

Modelling the impact of attitude and satisfaction on perception of customers with special reference to supermarkets and family run stores – structural equation modelling approach

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Abstract

The development of our economy depends on the major industries in our country. These industries can be classified as organized and unorganized sector. The retail industry, which is part of the organized sector, has performed well over the past decade. Family run stores, supermarkets and malls are also doing well since the past five decades, but these are part of the unorganized sector. This research study evaluates the customer's perception of family run stores and supermarkets. This study addresses the following issues - What aspects are involved in customer perception? How do the customers' attitude and

satisfaction influence their perception, and in this connection, how do they perceive supermarkets and family run stores? These are the major research issues. The authors have undertaken a scientific inquiry to evaluate the perceptions of customers about family run stores and retail stores located in Tiruchirappalli city.

Keywords: *Organized sector, unorganized sector, customer perception, customer attitude, customer satisfaction, retail.*

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Introduction

Over the past decades, supermarkets in India have developed from traditional stores into modern stores and chain stores as with other places in the world. Most of the major developments have taken place in Tiruchirappalli city. Rising incomes and changing lifestyles have stimulated the development and modernization of retailing in India. The strong competition in Tiruchirappalli has also encouraged supermarkets to move to provincial areas where significant competition has yet to develop, and where income levels are beginning to justify the investments. Large companies are able to satisfy their shareholders by achieving continued growth. Industry observers indicate that superstore businesses are expanding rapidly due to the variety of products and discounts they offer. They offer customers convenience with air-conditioned stores and they attract customers with a modern store layout. As the number of supermarkets continues to grow, the number of family-run stores has fallen. Customer perception is a marketing concept that encompasses a customer's impression. It is typically affected by advertising, reviews, public relations, social media, personal experiences and other channels. Consumer perception applies the concept of sensory perception to marketing and advertising. Just as sensory perception relates to how humans perceive and process sensory stimuli through their five senses, consumer perception pertains to how individuals form opinions about companies and the merchandise they offer through the purchases they make. Merchants apply consumer perception theory to determine how their customers perceive them. They also use consumer perception theory to develop marketing and advertising strategies intended to retain current customers -- and attract new ones. Cognitive theories of perception assume there is a poverty of stimulus. This (with reference to perception) is the claim that sensations are, by themselves, unable to provide a unique description of the world. Sensations require 'enriching', which is the role of the mental model. A different type of theory is the perceptual ecology approach of James J. Gibson. Gibson rejected the assumption of a poverty of

stimulus by rejecting the notion that perception is based upon sensations - instead, he investigated what information is actually presented to the perceptual systems. His theory assumes the existence of stable, unbounded, and permanent stimulus-information in the ambient optic array. And it supposes that the visual system can explore and detect this information. The theory is information-based, not sensation-based. He and the psychologists who work within this paradigm detailed how the world could be specified to a mobile, exploring organism via the lawful projection of information about the world into energy arrays. Specification is a mapping of some aspect of the world into a perceptual array; given such a mapping, no enrichment is required and perception is direct perception. A mathematical theory of perception-in-action has been devised and investigated in many forms of controlled movement, and has been described in many different species of organism using the General Tau Theory. According to this theory, tau information, or time-to-goal information is the fundamental 'percept' in perception. An ecological understanding of perception derived from Gibson's early work is that of "perception-in-action", the notion that perception is a requisite property of animate action; that without perception, action would be unguided, and without action, perception would serve no purpose. Animate actions require both perception and motion, and perception and movement can be described as "two sides of the same coin, the coin is action". Gibson works from the assumption that singular entities, which he calls "invariants", already exist in the real world and that all that the perception process does is to home in upon them.

