional stores.

2. Literature Review

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared Corona Virus Disease, a pandemic of transmissible from person to person on March 11th, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Over 60 percent of global consumers have changed buying behavior, many of them for convenience and value. Consumer's experiences on buying behavior are trying to adjust to the new normal as they have learned to live with the reality of COVID-19. This crisis has stimulated the consumers to try a different brand or shop at a different retailer when they could not find their preferred product according to their choice. The main reason behind trying a different product or different retailer is due to the availability and quality of products. The author has articulated the percentage of consumer choice of different buying behavior since COVID-19 in 10 countries (Mckinsey, 2020).

Source: (Mckinsey, 2020)
Fig. 1. Percentage of consumers who have tried new shopping behavior

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The above figure shows that more than 75 percent of consumers have changed their buying habits in the UK, US, India, and China. Whereas, in Japan, the percent of consumers who changed their buying habits is only 33 since no lockdown has been imposed. There is a lot of bad news surrounding the novel coronavirus. However, there is one good thing that has happened due to the pandemic. More and more people are now becoming aware of the importance of establishments of traditional stores mostly the 'mom and pop' stores nearby the home (economic times, 2020). The new social distancing and hygiene norms have changed the buying habits of consumers in the selection of traditional stores fundamentally. The new rules framed by the government acts as alertness for the consumers in buying the basic necessity items from the less crowded place and return home. Keeping into mind the threat of COVID-19, consumer perception about the tendency of impulse buying behaviour has been reduced (Mukherjee, 2020). Looking at the nature of consumers; Capgemini Research Institute has critically studied the sentiments of consumers in eleven countries shown in Figure number 2, to know how sentimental, the consumers on the recovery of coronavirus in the next six months from April/ 2020.
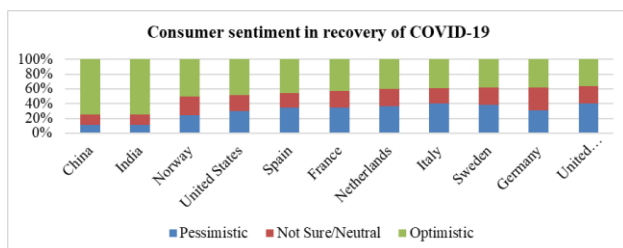
Source: Capgemini Research Institute, Consumer Behavior Survey
Fig. 2. Consumer sentiment in the recovery of COVID-19

China and India have been the only two countries where consumers have optimistic sentiments that there will be normalcy in the next six months consisting of shopping habits.

A large number of consumer's visits to different traditional stores have increased after the coronavirus pandemic. It has enabled the consumer's experience in a different environment in buying the products from traditional stores. Due to lockdown, traditional retailers have faced different challenges in filling up the shelves of their stores with different products and as a result, they could not satisfy the consumers with all their needs and wants. However, consumers have faced certain problems in buying the goods from traditional stores during COVID-19. The researcher has not come across any research paper to date that studied consumer experience in traditional stores about the degree of problem perspectives. In this context, the paper has attempted to examine the consumer perception and degree of problems in buying the goods from traditional stores during the coronavirus pandemic.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study have been framed to analyze the consumer experience in traditional stores during COVID-19:
1. To study the demographic attributes of the consumer.
2. To examine the degree of problems experienced by consumers during COVID-19.

4. Methodology of the Study

There has been ample literature review available on consumer experience and shopping behavior in the Indian context. However, there is a need for studying consumer perception and experience in the selection of traditional stores in the present times where Covid-19 has completely changed the retailing business. Data has been collected using an online survey through Google forms from consumers (N=200) in the demographic perspectives and degree of problems faced while shopping. The respondents for the study have been picked using a purposive sampling method. The consumers who visited traditional stores across prominent locations in Guwahati city for buying goods and services in the phase of the COVID-19 scenario have been contacted for the survey. The framework of analysis has been done into two folds; firstly, the demographic attributes such as gender, age, and marital status has been assessed on the selection of TS applying percentage method; and secondly, the degree of problems faced by consumers such as old stock, high price, Weighing problem, Long waiting time for billing, Trust, Selling low quantity, Poor after-sales service, Unavailability of products and Slow response and Difficult to exchange items have been assessed using weighted average score method. 200 consumers have been considered as a representative sample of the population, surveyed in mid-June, 2020.

5. Analysis and Findings

A. Demographic Profile

Table 1
Categorical division of respondents

Demographic Factors	Attributes	Percentage (%) of respondents
Gender	Male	67
	Female	33
Age	Below 20 years	17
	21-40	46
	41-60	37
Marital Status	Married	69
	Unmarried	31

Source: Compiled from online survey data

The demographic profile of the respondents shows the preliminary information of the selected respondents under the study. In the present study; gender, age, and marital status of the respondents have been included. The table number 1 shows that for Gender; 67 percent of the respondents are male and 33 percent of the respondents are female, for Age; 17 percent of the respondents are below 20 years, 46 percent are below 21-40 years and 37 percent are below 41-60 years, for Marital Status; 69 percent are married and 31 percent are unmarried.

