



THE INFLUENCE OF SERVICE ATTRIBUTES OF BEAUTY PARLOUR EMPLOYEES ON THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF URBAN WOMEN CONSUMERS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The beauty services industry is growing exponentially in India since the last few decades. The reason being the changing demographics within India due to globalisation, opening up of the Indian economy and urbanisation. Secondary reasons being rise in income levels, exposure to foreign brands, rising affluence of the middle class, media proliferation, increased number of women entering the workforce and also the growing need among Indians for self-grooming in order to look and feel good. The beauty care and beauty care service industry has therefore seen a boom in recent times. The availability of foreign cosmetic brands and the rejuvenation of several Indian cosmetic brands has further pepped up this industry.

The rising affluence among the people in general and women in particular has brought about a great change in lifestyle patterns in India. Due to increased family as well as work responsibilities it has become imperative for women to look their best. Rise in disposable income has enabled women to spend more on products and services for their self-grooming and beauty enhancement. Women visit parlours and salons for enhancing their looks and beauty.

Customer loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. In order to satisfy customers, it is very important for service industries to work upon their 'service quality' parameters. An important contributor to the success of a beauty parlour is its human resources or employees. Repeat customers to any particular parlour is due to the excellent service offered by its effective and efficient employees. Service quality is considered as a primary driver of corporate marketing and financial performance. The main objective of this paper is to analyse the personal attributes of the service employee at the beauty parlour and to enumerate the variables linked to the qualities of the employee that leads 'customer satisfaction'.

Keywords : women consumers, grooming, beauty parlour, beauty salon, service attributes

Introduction

The KPMG Wellness Report estimates that workforce requirements in the beauty and salon segment will grow from 3.4 million in 2013 to 12.1 million in 2022. Salaries of makeup and beauty professionals vary between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 65,000 per month (Mishra A., 2014). The beauty services industry in India has been growing exponentially since last few decades. The greatest driver for the beauty care and beauty care services industry is the urge to enhance and upgrade one's personality. A sea change has taken place in the overall demographics of India post the 1990's due to the opening up of the economy, increased entry of foreign players, rapid urbanisation, rise in income levels, media proliferation, and increased number of women in the workforce.

The rising affluence among the people in general and women in particular has brought about a great change in lifestyle patterns in India. Due to increased family as well as work responsibilities it has become imperative for women to look their best. Rise in disposable income has enabled women to spend more on products and services for their self-grooming and beauty enhancement. Women visit parlours and salons for enhancing their looks and beauty. Customer loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. In order to satisfy customers, it is very important for service industries to work upon their 'service quality'. An important contributor to the success of a beauty parlour is its human resources or employees. Repeat customers to any particular parlour is due to the excellent service offered by its effective and efficient employees. Service quality is considered as a primary driver of corporate marketing and financial performance (Buttle, 1996).

An interesting factor to note is that increased number of women entering the workforce has totally altered the requirements of the women segment and also the segments associated with them. Women with jobs juggle multiple responsibilities such as taking care of their families, kids, purchase of groceries and clothing, running various kinds of errands as well as performing their professional duties. These responsibilities give rise to requirements of various goods and services. Nevertheless, women also need to take care of their own needs and hence the requirement for products and services for self-grooming. Women need to look their best while juggling these multiple responsibilities. Their success mainly depends upon their personality and how well they carry themselves. Beauty care, self-grooming and grooming services have therefore gained importance in the lives of Indians in general and women in particular.

The success of any beauty salon depends upon the effectiveness and efficiency of its employees. It has been found that women who frequent parlours regularly depend upon the services of particular parlour employees. It is due to certain unique set of qualities the service employees possess, that women consumers avail repeat services of the parlour. These qualities which the service employee or contact person possess are, being presentable, being polite, possessing relevant knowledge, being trustworthy, offering counsellor services, effective complaint handling, being responsive, being competent and accessible etc.. Customers also appreciate personalised attention by the contact employee and they expect tailor-made solutions to address their unique problems. We have derived these unique service attribute variables through thorough review of literature of research papers based on the beauty service care industry.

It is a well-known fact that the friendliness of the employees, their courtesy, their responsiveness and enthusiasm influences customers in a positive way and they develop favourable attitudes regarding their overall consumption experience and the quality of the service offered to them. Service employee's communication abilities (greeting and courtesy words) has a favourable effect on the customers and they perceive the service experience positively. They get a feeling that the firm is genuinely interested in them and cares for their needs and requirements. In turn, this helps create a positive word of mouth of the service by the customers to all they are in touch with (Elizur, 1987, Jain et al, 2009).

