

NEW CUSTOMER ACQUISITION BY A RETAILER: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract: *The Indian retail market is rising and so is the challenge to attract a customer. A customer has unlimited retail options to look for his desired product and make the purchase decision. Getting a new customer or a potential buyer is certainly important to enhance profitability. Consequently there is a need to understand the efforts employed by the retailer to acquire a new customer. This manuscript was written with the purpose to understand the retailer's efforts towards new customer acquisition through a secondary data review of past research work. Based on the review various variables have been identified to determine the perception of a retailer towards new customer acquisition. The impact of these concepts on new customer acquisition needs further deliberation and research. The study proposes a model that would through an empirical deliberation find the gap between dimensions of retailer's perception of new customer acquisition and the consumer's dimensions of store choice. However, the future research needs to test the model and to know the customers response towards these efforts made by the retailers and to ascertain the success of these efforts from the point of view of the retailer.*

Keywords: *Retailer, customer, acquisition, consumer decision making, store choice.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the growing retail sector and the market flooded with stores, the retailers have been exhaustively looking for ways to increase business and draw more and more customers (Louis & Lombart, 2011). Rapidly expanding, highly profitable Indian retail market and the diversity of Indian consumers are reasons enough to create a discussion on a retailer, amongst the industry and the researchers alike (Das, 2014). Although the Global Retail Development Index (GRDI), 2014 ranks India at 20th place, dropping by six spots since the last ranking in 2012, it still continues to remain an attractive long term destination, on account of reasons like its demographics, having a population of 1.2 billion, out of which half are younger than 30 years. With the rising disposable incomes allowing for more spending on new products and brands (Kearney Report, 2014).

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Despite India being an attractive market for retail, still there remains a dearth of research focusing on the Indian retailer and customer's perception about the role played by a retailer (Das, 2014). Various variables defining and of relevance to a customer vary from retailer fairness (Frow, Wilkinson & Young, 2011; Nguyen, 2012; Nguyen & Klaus, 2013) to retailers personality (Brehgman & Willems, 2009; Lombart & Louis, 2011; Das, Datta & Guin, 2012). The role played by a retailer in at least apart of decision making has been established in various studies focusing on different ways adopted by a retailer to influence a customer. (Andrews, 2016; Nguyen & Klaus, 2013; Mantrala, Levy, Kahn, Fox, Gaidarev & Shah, 2009). While in choosing the product consumer considers value, durability, features, value, ease of use distinctiveness, in order to patronize the retailer the consumer considers location, credit availability, assortment, hours, sales help, customer service and more (Berman & Evans, 2009).

The retailers important role in consumer decision making and building customer loyalty remains an important area of research (Wulf & Odekerken, 2003; Moreau, Krishna & Harlam, 2001; Hill, Fombelle, Sirianni, 2015; Andrews, 2016), but understanding retailers acquisition efforts remains largely unaddressed.

Extending this area of research the present study tries to conduct a thorough analysis of past research that reinforces and concludes the retailers' key influences on acquiring a new customer. The outcomes of this piece of research would certainly provide practical insights to the industry by suggesting ways to strengthen the retailer as the most important link between the company and the consumer, the retailers who are struggling to enhance presence in the market or are planning to enter the market and even the consumer as the ultimate beneficiary of the retailers attempts to engage him.

The paper is thus designed and begins with a review of the past work for building a conceptual framework and hypotheses development. The research methodology is described to arrive at the results of the recent reviews and a discussion on their results and the implications. It culminated with a conclusion, the limitations and future research directions.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

The present day retailers are making tireless efforts to grow (Louis & Lombart, 2011). Retailer sales promotions are an important means employed to attract customers and enhance sales (Weitz, 1978; Moreau Krishna & Harlam 2001; Alvarez, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Villannueva et al., 2008; Banerjee, 2009; Seitz et al., 2010; Badrinarayan & Laverie, 2011; Demirag, Keskinocak & Swann, 2011). The focus also lies on improvising the retail physical environment, specifically called the store attributes or image (Baker, Berry & Parsuraman, 1988) and remains one of the most widely studied causes of attracting a customer and building customer satisfaction and loyalty (Levy & Weitz, 2003; Morschette, Swoboda & Foscht, 2005; Ghosh, 1990;

Mittal & Mittal, 2008). The need of the day is to look for present day literature on the increasing role of a retailer. To fulfill this gap in the area of retailing this study aims to move beyond the physical characteristics of the store and examine what more a present day retailer is doing to get a new customer on board. The outcomes of this paper would certainly give an insight to existing retailers and those planning to enter in the Indian market. The companies studying acquisition also need to recognize the increasing importance of a retailer as a key person in the process of enhancing business in a dynamic and competitive environment.

