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Organized Rural Agri-Input Retail Outlets : Preference and Satisfaction of Customers

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Abstract

Retailing in India is growing fast and is covering every nook and corner of the country. India is being acknowledged as an attractive destination for retailing worldwide. Organized retailing is expected to come up in a big way in India and rural areas are not left untouched. Present study is an attempt to study the consumer preference towards organized rural retailing of agri-inputs in Punjab. Top two and bottom two organized rural retail outlets, on the basis of annual sales, of Godrej Agrovet and Haryali Kisan Bazar were included in the study. Fifteen respondents from each outlet were included in study, leading to total sample size of 120. Findings of the study reveal that trustworthiness and technical services were the major reason for preference of organized rural retail outlets over other competing options. An attempt has also been made to study the level of satisfaction and problems of respondents with respect to organized rural retail outlets.

Key Words

Organized Retailing, Rural Retailing, Customer Preference, Satisfaction, Punjab

RETAILING IN INDIA

Retailing in India is receiving global recognition and attention and this emerging market is witnessing a significant change in growth and investment pattern. It is not just the global players like Wal-Mart, Tesco and Metro group which are eying to capture a pie of this market but also the domestic corporate behemoths like Reliance group, KK Modi group, Aditya Birla group, and Bharti group too are at some stage of retail development. Retailing in India is seen as sunrise industry next to IT, accounting for over 10 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Sirohi, 2005). It has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fast paced industries with several players entering in the market. India's vast middle class is key attraction for global retail giants wanting to enter newer markets.

Retailing includes all the activities in selling goods or services directly to final consumers for personal, non-business use (Kotler et al., 2012). It consists of the final activity and steps needed to place merchandise made elsewhere into the hands of the consumer or to provide services to the consumer. Organized Retailing presupposes a retailer's ability to manage or more importantly influence a set of supply chain variables in a commercially viable and sustainable way. A combination of increased consumer demand and improved sourcing options are creating the foundation for a significant growth in the organized retail sector.

The size of the Indian retail market in 2012 was estimated to be USD 518 billion. Currently, organized retail has been pegged at 8 per cent of the total retail market and is expected to grow much faster than traditional retail. According to the available estimates, share of organized retail is expected to grow to 20 per cent by 2020. Between 2010 and 2012, Indian retail industry experienced growth of 10.6 per cent and is expected to reach USD 750-850 billion by 2015. Food and Grocery (F&G) items account for more than 60 per cent of all retail sales, followed by apparel and mobile segment (Anonymous, 2013).

Indian retail market is characterized by significant rural population, large geographic spread and highly value conscious consumers (Anonymous, 2006). Organized rural retailing is a sector of immense opportunities. As majority of Indian population is living in villages and is ready to embrace the benefits of globalization. Improved rural incomes coupled by the demonstration effect of urban markets are expected to give a big push to rural retailing in near future. HUL's Shakti, Godrej Aadhar, Haryali Kisan Bazar, ITC e-choupal and Sagar are the initial projects to increase the penetration of organized retailing in rural India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section deals with the research work done at national and international level by various reserchers in the area of retailing, purchase of agri-inputs and customers' satisfaction. A brief review of the various related studies is presented in chronological order.

Dodds *et al.* (1991) reported a study of the effects of price, brand, and store information on buyers' perceptions of product quality and value, as well as their willingness to buy. The results indicated that price had a positive effect on perceived quality, but has a negative effect on perceived value and willingness to buy.

Dibb (1996) suggested that, with sound economic growth, a rising population and changing lifestyle, the Asia Pacific Rim offers an attractive trading environment for retailers and manufacturers. The report stated that trading environment in the region is somewhat diverse, so, a business wishing to take advantage of the opportunities must have a flexible marketing approach that allows them to adapt to local needs.

Padmanaban (1998) found that price and efficiency of agri-inputs have a significant role in influencing the brand loyalty of customers. The customer relied more on private dealers since they are primary source of plant protection. Moreover, credit facility made available to customers at dealers point of sale has attracted them and made loyal to such dealers.

Banerjee and Banerjee (2000) opined that retailing is entering an active phase in its business lifecycle in India. The increasing availability of consumer transaction level data at Point of Sale (POS) in various stores in India is opening up an important arena in market that can enhance business decision-making process.