Literature Review

“Consumer behaviour is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires.” (Solomon et al., 1995). Buyer behaviour has been defined as “a process, which through inputs and their use through process and actions leads to satisfaction of needs and wants” (Enis, 1974, p.228). Consumers have a very important role to play in the market place. The criteria consumers used to evaluate products and services is one of the most important roles they play. Marketers decide their marketing strategies based on the behaviour and preferences of consumers. It is consumers who help in changing the face of the market place from time to time. The whole concept of revenue generation is based upon the success of marketers in influencing their customers and garnering customer satisfaction and eventually customer loyalty (Solomon M., 2006).

According to the Haywood-Farmer ‘Attribute service quality model’ (1988), the service organisation achieves a ‘high quality status’ if it continuously meets customer expectations and offers customer delight. This model separates the attributes of the service station into three categories : physical facilities, behaviour of the employees and professional judgement. The behavioural aspects are timeliness, speed, communication (verbal, non-verbal), courtesy, warmth, friendliness, tact, attitude, tone of voice, dress, neatness, politeness, attentiveness, handling complaints and problem solving (Seth N., et al 2005). It has been found that quality of service is a very important aspect for the beauty care service industry. There is evidence that if the customer’s perception of the service offered are positive and if the behavioural intentions are favourable, it will strengthen their relationship with the service firm (Zeithaml & Bitner 2003).

It was found through various studies that when customers have closer relationships with service employees, both the service organization and the customers will build positive feelings towards each other, thus the level of satisfaction for the customer will increase which in turn will reap greater benefits for the service organization. This continuous positive interaction will help build customer loyalty which is a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Service firms can gain competitive advantage over other firms by offering excellent service quality. Even though there are several parameters which decide service quality, the human element or service employees is of utmost importance as they are

individuals who actually perform the service on the customer, build favourable relationships thus leading to customer satisfaction (Khan P.I. et al, 2011).

The terms, Service quality, customer satisfaction and customer value have gained a lot of importance for both manufacturing and service firms (Wang, Lo & Yang 2004). The fact is that superior service quality can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage for a service firm (Moore 1987, Lewis 1989).

As per a Goldman Sach's study of 2007, the income of women is rising rapidly across the globe relative to men's. According to them, the women segment is an untapped market waiting to be exploited by progressive businesses. Women's demographics has changed considerably since that past few decades. Their earning capacities have increased and they also have considerable influence over household finances. It has been seen that women have a higher propensity to 'buy' than men. In a study by Oppenheimer Funds research (2006) in "Women and Investing" have found that in dual income families, 30% of the women earn more than their husbands. An increasing number of women are now working in traditionally defined male jobs such as engineering, management and finance. (Ellwood I., et al 2008).

A study was conducted in Dhaka to measure the service quality and customersatisfaction level of high-end women's parlours. It was also aimed at assessing the importance of customer's preference, evaluate the service qualitylevel, determine the level of customer satisfaction and to enumerate the factors that lead to customer satisfaction.It was concluded through the study that theaspects that are important for customers are the service provider's behaviour,knowledge, environment, counselling abilities and affordability. It was found that the customers of high-end parlours were greatly satisfied with the parlour environment, executive's politeness, their complainthandling system, trustworthiness and materials. Thepoliteness of the service providers, knowledge level of theexecutives and safety and hygiene issues were also found to be satisfactory. From sixteen variables, four factors were derived that contributed to customer satisfaction and those wereSupport & Facility Factor, Employee Performance Factor, Customer Relation Factor and Communication Factor (Islam P., Tabassum A., 2011).

In a study conducted in 2014 on 220 women respondents in western Mumbai to study the factors that influence women to visit beauty parlours and to analyse if there is an association between demographic factors and parametersconcerning beauty salons.It was concluded from the study that very young and young respondents feel the necessity to visit beauty parlours

whereas most of the elderly do not. Young women gave utmost importance to ambience. Hygiene factor is directly related to education. As the education level of women increases, the hygiene factor becomes more important. More unmarried women than married women are of the opinion that visiting a parlour is a necessity (Savla S., Manjrekar P., 2014).

