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FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER LOYALTY: RETAIL STORES IN DELHI NCR

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Abstract:

Customer loyalty is a crucial factor for retail stores in Delhi NCR, as it directly impacts their profitability and long-term success. Understanding the factors influencing customer loyalty can help these stores develop effective strategies to retain customers and increase their lifetime value. This study aims to identify and analyze the key factors affecting customer loyalty in retail stores in Delhi NCR.

This study highlights the importance of understanding the factors affecting customer loyalty in retail stores in Delhi NCR. By focusing on product quality, price, customer service, store environment, and brand image, retail stores can develop strategies to enhance customer loyalty and drive long-term success.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, to collect data from customers and retail store managers. The data revealed several factors that significantly influence customer loyalty, including product quality, price, customer service, store environment, and brand image.

Keywords: *Customer Loyalty, Retail Stores, Brand Reputation, Loyalty Programs, Price, Shopping experience, Store Layout, Product Availability, Ease of Checkout, Customer Service, Brand Reputation, Tailored Recommendations, Consumer Behaviour, Promotional Activities, Convenient Shopping Channels, Superior Quality Products, Social Responsibility, Environmental Responsibility.*

INTRODUCTION:

Customer loyalty is a critical factor for the success and sustainability of retail stores in Delhi NCR, a bustling region known for its diverse consumer base and competitive retail landscape. With a plethora of options available to consumers, ranging from traditional markets to modern shopping malls, understanding the factors that influence customer loyalty is essential for retailers seeking to differentiate themselves and build a loyal customer base.

One of the key factors affecting customer loyalty in retail stores is the overall shopping experience. Consumers in Delhi NCR value convenience, variety, and personalized service. Retailers

who can offer a seamless shopping experience, both in-store and online, are more likely to attract and retain loyal customers. Factors such as store layout, product availability, and ease of checkout play a crucial role in shaping the overall shopping experience.

In addition to the shopping experience, customer service, and price, product quality and selection are also important factors influencing customer loyalty. Delhi NCR consumers have diverse preferences and tastes, and retailers who can offer a wide range of high-quality products catering to these preferences are more likely to attract and retain loyal customers.

Moreover, the convenience of shopping channels is becoming increasingly important in influencing customer loyalty. With the rise of e-commerce and m-commerce, consumers in Delhi NCR expect retailers to offer multiple shopping channels, including online and mobile, that are convenient and easy to use. Retailers who can seamlessly integrate these channels and offer a consistent shopping experience across them are more likely to retain loyal customers.

Furthermore, social and environmental responsibility are emerging as important factors influencing customer loyalty in Delhi NCR. Consumers are increasingly conscious of the impact of their purchasing decisions on society and the environment. Retailers who can demonstrate a commitment to social and environmental responsibility through their business practices are more likely to earn the loyalty of socially conscious consumers.

The National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi stands as a melting pot of cultures, preferences, and economic disparities, encapsulating a vast array of consumer segments. Against this backdrop, retail stores navigate through a myriad of challenges and opportunities to carve out their niche and foster customer allegiance. Factors such as convenience, product assortment, and pricing strategies emerge as critical determinants that influence consumer behavior and allegiance towards a particular retail establishment.

Moreover, the advent of digitalization and the omnipresence of e-commerce platforms have redefined the contours of customer loyalty within the retail landscape of Delhi NCR. In an era characterized by heightened connectivity and instant gratification, retailers are tasked with bridging the gap between physical and virtual storefronts, thereby offering omnichannel experiences that resonate with the evolving expectations of modern-day consumers. The ability to seamlessly integrate online and offline channels, harnessing the power of data analytics and personalized marketing, emerges as a pivotal strategy for nurturing enduring customer relationships.

In essence, the pursuit of customer loyalty within the retail sector of Delhi NCR unfolds against a backdrop of complexity and dynamism, where myriad factors converge to shape consumer perceptions and preferences.

In conclusion, customer loyalty is a multifaceted concept influenced by various factors in the retail environment. Retailers in Delhi NCR need to understand these factors and tailor their strategies

accordingly to build and maintain a loyal customer base. By focusing on offering a superior shopping experience, exceptional customer service, competitive prices, high-quality products, strong brand reputation, convenient shopping channels, effective promotional activities, and social and environmental responsibility, retailers can enhance customer loyalty and drive long-term success.