3. OBJECTIVES

Previous research findings have proved the various efforts of the retailer with the goal of acquiring a customer. However in India, research to examine such efforts is minimal. Therefore, this research is being done to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To overview the existing literature on retailer's efforts to acquire a new customer.
2. To develop a model that can explain the dimensions of acquisition from a retailer's perspective and ascertain the customer response thereof.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper evaluates the national and international literature on retailing and customer acquisition. It identifies the different concepts that have emerged globally in retailing. The existing literature reviewed reflects upon the development of understanding of a retailer and compared with the domestic literature available on the same. To build conceptual analysis various national and international reports, articles and papers have been referred.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMING

A. Customer Acquisition Defined

The statement goes thus from Peter Drucker, the celebrated management guru, that the "sole purpose of any business is to create a customer (Drucker, 1973)." Customers are assets that need to be acquired before they can be managed for profits (Levitt, 1986). Customer Acquisition is a sensitive aspect of business and can make or break an organization. Customer Acquisition has been defined as, "finding the right customers that provides a profitable return (Kolter & Armstrong, 2009)." Customer acquisition is paramount for any business to create profitability and it remains relevant in situations where switching costs are relatively lower and repeat purchase is infrequent (Shukla, 2013). While customer acquisition it is a prerequisite for organization to find the right customers to serve before decide how they can be acquired. It is the first objectives of Customer Relationship Management to acquire

a new customer and maintains that a new customer deserves the same attention as that given to a potential customer (Becker, Greve & Albers, 2009).

Customer acquisition is always a dependent process and certainly exerts influence on customer retention (Thomas, 2001) and consumer behaviour (Verhoef & Donkers, 2005). It has also been termed as customer initiation (Becker et al., 2009). It remains a challenging task to acquire promising customers (Thomas, Reinartz, and Kumar 2004; Blattberg, Getz, and Thomas 2001) subject to the condition that the costs of acquiring such customers do not outweigh the benefits (Blattberg, Getz, and Thomas 2001; Gupta and Lehmann 2003). Acquiring a new customer is a multistage process, represented as the sales funnel, where not all the suspects become the actual customers (Cooper & Budd, 2007; ; Yu & Cai, 2007; Patterson, 2007). The articles in the recent past reflects that firm's future prospects and value can only be strengthened by its customer base (Blattberg & Deighton, 1996; ; Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2000; Gupta & Lehmann, 2003).

B. Customer Acquisition by a Retailer

This section discussed the past literature on retailer and his efforts to attract a customer. The past literature is discussed in the perspective of the objectives and the respective variables considered by the different researchers. Table I gives a snapshot of the review of literature.

The above review concludes and reinforces the retailers' key role on consumer choice decision. The retailers and manufacturers always have wanted to understand the way marketing variables like price, loyalty, or promotions may affect the brand choice of the consumers (Alvarez & Casielles, 2004). There still remains a lot of reliance on sales promotion as a tool to attract customer and thus influence his final choice (McNeill, 2006). In an attempt to make customer experience more rewarding the retailers are employing the relevant tactics (Keh & Teo, 2001). In culturally diverse environment, tools like sales promotion need to be applied with a lot of customer focus (McNeill, 2006).

Extending this research there are studies on the role of a retail sales person in consumer brand choice. Retailers' salesmen form the impressions on the quality of brands through a variety of means like direct evaluation of product performance, customer feedback, personal experience, demonstration (Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011). Seeing the immense competition in the retail sector, the retailers are struggling hard to survive and grow, and so have gone to the extent of knowing the relevance of emotions in consumer behaviour (Kabadayi & Alan, 2012).

