

A Study of Customer Satisfaction at Local Physical Retail Shops in Dharan, Nepal

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the effect of Product Features (PF), Price (PR), and Seller's Service (SS) on Customer Satisfaction (CS) using a cross-sectional research design and a convenience sampling method. Primary data was collected from 281 respondents using a self-prepared five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The study proved the reliability and validity of the instruments. Data violated normality, and non-parametric tests, Spearman's rank-order correlation, and ordinal logistic regression were applied. Both Spearman's correlation result and the ordinal logistic regression result showed that there is a greater, significantly positive effect of the seller's service and product features on customer satisfaction as compared to price. There was no significant effect of demographic variables age, education, and permanent residence on customer satisfaction. This study revealed that the retailers should devote more focus to product features and the seller's services as compared to price to satisfy the customers at physical retail shops in Dharan.

Keywords: product features, price, seller's services, customer satisfaction, retail shops

Introduction

Background of the Study

Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City is in the eastern part of Nepal, in the Sunsari District of Koshi Province. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the total number of people living in Dharan is about 166,531. People who are only in Dharan for a short time are also living there for different reasons, like going to school, working, or doing business. It is in the middle of Nepal's hilly and Terai areas. There are many different religions, values, cultures, income groups, and other social and economic groups in the area. Various people from the hilly area have moved to Dharan, mostly because the weather is better there. There are more local physical retail stores because cities are growing quickly and more people are moving there. The

competition and customer preferences have been changing due to globalization and other factors. People should deal frequently with local physical retailers, especially to purchase food items, household items, clothing and footwear, stationery and educational materials, electronics items, health and cosmetics, toys, gifts, seasonal/occasional products, and other common retail items. Under that condition, it is essential to understand the level of customer satisfaction in Dharan. In Nepal, the retail sector plays a vital role in supporting local economies, and it can promote local entrepreneurship and self-employment, yet research on customer satisfaction in small urban retail shops like Dharan remains scarce. Most of the previous research on customer satisfaction in retail shops has been conducted in various developed countries in huge supermarkets, online businesses, and hospitality sectors (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006; Lin & Bennett, 2014). Only a few studies have been conducted in secondary cities like Dharan.

Every business success depends upon a high level of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is the basic requirement to be successful in this competitive market. Customer satisfaction is the comparison between the expectations of the customer and the benefits and values that they received from the products and the company. Competitive retail markets need customer loyalty, positive behavior, reliable service, and lastly, a high level of customer satisfaction. In the local physical retail shops, mainly, customers become satisfied when the benefits they receive match their expectations. Customer satisfaction is one of the most used research concepts in the retail business sector because it is directly related to the loyalty of customers and performance of the business organization (Oliver, 2014; Anderson, Fornell, & Mazvancheryl, 2004). In the retail business, customer satisfaction emerges when the offered and delivered product quality, price fairness, and service quality meet customer expectations. Customers evaluate the level of satisfaction based on various factors such as quality, variety, durability, and innovative products (Kotler & Keller, 2016). When there are an appropriate product assortment and easy availability, it can prevent switching to competitors. Customers always want a fair and reasonable price in comparison to the value received from the product and company (Xia, Monroe, & Cox, 2004; Martin, Ponder, & Lueg, 2009). In Nepal, most of the customers are price sensitive. So, a fair and reasonable price can also play a vital role in customer satisfaction. In the physical shops, face-to-face positive interaction with customers, salesmen's behavior, and trustworthiness can shape customer satisfaction and loyalty (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Chang & Polonsky, 2012). A positive retail service can compensate for some weakness of pricing policies and product features, but poor seller service can damage everything in the retail business.

The above-mentioned discussion presents the significance of customer satisfaction in retail business and can be applied in all sectors, including different cities in Nepal. But it is not presented with the present data of Dharan. Therefore, this study targets to scrutinize the relation

between product features, price, and seller's services and customer satisfaction with recent primary data.

Research Questions

The following is the research question for this study.

- What is the perception of the customers regarding the product features offered by the local physical retail shops in Dharan?
- What is the perception of the customers regarding the price determined by the local physical retail shops in Dharan?
- What is the perception of the customers regarding the seller's services provided by the local physical shops in Dharan?

Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives of this study:

- To evaluate the effect of product features on customer satisfaction in physical retail shops in Dharan.
- To analyze the effect of the price on customer satisfaction in physical retail shops in Dharan.
- To assess the effect of the seller's services on customer satisfaction in physical retail shops in Dharan.

Research Hypothesis

The following are the research hypotheses of this study:

H₁: There is a significant effect of the product features on customer satisfaction.

H₂: There is a significant effect of price on customer satisfaction.

H₃: There is a significant effect of the seller's service on customer satisfaction.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study is as below:

- This study only focuses on the predictors, product features, price, and seller's service to evaluate the customer satisfaction. Other predictors, such as quality, promotion, distribution, brand image, income, etc., were not included in this study.
- This small sample size of 281 may not reflect the real satisfaction level of all customers in Dharan.
- Demographic factors age, educational level, and permanent residence only—are taken for the study, and results based on only these factors may not apply to all types of customers in Dharan.

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on customer satisfaction with the local retail shops in Dharan. The powerful predictors of product features, price, and seller's service predictors are taken to assess the customer satisfaction level. By the results and conclusions of this study, local retail shops can formulate customer-related strategies to make a positive relationship with them. Customers and the general public can also know the real condition of the satisfaction level of customers at local retail shops in Dharan.

Literature Review

Customer Satisfaction and Physical Retail Shops

Customer satisfaction is the relation between the expectations of the customers and the actual benefit received by them. Customer satisfaction is a crucial and significant aspect for any type of business organization because it is a major predictor for customer loyalty, attracting customers in the present as well as the future, and business success (Moukrim & Gaber, 2024; Wan et al., 2018). Physical retail shop customer satisfaction is defined as the positive psychological and behavioral feedback of the customer towards the retailers when the customer gets the benefits that are equal to their expectations (Leong et al., 2015; Ratana Varaha et al., 2016). Furthermore, Ratana Varaha et al. (2016) and Leong et al. (2015) discovered that satisfaction is the customer's response in the comparison of expected and perceived benefit, which can be increased by increasing the overall positive shopping experience.

Product Features and Customers' Satisfaction

Product Features and Customers' Satisfaction Product attributes are the crucial predictors of customer satisfaction. The relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction is a widely recognized approach. Various research results indicate that when customers perceive a significant benefit in a product, they are more likely to be satisfied with the purchase they made. The perceived value is affected by the benefits acquired by the customer in comparison with the cost spent for the product (Deng et al., 2018). Innovation in manufacturing is also a required component of the product. New or innovative products with creative and unique attributes increase brand image and can lead to strategic advantages (Hajar et al., 2022). In the fast-service restaurant sector, for example, product innovation is an essential aspect of customer satisfaction because it proves an obligation to address numerous and new consumer requirements and demands (Hajar et al., 2022). Likewise, visual selling, aesthetics, and attractive displays of products in the store can play a significant role as indirect tools to draw attention and customer loyalty by improving the overall comfort and appeal of the procurement experience.

Price and Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction may be affected by various other factors such as competition and company image, seller's service and behavior, and appropriate location, but also price. Customer satisfaction has a direct relationship, and price should be determined as the purchasing power of the customers. Tsiotsou (2006) and Varki and Colgate (2001) have found that reasonable price and perceived value are the important determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty of the customer. When customers perceive an unfair price, even if it is low, it cannot satisfy the customers because they feel exploited (Herrmann et al., 2007). Customers always want a fair price determination process. When there are various hidden fees or price increases, it can decrease customer trust and satisfaction (Lien et al., 2015). The difference between what customers pay for the product and what customers receive from the product and business organization determines the customer satisfaction level and experience (Zeithaml et al., 1996). For customer satisfaction, there should be equality between the price and the benefit of the product.

The Seller's Services and Customer Satisfaction

The quality of services provided by the physical retailers, especially the positive interaction between the employees of the retail shop, is an important predictor of customer satisfaction (Wu et al., 2020; Ying et al., 2019). The employees in the retail shops are the representatives of the retail shop and the retail owner, and they should have the capacity to provide and add valuable and outstanding service to the customers (Judd, 1999). The Relational Service Quality Scale (RSQS), introduced by Dabholkar et al. (1996), discovered that the physical condition, reliability, relationships, problem solving, and appropriate policy are the important aspects for customer satisfaction. After-sale services such as replacement, maintenance of products, refunds, and polite human behavior of sellers from the welcoming stage to the post-purchase stage are the major predictors of customer trust, loyalty, and customer satisfaction (Khan et al., 2020).