Customer Attitude

One of the prime reasons for conducting marketing research is to understand consumer attitudes. Attitudes affect behaviour. In marketing, the desired behaviour is to purchase a product or service. Marketers need to know what attitudinal barriers exist in purchasing so they can strategize how to counter those obstacles through marketing activities. Large companies will conduct market studies that survey the

opinions of hundreds or thousands of people. Their goal is to survey a sample size large enough so that the results are deemed "significant." They pose questions to study participants that attempt in every way possible to understand all the attitudinal nuances of the study subject. Findings from research are used as the basis for marketing and advertising strategies. Big marketers will benchmark attitudes and do successive studies over a number of years to determine if marketing efforts have worked to change consumer attitudes. Consumers are individuals with likes and dislikes. When the preponderance of people in a particular group feel one way or another about a product, service, entity, person, place or thing, it is said to be a generalized consumer attitude that could affect the marketing of that person, product or entity in positive or negative ways. Marketers strive to influence consumer attitudes, and understanding the prevailing attitude is the first step to changing it if needed. Customer satisfaction is a term frequently used in marketing. It is a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet or surpass customer expectation.

Customer perception

Customer perceptions, like consumer satisfaction, are also influenced by external economic factors; in particular, the short-term interest rates of an adjustable rate mortgage and consumer confidence. As prices rise, as reflected in a rise of the CPI, consumers' pricing perceptions about a brand, in particular the perception that "prices are competitive," will decline. This will occur even if the cost of that brand has remained the same. When squeezed financially, consumers tend to generalize about prices and assign negative perceptions across the board. In our analysis, consumers were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: (retailer) prices are competitive with other retailers in the market.

It is mandatory to review the literature available with respect to the area of the research study. Several studies have been undertaken to analyse the perception of supermarkets' customers. Here are some studies conducted by analysts in the past.

Bolton and Drew (1991) developed a longitudinal model of the effect of a service change on customer attitudes about service quality. This model is estimated with data from a field experiment with three survey waves. Service changes are found to have a strong influence on customer evaluations of service quality through their effect on customer perceptions of current performance and disconfirmation. Chulmin Kim et al (2003) observed that the importance of managing dissatisfied customers increased because of severe competition from the introduction of new types of stores, such as online shopping. They also focused on customers who complain directly to the offending firms because their dissatisfaction provides a firm with the opportunity to improve its customer service. Bauman (2006) explored the factors predicting customer loyalty in retail banking. Their results indicate that willingness to recommend is best predicted by affective attitude, overall satisfaction and empathy. Short-term behavioural intentions, however, were best predicted by overall satisfaction and responsiveness, while long-term intentions were predicted by overall satisfaction, affective attitude and empathy. Hsieh and Li (2008) investigated the relationship between customer perceptions of public relations (PR) and customer loyalty to test for the moderating role of brand image in that relationship. Their study reveals that consumers' perception of an organisation's PR practice is an antecedent of loyalty. The impact of Public Relations Perception (PRP) on customer loyalty is stronger and more significant when the brand image is favourable. If it is unfavourable, the effect of PRP on customer loyalty is negligible. Han and Ryu (2009) examined the relationships among three components of the physical environment, namely, price perception, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the restaurant industry. Their study provides potential ways for restaurateurs to increase customer

loyalty by improving their understanding of the roles of physical environment, price perception, and customer satisfaction. Zhuomin et al (2012) made an attempt to study the effect of face perception on Brand Country of Origin (BCO) in the Chinese market. Results showed that: customers with high face perception have a more positive explicit attitude toward Japanese /American brands, and face perception moderates the relationship between implicit and explicit attitudes towards BCO. Mulvey (2015) examined an analytic framework based on the Means-End approach to understand innovation-values fit from the consumer's perspective with the goal of informing about new product commercialization strategy. Diallo et. al (2015) investigated the role of image and consumer factors in influencing store brands choice between two retail chains in the Latin American market, Brazil. Paul et. al (2015) stated that with greater competition, service quality has become one of the most popular areas of academic investigation. They examined the impact of various service quality variables on the overall satisfaction of customers and compared the private and public sector banks using a sample from India. Yu et. al (2015) examined guests' experiences at green hotels and the impact of green experience on customer satisfaction. More importantly, this study examines the contribution of different types of green practices on customer satisfaction. Fu and Juan (2016) presented a model of a comprehensive psychological process on individuals' public transit use decision-making, which is accomplished by the integration of the theory of planned behaviour and the customer satisfaction theory. They stated that the empirical examination supports the validity of this integrated framework to model public transit use behaviour, with a set of hypothesized cause-and-effect relationships among the concerned psychological constructs being confirmed. Lazzi (2016) examined if and how the perception of a product and the evaluation of the experience of consumption can change depending on the consumer's propensity to purchase branded or unbranded products. The results of their study highlighted the fact that attributes and benefits have the same role in the processes of consumer choice.

