

The Influence of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction in Online Stores in Andhra Pradesh: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the service quality and customer satisfaction of selected online retail stores in Andhra Pradesh Urban, India. Employing a descriptive research design, a purposive random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 400 individuals from the population, determined using Slovin's formula. Data was collected through a research questionnaire. The Theory of Reasoned Action underpinned this study. Findings revealed that website quality significantly contributes to customer satisfaction (Beta= .494, t= 13.133, p<0.05) and that service delivery also significantly impacts customer satisfaction (Beta= 0.527, t= 9.046, p<0.05). The study concluded that service quality, through both website quality and service delivery, has a significant effect on customer satisfaction. It recommended that online retail stores should focus on enhancing customer services as a key brand attribute to improve service delivery, enhance brand perception, and increase market share.

Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Service Delivery, and Website Quality.

INTRODUCTION:

The old method of retailing has been fundamentally altered by the proliferation of online shopping, which is not only advantageous for retailers but also for consumers (Dhadurya Naik, M 2022). The heightened competition faced by companies worldwide has made it crucial for businesses to expand their market size and meet rising customer expectations through advancements in technology and globalization (Diyan, 2018). This evolution has driven businesses to adopt a more customer-centric approach (Al-Qirim, 2017). Many organizations achieve notable success not solely due to favorable environments or competitive capabilities but primarily because their management views customer satisfaction and service quality as multi-dimensional constructs (Apulu, 2011).

Globally, electronic commerce is increasingly recognized as a means for businesses to reach international markets, offering both advantages and disadvantages, including in India. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become a vital strategy for gaining a competitive edge in a rapidly globalizing environment. Customer satisfaction has been a focal point for organizations and researchers alike, with studies showing that the primary objective of businesses is to maximize profits while minimizing costs (Adewoye and Oni, 2016). Although price and quality significantly impact customer satisfaction, there is limited empirical evidence exploring this relationship. This oversight often leads to consumer dissatisfaction post-purchase.

For over a decade, the Internet has empowered consumers, leading to the gradual decline of brick-and-mortar stores as e-commerce rises. Unlike physical stores, online businesses offer unparalleled convenience. In advanced countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and China, over 60% of commerce occurs online, with customers placing orders

and awaiting home delivery. However, this convenience of e-commerce is still not predominantly practiced in India and some other developing countries (Chaffey, 2018).

Gaining a competitive edge in today's marketplace requires building strong customer relationships and delivering superior value to target customers, rather than merely focusing on product development (Jiang, Chen, and Wang, 2018). Customer feedback on satisfaction plays a crucial role in determining whether an organization provides quality services, as higher quality leads to greater customer satisfaction. Many companies are implementing quality management programs to enhance their product and marketing process quality, recognizing that quality directly impacts product performance and customer satisfaction (Chaffey, 2018). The use of internet networks in Indian business remains relatively low, with e-commerce still in its early stages. While there is growing awareness of the benefits and opportunities of e-commerce, its adoption faces several challenges, including high establishment costs, limited accessibility, data security concerns, network reliability, privacy and confidentiality issues, product authenticity, and citizens' income and education levels (Nepomuceno and Richard, 2014). Despite these obstacles, e-commerce is gradually gaining traction in India, particularly in the banking and payment systems where smart cards are being introduced (Chang, 2011). Traditional commerce remains the primary transaction method, with only a few people using e-commerce. A crucial aspect of e-commerce is handling payments over the internet, typically involving monetary exchanges for goods and services (Singh, Yadav, and Sahu, 2016). Price plays a significant role in the marketing mix and consumer decisions, especially in online services where it is often a top priority. The evolving payment systems for e-commerce in India are competing for dominance, though e-commerce transactions are generally cheaper than mailing paper checks. Currently, the primary payment methods in India are cash and checks, whereas credit cards are the most popular form of consumer electronic payment online in developed nations (Obafemi, 2018).

General Ecommerce Statistics

In 2024, the global number of online buyers is expected to reach 2.71 billion, up 2.7% from the previous year. This figure is predicted to increase to 2.77 billion by 2025, reflecting the growth of the online shopping business as internet access and convenience have increased. China leads the online buying trend with 915.1 million online shoppers, while the United States will have 270.11 million online customers by 2024. It is also anticipated that 22.6% of all retail purchases will be performed online by 2027. Since 2021, the share of online retail purchases has been increasing at an average rate of 0.32% year. Global eCommerce sales will expand at a 7.8% CAGR between 2024 and 2027, reaching \$8 trillion by 2027. In comparison to physical retailers, they are growing at a rate that is more than twice as fast. This demonstrates how eCommerce is becoming a more profitable option for businesses worldwide. The 2024 estimates represent an 8.8% annual rise, giving it the third-fastest growth rate in worldwide eCommerce sales from 2021 to 2027.

