



# Factors affecting the choice of a retail outlet – A Review

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## Abstract

In recent years, the retail landscape has been transformed by the rise of organized retailing. The advent of major organized retailers has led to a decline in both the market share and profit margins of unorganized merchants. This shift is largely attributed to increasing consumer income levels. The intense competition among organized retailers provides consumers with numerous choices. This paper seeks to identify the factors that influence customers' decisions when selecting a retail outlet.

**Keywords** – Retailing, Organized Retail, Customer Service, Store layout, Location, Promotion

## Introduction

Retailing refers to any direct purchase by an individual consumer for personal use. Traditionally, India's retail sector was dominated by Kirana shops. Organized retailing only began to emerge in the early 1990s; prior to that, the unorganized sector was predominant. Consumers consistently seek a variety of options when making purchase decisions. The growth of organized retailing in India was initially impeded by factors such as a lack of educated labor, tax restrictions, and government regulations. Additionally, limited consumer awareness and restrictions on foreign companies entering the market further delayed the rise of organized retailing. However, in recent years, there has been a significant shift with the emergence of organized retailing. The entry of major organized retailers has resulted in a decline in both the market share and profit margins of unorganized merchants, primarily due to increased consumer income levels. In 2020, the Indian retail industry was valued at \$883 billion, with projections to reach \$1.1 trillion by 2027 and \$2 trillion by 2032. In 2020, Food and grocery accounted for 68% of the market, while lifestyle products comprised 15%. Consumers are increasingly shifting their focus from local Kirana stores to organized retail outlets, attracted by superior customer service and cleaner environments (Sharma, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 further accelerated the shift from traditional independent stores to retail malls, even for convenience shopping. The intense competition within organized retailing offers consumers numerous choices regarding where to shop. Understanding the factors that influence a customer's choice of retail outlet is therefore crucial for retailers aiming to attract and retain customers.

## Literature Review

### Store Choice

Store choice can be understood as a cognitive process (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004) that explains why consumers prefer one store over another (McGoldrick, 2002). The selection of a store is driven by positive attributes that meet consumers' underlying motives. A store is chosen based on the customer's confidence in the store's

product quality and service. Familiarity with the store is crucial, as it relates to the perceived risk of making a wrong purchase and the importance of the product category to the shopper (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004).

Martineau (1958) categorized store attributes into two main groups: functional and psychological. Functional attributes include factors like location, product assortment, and store layout, while psychological attributes involve the feelings evoked by these functional elements. The study found that functional attributes tend to be more influential in store choice than psychological ones. Consumers are thought to weigh the value offered by different stores when deciding where to shop. Shopping value is a multi-dimensional construct, often described as comprising utilitarian and hedonic value (Babin et al., 1994). Hedonic shopping value is linked to the fun and pleasure derived from shopping and is related to the perceived enjoyment of the shopping experience. Hedonic attributes typically involve atmospheric variables such as store interior and exterior, design and layout, decoration, and personnel variables. In contrast, utilitarian shoppers focus on functional outcomes such as saving effort, time, and money, and reducing risk (Sands et al., 2009). Sinha (2003) studied shoppers' dispositions toward shopping and found that Indian shoppers differ from those in developed countries, valuing entertainment more than functional value, which contradicts Martineau's (1958) findings.

Fisk (1961) identified key store attributes like location accessibility, merchandise suitability, price value, sales efforts, and store service. Berry (1969) later identified three main factors influencing store choice regardless of store type: quality and variety of merchandise, sales staff, and store atmosphere. Prashar (2013) found that customers value product availability and variety, store ambiance, service and facilities, and value for money. Lindquist (1974-1975) identified seven store attributes affecting customer choice: assortment, merchandise quality, pricing, convenience, merchandise styling, general service, and salesclerk service. Doyle & Fenwick (1975) proposed that price, product variety, one-stop shopping, quality, store location, advertising, store appearance, and convenience are major attributes evaluated by grocery store customers. Bearden (1977) highlighted seven significant attributes for store patronage: price, merchandise quality, assortment, atmosphere, location, parking facilities, and staff friendliness. Hasty and Reardon (1997) classified store attributes into three categories: accessibility (location, layout, appearance, knowledgeable staff), facilitation of sales (low-priced specials, promotional offers, accepted payment methods), and auxiliary attributes (play areas for children, food courts). Bawa and Ghosh (1999) proposed a model to understand the factors influencing variations in shopping behavior across households, finding that the relationship between household characteristics and shopping behavior is complex. For some households, shopping is recreational, while for others, it competes directly with wage-earning activities. Solgaard and Hansen (2003) identified several store attributes important for consumer evaluation, including merchandise assortment and quality, personnel, store layout, accessibility, cleanliness, and atmosphere.