Paul et. al (2016) stated that the substitution of small retail stores by large stores has been a topic of debate among academicians, practitioners, retailers and general public, especially in the context of foreign firms entering emerging markets such as China and India. Therefore, they examined the determinants of consumer satisfaction in small and large retail stores in an emerging market, with a sample from India. In order to provide insights into various segments of the Indian organized retail sector - employment opportunities, education profile of employees across states, skill gaps, work force distribution - Raju and Kumar (2016) studied the impact of effective Visual Merchandising (VM) on the impulse buying behaviour of customers at various retail stores in Andhra Pradesh. Disfani et. al (2017) stated that maintaining and improving customer loyalty is an important strategic goal for businesses as competition has intensified in almost all sectors of the economy. Their study in marketing provides some guidance to retail managers about developing and sustaining shopper loyalty across different store formats. The results reveal the important differences and offer directions for the pursuit of different strategies by supermarkets and hypermarkets. They also discussed the specific strategies, and the implications of this research for theory and practice. Kasiri et. al (2017) analysed the direct and indirect impacts of standardization and customization on customer satisfaction and loyalty through service quality. A framework was developed by extending Grönroos' model of service quality by including the antecedents of service quality. Ali and Raza (2017) measured the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction among the customers of Pakistani Islamic banks. Their study employed a modified SERVQUAL model by introducing a unique dimension of compliance in the context of service industry. Lee et. al (2018) investigated the antecedent attributes of customer satisfaction in the coffee shop business domain. Their results revealed that the hypothesized antecedent variables were statistically significant to account for satisfaction. Taste was identified as the most influential attribute accounting for satisfaction. Moreover, a significant

relationship between "satisfaction" and "loyalty" was identified. Kato and Tsuda (2018) stated that in order to acquire target brand images, companies develop various activities to manage brands as assets. However, since companies cannot grasp the necessary elements for the image, some of them bring to market inconsistent products and promotions. Zhao et. al (2019) opined that customers' online reviews of hotels have significant business value in the e-commerce and big data era. They found that customers' reviews positively influence their overall satisfaction. Gomes and Graca (2019) discussed the perception of Portuguese consumers, namely undergraduate students, regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). They also stated that since consumer perceptions on CSR dimensions are limited to a national contingency, their research provides some results that bridge the research gap on the subject in Portugal. Harrison et. al (2019) reviewed customer-brand research related to business ethics and social responsibility and conducted a study to evaluate customer attitudes. Uysal (2019) examined social loafing perceptions of employees in the same organisational climate related to co-workers to determine its effects on employees' feeling of burnout. A positive and significant relationship has been determined between burnout and social loafing perception revealed in the result of the analysis.