Research Gap

The study of customer satisfaction conditions is a significant aspect to know the customer's feedback and for the retail business's success. Various research has been conducted on customer satisfaction in different areas worldwide, such as in fast-service restaurants, organized large retail sectors, supermarkets, the online retail sector, and other general retail businesses, as mentioned in the literature review of this study. Numerous researchers have conducted various studies, taking different predictors of customer satisfaction in different business sectors. But there are no research activities that have been conducted for retail businesses in the fast-growing urban area of Dharan in Nepal. Therefore, this study aims to understand the empirical insights into how the predictors product features, price, and the

seller's service impact customer satisfaction at once at local physical retail shops in Dharan, Nepal.

Research Methods and Materials

In this study, a cross-sectional quantitative research design was used to assess the relation between the predictor's product features, price, and seller's service and the dependent variable customer satisfaction at local physical retail shops in Dharan. Demographic variables age, education, and permanent residence were also recorded to find their impact on customer satisfaction. A self-structured printed questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. The convenience sampling method was used to collect the data from the customers of a local retail shop. A five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree) was used to collect the required data for the study. Each variable or construct was examined by using four items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The data analysis tool SPSS (version 26) was applied in this study. Cronbach's alpha was used to find the internal consistency or reliability of the data. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), Bartlett's test of sphericity, and rotated factor loading tests were used to assess the validity of the data. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were applied to test the normality of the collected data. Due to the non-normality of data, Spearman's rank-order correlation, ordinal logistic regression, model fitting information, goodness of fit indices, pseudo R^2 , and test of parallel line tests were applied to assess the correlation, effects, and model fit of the variables and data.

Results and Discussion

This chapter displays and presents the analyzed data in a tabular format with interpretation.

Table 1

Internal Consistency/Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) for the Study Variables

Variable/scale	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Product Features (PF)	4	.794
Price (PR)	4	.761
Seller's Service (SS)	4	.803
Table 1 (Continued)		
Variable/scale	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	4	.836
Overall Cronbach's alpha	16	.870

The Cronbach's alpha values for the study variable Product Features (PF) are .794, Price (PR) is .761, Seller's Service (SB) is .803, Customer Satisfaction (CS) is .836, and the

overall Cronbach's value is .870. These values show that the data is very reliable because they are all higher than the commonly accepted threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The results show that all of the study's measurement tools are reliable, consistent, and trustworthy for further research.

Table 2

Tests of Normality

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	P	Statistic	Df	p
PF	.121	281	.000	.963	281	.000
PR	.097	281	.000	.980	281	.000
SS	.084	281	.000	.972	281	.000
CS	.131	281	.000	.953	281	.000

Table 2 shows that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test values of all variables—Product Features (PF), Price (PR), Seller’s Service (SS), and Customer Satisfaction (CS)—are below .05 ($p < .05$). These results indicate that the data used in the study are not normal and violate the assumption of normality (Field, 2018).

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity

Test	Value	df	p
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.877		
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	1727.020	120	.000

Note. Determinant = 0.002.

The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test show that the KMO value is .877. Given that this KMO value is higher than the .6 cutoff, the study's sample size is deemed adequate (Kaiser, 1974). The results of Bartlett's test of sphericity are significant, with $\chi^2 (120) = 1727.02$, $p < .01$. There is no multicollinearity issue in the data (determinant = .002). These values all validate that the data are appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 4

Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Components			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
PF3			.788	
PF4			.711	
PF5			.706	
PF6			.746	
PR7				.752
PR8				.734
PR11				.726
PR12				.772
SS31		.797		
SS32		.690		

Table 4 (Continued)

Items	Components			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
SS33		.791		
SS35		.722		
CS37	.809			
CS38	.696			
CS39	.747			
CS41	.721			

Table 4 shows the exploratory factor analysis to examine the construct validity condition of the data. Principal component extraction and varimax rotation were used for factor analysis. Total constructs are 4, and total items are 16. Product Features Items PF3 (.788), PF4 (.711), PF5 (.706), and PF6 (.746) loaded on factor 3. Price Items PR7 (.752), PR8 (.734), PR11 (.726), and PR12 (.772) loaded on factor 4. Seller's service items SS31 (.797), SS32 (.690), SS33 (.791), and SS35 (.722) loaded on factor 2. Customer Satisfaction Items CS37 (.809), CS38 (.696), CS39 (.747), and CS41 (.721) loaded on factor 1. Items PF1, PF2, PR9, PR10, SS34, SS36, CS40, and CS42 were removed due to the inappropriateness of the items' loading. All factor loadings are above .69, and all items are loaded onto their respective factor, indicating a strong item-factor relationship. These results show construct validity in the study data.