A global survey by Nielsen Company on store choice value revealed that consumers prioritize good value for money as the most critical factor in choosing a grocery store. Location remains a key factor but varies by country, generally ranking third or fourth in importance due to convenience and easy parking. The second most important attribute globally is a better selection of high-quality brands and products, as today's consumers seek both value and a wide range of options (Nielsen Company, 2008).

Nguyen, Vu, and Zhang (2010) found differences in store choice criteria among Vietnamese grocery consumers when choosing between traditional and modern retailers. Each channel has its strengths and weaknesses, leading consumers to rank attributes differently. Key attributes for traditional channels include convenient location, fresh food, price, service, and shopping habits. Vietnamese consumers prefer traditional channels for fresh food due to their proximity to residential areas. Convenience is also a dominant factor in store choice, similar to other Asian markets like India and China. Freshness and price are influential factors for fresh and packaged food categories, respectively.

For modern grocery channels, critical attributes include product quality, wide product assortment, in-store environment, and promotions. Vietnamese consumers appreciate the wide range of products and the spacious, cool environment of supermarkets, viewing grocery shopping as a relaxing or entertaining activity, termed "novelty seeking" (McDonald et al., 2000). In modern channels, consumers prioritize food safety standards and product origin, feeling more secure buying from supermarkets due to stricter regulations compared to traditional channels. While in-store promotions significantly influence the household and personal care product category, the attributes of service and perceived in-store convenience, such as reducing shopping time, costs, and efforts, are less significant for consumers shopping at supermarkets. Although store location is important for daily grocery shopping convenience, time and effort spent shopping in the store are not emphasized.

The paper now delves deeper into some of the factors that consumers value when selecting a store.

## Store layout

For shoppers, convenience is the most critical aspect of the store experience. This includes having a spacious environment and easy access to goods, which contribute to a pleasant shopping experience. The store layout is a significant factor that can influence consumers' expectations. A poorly designed layout can result in psychic costs for customers, diminishing their shopping pleasure (Baker et al., 2002). The impact of product display also extends to long-term effects on store image and patronage (McGoldrick, 2002). From a hedonic perspective, key drivers of store choice include in-store service and the attractiveness of the physical layout (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004).

## Assortment

Shoppers consistently report that retail assortments influence their store choice decisions, ranking this factor third in importance after convenient locations and low prices (Arnold, Roth, and Tigert, 1983). Research on retail patronage indicates that perceptions of variety significantly impact attitudes and store choice (Hoch et al., 1999). Shoppers primarily seek a variety of assortments to meet their buying needs, as a wide selection facilitates easier shopping choices and accommodates different tastes unless preferences are firmly established, and purchases are routine. Additionally, a crucial factor in store choice is the customer's uncertainty and desire for alternatives, where a broad product range reduces their search costs. Customers may also change their preferences based on different situations to find new stimuli, and having alternative options satisfies this need (Hoch et al., 1999). Studies on retail format patronage found that stable store format features, such as assortment and accessibility, influence multi-store patronage. The results suggest that customers' preferences for alternative formats are interrelated (Fox et al., 2004). Shoppers demand good service and quality merchandise from retailers (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004). A study on supermarket patronage among Chinese consumers found that merchandise quality, assortment, and low prices are critical factors in deciding where to shop. Key factors for choosing goods include food safety, reliable labeling of green food, a rich variety, adequate stocking, and good value for money. Customers emphasize product quality due to intense price competition and the prevalence of counterfeit goods (Chai and Zhou, 2009).

## Pricing

Price is a crucial factor for consumers and is a prominent attribute in most purchase decisions. Researchers have extensively studied how consumers form their perceptions in response to various retail pricing and promotional strategies. Lichtenstein et al. (1993) found that consumer price perceptions can significantly influence purchasing behavior. Consumers are willing to pay higher prices when they perceive the price as indicative of prestige, status, or high quality. Conversely, those who view price negatively are more responsive to low prices and sales promotions, often disregarding the quality associated with the price (Moore and Carpenter, 2008). Mason et al. (1994) proposed that reasonable prices in a retail store lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Their study found that stores offering reasonable prices often capture a large market share. Saporito (1995) discovered that some loyal shoppers choose their grocery stores based solely on price. However, other shoppers consider not only price but also additional store attributes when making their choice. Freymann (2002) confirmed the importance of pricing in both initially selecting and continuing to shop at a given store. Over the years, numerous researchers have focused on different elements of price as a determinant of store choice (Yavas, 2003). In various streams of literature, price is depicted either as a pure monetary cost (Fox et al., 2004) or as an element of broader concepts such as store image (Finn and Louviere, 1996) and consumer value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

## Promotion

A prominent and widely-cited work on store image by Lindquist (1974) synthesized findings from 19 research articles into nine key groups: merchandise, service, clientele, physical facilities, promotion, accessibility, store atmosphere, institutional factors, and post-transaction satisfaction. In recent marketing literature, the concept of store positioning has gained attention. Shoppers identify and develop "hot buttons" that assist in store selection (Woodside and Trappey, 1992). These buttons, such as "most convenient" or "lowest prices," allow shoppers to quickly identify stores that meet their criteria, thereby simplifying the decision-making process.