Even the social and behavioral researchers are keen to understand the extent to which the green image of the retailer is helpful in building shopping value and store loyalty (Yusof, Musa & Rahman, 2012). A recent work focusing on the

Table 1
Retailer's Acquisition Effort

Citation	Title	Objective	Variables	Conclusion
Andrews (2016) <i>J of Retailing & Consumer Services</i>	"Product information and consumer choice confidence in multi-item sales promotion"	Consumer choice confidence using diagnostic product information & multi-item sales promotion	High & low diagnosticity (Free & fixed selection)	Choice confidence is positively influenced by information diagnosticity
Weathers, Swain & Makienko (2015) <i>J of Business Research</i>	"When and how should retailers rationalize the size and duration of price discounts?"	Discount size & duration & customer evaluation of offers	Dependent measures (product quality, retailer credibility, retailer opportunism, purchase intentions) Discount manipulation checks (size, congruency, duration)	Consumers foresee retailers to use lesser time period for larger discounts, violating this leads to expectations adversely affecting perception of retailer credibility & purchase intention
Das, G. (2014) <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Service</i>	"Factors affecting Indian shoppers' attitude and purchase intention: An empirical check"	Examine factors influencing Indian consumer's attitude for retailers and their intention to purchase	Self- congruity, retailer association retailer awareness	Self- congruity, , retailer association and awareness have a positive effect on consumer attitude
Kushwala (2014) <i>Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences</i>	"An exploratory study of consumer's perception about relational benefits in retailing"	Perception of Indian consumers in reference	Confidence, social & Special treatment	Male respondents gave priority to confidence, followed by social & special treatment benefits, females-social, confidence, special treatment.
Nguyen & Klaus (2013) <i>J of Consumer & Retailing Services</i>	Retailers fairness: Exploring consumer perceptions of fairness towards retailers' marketing tactics	Explores consumer perception towards retailers' marketing	Product dimension (Quality, value for money, good reputation) Interaction dimensions (Honesty & Integrity, transparency, ethical behaviour) Service dimension (fair treatment, customer care, good services)	Increased honesty, integrity, ethical and moral behavior as drivers of fairness perceptions.
Castro, Thompson & Ward, (2012) <i>Advances in Consumer Research.</i>	"The Importance of Warmth and Competence in the Acquisition and Retention of New Customer"	Examine how warmth &competence judgment, changes as customer acquires experience with a firm	Warmth & Judgment competence	Warmth judgments are dominant over competence judgments prior to service interactions. Post experience competence judgment is more important.

Citation	Title	Objective	Variables	Conclusion
Kabadayi & Alan 2012 <i>Procedia-Social & Behavioral Science</i>	Revisit Intention of Consumer Electronics Retailers: Effects of Customers' Emotion, Technology Orientation and WOM Influence	Empirical study to test if technology orientation & customer emotional states have impact on the revisit intention.	Customers emotions (positive & negative) & high involvement in technology oriented products (customer innovative ness & technologic product involvement	Positive correlation between positive emotions & technology orientation and the revisit intention
Badrinarayan & Laverie 2011 <i>J. of Personal Selling & Sales Management</i>	Brand Advocacy and Sales Effort by Retail Salespeople Antecedents and influence of Identification with Manufacturers Brands	To understand manufacturers reputation, communication with retail salesmen, brand quality & its impact on brand identification	Relationship marketing	Interaction between manufacturers representatives and the retail salesmen is positively related to brand identification
Louis & Lombart (2011) <i>International Management Review</i>	Image and personality: two complementary tools to position and differentiate retailers	Retailers positioning & differentiation using concepts of image and personality	Retailer Image & personality	Stronger differentiation with the concept of personality compared to image
Villanueva, Yoo & Hanssens, 2008 <i>American Marketing Association.</i>	'The Impact of Marketing-Induced Versus Word-of-Mouth Customer Acquisition on Customer Equity Growth'	Comparison of acquisition vehicles, MKT & WOM, to measure short & long term effect of acquisition on equity.	Marketing & WOM communication	For new customers CLV depends on C.Acquisition.
Florian, Wangenheim & Bayon, 2007. <i>J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci.</i>	'The chain from customer satisfaction via word-of-mouth referrals to new customer acquisition'	To analyze the functional linkage between customer satisfaction, WOM & New customer acquisition.	WOM	Satisfaction-WOM-new customer acquisition can enrich quality & satisfaction models.
Lewis, 2006	Customer Acquisition Promotions and Customer Asset Value	To assess the relationship between acquisition discounts and customer value	Discounts & promotions	Acquisition discount depth is negatively related to repeat-buying rates and customer asset value
McNeill, 2006 <i>Austrasian Marketing Journal</i>	The Influence of Culture on Retail Sales Promotion Use in Chinese Supermarkets	Considers the use of, and preferences towards sales promotion methods	Sales Promotion	Price Discounts & free gifts as most popular
Alvarez & Castelles 2004 <i>European J of Marketing</i>	Consumer evaluations of sales promotion: the effect on brand choice	Influence of sales promotion on brand choice.	Sales promotion	Promotion is considered necessary at the moment of purchase & as a tool can help retailer acquire a customer.