Furthermore, social and environmental responsibility are emerging as important factors influencing customer loyalty in Delhi NCR. Consumers are increasingly conscious of the impact of their purchasing decisions on society and the environment. Retailers who can demonstrate a commitment to social and environmental responsibility through their business practices are more likely to earn the loyalty of socially conscious consumers.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

Customer loyalty in retail stores is influenced by various factors that shape consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. Understanding these factors is crucial for businesses in Delhi NCR to develop effective strategies for building and maintaining loyal customer relationships. According to Reichheld (1996), customer loyalty is the result of consistently positive emotional experiences, satisfaction, and perceived value. This highlights the importance of providing exceptional customer service and ensuring that customers feel valued and appreciated.

One of the key factors influencing customer loyalty is the quality of products and services offered by retail stores. Oliver (1999) emphasizes the role of product quality in shaping customer perceptions and loyalty. Retailers in Delhi NCR need to focus on offering high-quality products that meet the needs and expectations of their target customers. This can help build trust and loyalty among customers who value quality and reliability in their shopping experience.

Another important factor influencing customer loyalty is the perceived value of products and services. According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is the customer's perception of the benefits received compared to the costs incurred. Retailers in Delhi NCR can enhance perceived value by offering competitive prices, promotions, and discounts. This can help attract price-conscious customers and build loyalty over time.

In exploring the factors influencing customer loyalty within retail stores in the Delhi NCR region, several theoretical frameworks have been instrumental in guiding research and understanding consumer behavior. One such framework is the Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes the importance of building long-term relationships with customers through trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Berry, 1983). According to this theory, customer loyalty is a result of strong emotional connections and positive interactions between the customer and the retailer.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis in 1989, posits that customers' acceptance and usage of technology-driven services or systems are influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the retail sector, the integration of technology, such as online

shopping platforms or mobile apps, can enhance the overall customer experience and foster loyalty.

Moreover, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975, suggests that an individual's intention to perform a behavior is determined by their attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. Applied to retail, customers' attitudes toward a store's products, services, and brand image, as well as social influences, can shape their loyalty intentions.

Additionally, the Social Exchange Theory, first proposed by Homans in 1958 and further developed by Blau in 1964, posits that individuals engage in relationships based on the perceived benefits and costs involved. Within the context of retail stores, customers develop loyalty when they perceive the benefits of shopping at a particular store (e.g., discounts, rewards) outweigh the costs (e.g., time, effort).

Moreover, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, introduced by Festinger in 1957, suggests that individuals experience discomfort when they perceive inconsistencies between their beliefs or attitudes and their behavior. In the retail context, retailers can mitigate cognitive dissonance by providing post-purchase support, assurances, and guarantees, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, the Emotional Branding Theory emphasizes the role of emotions in shaping brand perceptions and loyalty. According to this theory, retailers can build strong emotional connections with customers by appealing to their values, aspirations, and lifestyle preferences through marketing strategies and brand storytelling.

Lastly, the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Model, proposed by Oliver in 1980, suggests that customer satisfaction is influenced by the perceived discrepancy between expectations and actual experiences. Retailers can manage customer expectations through transparent communication, consistent service delivery, and continuous improvement efforts to enhance satisfaction and loyalty.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Despite the significant growth and competition in the retail sector of Delhi NCR, customer loyalty remains a crucial yet challenging aspect for retailers. This study aims to explore the various factors influencing customer loyalty towards retail stores in this region. The problem arises from the lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the specific elements that drive or hinder customer loyalty in this context. Additionally, the rapid advancement of technology, changing consumer preferences, and the emergence of online shopping platforms pose significant challenges to traditional brick-and-mortar stores in retaining loyal customers. Therefore, there is a pressing need to identify and analyze the key factors that impact customer loyalty in retail stores within Delhi NCR, to provide valuable insights for retailers to enhance their strategies and maintain a loyal customer base.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of this study is to analyze and identify the key factors influencing customer

loyalty towards retail stores in Delhi NCR. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of customer service quality on customer loyalty.
2. Examine the role of product quality and variety in influencing customer loyalty.
3. Evaluate the influence of pricing strategies on customer loyalty.
4. Assess the significance of store ambiance and layout on customer loyalty.
5. Explore the effect of promotional activities and discounts on customer loyalty.
6. Understand the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.
7. Identify the most influential factors affecting customer loyalty in the retail sector in Delhi NCR.
8. Provide recommendations for retail stores to enhance customer loyalty based on the findings of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

STUDY METHODOLOGY:

The research is both descriptive in nature and quantitative in nature, and it is carried out using the questionnaire method with participants from various locations and age groups. This instructs the researchers on what information to gather and how to use it to address their study questions. 108 respondents made up the sample size.