Table 5

Spearman's Correlations among Study Variables (N=281)

Variables		2	3	4
1. PF	-			
2. PR	.320**	-		
3. SS	.380**	.283**	-	
4. CS	.507**	.355**	.508**	-

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Due to the non-normal nature of the study data (N=281), Spearman's rank order correlation was used to assess the correlation between the variables. Price (PR) and customer satisfaction (CS) have a low connection ($r=.355, p<.01$), Seller's service and CS have a moderately good correlation ($r=.508, p<.01$), and Product Features (PF) and CS have a moderately positive correlation ($r=.507, p<.01$), according to Table 5. It shows that while SS, PR, and PF are beneficial to CS, the effects of SS and PF are greater than those of PR. Since all of the correlations between the variables are below the multicollinearity threshold ($r=.8$), these results suggest that there are no multicollinearity issues (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 6

Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	P
Intercept Only	1428.243			
Final	1278.017	150.227	8	.000

Note. Link function: Logit

The resulting model fits the research data much better than the intercept-only model ($\Delta\chi^2(8) = 150.23, p <.001$), according to the test for fitting an ordinal regression model, which is displayed in Table 6. This implies that the inclusion of predictors (IVs) significantly boosts the model's explanatory ability in predicting the dependent variables (DV).

Table 7

Goodness-of-fit

Tests	Chi-Square (χ^2)	Df	P
Pearson	3989.594	4057	0.772
Deviance	1266.926	4057	1.000

Note. Link function: Logit.

Table 7 shows the goodness-of-fit test of the study data. The result proves that the Pearson goodness of fit is non-significant ($\chi^2 (4057, N = 281) = 3989.59, p = .772$). The deviance test is also non-significant ($\chi^2 (4057, N = 281) = 1266.93, p = 1.000$). Based on these results, the model can be considered to fit the study data adequately because both the Pearson.

Table 8

Pseudo R-Square Statistics

Tests	Value
Cox and Snell	.414
Nagelkerke	.417
McFadden	.104

Note. Link function: Logit.

and Deviance test results are non-significant ($p > .05$). (Hosmer, Leeshawn, & Sturdivant, 2013).

Table 8 shows the pseudo-R-squared test result. Among the Cox and Snell, Nagelkerke, and McFadden tests, Nagelkerke is considered the most interpretable, and Nagelkerke's R^2 value is .417. It indicates that 41.7% of the variance in the outcome variable is explained by the model, which is a moderate and acceptable effect size for social sciences like marketing (Menard, 2002).

Table 9

Test of Parallel Lines

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	P
Null Hypothesis	1278.017			
General	1146.045 ^b	131.972 ^c	112	0.096

Table 9 shows the test of parallel lines; it assesses the proportional odds or parallel slopes, which is a basic assumption in ordinal logistic regression analysis. The result shows that the difference in chi-square between the independent variables and the dependent variable is

non-significant ($\chi^2(112) = 131.97, p = .096$). The p -value exceeds .05. The relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable is consistent or parallel across all thresholds of the ordinal outcome, the proportional odds assumption is fulfilled, and the model is appropriate. (Agresti, 2010).

Table 10
Parameter Estimates

Predictor		B	SE	Wald	df	p	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Location	PF	0.933	0.141	43.786	1	0.000	0.657	1.210
	PR	0.381	0.134	8.103	1	0.004	0.119	0.643
	SS	0.961	0.143	44.962	1	0.000	0.680	1.241
Table 10 (Continued)								
Predictor		B	SE	Wald	df	P	95% CI	
							LL	UL
	[Age=0]	-0.108	0.345	0.099	1	0.753	-0.785	0.568
	[Permanent residence=0]	1.390	1.256	1.224	1	0.269	-1.072	3.851
	[Education level=0]	-0.083	0.463	0.032	1	0.857	-0.990	0.824

Note. B =unstandardized regression coefficients, SE =standard error, CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit.