In a study conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2015 to study the consumer perception on service quality dimensions like tangibility, reliability, accessibility, empathy and responsiveness using SERVQUAL model, it was concluded that the service dimension 'empathy' has significant influence on customer satisfaction over the other service dimension factors (Azad S., 2015).

In a study conducted in Tiruchirapalli aimed at building a conceptual framework of brand preferences based on consumer's experiential view. There were multiple objectives of the study such as study the consumer preference towards parlour services, to study the perception of various segments towards beauty care services, the preferences for certain brands among consumers, to study the various promotional efforts of beauty parlours on consumers and to study how demographic factors influences brand preference. The sample consisted of 210 females and 14 males. It was found out through the study that women below the age of 25 years and women from high income families felt the greatest necessity of visiting beauty parlours. Personal attention from beauticians was the greatest aspect that resulted into customer satisfaction. Aspects such as location of the parlour, experience of beauticians, ambience and quality were very important to the customers. The major source of information influencing the consumers were the neighbours (Banu Priya R. et al 2016).

Objectives of the study

1. To understand the attitudes and preferences of the women consumers in India with respect to grooming.
2. To understand the concepts of five dimensions of service quality.
3. To review literature to assess the past studies carried out in the area of service quality.
4. To derive factors from variables that determine the attributes of contact employee at the parlour that leads to customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

Sample Description : Working women (employed and self-employed) in the age group 21 to 35 residing in Mumbai.

Sample size : 102 respondents

Area of research : Select suburbs of Mumbai

Type of study : Descriptive cross sectional study

Data collection tool : Questionnaire

Sampling method : Non-probability sampling (Convenience sampling) as we require working women belonging to specific demographic criteria.

Description of service under study :

Beauty parlour services availed by women for enhancing their beauty and personality.

Sources of data : This would basically be a primary research ably supported by secondary data sources which would complement the studies and strengthen the research effort.

Data Analysis tools used : Percentage Analysis and Factor Analysis (SPSS – Statistical package for Social Sciences)

The questionnaire was framed with around 6 questions related to demographic variables, 6 questions pertaining to variables of contact person's attributes (at a beauty parlour) and two variables pertaining to gauge customer satisfaction related to services offered by the contact employee at the parlour.

Data Analysis, Interpretation and Findings

A) Frequency Tables for Demographic variables

Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 21 to 25	52	51.0	51.0	51.0
26 to 30	31	30.4	30.4	81.4
31 to 35	19	18.6	18.6	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Graduate	40	39.2	39.2	39.2
Masters	60	58.8	58.8	98.0
Others	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Marital_status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Single	63	61.8	61.8	61.8
Married	39	38.2	38.2	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Employment status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Self Employed	25	24.5	24.5	24.5
Employed	77	75.5	75.5	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Personal Annual Income

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Rs. 200,000 to 400000	39	38.2	38.2	38.2
Rs. 400,001 to 600,000	21	20.6	20.6	58.8
Rs. 600,001 to 800000	35	34.3	34.3	93.1
Rs. 800,001 to 1000000	3	2.9	2.9	96.1
Rs. 1,000,001 to 1,200,000	2	2.0	2.0	98.0
'>Rs. 1,200,000	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

- a. It was found that 51% respondents belonged to the age group 21 to 25 years, 30.4% respondents belonged to the age group 26 to 30 and 18.6% respondents belonged to the age group 31 to 35 years.
- b. 39% respondents were graduates, 59% were post graduates and 2% possessed other educational qualifications.
- c. 62% women are single and 38% women are married.
- d. 25% women are self-employed and, 75% are employed (in service).
- e. Personal Annual Income : The annual income range of women respondents were as under :

Rs. 200,000 to 400,000 per annum	: 38%
Rs. 400,001 to 600,000 per annum	: 21%
Rs. 600,001 to 800,000 per annum	: 34%
Rs. 800,001 to 1,000,000 per annum	: 3%
Rs. 1,000,0001 to 1,200,000 per annum	: 2 %
> Rs. 1,200,000 per annum	: 2 %

(B) Frequency table for Employee Attribute variables

The employee should be friendly. (Table A)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	2.9
Undecided	27	26.5	26.5	29.4
Agree	32	31.4	31.4	60.8
Strongly Agree	40	39.2	39.2	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

The employee should have relevant knowledge. (Table B)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Undecided	17	16.7	16.7	18.6
Agree	29	28.4	28.4	47.1
Strongly Agree	54	52.9	52.9	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