Research Problem

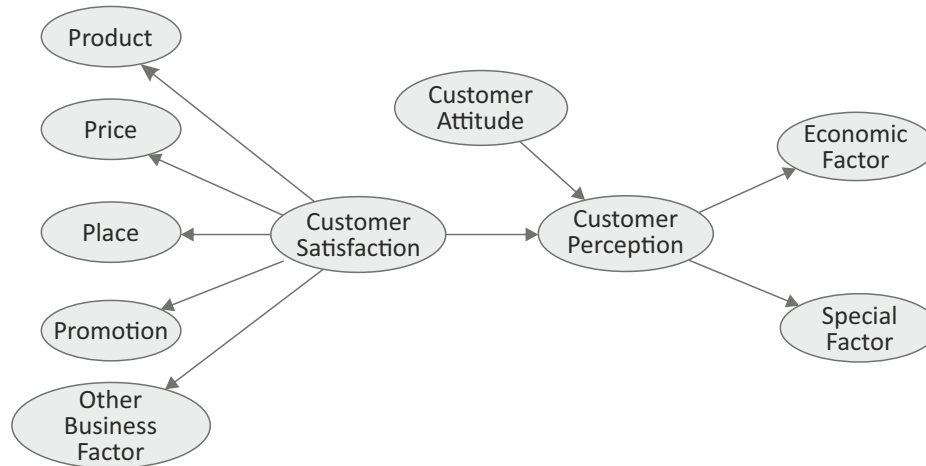
The development of an economy depends on the performance of the industries in a country. Among various industries in India, Retailing has been one of the emerging industries since the past two decades. Prior to that, family run stores dominated the retail market. However, even after the emergence of organized retail stores, family run stores have survived and maintained their market share in every part of the country, in both rural and urban areas. This study has attempted to assess customers' perception of supermarkets and family run stores, and the impact of the level of satisfaction and attitude of customers on their perceptions of these two stores. It also finds out the determinants of customer satisfaction and factors determining customer attitude. These issues lead the authors to conduct a scientific inquiry on customers' perception of select supermarkets and family run stores in Tiruchirappalli.

Research Methodology

Objectives of the study

- 1) To study the customer perception in supermarkets and family run stores
- 2) To propose a multi-dimensional and structural model of evaluating the perception of customers in supermarkets and family run stores located in Tiruchirappalli city.
- 3) To give suitable suggestions and recommendations to the managers of supermarkets and family run stores.

Hypothesized Research Model



Pilot Study

A draft questionnaire was prepared by the authors to evaluate the customer perception. It comprised of 5 different sets of questions - personal and demographic factors (6), behavioural Information (4), customer attitude (12), customer satisfaction (5), and customer perceptions (10), which were anchored to the five-point Likert scale. 90 customers were randomly selected based on the frequency of visits to supermarkets and family run stores. A draft questionnaire was issued to these customers for the purpose of collecting the preliminary information about their attitude, satisfaction and perception. The authors did not modify the semantic meaning of the conceptual questions in the questionnaire.

Sampling framework

This research is a sample survey to evaluate the impact of attitude, satisfaction and perception of customers in supermarkets and family-run stores. The authors adopted a purposive sampling method, which comes under the non-probabilistic sampling technique. The authors selected fifteen supermarkets, namely, Spencer, Reliance, FSM, Kaveri, Mizan, Ganga, Cinthamani, More for you, Kungumam, Anandha,

Adhi, Amma, Image quality, Sri Astalakshmi, and RT Mini supermarket for the purpose of evaluating customers' perception. The determination of the sample size was as follows.

Determination of Sample size

In order to determine the sample size for this research study, the following formula was used:

$$n = \left(\frac{Z * s}{e} \right)^2$$

Where n is the sample size, z is the standard normal variate value (1.64) at 95% Confidence level, e is the allowable sampling error at 5% level and s is the standard deviation of the customer perception. Based on the pilot study, the standard deviation ($s = 0.528$) of the customer perception was calculated. Now by substituting the above said values in the formula, we get the required sample size as 300 customers, which is the lower limit of sample survey and is used to analyse the customer perception of supermarkets and family run stores in Tiruchirappalli city.