Anand and Rajshekhar (2001) examined an interesting development in Indian retailing sector. It was found that retail formats are being experimented in different parts of the country like discount stores, quasi-malls, corner shops, hypermarkets, cash & carry etc. Not a single format has emerged as dominant.

Vikram (2003) found in his study that organized retail industry has potential in the Indian sub continent to provide more and more opportunities to the Indian investors. The unfulfilled demand of the Indian consumers for quality products at the right price and environment with the perfect service and ambience will fuel the growth of the Indian retail industry.

Jain and Rathod (2005) concluded that the government's efforts to ensure easy availability of credit at affordable rates and the initiatives of companies like Mahindra Finance to offer credit in rural areas make it easy to experiment with unconventional channels of distributing and new retailing formats.

Pilley and Sexena (2005) highlighted the factors that affect rural people's needs, desires, aspirations and their buying behavior in general to be successful in marketing to rural areas regarding agricultural inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, and insecticides, capital goods like tractors and agricultural machinery, and pump sets etc. The study has also thrown light on changing life style and increasing disposable income of rural population.

Arora and Vyas (2006) examined that today smart retailer can make affordable immediate changes: yet realize very meaningful incremental gains in effective store performance from the backroom of the store operation. Besides this, the smart retailers take advantage of enabling technology wherever it can bring added value to the operations.

Sinha and Kar (2006) in their study revealed that Indian retail sector is going through a transformation and this emerging market is witnessing a significant change in its growth and investment pattern. Both existing and new players are experimenting with new retail formats.

Sanwalka and Mitra (2007) indicated that India is witnessing different experiments to tap the rural market potential. ITC is experimenting the retailing with its e-chaupals and chaupal sagars-rural hypermarkets. HUL is using its project Shakti initiative- leveraging women self-help group to explore the rural market. Mahamaza is leveraging technology and network marketing concepts to act as an aggregator and serve the rural markets.

Sivsankar and Bineeth (2007) conducted a study regarding main points to be discussed conceptually to prove retail chains effect on small shops. Taking into consideration, customer who is loyal to certain shops, it can be seen that there is a shift in these loyal customers too, when making purchasing decision.

Mittal et al. (2010) concluded that the farmers preferred organized retail outlets because of better quality and technical services. Ghosh and Tripathi (2010) studied the basis of organized retail store evaluation by the consumers. It was concluded that the consumers evaluated organized retail stores on the basis of convenience, merchandise, store atmosphere and services.

Kesari and Srivastva (2012) opined that rural shopping malls can provide a range of products to consumers such as cosmetics, garments, electronics etc. Besides, these malls can serve as agri-sourcing centres and facilitation centres. Singh and Aggarwal (2012) stressed that space, ambience, and convenience are the important factors in drawing the customers to organized retail outlets in India. With improvement based on the above-mentioned factors, the consumer preference for organized retail outlets is likely to increase. Gupta (2013) studied consumer preference towards organized retailing in Jammu and found that the consumers were visiting these outlets for variety, availability of merchandise, atmosphere and entertainment facilities.

Most of the previous studies focused on the preference of customers towards organized retail outlets in urban areas and very few studies were focused on organized rural retailing. To fill this research gap, the present study was conducted to explore the concept of rural retailing and the satisfaction of customers towards rural retail outlets.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to meet the data requirement and analysis to cover the above mentioned aspects has been discussed in this section.

Research Design

Descriptive research was carried out in state of Punjab and the focus was on studying factors such as sources of information about organized retail outlets, factors important in choosing organized retail outlets for purchasing agri-inputs, problems faced by customers in purchasing agri-inputs and level of satisfaction with respect to organized rural retail outlets

Sampling Technique

Organized rural retail outlets of two companies i.e. DCM Shriram consolidated Limited, Godrej Agrovet were operational in Punjab at the time of study. For the purpose of sample selection, top two and bottom two retail outlets of both companies were selected on basis of sales made during the last financial year. Lists of customers who bought from these outlets were obtained from respective outlets and a sample of fifteen customers from each outlet was selected randomly, making the total sample size of 120 respondents. Data was obtained from the customers with the help of pre-structured, non-disguised questionnaires. Detail of sampling scheme has been shown in Table 1.