The employee should possess relevant skills. (Table C)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Undecided	26	25.5	25.5	26.5
Agree	26	25.5	25.5	52.0
Strongly Agree	49	48.0	48.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

The employee should be responsive to situations. (Table D)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	5	4.9	4.9	4.9
Undecided	19	18.6	18.6	23.5
Agree	29	28.4	28.4	52.0
Strongly Agree	49	48.0	48.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

The employee should understand my needs. (Table E)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	2.9
Undecided	16	15.7	15.7	18.6
Agree	34	33.3	33.3	52.0
Strongly Agree	49	48.0	48.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

The employee should handle complaints effectively (Table F)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Undecided	16	15.7	15.7	17.6
Agree	33	32.4	32.4	50.0
Strongly Agree	51	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee (Table G)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	3	2.9	2.9	2.9
Disagree	7	6.9	6.9	9.8
Undecided	27	26.5	26.5	36.3
Agree	32	31.4	31.4	67.6
Strongly Agree	33	32.4	32.4	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee
(Table H)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Disagree	4	3.9	3.9	4.9
Undecided	36	35.3	35.3	40.2
Agree	33	32.4	32.4	72.5
Strongly Agree	28	27.5	27.5	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

- 1) Around 72% respondents felt that the contact employee at the parlour should be friendly, 27% were undecided and 3% disagreed. (Table A)
- 2) 83% respondents felt that the parlour contact employee should have relevant knowledge, 17% were undecided and 2% disagreed. (Table B)
- 3) 75% respondents felt that the parlour contact employee should possess relevant skills, 26% were undecided and 1% disagreed. (Table C)

- 4) According to 78% respondents, the parlour contact employee should be responsive to situations, 19% were undecided and 5% disagreed. (Table D)
- 5) According to 83% of respondents the parlour contact employee should understand their needs, 16% were undecided and 3% disagreed. (Table E)
- 6) Around 84% of the respondents felt that the parlour contact employee should handle complaints effectively, 16% were undecided and 2% disagreed. (Table F)
- 7) 65% of the respondents preferred the services of a particular parlour employee, 27% were undecided and around 3% disagreed. (Table G)
- 8) 61% respondents felt that their satisfaction at the parlour depended greatly upon the services offered by a particular parlour employee, 36% were undecided and 1% disagreed. (Table H)

It is therefore evident that majority of respondents feel that the parlour contact employee should be friendly, should have relevant knowledge, should understand their needs, should possess relevant skills, should be responsive to situations and must handle complaints effectively. A majority of them also agreed that they prefer the services of a particular parlour employee and their satisfaction levels at the parlour depends upon the services offered by that particular employee.

(C) Factor Analysis

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.911	.912	6

Table 2
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.899
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	390.810
	df	15
	Sig.	.000

Table 3

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
The employee should be friendly.	1.000	.593
The employee should have relevant knowledge.	1.000	.818
The employee should possess relevant skills.	1.000	.722
The employee should be responsive to situations.	1.000	.687
The employee should understand my needs.	1.000	.595
The employee should handle complaints effectively	1.000	.769