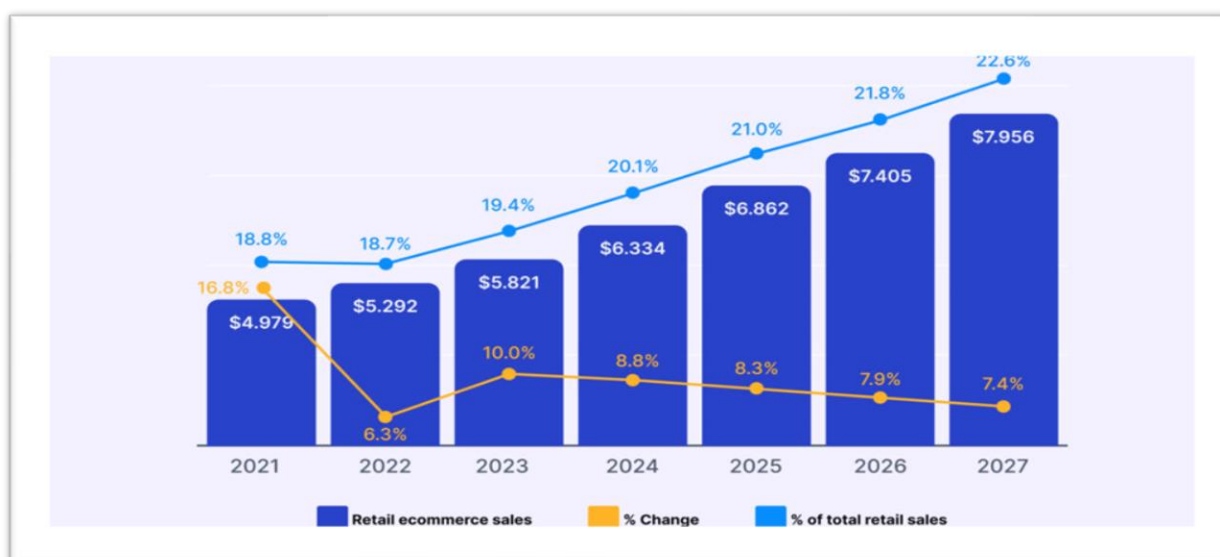


Figure: Retail E – Commerce Sales Worldwide from 2021 to 2027

Review of Literature

Concept of Service Quality

Service quality is more challenging for customers to evaluate than goods quality due to its intangible nature; services are performances that are difficult to assess before purchase. This intangibility makes it hard for service providers to understand how consumers perceive their service. Service quality refers to the manner in which customers are served in an organization, which can be either good or poor (Khan, 2013). It is recognized as a critical success factor for firms aiming to differentiate themselves from competitors. Service quality is defined as the customer's attitude or judgment about the superiority of a service (Robinson, 2019). The concept of service quality evolves over time, but its core aim remains customer satisfaction (Kotler and Keller, 2019). Providing excellent service quality is essential for reaching and retaining customers. It is central to service marketing, regardless of whether the business is in tangible product manufacturing or the service industry. As society progresses and living standards rise, customers increasingly demand both quality products and satisfactory service. Thus, companies must prioritize both product and service quality. Positive evaluations of service quality are crucial for business success, as perceived service quality is a key driver of perceived value. Research shows that high service quality leads to customer retention, attraction of new customers, reduced costs, enhanced corporate image, positive word-of-mouth, and increased profitability. Measuring service quality helps determine if services meet customer expectations and satisfaction levels.

Website Quality

Website quality is crucial for making a website profitable, user-friendly, and accessible, as well as for providing useful and reliable information through good design and visual appearance that meet users' needs and expectations. A website quality model offers an approach to defining and measuring website quality. With numerous new websites launched daily, those with similar content can vary significantly in quality; poor quality leads users to leave the site (Fillis, Johansson, and Wagner, 2015). Generally, there is no second chance to recapture a user. Therefore, improving website quality is essential. As products and services increasingly shift to digital forms delivered via the Internet, which is a highly visible and explosive information technology tool, the interactive functions of the Internet enable electronic services to become technology priorities (Apulu, 2015). E-services are interactive, content-centered, and Internet-based customer services driven by the customer and integrated with organizational customer support processes and technologies to strengthen customer-service provider relationships.