Indian shoppers indicates certain factors viz. self congruity, retailer awareness, association, perceived quality affecting the shoppers' attitude towards retailer (Das, 2014). Most of the above discussed above are dominantly focused on the Western economy. Despite India being an attractive market or retail, still there remains a dearth of research being done focusing on the Indian retailer (Das, 2014).

6. FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

The study indicates the importance of customer acquisition and brings out certain dimensions that are relevant while acquiring a new customer in a retail store. On the basis of last 10 years review a list of variables affecting customer acquisition has been drawn that needs to be empirically tested and proposed as a scale for knowing customer acquisition for various products. Table II gives a brief description of the various variables related to new customer acquisition be a retailer.

Table 2
Various dimensions of retailer's acquisition efforts

<i>Variable/Dimension</i>	<i>Authors</i>
A good bargain on products	McNeil, 2006: Lee-Wingate & Stern, 2007: Martin, Ponder & Lueg, 2009: Nguyen & Mutum, 2012: Nguyen & Klaus, 2013, Mindquist, 1974: Nevin & Klaus, 1980: Louis & Lombart, 2011: Yusof et al., 2012: Das, 2014b: Lhoest-Snoeck, Nierop & Verhoef 2014: Backstrom & Johannson, 2006: Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002
A high quality products	Mindquist, 1974: Nevin & Klaus, 1980: Louis & Lombart, 2011: Yusof et al., 2012: Das, 2014b, Lee-Wingate & Stern, 2007: Martin, Ponder & Lueg, 2009: Nguyen & Mutum, 2012: Nguyen & Klaus, 2013: Lakshmi & Rendarajan 2000: Yoon, Oh, Song, Kim & Kim 2014: Rogopoulou & Tsistsou, 2008: Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002
Ability of the employees to instill confidence	Louis & Lombart 2011: Burlakanti & Srinivasan 2013: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993: Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002
An easy layout	Mindquist, 1974: Nevin & Klaus, 1980: Louis & Lombart, 2011: Yusof et al., 2012: Das, 2014b: Seock 2009
Convenient location of the store.	Fox, Postrel, McLaughlin, 2007: Seock 2009: Louis & Lombart 2011: Kushwaha 2014: Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002
Honesty in customer dealing	Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993: Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002: Nguyen & Klaus, 2003
Giving individual attention during the first visit	Kushwaha 2014
Easy finance options	Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002: Rigopoulou & Tsistsou (2008), Yilmaz, Aktas & Celik (2007), Dasar, Hundekar & Maradi (2013), Neethikumar & Aranganathan (2014),
Friendly nature of the employees	Seock 2009: Louis & Lombart 2011: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993

