

DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AT SUPERMARKETS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY FROM PAKISTAN

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Abstract: *Pakistan is an emerging economy. It provides great opportunity for organized corporate driven retailing. There have been few global retailers who have already tasted some success with their cash-n-carry and supermarket formats. Some home grown retailers have also made forays into this market. There is a lot of need to understand the consumer behavior towards modern retail practices in Pakistan. This research study is conducted with an objective to find out how various factors influence shoppers' behavior towards supermarkets with 300 respondents consisting of 150 males and 150 females by using shop intercept method in the cities of Lahore and Faisalabad in Pakistan. The outcomes of this study provide the insights to understand the influence of several factors like promotion and special offers, easy access to supermarket, geographically convenience and locality, customer services, exploration, pricing factor, socio-economic effects, cleanliness, aesthetics and escape from routine work on the consumer's perception.*

Key words: Pakistan; retailing; Supermarkets; Consumer Behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is among the subsequent eleven economies driving global growth [1] irrespective of continued stern challenges specifically energy crisis, natural disasters, poor law and order situation and barriers that have held back investment growth in the economy. The aggregate share of wholesale and retail trade in GDP for the fiscal year (FY) 2013 is 18.2 percent. The average growth rate of Pakistan economy during last five year was 2.9 percent per annum and 2.5 percent in the FY 2013. These figures lead to reflect the fact of raise in contribution to growth rate to 0.5 percent which was previously 0.3 percent [2]. 'Retail' is derived from a French word 'retailier' that means 'to break bulk' [3]. Traditional term 'retailer' has been replaced with momentous one stop shop culture in various developed and developing countries (like Japan, China, and Brazil etc). The flourishing of supermarkets as convenient destination for shopping, recreation and exploration of to date merchandise has turned the face of traditional retail industry. Pakistan's retail business is an emerging industry encouraging the clusters of retailers to upgrade customary retail system to the fashionable shopping malls and supermarkets. Initiation of the modern retail revolution provided a gateway into the hub cities for international wholesale chains and real estate like Metro Cash and Carry and Hyperstar etc. This arrival brought the local and foreign large scale investments along with the products from around the world with same quality, wide array of variety and value for money for domestic consumers.

One of the major reasons of fueling demand for the commercial real estate is less contribution of organized retailing in Pakistan which requires at least 3,000 sq ft to 20,000 sq ft. floor space for set up as an fundamental operational requirement [4]. Major cities of Pakistan like Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi etc. have received prodigious socio-economic contributions from these contemporary supermarkets making them prominent cities at local as well as regional level.

Punjab is the most densely inhabited province of Pakistan. It is hub for investment by local and multinational enterprises. The capital of Punjab, Lahore; with a population of more than

9 million is the 2nd largest city of Pakistan after Karachi. The market value of all goods and services and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remains the standard by which wealth is calculated and through which it ranks amongst 122 richest cities of the world [4].

Local eminent stores, like Al-Fatah and HKB persist in providing dedicated services in Lahore almost since the Pakistan came into existence in 1947. Nowadays, the major cities are eyewitness to the influx of international wholesale chains which have grown swiftly in the recent years.

In 2007, METRO inaugurated its first cash and carry wholesales chain in Pakistan. In July 2012 METRO and another supermarket chain Makro-Habib combined wholesale business in Pakistan [5]. At present the company is operational at 9 various locations in 'Punjab' at Lahore and Faisalabad, capital city Islamabad and 'Sindh' at Karachi. The company operates globally in above 700 stores in 29 countries including Asia, Africa and Africa with workforce of more than 100,000 employees [6]. Hyperstar (Carrefour) is wholesale store shelving up to 30,000 different products, operating lucratively in 'Punjab', Lahore and 'Sindh', Karachi with expansion plan to establish 7 new stores, 3 in Lahore and 4 in Karachi [7]. It was realized that there is a need to study the demand drivers and transformation in consumption pattern, preferences and habits that have fueled their growth simultaneously. The objective of this research study was to identify various factors and their influence on shoppers' behavior towards supermarkets in Pakistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is conducted for the assessment of the factors that determine consumer satisfaction while shopping at supermarkets in the following arrangements.