Data Collection

The data for the present study was collected by interviewing the selected respondents with the help of questionnaires. Before filling the questionnaires, main objective of the research was explained to the respondents.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire was converted to master table which facilitated tabulation of data in the desired form. The questionnaire contained rating questions. The respondents were asked to rate the factors according to importance while making purchases of agri-inputs from organized

Table 1
Sampling Scheme

Company	Selection Criteria	Selected Outlets	No. of Customers in the list	Sampling Technique	Total Sample
Godrej Aadhar	Top Two Retail Outlets	Batala	78	Selected 15 respondents from the list of each outlet using simple random sampling	120
		Mehta	117		
	Bottom Two Retail Outlets	Macchiwara	62		
		Sultanpur Lodhi	61		
Haryali Kisan Bazar	Top Two Retail Outlets	Ferozepur	69		
		Mukatsar	71		
	Bottom Two Retail Outlets	Sardhulgarh	62		

rural retail outlets and how much they are satisfied from the products and services provided by organized rural retail outlets. Mean score was calculated by assigning weights of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively to extremely important, somewhat important, neither important nor unimportant, somewhat unimportant and not at all important. The respondents were asked to indicate their choice for the degree of importance attached and satisfaction regarding various products and services offered by organized rural retail outlets.

RESULTS

The following section deals with the results obtained from the study. In the first part of the section profile of the respondents on the basis of land holding and family income has been presented. Subsequent parts deal with the sources of getting awareness about organized rural retail outlets, place decision, satisfaction and problems faced with respect to these outlets.

Profile of the Respondents

To gain a better understanding of the customer's buying behaviour regarding agri inputs and level of satisfaction towards rural retail outlets, land holding and family income of the respondents may be helpful. Therefore, the respondents were enquired about their land holding and annual family income. Responses thus obtained have been presented in Table 2.

It can be seen from Table 2 that Majority of the respondents i.e. 55.83 per cent had land holdings between 20-50 acres, 31.66 per cent of the respondents

Table 2

Profile of Respondents (N=120)

Land Holding (Acres)	Frequency
Less than 5	03(2.50)
5-20	38(31.66)
20-50	67(55.83)
50 and above	12(10.00)
Annual family income	Frequency
Less than Rs.80,000	02(1.66)
Rs80,000-150,000	19(15.83)
Rs150,000-500,000	56(46.66)
Rs 500,000 & above	43(35.83)

*Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

had land holdings between 5-20 acres, 10.0 per cent of the respondents had land holdings of more than 50 acres, and 2.50 per cent of the respondents had land holdings less than 5 acres. It can be stated that customers of organized rural retail outlets covered under the survey were having considerable land holding.

Majority of the respondents i.e. 46.66 per cent were having annual family income between Rs 150,000 to 500,000. About 36 per cent of the respondents were having annual family income more than Rs 500,000. It can be stated that customers of organized rural retail outlets were quite well to do and were having relatively higher level of income.

Major agri-inputs purchased by the respondents included agricultural implements and tools, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, lubricants, soil and water testing services.

Sources of Awareness about Organized Rural Retail Outlets

Respondents were asked about their awareness regarding organized rural retail outlets i.e. Godrej Adhaar and Haryali Kissan Bazaar. It was found that 62 respondents were aware of Haryali Kissan Bazaar and 76 were aware of Godrej Adhaar and 18 respondents were aware of both of these organized rural retail outlets. Respondents were asked to indicate the source of awareness from where the customers got information regarding organized rural retail outlets.

Table 3

Sources of Awareness (N=120)

Source	Number of Respondents
Relatives/Friends	64
Fellow Farmers	49
Newspaper/Magazine	34
Farmers Meetings/Seminars	30
Exhibitions/Kisan Mela	30
Field trials/Demonstrations	25
TV/Radio	13

* Multiple responses

It can be seen from Table 3 that majority of the respondents i.e. 64 got information regarding organized rural retail outlets through relatives and friends, 49 respondents got information through fellow farmers, 34 respondents each got information through newspaper and magazines. It can be seen from Table 3 respondents stated relatives/friends and fellow farmers as the main source of information. These results indicate that word of mouth and the recommendations of the relatives, friends and fellow farmers were more prevalent as compared to print and electronic media as source of awareness regarding the organized rural retail outlets.