SECONDARY DATA:

Secondary data is information that has been gathered without the user's knowledge. Censuses, organizational records, and data gathered through qualitative techniques or qualitative research are typical sources of secondary data for social science. Contrarily, primary data are gathered by the researcher who is performing the study.

Other sources-

1. Diary
2. Books
3. Periodicals
4. Online resource

STATISTICAL TOOLS:

The following statistical techniques were utilized in the study:

1. A tabulation technique
2. A straightforward percentage analysis.
3. A method for Simple percentage calculations are as follows: = Number of respondents for the specific factor X 159

Number of respondents overall

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The responses from 159 individuals regarding the factors influencing their choice of retail

stores in Delhi NCR reveal a significant emphasis on price competitiveness, with 25.2% indicating it as a key factor. This suggests that consumers in this region place a high value on getting good deals and value for their money. Product quality follows closely behind, with 18.9% of respondents highlighting it as a critical factor, indicating that while price is important, consumers are also discerning about the quality of products they purchase. Location is also a significant consideration, with 14.5% of respondents citing it as a key factor. Interestingly, a sizable 41.5% of respondents indicated that all of the above factors influence their decision, suggesting that for many consumers in Delhi NCR, a combination of price, product quality, and location are essential considerations when choosing a retail store.

As per the pie chart no. 1 given in annexure.

As per related to Customer service plays a pivotal role in determining customer loyalty to a retail store, as highlighted by the responses collected. With 57.2% of respondents indicating that customer service is very important, it underscores the significance of quality service interactions in fostering loyalty. This sentiment is further reinforced by the 28.9% who consider it somewhat important.

As per the pie chart no. 2 given in annexure.

The statement, "How likely are you to recommend your favorite retail store to others?" garnered 159 responses, revealing interesting insights into customer loyalty. A significant 42.8% indicated they were "very likely" to recommend their favorite retail store, highlighting a strong inclination towards advocacy. Furthermore, 53.5% expressed being "somewhat likely" to recommend, indicating a generally positive sentiment towards their chosen store. The 3.8% who stated they were "not likely" to recommend could represent a segment of dissatisfied customers, suggesting potential areas for improvement.

As per the pie chart no. 3 given in annexure.

The statement reflects the frequency of shopping at favorite retail stores in Delhi NCR based on 159 responses. It highlights that a significant portion of respondents, 53.5%, shop daily at their favorite retail store, indicating a high level of loyalty and regularity in their shopping behavior. Additionally, 20.1% shop weekly, suggesting a consistent preference for their chosen store.

The responses also show that 14.5% shop monthly, indicating a moderate level of loyalty, while 11.9% shop occasionally, indicating a lower level of loyalty.

As per the pie chart no. 4 given in annexure.

The statement highlights the significant impact of product variety on customer loyalty to retail stores in Delhi NCR, as indicated by the responses. The majority, comprising 96.2%, find product variety either very important or somewhat important. This underscores the crucial role that a diverse product range plays in attracting and retaining customers.

As per the pie chart no. 5 given in annexure.

The statement underscores the critical role that the overall shopping experience plays in shaping customer loyalty towards retail stores in Delhi NCR. With 58.5% of respondents considering it "very important," and an additional 34% deeming it "somewhat important," it's evident that a positive shopping experience significantly influences customer loyalty.

Moreover, the 6.9% who consider the overall shopping experience as "not important" indicate a minority view. However, this segment cannot be ignored, as even a small percentage of dissatisfied customers can impact a store's reputation and bottom line. It highlights the need for retail stores to continuously enhance and personalize the shopping experience to cater to diverse customer preferences. The 0.6% who are "not sure" might indicate a lack of clear understanding or a neutral stance, suggesting that there is a segment open to influence based on their future experiences.

As per the pie chart no. 6 given in annexure.

The statement about the importance of the overall shopping experience in determining customer loyalty reveals crucial insights. With 96.2% of respondents indicating that the overall shopping experience is either very important or somewhat important, it's evident that this factor plays a significant role in fostering loyalty among customers

As per the pie chart no. 7 given in annexure.