According to Tom and Lucey (1995) long response time leads to annoy the customers [8]. Tom and Lucey (1997) further studied the determinants of consumer satisfaction and concluded that customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction is based not only on the perceived waiting time, but also on the customer identification of the causes, as well as the stability and control of the causes [9]. The study of Priporas (2002)

found that Store image is an important and dynamic variable measured in Greece food retailing with the help of various dimensions [10]. According to Kaul (2005) easy to shop, convenience of location, variety of merchandise, decor and store personnel are major store attributes. Performance of any retail store is drastically affected by the excellence of the service being provided by the stores. Demographic factors like age, gender, education and occupation to household characteristics like family size, average monthly income and experience of shopping tenure etc. are affecting buying choice nowadays [11]. The study of Moazzam and Badar (2006) identified that a mainstream of Pakistani consumers seek an extensive assortment of quality products in adequate quantities under one roof. Sample survey of 52 % population is an evidence that attractive and convenient display is also a strappingly agreed upon driving factor [12].

According to Gounaris (2008), Sales staff can play an important role to satisfy the store customer by interaction of salesman and customer's accompanying by pleasant attitude [13]. Huddleston et al. (2009) concluded that satisfaction related to perception is higher for special grocery stores than convention stores. Store formats, assortment, product service, store price, and have positive impact on satisfaction. This was found by conducting a survey to customer of such stores from ten states of USA [14].

Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) has categorized customers in four types i.e. typical, social, occasional, and social out of which products, pricing, atmosphere, personnel, merchandising, in store convenience are found important determinants of and have positive effect on satisfaction [15]. According to Gobiraj et al. (2010) customer satisfaction was derived when expectations are fulfilled otherwise dissatisfaction occurred. Exploratory study carried out in main superstores of London shows a positive correlation between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction [16].

Mirza (2011) identified that larger number of the households with family size of 3-5 shopped at big supermarkets compared to those who shopped at general stores with large family size of 6-8 [17]. Mirza's study underlines that how consumers usually consider crowded shopping centers and long queues as major shopping stressors. Consumers have progressively resorted more to large, structured retailing stores with a spacious variety of products. 'One stop shop' solution entailed that consumers have started making 'planned' shopping in preference to needs-based purchases. In fact, by and large, a visit to modern retail centers may even signify an amusing family excursion where family members can shop together with ease and convenience [Ibid].

Noyan and Simsek (2011) adapted a model of Bloemer (2002) and Dickson's (1982) for determining consumer satisfaction via store image, customer relationship, and positive effect where the results showed that proneness to these factors plays a considerable role in creating customer satisfaction [18]. Mohan (2013) explored different cluster variables of service quality named 'shopping convenience-convenient', 'store environment-cleanliness', 'pricing and offers-promotion offers', 'customer service-staff responsiveness to enquiry' and 'correctness of billing', which derives customer satisfaction by using factor analysis [19]. Arshad et al. (2014) confirmed the determinants of

satisfaction empirically tested from worldwide literature where physical aspect, reliability, on time service, personal interaction with salesman and problem solving ability mostly determine the satisfaction in the customers of Pakistan [20].

2.1 Need for study

Low real estate rents and mounting desires are playing role of magnet for investments in range of sectors in Pakistan like apparel, fresh food, grocery and beverages, footwear, healthcare products, cosmetics, consumer electronics and home appliances etc. It is expected to rise by USD 30 billion in subsequent 3 years, at a rapid growth rate of 8 percent [4]. Such demand is driven by consumer's characteristics like education, income, shopping exposure, household size and number of dependents along with exogenous factors like quantity, quality, variety and ease of shopping. Retail set-up is anticipated to turn down by 50 percent in imminent years in favor of local and international large scale retailers and wholesale chains [Ibid]. On the other hand, in recent times shopping has turned into source of entertainment and recreation more than just a routine shopping. In Pakistan where retail industry is becoming competitive day by day, maintaining customer relationship has become fundamentally important. Consumer magnetism and retention is solely based on consumer satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction is a factor of compound of numerous latent variables. Modern retailing is a relatively new phenomenon in Pakistan. At micro level, an individual customer is influenced by many variables when he or she decides to shop at a supermarket instead of the traditional mom-and-pop stores. It is required to conduct an exploratory research and to understand those variables.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Shopping in supermarkets is persuaded by various factors. The objectives of this research was to find out how the following factors influence shoppers' behavior towards supermarkets - promotions and special offers, easy access to supermarkets, geographically convenience and locality, customer services, exploration, pricing factor, socio-economic effects, cleanliness, aesthetics and escape from regular routine work.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study is based on 300 respondents out of which 150 males and 150 females were selected by using Purposive Quota Sampling Method. A questionnaire was used as data collection instrument. Adequate literature review was carried out to develop the scale used in the questionnaire. Some of the items used in the scales were taken from Mohan's (2013) study [19]. Rest of the items was included based on the knowledge of the researchers as well as after discussions with experts from retail industry. The questionnaire has 33 items where the perception of the respondents can be captured on a 5-point Likert scale (1-being High in importance to 5- being Low in importance). Apart from these items, the questionnaire has the questions to capture the demographic profile of the respondents. Once the questionnaire was created, its validity was checked by again showing it to retail subject experts as well research methodology experts. A pilot study was conducted on 40 sample size. The reliability of the scale items was measured through Cronbach Alpha. Its value came out to be 0.735 which is more than adequate.