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B. Degree of Problems

Customer encompasses many problems while shopping in traditional stores from time to time. Narrow merchandise, higher price, and limited quantity are the major problems faced by the customer in traditional retail stores (Balaji, Karthikeyan, & Kumar, 2013). The retailing industry is facing challenges as customer taste and preference keeps changing from time to time. In spite of getting the freedom and opportunity to shop freely, customer frequency of facing problem is seen to be increasing on many aspects i.e. inconvenient location, long queue for billing, a non-cooperative attitude of sales personnel, no home delivery, improper space management, poor after-sales service, selling of counterfeited products, unavailability of goods, unhygienic conditions of the store, improper parking facility, unavailability of branded items, lack of knowledge of retailers, billing problems. The study has found that customers face the highest problem of inconvenient location and improper parking facilities in unorganized retail stores (Gupta, 2012).

The present situated created during COVID-19 has bought additional problems for the customer in buying the goods and services from TS. The study has tried to cover the major degree of problems into 10 (factors) such as old stock (F1), high price (F2), Weighing problem (F3), Long waiting time for billing (F4), Trust(F5), Selling low quantity (F6), Poor after-sales service (F7), Unavailability of products (F8) and Slow response (F9) and Difficult to exchange items(F10) on observation of the researcher and in expert opinion with sample consumers'. The statistical method 'Henry Garret Ranking' has been used to evaluate the degree of problems faced by consumers during COVID 19.

As per this method, respondents have been asked to assign the rank for all factors and the outcomes of such ranking have been converted into score value with the help of the following formula:

Percent position = $100 (R_{ij} – 0.5)/ N_j$

Where R_{ij} is Ranks,

N_j is the Total rank given by 200 respondents (i.e. 10).

For each percent position value, Garret values have been calculated. To find the garret value, the study has used Garret Ranking Conversion Table where the percent and garret score has been given in table 3.

Table 3
Percent position and Garret values

Rank	100(R-0.5)N	Percent Position	Garret Value
1	100(1-0.5)N	5	82
2	100(2-0.5)N	15	70
3	100(3-0.5)N	25	63
4	100(4-0.5)N	35	58
5	100(5-0.5)N	45	52
6	100(6-0.5)N	55	48
7	100(7-0.5)N	65	42
8	100(8-0.5)N	75	36
9	100(9-0.5)N	85	29
10	100(10-0.5)N	95	18

Source: (Dhanavandan, 2016), (SHoDH, 2020)

Finally; for each factor, the scores of each respondent are added in table 4, and then the total value of scores and mean values of the score is calculated in order to find out the ranks. The factors having the highest mean value is considered to be the best.

Table 5
Henry Garret Ranking Scores

Factors	Mean Score	Rank
Old stock	160.62	5
Higher price	171.06	3
Weighing problem	174.47	2
Long waiting time for billing	164.25	4
Trust	120.48	9
Selling low quantity	129.06	8
Poor after sales service	147.84	6
Unavailability of products	181.92	1
Slow response	145.86	7
Difficult to exchange items	70.38	10

Thus, it is cleared from the above analysis (table number 2.3) that the major degree of problems faced by consumers in availing service from the traditional store during COVID-19

Table 2
Ranking the responses of respondents

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
F1	0	14	32	52	56	14	10	14	4	4
F2	18	16	24	70	24	24	14	1	4	5
F3	34	41	22	20	32	23	12	4	4	8
F4	32	14	28	16	10	24	48	22	6	0
F5	8	8	4	12	4	28	24	40	52	20
F6	18	20	8	10	8	18	24	10	44	40
F7	20	22	14	26	10	26	22	20	14	26
F8	36	18	74	14	6	16	24	4	6	2
F9	14	20	6	6	54	10	22	38	30	0
F10	0	0	14	0	0	0	4	2	30	150

Source: Compiled from online survey data

Table 4
Multiply the garret values with the respondent ranks

Factors	1*82	2*70	3*63	4*58	5*52	6*48	7*42	8*36	9*29	10*18	Total
F1	0	980	2016	3016	2912	672	420	504	116	72	16062
F2	1476	1120	1512	4060	1248	1152	588	36	116	90	17106
F3	2788	2870	1386	1160	1664	1104	504	144	116	144	17447
F4	2624	980	1764	928	520	1152	2016	792	174	0	16425
F5	656	560	252	696	208	1344	1008	1440	1508	360	12048
F6	1476	1400	504	580	416	864	1008	360	1276	720	12906
F7	1640	1540	882	1508	520	1248	924	720	406	468	14784
F8	2952	1260	4662	812	312	768	1008	144	174	36	18192
F9	1148	1400	378	348	2808	480	924	1368	870	0	14586
F10	0	0	882	0	0	0	168	72	870	2700	7038

has been the unavailability of products followed by weighing problem, higher price, long waiting time for payment, old stock, Poor after-sales service, slow response, selling low quantity, trust and difficult to change items.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In the light of the retail system; especially when the demand for traditional stores has been rapidly increasing at present due to the pandemic, the generalization of findings cannot be assumed with a limited sample size and geographical location. The consumers from other geographical locations may have a different perception. The limitations can be attended in the future by conducting more studies in other geographic areas where the drift is picking up due to COVID-19. A researcher may also conduct some more study in the future pertaining to problems faced by consumers and their perception of buying habits from shopping malls and online retailing keeping into consideration the uncertainty and crisis created by COVID-19.

7. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the traditional retailers and consumers to maintain safety, social distancing, and hygiene in buying and selling the products. Thereafter, the results revealed how goods unavailability during the crisis of COVID-19 has caused a major problem for the consumers in buying the goods from traditional stores. However, it could be reasonable to conclude that consumer perception will be changed with regard to goods unavailability post-COVID-19, once the trend of lockdown comes to an end in a complete manner.

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