A study by Volle (1999) on the effect of store-level promotions on store choice found that while promotions have a significant short-term effect on store choice, this effect is relatively weak. Store choice is primarily driven by customer loyalty. In grocery shopping, store-level promotions are often seen as unexpected events that most shoppers do not anticipate. This study suggests that marketers should view in-store promotions as a necessary investment aimed at building a competitive price image rather than expecting immediate measurable outcomes. Furthermore, adapting store-level promotions to individual characteristics seems irrelevant and does not contribute to increased patronage. Additionally, McGoldrick (2002) argues that "inefficient promotions, which add costs and inflate inventories, do not significantly influence consumer patronage decisions."

## Store atmosphere

Kotler (1973) studied the role of store atmospherics, ambiance, and store environment, finding an important relationship with store choice. While the influence of retail store atmospherics has received modest attention, it is acknowledged as a significant element in determining store image (Lindquist, 1974). Baker et al. (1992) extended the literature on retail store atmospherics by providing an experimental method for retailers to examine various aspects of the store environment and its impact on store patronage. They proposed that the affective states of pleasure and arousal positively relate to customers' willingness to buy at a store. Baker and Parasuraman (1994) found that consumers' views on a store's physical attractiveness had a higher correlation with patronage decisions than price levels, selection, and merchandise quality. Daucé (2000) found that aromas or scents positively affect consumers' hedonic behavior. Soft light with warm colors attracts customers for luxury goods, while bright light is more effective for discount stores (Baker & Grewal, 1992; Schlosser, 1998). Valdez and Mehrabian (1994) showed that consumers feel more positive in blue-colored environments than in warm-colored ones. Good interior designs enhance customer interest and lower psychological barriers to purchasing (Davies & Ward, 2002; Omar, 1999; Walters & White, 1987). Globally, consumers select retail stores based on store design and merchandising display (Kerfoot et al., 2003). Many consumers view shopping as a leisure activity and choose stores based on their entertainment value (Woodside et al., 1992). Visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile factors in the in-store ambiance contribute to the psychological cost of shopping (McGoldrick, 2002). Baker et al. studied the influence of store environment on store choice, focusing on attributes such as interpersonal service quality, shopping experience costs, and merchandise value. Their findings suggest that design cues have a greater and more pervasive influence on customer perceptions for store choice than do employee and music cues (Baker et al., 2002).

The shopping atmosphere is a hedonic factor that determines the value of merchandise, and the shopping experience plays an important role in building store patronage (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004). Manipulation of atmospheric factors significantly impacts customers' moods (Cheng, 2009). Prospective customers stay longer in a positive store environment, increasing the likelihood of purchasing. Positive store environments create loyal customers whose repeat shopping behavior accelerates (Bagdare, 2013). Prashar et al. (2015) identified nine factors impacting store atmospherics: Querulous, Music, Sensitive, Budget Seeker, Sensuous, Light, Idler, Space Seeker, and Comfort Seeker. Contrary to earlier studies where music, space seeker, and comfort seeker were considered the most significant factors, light and querulous emerged as major influences on store atmospherics. Environmental factors such as aroma, lights, music, colors, crowds, safety, and sales employees affect shoppers' habits and are termed atmospherics.

## Location / Accessibility

A widely accepted theory for store selection, the central place theory, posits that location is a critical factor in attracting customers to a shopping area (Craig et al., 1984). Fotheringham (1988) suggests that location significantly influences store choice. This was further corroborated by Mai and Hui Zhao (2004) in their study of the Chinese market, which found that proximity to home is a major driver for store choice. Numerous researchers have highlighted the importance of store location in determining store choice. Location encompasses factors such as distance and travel time to the store, suggesting customers' accessibility to the store. Fox et al. (2004) found that consumers prefer to shop at stores that are easily accessible and convenient. Distance from the store, breadth of merchandise, and availability are primary factors influencing the choice of a retail outlet. Research by Sinha and Banerjee (2004) found that nearly three-fourths of participants identified these elements as critical reasons for store selection, followed by ambiance and patronized stores, both at 8 percent. A study on store patronage patterns in urban China found that store location, specifically the distance to the store, is often critical. Given that many urban Chinese consumers walk or cycle to stores,

some retailers provide free shuttle buses to transport consumers from other parts of the cities (Uncles and Kwok, 2007). Contrary to the common belief that Indian customers prioritize proximity when shopping for food and groceries, Prashar (2013) found that store location is overshadowed by other store atmospherics.