Hyperstar and Metro Cash and Carry are selected as targeted area. The responses were filled up by conducting face to face interview with consumers visiting 4 supermarkets locations operating in Lahore and Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

4.1 Sample Profile

The primary data consisting of 150 male and 150 female respondents has been gathered from 5 different groups of people belonging to different line of work and educational background. The sample contains 1% illiterate respondents followed by 9.3% literate with basic education, 3.3% with education upto matriculation, 16.7% intermediate, 24% post graduate and rest of the sample is covered by graduate i.e. 45.7%.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Strength of perception of individual attributes

As explained in the section 'Research objective', 10 factors have been identified, based on the literature review that influence the consumers' behavior towards shopping in supermarkets. Each of these factors has several embedded items which define it. In total 33 such individual items were included in the questionnaire. The first analysis was conducted to understand the strength of perception of each individual attribute.

A series of null hypotheses (H0) were formed which are as follows:

H01: Bi-weekly promotions are an important attribute for the customers for shopping in supermarkets

H02: Deal of the day is an important attribute for the customers for shopping in supermarkets

H03: Occasional special offer is an important attribute for the customers for shopping in supermarkets

and so on till

H033: To escape from the dull job routine is an important attribute for the customers for shopping in supermarkets

Single sample t-test was used as the statistical technique to test the series of null hypotheses. The test value (hypothesized mean) was taken as 2 (representing 'important' on the 1 to 5 scale taken in the study).

The results can be seen below in Table no 3 given in the annexures. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected in 6 items. Hence the attributes important for shopping in supermarkets are: one stop shop, trained and cooperative staff, comparatively low prices with respect to market, retail price discount factor, invoices are transparent, and interior design and product assortment of shelves.

The null hypothesis has been rejected in all the rest of 27 items out of 33 items present in the questionnaire. Looking at the means, we can deduce the following information:

The attributes which came out to be significantly high on importance for shopping in supermarkets are: cleanliness, and quality food products handling and packing.

The attributes coming out to be lower in importance are: bi-weekly promotions, deal of the day, occasional special offer, easy access to car parking area, free trolley services to the parking area, convenient supermarket hours, easy to go as near to residence / work area, convenient geographical location, no waiting to get staff attention, delightful customer service, handling and trying variety of new products, original products of my interest, new products in supermarkets, international brands, special discount on payment through

debit / credit cards, membership card benefits, enjoy going to supermarket with friends, staff courteous to regular customers, shopping meet up with standard of living, hygienic practices, cleanliness, quality food products handling and packing, lighting and decoration, music background, feeling of relaxation, visit to supermarket reducing stress, and visit to supermarket to escape dull job routine.

It is important to note that these attributes are coming relatively lower in importance than the rest only because the researcher created the null hypotheses of mean perception being 2 on a 5 point scale. However, in absolute sense, none of these attributes is really low in importance because in no case the mean is above 3 on the 5-point scale.

5.2 Strength of perception of the factors

The responses gathered on all the items within each factor were averaged to get an overall mean perception of the factor ranging from 1 to 5 with 1 denoting highly important to 5 denoting low importance.

The series of null hypotheses (H0) were formulated as follows:

H01: The overall promotions and special offer factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H02: The overall easy access factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H03: The overall geographical factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H04: Customer services is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H05: Exploration is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H06: Pricing factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H07: Socio-economics factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H08: Cleanliness factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H09: Aesthetics factor services is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

H010: The overall escape factor is important for customers for shopping in supermarkets

Again, this data was subjected to single sample t-test as the statistical technique to test the series of null hypotheses. The test value (hypothesized mean) was taken as 2 (representing 'important' on the 1 to 5 scale taken in the study). The results are depicted in table no 4.

The null hypothesis is not rejected only in one factor: Cleanliness. Thus cleanliness has emerged as an important factor for customers for shopping in supermarkets.