In a competitive business environment, service quality and excellence are becoming more important. The traditional Servqual Model suggests that service quality is the gap between consumer expectations and actual service performance, informing perceptions of service quality. Traditional service quality assessment involves five attributes: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. The Servqual scale, though traditionally used for general service quality measurement, has been adapted to measure service quality in e-commerce websites, as the traditional scale is not entirely suitable for e-service quality.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the degree to which a customer is content with their trading experience with a company, measuring how well a firm meets customer expectations. It is a critical factor in marketing, as firms cannot retain customers without high levels of satisfaction. The impact of e-commerce spans consumers, public policy, business, and education (Ghanem, 2016). Public policy initiatives and future research directions are discussed, highlighting the complexities between B2B and B2C e-commerce, including a wide range of relevant media such as interactive digital TV and various mobile and wireless services, which differ significantly in consumer ownership and access technologies. The rapid growth of e-commerce has brought forth ethical issues including security concerns, spamming, unmarked advertising, cyber squatters, online marketing to children, conflicts of interest, and manufacturer competition with online intermediaries (Ghanem, 2016). Education and continuous learning have become crucial in societies, driving the demand for distance and open learning as Internet availability expands, computing devices become more affordable, and learning becomes more accessible. Recent Internet infrastructure growth and economic reforms in the insurance sector have opened up India's monopolistic insurance market to foreign competition and alliances (Alotaibi, Lee, Choi, & Ahn, 2018). While e-commerce has traditionally focused on business-to-consumer (B2C) applications, attention is increasingly

shifting to business-to-business (B2B) applications, with the insurance industry providing a model that incorporates both B2C and B2B applications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which elucidates the relationship between attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. The TRA posits that individuals make rational decisions based on available information, and behavior is primarily determined by intention, which represents the readiness to perform a specific action (Anderson & Gerbing, 2018). The quality of information provided by B2C e-commerce websites significantly influences the intention to purchase. Reliable and accurate information enhances online customer satisfaction and trust, thereby influencing initial purchase decisions. The TRA also supports modeling customer trust, incorporating insights from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). According to TAM, the intention to adopt new technology is influenced by perceived usefulness and ease of use. Asuncion, Martín, and Agustín (2014) propose a model where trusting beliefs about vendor website attributes lead to trusting intentions, ultimately affecting trust-related behaviors. While the TRA has a broad scope, it requires constant revision, particularly in extending to various choices and goals. The distinction between goal intentions and behavioral intentions involves multiple variables and uncertainty regarding intention attainment (Loiacono, Watson, and Hoodhue, 2017). Notably, some behaviors present greater control challenges than others, highlighting the uncertainty inherent in goal attainment for every intention.

The evolution of the world has significantly transformed business practices, particularly through the use of technology in online marketing. Online marketing has become a crucial and promising channel for commercial processes. In India, SMEs contribute nearly 10% to industrial production and 70% to employment. Research from both developed and developing countries indicates that SMEs are vital for economic growth and development, serving as key sources of jobs, wealth generation, and government revenue through taxes. The SME sector is essential for stimulating both national and international economic growth. Many small and medium-sized businesses in India are increasingly investing in internet and online marketing.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows;

- To examine the impact of website service quality on consumer satisfaction in chosen online retail stores.
- To investigate the influence of service delivery on customer satisfaction in these stores.

Test of Hypotheses

The study hypothesizes that:

H01: There is no significant effect of website quality on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores

H02: Service delivery has no significant effect on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores

Research Methodology

The research design employed for this study was descriptive, chosen for its utility in collecting data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed, such as the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores in Andhra Pradesh Urban, India. The population comprised internet users in Andhra Pradesh, estimated at 10 lakhs users. The study also considered the opinions of residents from various backgrounds including youths, businesspeople, artisans, market women, and local government officials, whose insights were valuable for data analysis. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, given that only online users could effectively respond to the study's questions. The sample size of 400 participants was determined using the Slovin method. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire with a six-point Likert scale, measuring both independent variables (service quality dimensions such as website quality and service delivery) and the dependent variable (customer satisfaction). The questionnaire included two sections: the first collected biographical data such as age, gender, occupation, work experience, and academic qualifications, while the second focused on service quality and customer satisfaction dimensions. Responses were scaled

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with service quality as the independent variable and customer satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research Hypothesis One:

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of website quality on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores

Table 1: Regression Analysis Predicting Customer Satisfaction from Website Quality

Variable	B	Beta	T	Sig.	R	R ²	F-ratio	Pv
Website Quality	0.494	.669	13.133	0	0.669	0.447	172.477	P<0.05

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The results in Table 1 demonstrate that website quality significantly predicts customer satisfaction (Beta = .494, t = 13.133, p < 0.05). Individually, the variable showed a significant regression coefficient of R² = 0.447 (p < 0.05), indicating that website quality explained 44.7% of the observed variance in customer satisfaction. Hence, there is impact of website quality on customer satisfaction with respect to online store in Indian context. This suggests that website quality is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction, thereby rejecting hypothesis one.