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Data collection and Instrumentation

By rectifying the shortcomings faced in the pilot study results, a well-structured questionnaire was prepared by the authors after the pilot study was completed. The finalized questionnaire was issued to 300 customers who visited supermarkets and family run stores. The finalized questionnaire is divided into five parts - the first part includes questions related to personal and demographic profile of the customers; Part 2 comprises the behavioural information of customers; Part 3 includes the dimension of attitude

questions; Part 4 comprises the dimension of customer satisfaction questions in marketing and business factors; Part 5 consists of the dimension of customer perception of economic and social factors. Finally, secondary information regarding the profile of supermarket customers and related reviews was also collected by the authors from the internet. The authors also visited all the above-mentioned supermarkets and family-run stores in Tiruchirappalli city for the purpose of conducting formal discussions with customers.

Data analysis

After final data collection, the authors analysed the data with the help of popular statistics software namely IBM SPSS 22 and IBM SPSS AMOS 22. At first, the data was organised and logically tabulated. Simple frequency tables were prepared and presented based on the personal and demographic background of the customers. Structural equation modelling was used to propose a multi-dimensional model of evaluating the impact of customer attitude and customer satisfaction on the perception of the customers.

Section 3: Data analysis

Table 1: Personal & demographic and Socio-economic profile of customers

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	124	41.3
	Female	176	58.7
Age	18-24 years	77	25.7
	24-35 years	88	29.3
	35-44 years	99	33.0
	44 years and above	36	12.0
Education and qualification	School	18	6.0
	Diploma	33	11.0
	UG	104	34.7
	PG	88	29.3
	Others	57	19.0

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Occupation	Student	72	24.0
	Homemaker	52	17.3
	Business	31	10.3
	Govt. employee	38	12.7
	Pvt. employee	88	29.3
	Others	19	6.3
Monthly income	Below Rs10,000	101	33.7
	Rs 10,000- Rs 20,000	74	24.7
	Rs 20,000- Rs 30,000	54	18.0
	Rs 30,000- Rs 40,000	23	7.7
	Rs 40,000- Rs 50,000	35	11.7
	Above Rs 50,000	13	4.3
Marital status	Single	105	35.0
	Married	178	59.3
	Divorced	17	5.7
Residential location	Central	40	13.3
	Thillainagar	68	22.7
	Cantonment	60	20.0
	Thennur	81	27.0
	KK nagar	51	17.0
Regular purchase in the supermarkets	Mizan	16	5.3
	Spencer	45	15.0
	Kungumum	22	7.3
	Adhi	18	6.0
	Image quality	16	5.3
	Ganga	17	5.7
	More for you	15	5.0
	Kaveri	32	10.7
	Amma	12	4.0
	Sri Astalakshmi	8	2.7
	Chintamani	18	6.0
	FSM	35	11.7
	Anandha	12	4.0
	Reliance	26	8.7
R.T Mini	8	2.7	

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Reason for shopping	To Buy something	111	37.0
	Extra money	62	20.7
	On the way	28	9.3
	Accompanying friends	34	11.3
	I am free	36	12.0

Table 2: Concepts and items of customer perception and their codes

Dimension	S.no	Item	Code
Customer Attitude	1	I enjoy shopping	CA1
	2	I know the difference between supermarkets and family-run stores	CA2
	3	Supermarkets improve consumers' lifestyle	CA3
	4	Supermarkets and family-run stores are competing with each other	CA4
	5	Supermarkets have negative effects over family-run stores	CA5
	6	I care that family-run stores are closed down because of supermarkets	CA6
	7	I know that government is restricting supermarkets from expanding	CA7
	8	Government should restrict supermarkets from expanding more	CA8
	9	Government should allow free and fair competition	CA9
	10	Government should support family-run stores	CA10
	11	We don't need supermarkets because family-run stores are enough	CA11
	12	Supermarkets are essential for consumers in Trichy	CA12
Customer Satisfaction	13	Variety of products	Pro1
	14	Quality of products	Pro2
	15	Fresh and healthy food	Pro3
	16	Traditional & handmade products	Pro4
	17	Reasonable Price	Pri1
	18	Stable Price	Pri2
	19	Easily reachable location	PI1
	20	Car shelter and service	PI2
	21	Cleanliness of the store	PI3
	22	Quality facilities and equipment	PI4
	23	Product placement	PI5
	24	Washroom facility	PI6
	25	Offering discount (price, premium, etc.)	Prom1