Table 10 presents the parameter estimates from a test using ordinal logistic regression on non-normal five-point Likert-type data, with a sample size of 281. The table demonstrates that Seller’s Service (SS) is positive and the strongest predictor of Customer Satisfaction (CS). A one-unit increase in SS will have a 96% effect on CS. The p -value is significant, and in its 95% Class Interval (CI), zero is not included between the lower and upper limit ($B = 0.96, SE = 0.14, Wald \chi^2(1) = 44.96, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.68, 1.24]$). Likewise, Product Features (PF) is also a positive and stronger predictor of Customer Satisfaction (CS) ($B = 0.93, SE = 0.14, Wald \chi^2(1) = 43.79, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.66, 1.21]$). Price (PR) has a positive but smaller effect on Customer Satisfaction (CS) ($B = 0.38, SE = 0.13, Wald \chi^2(1) = 8.10, p = 0.004, 95\% CI [0.12, 0.64]$). Demographic variable Age does not influence CS more positively on CS because the p -value is non-significant and zero is included between the lower and upper limits ($B = -0.11, SE = 0.35, Wald \chi^2(1) = 0.10, p = .753, 95\% CI [-0.79, 0.57]$). Education level also does not predict the CS more positively ($B = -0.08, SE = 0.46, Wald \chi^2(1) = 0.03, p = .857, 95\% CI [-0.99, 0.82]$). Likewise, permanent residence is a positive but does not predict the CS due to a

low value of B , non-significance of the p -value, and inclusion of zero between the lower and upper limits of the 95% CI ($B = 1.39$, $SE = 1.26$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 1.22$, $p = .269$, 95% CI [-1.07, 3.85]). All these results show Product Features (PF), Price (PR), and Seller's Service (SS) predictors have a positive, greater impact or influence on Customer Satisfaction (CS), but all demographic variables age, education, and permanent residence have no effect on Customer Satisfaction (CS) (Agresti, 2010; Field, 2018).

Conclusion

In order to examine the link between the independent variables price, seller service, and product features and the dependent variable, customer satisfaction, this study was conducted in actual retail establishments in Dharan, Nepal. Buyer satisfaction is highly and significantly impacted by seller behavior, according to the study ($r = .508$, $p < 0.01$) ($B = 0.96$, $SE = 0.14$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 44.96$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.68, 1.24]).

Similarly, product features have a strong, positive, and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($B = 0.93$, $SE = 0.14$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 43.79$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.66, 1.21]). ($p < 0.01$, $r = .507$). Price has a positive but not as strong of an impact on customer satisfaction as seller behavior and product features ($B = 0.38$, $SE = 0.13$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 8.10$, $p = 0.004$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.64]) ($r = .355$, $p < 0.01$).

The result reveals that the seller's services and product features are more important predictors for increasing and maintaining customer satisfaction than price. The retailers should give more focus to increasing effective seller service and providing appropriate products. The result shows the low but positive effect of price on customer satisfaction. So, retailers should also focus on delivering the product at a reasonable price and implement the appropriate pricing policies. In this study, the effect of demographic variables was also evaluated. The result showed that the variable age had no significant effect on customer satisfaction ($p = 0.753$). Likewise, education level had no significant effect on customer satisfaction ($p = 0.857$). Permanent resident of residence also did not affect customer satisfaction ($p = 0.269$). Therefore, there is no relation or impact of demographic variables on product selection and perception towards price and the seller's service.

Implication

The findings of this study show that retailers should focus more on increasing effective sellers' service activities, such as polite and helpful interaction, providing training to staff to be more customer-oriented, fair dealing, appropriate after-sales service, prompt service, listening and solving customers' problems and complaints, parking facilities, and other support. Likewise, retailers should focus on product-related activities such as quality, information, variety, assortment, availability of product, and innovative products. The result shows the low but positive effect of price on customer satisfaction. So, retailers should also focus on

delivering the product at a reasonable price and implement the appropriate pricing policies. This study may also help other researchers who want to conduct research in the future to assess the relationship between these predictors and customer satisfaction in different demographic groups and geographic locations.

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