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## Empirical study on role of customer service in delivering satisfaction at branded retail outlets in Pune

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### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to determine the prominent factors that are important in delivering customer satisfaction at branded retail outlets in Pune. Secondary data has been collected through research reports and research journals related to human resource and retailing. Primary data is being collected through informal interviews and structured questionnaires administered to front end employees and customers visiting selected retail formats in Pune and Mumbai. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 200 respondents who visited the malls in the two cities. Factor analysis was carried out to analyse the data. The results indicated that caring, problem solving, committed and helpful salesmen play an important role in delivering customer satisfaction. Hence salesmen skills is important dor customer satisfaction. The research will help retailers in designing marketing programs that will help give superior customer service. Good service leads to customer satisfaction and retention and profits for the retailers. This will also help the retailers to have a loyal customer base.

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*Keywords:* customer; satisfaction; retail

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## **1. Introduction**

In organized retail outlets, customer service is delivered by front end employees i.e. salespersons. Grönroos (2000) opined that customer service has played a very important role in every business and hence it is important to emphasize on training of employees rather than on material resources. As front end employees meet external customers and are responsible for customer service delivery, their skills impact on how store image is perceived by the customers. Ahmed and Rafiq (2002) in internal marketing, the focus is on employee satisfaction and as employees deliver service to customers, satisfied employees can better deliver customer satisfaction. Researchers (Brady and Cronin 2001) have re-affirmed the same. Service literature has been interested in the factors that influence the attitudes and behaviors of service employees and has examined the influence of organizational characteristics (e.g., Babakus et al. 2003), social environment (e.g., Sergeant and Frenkel 2000), global perceptions of the job (e.g., Singh 2000), and personality (e.g., Hurley 1998).

Behavioural skills of an employee play a vital role in delivering customer service. These skills create an impact on employee skills and help in achieving sales (Coll & Zegwaard, 2006) by improving and developing competencies of salespersons such as interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication and problem solving skills (Hind et al., 2007; Maher & Graves, 2007). Birkett (1993) developed taxonomy of cognitive skills and behavioral skills. According to Birkett, cognitive skills include technical skills - the application of technical knowledge with some expertise; analytical/constructive skills - problem identification and the development of solutions; and appreciative skills - evaluating complicated situations and making creative and complex judgements. Behavioural skills include: personal skills - how one responds and handles various situations; interpersonal skills - securing outcomes through interpersonal relationships; and organizational skills - securing outcomes through organizational networks.

The training on behavioural and technical skills imparted to the employees enables them in delivering customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction depends on how products and services meet or surpass customer expectation (Kotler et al., 2000). In a competitive marketplace where businesses are focusing on retaining customers, customer satisfaction is one of the differentiating factor. The paper investigates the impact of Employee Technical and Behavioural skills in delivering Customer Satisfaction at Organized Retail outlets in Pune. For study purpose, the behavioural skills such as communication, promptness in service, politeness, being available on request, willingness to help and convincing abilities have been selected. Similarly, technical skills such as product knowledge, cross functional knowledge, operational knowledge and complaint management have been selected.

## **2. Retailing in India**

Retailing can be said to be the interface between the producer and the individual consumer who is buying for personal consumption. This excludes direct interface between the manufacturer and institutional buyers such as the

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