Table 2: H₀₂: Service delivery has no significant effect on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Predicting Customer Satisfaction from Service Delivery

Variable	B	Beta	T	Sig.	R	R ²	F-ratio	Pv
Service delivery	2.699	0.527	9.046	0	0.527	0.278	81.82	P<0.05

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The results indicated that service delivery significantly contributes to the variance in customer satisfaction (Beta = 0.527, t = 9.046, p < 0.05). Individually, the variable showed a significant regression coefficient of R² = 0.278 (p < 0.05), indicating that service delivery explained 27.8% of the observed variance in customer satisfaction. Therefore, there is service delivery effect on customer satisfaction towards online stores. This suggests that service delivery is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction, thereby rejecting hypothesis 2.

Major Findings

Regarding research hypothesis one, which suggested that there is no significant effect of website quality on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores, the findings of this study contradict that hypothesis. The study revealed a significant effect of website quality on customer satisfaction. Website quality plays a crucial role in attracting, acquiring, and retaining customers. A high-quality website not only influences customer decisions to purchase but also determines whether customers will engage in online transactions at all. Conversely, low-quality websites can lead to customer loss, increased costs, and reduced profits. Therefore, understanding how website quality impacts customer trust on websites is critical, as it ultimately affects purchasing decisions. Elements of website quality such as information quality, response time, and visual appeal significantly affect customer perceptions. Customers are more likely to trust sellers with high-quality websites, perceiving them as competent, reliable, and benevolent, and are therefore more willing to depend on them. The study also highlighted the importance of physical design elements like information design, navigation, layout, and appearance, alongside considerations for hardware capabilities to ensure websites load quickly and reliably. A well-designed website must be visually appealing, user-friendly, and contain relevant content that fosters effective interaction with sellers. These characteristics shape customers' perceptions of online stores, particularly for first-time users,

influencing their confidence in the website's reliability. It is recommended that retail websites prioritize appealing design and customization to meet specific customer needs. The study also identified factors crucial to e-commerce website success, including download speed, ease of navigation, interactivity, responsive design, quality content, search mechanisms, and security and privacy measures. While various studies underscore the importance of website quality for e-commerce success, they often focus on disparate website attributes, lacking a unified model or framework for evaluating e-commerce website quality. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the vital role of website design in assisting customers in finding information effectively (Guo, Ling, and Liu, 2012).

Regarding research hypothesis two, which posited that service delivery has no significant effect on customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores in Lagos state, the findings of this study revealed the opposite. The study found that service delivery does have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The quality-of-service delivery observed by customers plays a crucial role in their satisfaction and retention. Prompt order processing and delivery, along with efficient payment terms, are critical factors influencing customer satisfaction, particularly in online retail settings. While instant delivery is feasible for virtual goods like digital files, it poses challenges for physical goods in Africa due to risks and complexities associated with airfreight and customs procedures, as well as limited local warehousing facilities (Rao and Monroe, 2019). The findings emphasize the importance of reliability in service delivery, which is highly valued by Indian online book shoppers (Liu and Arnett, 2016). Effective customer service emerged as a key strategy to immediately enhance satisfaction levels. The results of this study provide valuable insights for companies to assess their competitive positioning, identify areas for improvement, and determine which website characteristics can enhance performance. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of providing clear and comprehensible information and services to meet the diverse needs of users (Bayan, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in selected online retail stores. The findings demonstrated that service quality significantly affects customer satisfaction through website quality and service delivery. Specifically, the study confirmed a significant positive impact of website quality on customer satisfaction in the selected online retail stores. Furthermore, the research contributed to the literature by highlighting the importance of website information quality and service delivery in enhancing customer satisfaction. This study underscores the critical role of service quality in fostering customer satisfaction in a competitive business environment.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made for the management of online business outlets:

- i. There is a need to emphasize Customer Services as a defining brand strategy to enhance service delivery, improve brand perception among consumers, and increase market share. Implementing technologies such as Customer Relations Management (CRM) systems and employing Customer Experience Managers (CEM) and Customer Relations Managers (CRM) can help build stronger relationships and enhance communication with customers of online business outlets. Additionally, improving control over the dealer network through closer monitoring systems or by acquiring partial or complete ownership of dealerships can provide greater control to the online business service provider, thereby ensuring consistently high levels of customer service delivery.
- ii. Online business outlets should establish specialized complaint channels that are efficient and easy to use, such as a mobile app that allows consumers to directly lodge complaints to the business outlets rather than to specific dealerships. This ensures that each business unit is promptly informed of the complaint and can exert necessary pressure on the dealership for corrective actions.
- iii. Online business outlets should ensure accuracy in pricing information to avoid disparities between online prices and actual market prices, which can discourage customers from making purchases on their platforms.
- iv. Online business outlets should ensure that the products displayed on their websites match exactly with the products delivered when orders are placed. Consistency in product presentation and delivery is crucial for maintaining customer trust and encouraging further patronage of online products.

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