<i>Variable/Dimension</i>	<i>Authors</i>
Promotional deals	Weitz, 1978: Moreau et al., 2001: Alvarez, 2004: Lewis, 2006: Villannueva et al., 2008: Banerjee, 2009: Seitz et al., 2010: Badrinarayan & Laverie, 2011: Lahoti, 2013: Weather et al., 2015
Variable/Dimension	Authors
Giving good quantity of information to enable decision-making	Kivetz, 2000: Punj, 2002: Andrews, 2016: Rogopoulou & Tsistsou, 2008
Convenient parking facility	Louis & Lombart 2011: Kushwaha 2014
Having wide range of products	Louis & Lombart (2011), Hundal (2008)
Convenient operating hours	Lakshmi & Rendarajan(2000): Kushwaha 2014
Live product demonstration	Backstorm (2006),
Product Knowledge of the employees	Weitz, 1978: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993
Giving good quality information to enable decision-making	Kivetz, 2000: Punj, 2002: Andrews, 2016: Rogopoulou & Tsistsou, 2008:
Prompt & time-bound service	Lakshmi & Rengarajan, 2013: Lakshmi & Rendarajan 2000: Vlachos & Vrechopoulos 2012: Nguyen & Klaus, 2013: Govindrajan & Krishnan, 2013: Rogopoulou & Tsistsou, 2008: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993, Hundal (2008)
Store Ambience	Mindquist, 1974: Nevin & Klaus, 1980: Louis & Lombart, 2011: Yusof et al., 2012: Das, 2014b: Babin & Attaway(2000): Seock 2009:
The retailers reputation	Nguyen & Klaus, 2013: Martineau, 1958: Zentes, Morschett & Klein, 2008: Louis & Lombart, 2011: Das, Datta & Guin, 2012: Das, 2014a: Seock 2009: Das, Datta & Guin, 2012: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993:
Timely delivery and installation	Nguyen & Klaus, 2013: Rogopoulou & Tsistsou, 2008: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993
Value for money	Lee-Wingate & Stern, 2007: Martin, Ponder & Lueg, 2009: Nguyen & Mutum, 2012: Nguyen & Klaus, 2013: Louis & Lombart 2011: Sinha, Banerjee & Uniyal 2002
Visual appeal of the store	Mindquist, 1974: Nevin & Klaus, 1980: Louis & Lombart, 2011: Yusof et al., 2012: Das, 2014b: Louis & Lombart 2011:
Well groomed employees	Badrinarayan & Laverie, 2011: Louis & Lombart 2011: Hawes, Rao & Baker, 1993:
Willingness to handle returns and exchanges	Seock (2009), D'Astous & Guevremont (2008): Paulins & Geistfeld (2003)
Good Word of mouth referrals	Wangenheim & Bayon, 2007: Kabadayi et al., 2012: Villannueva, Yoo & Hanssens, 2008: Wangenheim & Bayon (2007): Jones & Reynolds 2006: Wangenheim & Bayon 2007: Villanueva, Yoo & Hannsens 2008: Uncles, East & Lomax 2013: Soni, Lohani & Sagar, 2010: Das, Mohanty & Chandra, 2008: Nam & Chintagunta,2006, Hundal (2008)

The various dimension mentioned might be perceived differently by the customer and the retailer. There exists a gap in the retailer efforts to acquire a new customer and the variables that influence the store choice decision of the customer. Thus the model suggests studying them both at the level of customer as well as the retailer.

Figure 1 below show the need to assess the gap between the dimensions of retailer's perception of new customer acquisition and the dimensions of store choice considered by a consumer. The above construct can be proved further by developing a scale measuring both new customer acquisition by the retailer and the store choice by the customers. Thus the study identifies and in the future help in addressing the gap between the retailer strategy of acquisition and the consumer behaviour for store choice.

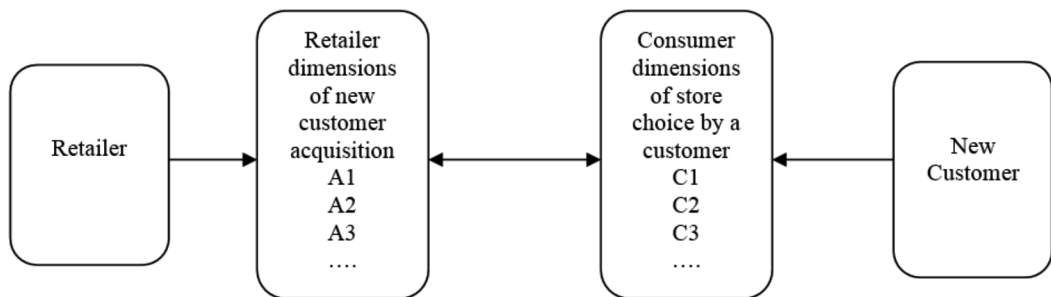


Figure 1: Theoretical construct addressing the gap between retailer and consumer

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The study is based on past research and does not give an empirical insight. The present study focused on the extant review of literature on retailer's effort to attract and acquire a customer. The consumer store choice behaviour already stands a well researched area. As a future scope of research the study would help in filling the gap between the retail industry and the consumer with respect to the acquisition practices. There is a need to empirically test which of these efforts are important and applicable in the India context. An empirical test of the suggested model will help to recognize the difference in perception of a retailer and the customer. Similarly there is a future scope to analyze the acquisition efforts by the retailer for the different product categories as both retailer strategies and store choice behaviour varies from one product category to another.

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