Place Decision

The respondents were enquired about various options of place of purchase and important factors influencing the purchase from organized rural retail outlets as compared to other options.

Respondents were enquired about other places of purchase of agri-inputs along with organized rural retail outlets. Responses thus obtained have been presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Places of purchase (N=120)

Place of Purchase	Number of Respondents
Organized Rural Retail Outlets	120
Shop in/near village	59
Co-operative societies	48
Shop in city	32

Apart from organized rural retail outlets, 59 respondents were buying agri-inputs from shop in/near village, 48 respondents were making purchases from co-operative societies, and 32 respondents were buying agri-inputs from shops in city. These results indicate that besides the organized rural retail outlets, the respondents preferred to purchase from other nearby sources such as shops in the village and cooperative societies and shops located at a distance, i.e., in city were relatively less preferred.

Respondents were asked to rate factors on the basis of their importance while making purchases from organized rural retail outlets rather than other options. Responses thus obtained have been presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Factors Affecting Choice Organized Rural Retail Outlets over Other Options (N=120)

Factors	Mean	S. D.	z-value
Trustworthiness	4.05	0.85	13.46*
Technical Services	3.99	0.86	12.53*
Availability	3.87	0.89	10.74*
Attractiveness of Retail Outlet	3.79	0.82	10.53*
Variety	3.73	0.86	8.48*
Price	3.67	0.87	9.24*
Shopping Experience	3.66	0.92	7.86*
Credit Facility	3.59	0.96	6.70*
Home Delivery	3.58	1.00	6.37*
Location of Outlet	3.56	1.12	5.49*
Suitable Timings	2.98	1.03	-0.21

* Significant at 1% level of significance

Table 5 shows that factors important in making purchase of agri-inputs from organized rural retail outlets were trustworthiness, availability of technical services, availability of the products, attractiveness of outlet and variety. It was found that the factors such as location of outlet and suitable timing were relatively less important. Further, it can be seen that except for suitable timings, average for the various factors included in the enquiry was found to be different from the mid value of the scale, i.e., 3 at 1 per cent level of significance.

Analysis for Top Retail Outlets

Respondents were asked to rate factors on basis of importance while making purchases from top organized rural retail outlets rather than other options. Responses thus obtained are tabulated in Table 6.

Table 6

Factors Affecting Choice Organized Rural Retail Outlets over Other Options : Top Retail Outlets (N=60)

Factors	Mean	S. D.	z-value
Trustworthiness	4.00	0.84	9.26*
Technical Services	3.98	0.79	9.61*
Availability	3.83	0.96	6.69*
Attractiveness of Retail Outlet	3.62	0.80	6.02*
Variety	3.57	0.83	5.33*
Price	3.55	0.89	4.35*
Home Delivery	3.53	1.03	3.98*
Shopping Experience	3.52	0.93	4.33*
Credit Facility	3.52	1.03	3.91*
Location of Outlet	3.20	1.13	1.37
Suitable Timings	2.80	1.02	-1.51

* Significant at 5% level of significance

Table 6 shows that factors important in making purchase of agri-inputs from top organized rural retail outlets were trustworthiness and technical services, Availability, attractiveness of outlet and variety/options. It was found that location of outlet and suitable timing was less important.

Analysis for Bottom Retail Outlets

Respondents were asked to rate factors on basis of importance while making purchases from bottom organized rural retail outlets rather than other option. Their responses are tabulated in Table 7.

Table 7 shows that factors important in making purchase of agri-inputs from organized rural retail outlets at bottom were trustworthiness and technical services, Attractiveness, location of outlet, and availability. It was found that home delivery and suitable timing was less important.