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Chart 1

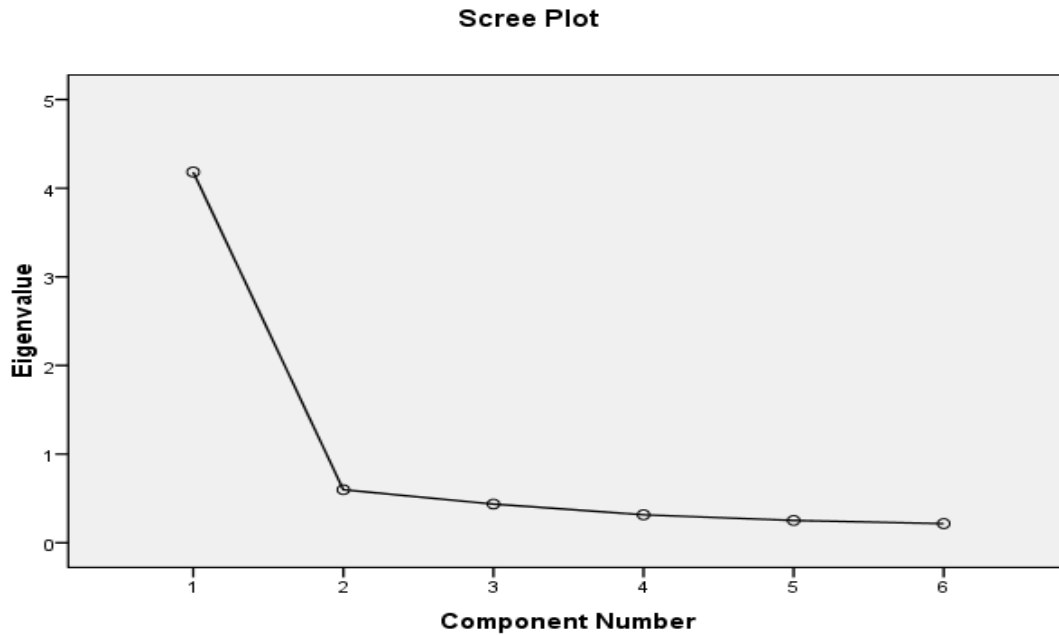


Table 4

Total Variance Explained

Comp onent	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.183	69.719	69.719	4.183	69.719	69.719
2	.598	9.968	79.687			
3	.436	7.272	86.959			
4	.315	5.256	92.214			
5	.252	4.195	96.409			
6	.215	3.591	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 5

Component Matrix^a

--

a. 1 components extracted.

Table 6

Rotated Component Matrix^a

--

a. Only one component was extracted.

The solution cannot be rotated.

(C) a. Interpretation of Factor Analysis Output

Reliability Test

A higher **Cronbach's α value of 0.912**(Table 1) suggests that the variables under study are highly correlated and that factor analysis can be applied to this data.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Table 2 shows two tests that indicate the suitability of your data for structure detection. The **Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy** is a statistic that indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors. The result of **Bartlett's test of sphericity** shows high significance value (0.00) and KMO (0.899) indicates that the data is appropriate for factor analysis.

Communalities indicate the amount of variance in each variable that is accounted for. Table 3 depicts the communalities wherein it is found that almost all the variables have loadings of approximately 0.6 and more.

The Scree plot as per Chart 1 shows us that only one factor has been extracted from the variables having Eigen value > 1 . Only that factor will be considered which is to the left of the inflection point and eliminate all factors which are to the right.

As evident from the Table 4, we find that a single factor was extracted which accounts for 69.72 % of the total variance (information contained in the original 6 variables). Almost all the variables contribute towards the **single extracted factor**.

Hence we have reduced the number of variables from 6 to a single factor. Since all the six variables have contributed towards the single factor, we can name this particular factor as **‘Outstanding service employee attributes’**. Thus this particular factor enumerates the qualities which a service employee should possess in order to satisfy the customer.

Limitations of the study

1. The study has been conducted on women residing in Mumbai and therefore cannot be applied to women residing in other metropolitan cities or rural areas.
2. The sampling method used is Convenience sampling and therefore results could be biased.
3. The study concerns women buying behaviour with respect to the beauty care service industry only therefore cannot be generalized for other products and services
4. We shall be studying the buying behaviour of a specific segment of women, which cannot be generalised to other segments such as teenagers and women in their late forties.
5. The sample size being only 102 respondents, the accuracy of the study would be limited.
6. We have been able to study only the human aspect (contact person attributes) of the beauty care services industry. Future studies could be carried out on other aspects of the beauty care services industry such as service processes, distribution, service ambience/environment, pricing of service products and promotional aspects.

Conclusion

It is impossible to ignore the women segment as they are capable of influencing all the other consumer segments. They possess the multiplier effect, that is, if they are satisfied with any product and service they talk about it to others. Positive word of mouth is the most effective promotional tool and it contributes greatly towards increasing the revenues of the firm in question. Women are greatly dependent on beauty parlours for the maintenance and upkeep of their looks and personality. Through a thorough review of literature, it was evident that the qualities and attributes of service employees are the key contributors towards the success of any service industry. The greatest contributing factor towards the success of any beauty parlour or salon is the quality of service they offer. Service quality depends greatly upon the attributes of the service employees at the parlour. Qualities such as being friendly, knowledgeable, possessing relevant skill sets, being responsive to situations, understanding

customer's specific needs and effective complaint resolution are of utmost importance to a service employee. These qualities which a service employee possesses contributes towards the service quality which in turn results into customer satisfaction eventually resulting into customer loyalty. To sum it all up, we can call a combination of these qualities '**Outstanding service employee attributes**'.

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