	25	Offering discount (price, premium, etc.)	Prom1
	26	Occasional gift for consumer	Prom2
	27	Advertisement and consumer awareness	Prom3
	28	Information service	Bf1
	29	Sales service	Bf2
	30	Complain and problem solving ability	Bf3
	31	Management ability	Bf4
Customer Perception	32	Benefiting local economy	Ef1
	33	Benefiting local consumers	Ef2
	34	Creating employment	Ef3
	35	Paying tax to government	Ef4
	36	Following government rules and regulations	Ef5
	37	Contribution to social activities	Sf1
	38	Contribution to humanitarian aid	Sf2
	39	Caring about local culture	Sf3
	40	Caring about labour & human rights	Sf4
	41	Caring about environmental safety	Sf5

Figure 1: Structural equation modelling of customer perception in supermarkets

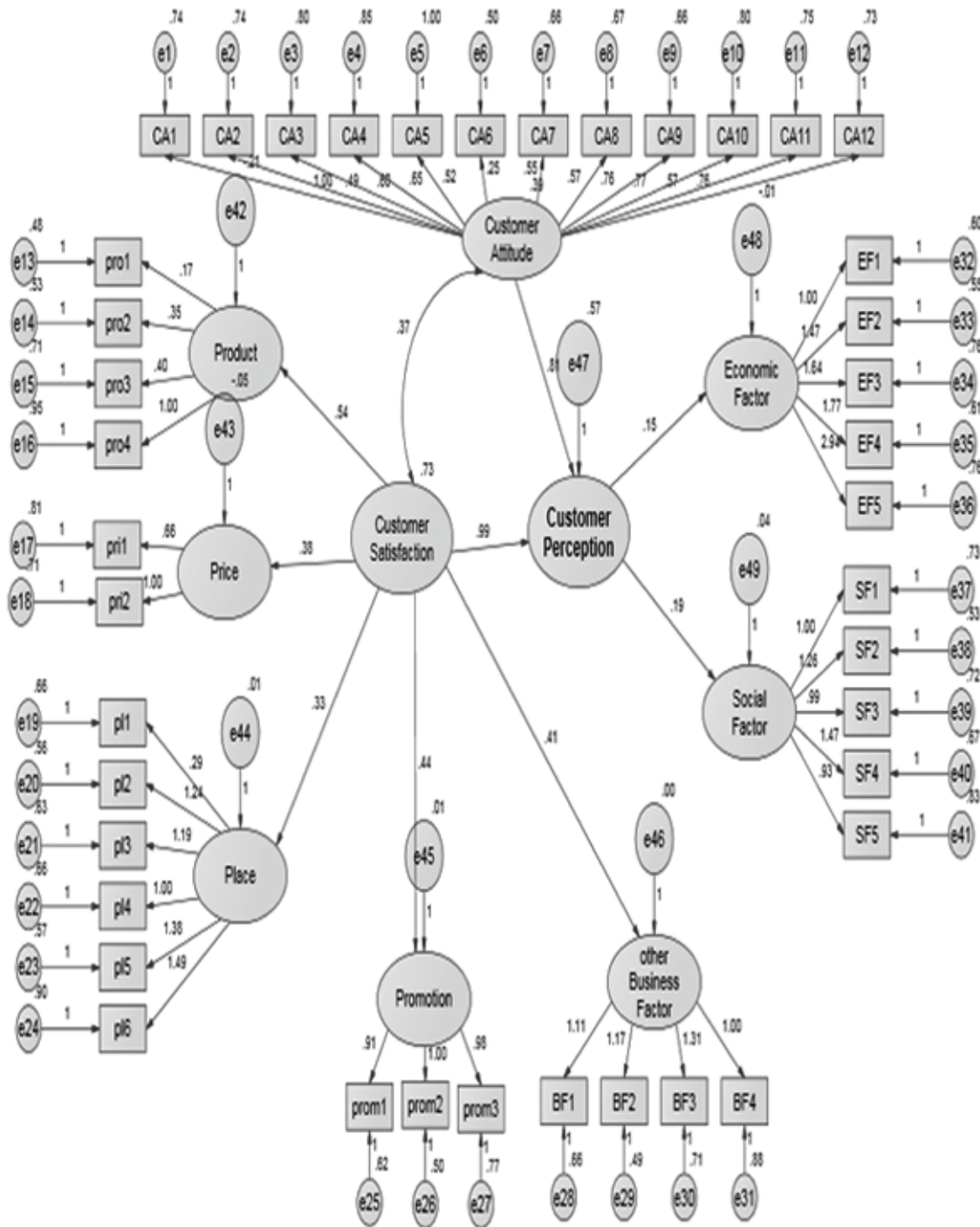
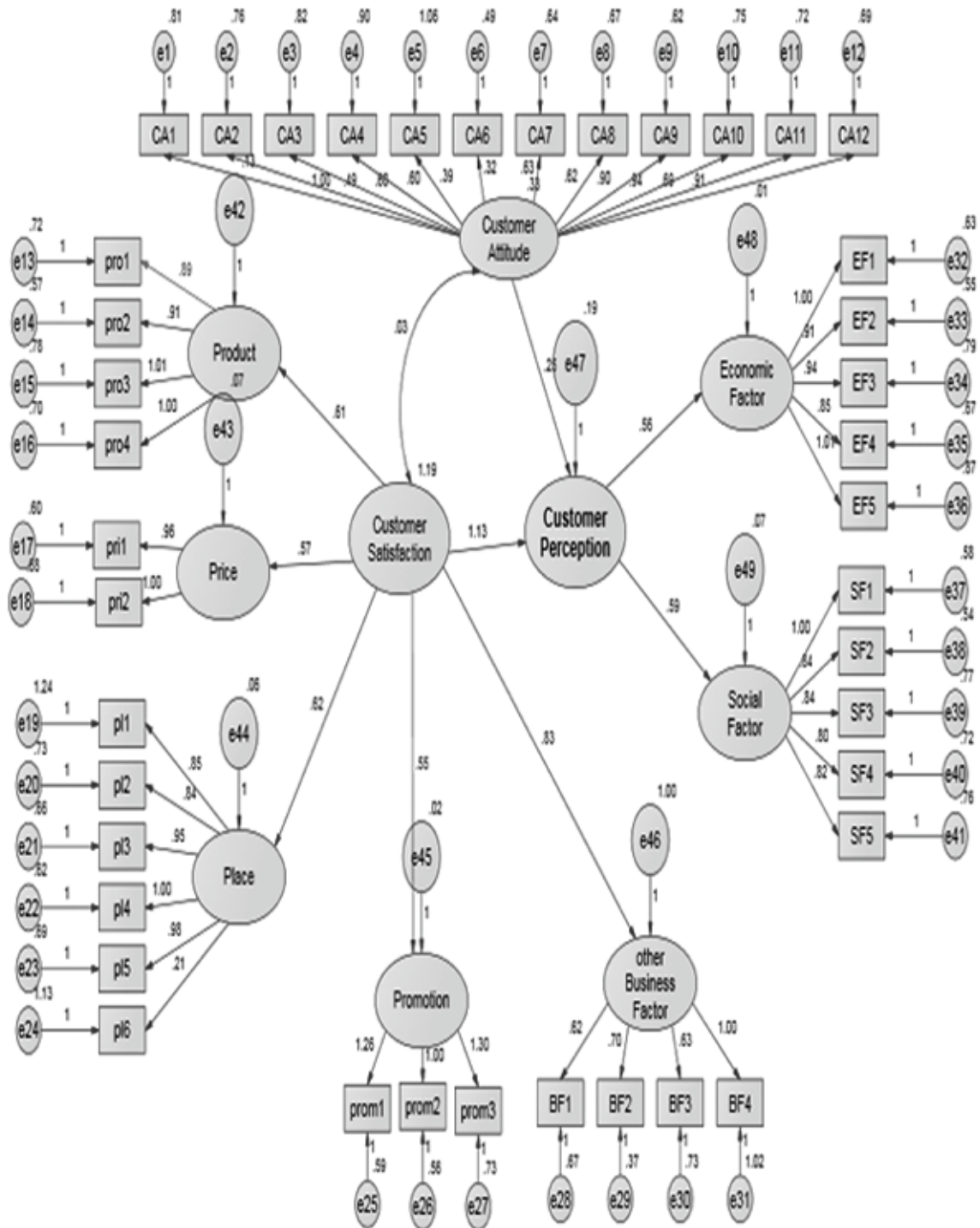