Table 7

Factors Affecting Choice Organized Rural Retail Outlets over Other Options : Bottom Retail Outlets (N=60)

Factors	Mean	S. D.	z-value
Trustworthiness	4.10	0.86	9.91*
Technical Services	4.00	0.94	8.26*
Attractiveness of Retail Outlet	3.97	0.80	9.42*
Location of Outlet	3.92	1.00	7.13*
Availability	3.90	0.82	8.49*
Price	3.90	0.82	8.49*
Shopping Experience	3.80	0.90	6.90*
Variety	3.77	0.89	6.09*
Credit Facility	3.77	0.87	6.25*
Home Delivery	3.62	0.98	4.92*
Suitable Timings	3.17	1.01	1.31

* Significant at 5% level of significance

Satisfaction of Customers Regarding Organized Rural Retail Outlets

Level of satisfaction with respect to organized rural retail outlets and problems faced by the respondents while purchasing agri inputs from organized rural retail outlets were also explored. Results thus obtained have been presented in the following section.

Level of Satisfaction of Respondents Regarding Organized Rural Retail Outlets

The data was collected from the respondents in form of the rating of factors depicting level of satisfaction regarding organized rural retail outlets. Their responses are tabulated in Table 8.

From the Table 8 it is clear that customers were satisfied largely by quality of the products and display within outlet, dealing of employees, store location, variety and freshness. Respondents were less satisfied by price and home delivery.

Table 8

Overall Level of Satisfaction of Respondents (N=120)

Factors	Mean	S. D.	z-value
Quality of products	4.02	0.80	13.97*
Display within the outlet	3.82	0.99	9.11*
Dealing of Employees	3.76	0.96	8.64*
Store location	3.75	1.01	8.15*
Variety	3.74	0.88	9.25*
Freshness	3.73	0.92	8.11*
Performance of products	3.71	0.83	9.34*
After sale service	3.67	0.83	8.82*
Outlet Timings	3.67	1.01	7.28*
Convenience of purchase	3.66	0.91	7.95*
Fairness in billing	3.65	0.80	8.90*
Availability of products	3.62	0.96	7.05*
Safety	3.62	1.02	6.67*
Packaging of agri-inputs	3.60	0.80	8.22*
Credit facility	3.59	0.99	6.55*
Prices of agri inputs	3.57	0.91	6.87*
Home delivery of products	2.88	1.01	-1.30

* Significant at 5% level of significance

Problems Faced by Respondents While Making Purchase From Organized Rural Retail Outlets

Respondents were asked about problems faced while purchasing from organized rural retail outlets. Their responses are tabulated in Table 9.

Table 9

Problems Faced by Respondents (N=96)

Problems	Number of Respondents
Time consuming documentation	43
Less field visits by experts	35
Home delivery	23
Non-availability of products	14
Prices are high	12
Products are stored at different places	12
New seed varieties are less available	9

The major problem faced by 43 customers is of time consuming documentation, 35 customers had problems of less visits by experts, 23 customers faced problem of home delivery, 12 customers each reported the problem of high price and storage of products at different places, 14 customers faced problem of less availability sometime and 9 customers faced problem of less availability of new varieties of seeds.

Respondents were enquired whether they will recommend other farmers to purchase from organized rural retail outlets. It was found that all the respondents i.e. 120 were willing to recommend other farmers to purchase from organized rural retail outlets. Respondents were asked about the reasons for recommendations of purchases from organized rural retail outlets to other farmers. The major recommendations came by 33 customers regarding good store ambience. 29 customers suggested that products are of good quality, 19 customers suggested because of dealing of employees, 17 customers suggested because of variety available under one roof, 15 customers suggested due to credit availability and 6 customers suggested because of freshness of products.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that trustworthiness and technical services were the major attributes responsible for making the organized rural retail outlets as preferred place of purchase over the competing options. Word of mouth from the relatives, friends and fellow farmers were the major sources of awareness about organized rural retail outlets. Satisfaction level of the respondents was high with respect to quality of products and their display but low satisfaction level was observed with respect to home delivery and prices. Time consuming documentation and lesser field visits by the experts were the major problems faced by the respondents. For future growth, organized rural retail sector should ensure that the existing customers are retained and served well. Because, recommendations from the acquaintances play important role in rural buying behaviour. Findings of the study reveal that there is a need to improve the documentation procedure and home delivery system.

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