In all the other cases, null hypothesis is rejected. Looking at the means, we can infer that the apart from cleanliness, the top 3 factors which emerge as important are customer service, aesthetics and convenience. The factors which emerged as relatively less important are: promotion and special offers, easy access, geographical convenience, exploration, socio-economic effects, and escape factors.

Once again, it is important to note that these factors are coming relatively lower in importance than the rest only

Table 3: Single sample t-test results (N=300)

	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Bi-weekly promotions	3.00	1.188	14.579	299	.000*
Deal of the Day	2.90	1.196	12.984	299	.000*
Occasional Special Offer	2.19	1.028	3.200	299	.002*
Easy access to car parking area	2.33	1.134	5.041	299	.000*
Free Trolley services to the parking area	2.31	1.113	4.875	299	.000*
Convenient supermarket hours	2.35	.923	6.633	299	.000*
Easy to go as its near to residence or place of work	2.38	.933	6.990	299	.000*
Convenient geographical location	2.40	.947	7.376	299	.000*
One stop shop	1.97	1.004	-.575	299	.566
No waiting to get staff attention	2.27	.868	5.389	299	.000*
Trained and cooperative staff	2.04	.865	.801	299	.424
Delight Customer Services	2.20	.884	3.855	299	.000*
handling and trying variety of new products	2.43	.895	8.321	299	.000*
Original Products of my interest	2.27	.893	5.170	299	.000*
Supermarket is a good place to find out what is new	2.45	1.009	7.671	299	.000*
Wide Range of International Brands availability	2.18	.883	3.598	299	.000*
Comparatively low prices with respect to market	2.23	2.090	1.878	299	.061
Retail Price Discount Factor	1.94	.834	-1.177	299	.240
Special discount on payments through debit / credit cards	2.39	1.215	5.606	299	.000*
Membership card benefits	2.63	1.288	8.520	299	.000*
Invoices (receipts) are transparent	2.10	.964	1.857	299	.064
Enjoy going supermarket with friends	2.39	1.141	5.871	299	.000*
Staff is friendly and courteous due to being regular customers	2.28	.919	5.278	299	.000*
Shopping meet up with standard living of life	2.13	.867	2.664	299	.008*
Hygienic practices	2.09	.773	2.017	299	.045*
Cleanliness	1.80	.773	-4.557	299	.000*
Quality food products handling and packing	1.87	.881	-2.557	299	.011*
interior design and product assortment of shelves	2.05	.898	1.029	299	.304
The Lightning and decoration	2.16	.925	2.935	299	.004*
The music background	2.41	1.055	6.733	299	.000*
I get the feeling of relaxation	2.35	1.012	5.936	299	.000*
Visiting the supermarket causes stress reduction	2.81	1.136	12.345	299	.000*
Visit supermarket to escape from the dull job routine	2.94	1.221	13.287	299	.000*

Note: $p < 0.05$ (significant at 95% confidence level)

Table 4: Single sample t-test results for factors (N=300)

	M	SD	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
meanpromo	2.6956	.95334	12.637	299	.000*
meanaccess	2.3322	.78233	7.355	299	.000*
meanconv	2.2489	.67793	6.359	299	.000*
meancustserv	2.1689	.69424	4.214	299	.000*
meanexplor	2.3317	.52368	10.970	299	.000*
meanprice	2.2600	.79488	5.655	299	.000*
meansoeco	2.2667	.67608	6.832	299	.000*
meancleanliness	1.9189	.63797	-2.202	299	.028
meanaesthetics	2.2067	.78415	4.565	299	.000*
meanscape	2.6978	.92759	13.029	299	.000*

Note: $p < 0.05$ (significant at 95% confidence level)

Table 5: Group Statistics for Gender

	Gender	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
meanpromo	Male	150	2.8067	1.08633	.08870
	Female	150	2.5844	.78667	.06423
meanaccess	Male	150	2.1133	.83262	.06798
	Female	150	2.5511	.66216	.05407
meanconv	Male	150	2.0778	.65813	.05374
	Female	150	2.4200	.65587	.05355
meancustserv	Male	150	2.0422	.74615	.06092
	Female	150	2.2956	.61492	.05021
meanexplor	Male	150	2.2467	.56163	.04586
	Female	150	2.4167	.46942	.03833

meanprice	Male	150	2.2693	.72759	.05941
	Female	150	2.2507	.85928	.07016
meansoceco	Male	150	2.1889	.65015	.05308
	Female	150	2.3444	.69452	.05671
meancleanliness	Male	150	1.7467	.47248	.03858
	Female	150	2.0911	.73060	.05965
meanaesthetics	Male	150	2.2911	.85861	.07010
	Female	150	2.1222	.69452	.05671
meansescape	Male	150	2.9600	.93719	.07652
	Female	150	2.4356	.84252	.06879