## Parking

Waerden et al. (1998) conducted a study on the impact of changing parking conditions around shopping centers on consumer store choice behavior. They found that retailers employ various infrastructural and regulatory measures to control accessibility, including factors like the number of available parking spaces, parking costs, maximum parking duration, location of parking spaces, and diversity of parking supply (Waerden et al., 1998). Their research provided empirical evidence that the location of the chosen parking lot strongly influences which stores customers are likely to visit. Customers are more likely to visit stores located in the vicinity of their chosen parking spot rather than those situated farther away.

## Customer service

In the realm of personal service, there is substantial potential for retailers to enhance the shopping experience for customers through efficiency, appearance, attitude, availability, and product knowledge (McGoldrick, 2002). Even in today's predominantly self-service market, the service provided by store staff plays a crucial role in shaping retail image and customer patronage. When store choice is driven by hedonic considerations, factors such as in-store service and physical layout become particularly important (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004). It is critical for retailers that their service delivery adds value to customers in order to strengthen patronage. The retailer's in-store service encompasses core service, servicescape, and employees, all of which contribute to customers' perceived value and intentions to patronize (O'Cass and Grace, 2008). Khadilkar (2012) identified various categories of services across parameters such as promptness, multiple counters, extended working hours, handling customer complaints, error-free transactions, parking facilities, and home delivery services. Waiting for service in a retail store is an experience that can lead to consumer dissatisfaction, which in turn may negatively impact store patronage behavior (Hui, Dube, and Chebat, 1997).

## Salesperson

Understanding consumer perceptions of retail salespeople is crucial for comprehending consumer behavior during retail sales interactions (Mallalieu, 2006). This underscores the significant role of salespeople as a vital link between retailers and their customers.

## Demographic factors

Dodge and Summer (1969) and Aaker and Jones (1971) discovered that store choice is influenced by factors such as consumers' socioeconomic background, personality traits, and previous purchasing experiences. Lumpkin, Greenberg, and Goldstucker (1985) observed that elderly consumers differ in their shopping behavior compared to younger ones. The later are less concerned with price and proximity to the store, instead viewing shopping as a recreational activity and preferring stores with high "entertainment" value. Store choice is also influenced by the brands purchased and the personal values that the shopper values (Erdem, Oumlil, and Tuncalp, 1999). Therefore, a shopper who prioritizes personal gratification would place more importance on the status of the store compared to a shopper who values independence and intellect. Carpenter and Moore (2006) investigated the choice of retail formats among grocery shoppers in the US. Their study identified demographic groups that prefer specific formats and analyzed how store attributes influence format selection.

## Why customers switch

Seiders and Tigert (1997) observed that switching rates among stores were not uniform and identified different motivations for switching. They categorized these motivations into three types: price, location, and variety-based switching. However, at an aggregate level, they found no discernible differences between switchers and non-switchers in terms of store choice criteria or demographics. They emphasized the significance of "familiarity" among non-switchers. They concluded that to comprehensively understand switching behavior, researchers should analyze switchers based on the specific stores they switch to. Accessibility plays a crucial role in switching behavior, as noted by East et al. (2000), who highlighted that

First Store Retention (FSR) is strongly influenced by the competitive environment, especially with new market entrants at the local level. Findlay and Sparks (2008) similarly found no overall differences in socio-economic or demographic profiles between switchers and non-switchers. They attributed the high incidence of switching to a reassessment of store choices and attributes following a change in stores, suggesting the presence of a triggering mechanism. In summary, factors influencing store selection encompass a variety of motivations including price, location, variety, and accessibility, with the dynamics of familiarity and competitive environment playing significant roles in consumer decision-making.

Thus the factors affecting the choice of a retail outlet can be summarised in two groups as follows.

### **Utilitarian factors**

Effort (Location, parking), time, money saving and risk reduction, sales service, store service, quality and variety of merchandise, sales staff, convenience, facilitation of sales (e.g., low-priced specials, promotional offers and accepted methods of payments), fresh products etc.

### **Hedonic factors**

The ambiance of the store, including its interior and exterior design, layout, point-of-purchase displays, decorations, and the demeanor of personnel, along with auxiliary features like play areas and food courts, are crucial elements influencing customer perception. Additionally, cleanliness contributes significantly to shaping the desired image of the store in the minds of customers.

Moreover, the promotional strategies employed by retailers also play a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining the desired store image.

### **Conclusion**

The paper discussed several factors influencing consumer preferences towards specific retail outlets based on a limited number of studies. Future research could benefit from reviewing a wider array of literature to uncover additional factors driving these preferences. Such insights would be valuable for retail marketers aiming to develop targeted promotional strategies tailored to their specific customer segments.

In conclusion, organized retailing offers substantial advantages, underscoring the importance for marketers to pinpoint key factors that influence their target customers' choice of retail outlet. This understanding can guide effective promotional strategies aimed at both acquiring and retaining customers.

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