Figure 1: Structural equation modelling of customer perception in supermarkets



Discussion

Table 1 presents various relevant factors such as demographic profile of the customers (Gender, Age, Education and Qualification, Occupation, Monthly income, and Marital status) and shopping behaviour (reason for shopping, shopping duration, money spent per visit, etc.) at both supermarkets and family run stores. Figure 1 presents the structural equation modelling of customers' perception of supermarkets. This structural model reveals that customers of supermarkets assess the supermarket in terms of satisfaction and their attitude. Among the two major dimensions of customer perception, customer satisfaction (0.986) contributed more to their perception, when compared to their attitude. If the customer perception of the supermarket positively increases, they believe the supermarkets have contributed more to the society than to the economy. Moreover, customer satisfaction and customer attitude are positively correlated; if their attitude changes, then satisfaction also increases or decreases. Moreover, the GFI (0.826), AGFI (0.806) are close to 1 and RMR, RMSEA are close to 0 respectively. This shows that the proposed model of evaluating the customers' perception of supermarkets is valid and reliable. Figure 2 presents the structural equation modelling of customers' perception of family run stores. This structural model reveals that customers of family run stores assess them based on their satisfaction and attitude. Among the two major dimensions of customer perception, customer satisfaction (1.132) contributed more to their perception, when compared to their attitude. If customers' perception of family run stores positively increases, they believe family run stores contributed more to society than to the economy. Moreover, customer satisfaction and customer attitude are positively correlated and if their attitude changes, then satisfaction also increases or decreases. Moreover, the GFI (0.816), AGFI (0.795) are close to 1 and RMR, RMSEA are closed to 0 respectively. This shows that the hypothesized research model of evaluating customers' perception of family run stores is valid and reliable.

Conclusion

This research study has attempted to analyse the perception of customers about supermarkets and family run stores. It can be concluded that customers are not satisfied with the complaints and problem-solving abilities of supermarkets. However, in terms of marketing factors, customers are satisfied with product, price, place and promotion of supermarkets. Customers' perception about economic and social factors of supermarkets is better than family run stores. But focusing on the local culture is very important. Product placement is important because customers have difficulty in finding the products they want. Sales staff should be more attentive towards customers. Customers are attracted by the product variety and quality. Adding more traditional and handmade products, among other factors, would enhance the satisfaction and attitude of the customers. Store maintenance and product placement are very important to improve sales based on marketing factors. Moreover, customers believe that supermarkets must contribute more to the economy and to society. Similar factors are applicable to family run stores.

Universalization and Generalization of the study

The authors proposed a model of evaluating the perception of customers in supermarkets and family run stores. Similar research studies can be conducted in other parts of the country to understand the generalized perception of the Indian customers regarding both kinds of stores. The results derived from this research study are applicable only to the subject of this study. The authors believe that this research model can be adopted to evaluate the effect of customer perception, satisfaction and attitude in other industries such as Consumer Durables, Industrial goods, Food retailers, Apparels, Textiles and so on.

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