Note: p < 0.05 (significant at 95% confidence level)

Table 6: Independent t-test results for Gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
meanpromo	Equal variances assumed	20.586	.000	2.029	298	.043
	Equal variances not assumed			2.029	271.565	.043*
meanaccess	Equal variances assumed	8.138	.005	-5.040	298	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.040	283.623	.000*
meanconv	Equal variances assumed	.007	.932	-4.511	298	.000*
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.511	297.996	.000
meancustserv	Equal variances assumed	6.328	.012	-3.209	298	.001
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.209	287.505	.001*
meanexplor	Equal variances assumed	4.439	.036	-2.844	298	.005
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.844	288.904	.005*
meanprice	Equal variances assumed	.879	.349	.203	298	.839
	Equal variances not assumed			.203	290.118	.839
meansoceco	Equal variances assumed	.067	.796	-2.003	298	.046*
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.003	296.711	.046
meancleanliness	Equal variances assumed	24.419	.000	-4.849	298	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.849	255.076	.000*
meanaesthetics	Equal variances assumed	1.640	.201	1.873	298	.062
	Equal variances not assumed			1.873	285.531	.062
meansescape	Equal variances assumed	3.474	.063	5.097	298	.000*
	Equal variances not assumed			5.097	294.683	.000

Note: p < 0.05 (significant at 95% confidence level)

Table 7: Group Statistics for location

		Geographical location of consumer	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
meanpromo	Urban	230	2.7362	1.00314	.06615	
	Rural	70	2.5619	.75830	.09063	
meanaccess	Urban	230	2.2855	.78507	.05177	
	Rural	70	2.4857	.75860	.09067	
meanconv	Urban	230	2.2681	.70080	.04621	
	Rural	70	2.1857	.59692	.07135	
meancustserv	Urban	230	2.1449	.69883	.04608	
	Rural	70	2.2476	.67789	.08102	
meanexplor	Urban	230	2.3326	.53146	.03504	
	Rural	70	2.3286	.50098	.05988	
meanprice	Urban	230	2.3426	.81611	.05381	
	Rural	70	1.9886	.65575	.07838	
meansoceco	Urban	230	2.3101	.70449	.04645	
	Rural	70	2.1238	.55363	.06617	
meancleanliness	Urban	230	1.9841	.67910	.04478	
	Rural	70	1.7048	.41526	.04963	
meanaesthetics	Urban	230	2.2493	.80192	.05288	
	Rural	70	2.0667	.71017	.08488	
meansescape	Urban	230	2.7261	.93705	.06179	
	Rural	70	2.6048	.89603	.10710	

Note: p < 0.05 (significant at 95% confidence level)

Table 8: Independent t-test results for location

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
meanpromo	Equal variances assumed					
	Equal variances not assumed			1.554	149.313	.122
meanaccess	Equal variances assumed	.057	.812	-1.883	298	.061
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.918	117.550	.058
meanconv	Equal variances assumed	1.494	.223	.890	298	.374
	Equal variances not assumed			.969	132.031	.334
meancustserv	Equal variances assumed	1.477	.225	-1.084	298	.279
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.102	117.160	.273
meanexplor	Equal variances assumed	2.864	.092	.056	298	.955
	Equal variances not assumed			.058	120.114	.954
meanprice	Equal variances assumed	2.057	.153	3.317	298	.001*
	Equal variances not assumed			3.724	140.011	.000
meansoceco	Equal variances assumed	3.144	.077	2.030	298	.043*
	Equal variances not assumed			2.305	143.280	.023
meancleanliness	Equal variances assumed	20.711	.000	3.258	298	.001
	Equal variances not assumed			4.178	189.257	.000*
meanaesthetics	Equal variances assumed	2.596	.108	1.711	298	.088
	Equal variances not assumed			1.826	127.173	.070
meanscape	Equal variances assumed	.057	.812	.958	298	.339
	Equal variances not assumed			.981	118.618	.328

Note: $p < 0.05$ (significant at 95% confidence level)

because the researcher created the null hypotheses of mean perception being 2 on a 5 point scale. However, in absolute sense, none of these factors is really low in importance because in no case the mean is above 3 on the 5-point scale.

5.3 Difference in perception of the factors due to gender

Gender is one of the most fundamental but potent variable which creates the difference in perception about any aspect in the real world. This is nowhere more visible than in marketing where gender is the basic demographic variable for segmentation of customers and defines their product / brand choice. For the purpose of this study, it was decided to determine the difference in perception of the factors which influence shopping behavior in supermarkets, based on the gender of the respondent. The mean values of the 10 factors were subjected to independent sample t-tests with the gender as the grouping variable. The null hypotheses for these tests were that there is no difference between the perceptions of each factor due to the gender of the customer. The results are shown in table no 5 and 6.

In the Table 4, the 2nd and 3rd column depict the results of Levene's test for equality of variance between the two independent samples. If the significance value is more than 0.05, the null hypothesis of equal variance is accepted otherwise not. Depending on the result of this test, the t-test results were noted from the appropriate row. From the last column, we can infer that the null hypothesis of the independent sample t-test is accepted in two factors – price and aesthetics. Thus the perception of both male and female customers is same for Price and Aesthetics factors. Looking at the means of these two factors from Table 3, both of these factors are important for male as well as female customers.

The null hypothesis of the independent sample t-test is not accepted in the other eight factors and hence there is a significant difference in the perceptions of male and female customers towards these. From Table 3, we also infer:

Factors which are significantly more important for female customers are – Promotions and special offers, and Escape Factors which are significantly more important for male customers are – Access, Geographical convenience and location, Customer services, Exploration, Socio-economic effects and Cleanliness.

5.4 Difference in perception of the factors due to geographical location

Location/ place of living is the basic geographic variable used for segmentation of customers and it also defines their product / brand choice. For the purpose of this study, it was decided to determine the difference in perception of the factors which influence shopping behavior in supermarkets due to the location of the customer (urban or rural). The mean values of the 10 factors were subjected to independent sample t-tests with the location as the grouping variable. The null hypotheses for these tests were that there is no difference between the perceptions of each factor due to location of the customer. The results are as follows in table no 7 and 8.

As explained earlier, depending on the result of the Levene's test, the t-test results were noted from the appropriate row of Table 6. From the last column in Table 6, we can infer that the null hypothesis of the independent sample t-test is accepted in seven factors. Thus the perception of both urban and rural customers is same for Promotions and special offers, Easy Access, Geographically convenience, Customer services, Exploration, Aesthetics and Escape factors. Looking at the means of these two factors from Table 5, all of these factors are relatively important for urban as well as rural customers.

The null hypothesis of the independent sample t-test is not accepted in the other three factors and hence there is a significant difference in the perceptions of urban and rural customers towards these. From Table 5, we also see that all of these three factors are coming out as more important for rural customers – Price, Socio economic effects, and

Cleanliness. Price is understandable, but the other two factors represent an interesting finding.

6. CONCLUSION

This study illuminated that consumers' perception is widely varied in accordance with the one stop shop, trained and cooperative staff, comparatively low prices with respect to the market, retail price discount factor, transparent invoices, and interior design and product assortment of shelves. 'Cleanliness' and 'quality food products handling and packing' appear to be highly significant elements. Additionally, cleanliness emerged as a vital factor, including various components, i.e. 'hygienic practices follow in supermarkets', 'cleanliness', and 'Quality food products handling and packing'. The results also showed that we can conclude that the perception of male and female consumers was highly influenced by price and aesthetic factors. Factors which were more important for female consumers are promotions and special offers, and escape. On the contrary, factors which were notably more important for male customers are easy access to supermarkets, geographical convenience and location, customer services, exploration, socio-economic effects and cleanliness. Statistical results revealed very interesting results by extracting three most important factors that is price, socio-economic effects and cleanliness for the rural consumers. Price was understandable factor. It played a significant role in the buying pattern of consumer, but both the other factors represent attention-grabbing result. The outcome of this research showed a comprehensively, integrated framework to understand the vibrant relationships among several dimensions of 'promotion and special offers', 'easy access to supermarket', 'geographically convenience and locality', 'customer services', 'exploration', 'pricing factor', socio-economic effects, cleanliness, aesthetics and 'escape from routine work' on the consumers' perception. The results of this study can be an indicator for supermarkets to make the necessary changes in their operations, targeting and communication strategies for different geographic and demographic segment of

customers. However the study is limited due to its sampling method and the scope of the study and hence it is recommended that further research efforts are needed to examine these factors in depth before generalization can be made.

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