Promotional offers and discounts play a significant role in shaping customer loyalty to retail stores in Delhi NCR, as evidenced by the responses gathered. A substantial majority, comprising 37.1%, indicated that these factors have a substantial impact on their loyalty, suggesting that discounts and promotions are crucial drivers of customer retention in this region. This response highlights the importance of pricing strategies in the competitive retail landscape of Delhi NCR, where customers are actively seeking value and savings. The 44% who indicated that these offers somewhat influence their loyalty further emphasize the significance of discounts and promotions, indicating that while not the sole determinant, they are nonetheless influential in retaining customers. Conversely, the 14.5% who indicated that promotional offers and discounts do not have much influence on their loyalty, along with the 4.4% who stated that these factors do not influence their loyalty at all, suggest a segment of customers who prioritize other aspects of the retail experience over price-related incentives.

As per the pie chart no. 8 given in annexure.

The statement provides valuable insights into the satisfaction levels of customers regarding loyalty programs offered by retail stores in Delhi NCR. With 50.3% of respondents indicating they are "very satisfied" with these programs, it suggests that a significant portion of customers find these offerings beneficial and appealing. This high level of satisfaction could indicate that these loyalty programs are well-designed, providing meaningful rewards and incentives that resonate with

customers. On the other hand, the 45.9% of respondents who are "somewhat satisfied" might suggest that while the loyalty programs are generally appreciated, there is room for improvement.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTION:

RESULTS:

The responses from 159 individuals regarding the factors influencing their choice of retail stores in Delhi NCR reveal a significant emphasis on price competitiveness, with 25.2% indicating it as a key factor. This suggests that consumers in this region place a high value on getting good deals and value for their money. Product quality follows closely behind, with 18.9% of respondents highlighting it as a critical factor, indicating that while price is important, consumers are also discerning about the quality of products they purchase. Location is also a significant consideration, with 14.5% of respondents citing it as a key factor. Interestingly, a sizeable 41.5% of respondents indicated that all of the above factors influence their decision, suggesting that for many consumers in Delhi NCR, a combination of price, product quality, and location are essential considerations when choosing a retail store.

The statement, "How likely are you to recommend your favourite retail store to others?" garnered 159 responses, revealing interesting insights into customer loyalty. A significant 42.8% indicated they were "very likely" to recommend their favourite retail store, highlighting a strong inclination towards advocacy. Furthermore, 53.5% expressed being "somewhat likely" to recommend, indicating a generally positive sentiment towards their chosen store.

The statement highlights the significant impact of product variety on customer loyalty to retail stores in Delhi NCR, as indicated by the responses. The majority, comprising 96.2%, find product variety either very important or somewhat important. This underscores the crucial role that a diverse product range plays in attracting and retaining customers. A wide variety of products can cater to diverse consumer preferences, ensuring that customers find what they are looking for, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and fostering loyalty. Additionally, a varied product selection can create a unique selling proposition for a retail store, setting it apart from competitors and enhancing its appeal to customers seeking variety and novelty in their shopping experiences.

SUGGESTIONS:

The responses from 159 individuals regarding the factors influencing their choice of retail stores in Delhi NCR reveal a significant emphasis on price competitiveness, with 25.2% indicating it as a key factor. This suggests that consumers in this region place a high value on getting good deals and value for their money. Product quality follows closely behind, with 18.9% of respondents highlighting it as a critical factor, indicating that while price is important, consumers are also discerning about the quality of products they purchase.

Customer service plays a pivotal role in determining customer loyalty to a retail store, as

highlighted by the responses collected. With 57.2% of respondents indicating that customer service is very important, it underscores the significance of quality service interactions in fostering loyalty. This sentiment is further reinforced by the 28.9% who consider it somewhat important.

These figures indicate that a vast majority of customers value positive experiences and assistance from staff, suggesting that exceptional customer service can strongly influence their decision to remain loyal to a particular retail store. Conversely, the 8.2% who view customer service as not important and the 5.7% who are unsure indicate a smaller but still notable segment of customers who may not prioritise service as a loyalty factor. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of responses emphasising the importance of customer service underscore its critical role in shaping customer loyalty in retail stores in Delhi NCR.

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LIMITATIONS:

The data gathered provides valuable insights into the factors influencing customer loyalty towards retail stores in Delhi NCR. However, there are some limitations to consider:

Sample Size and Representativeness: While the responses from 159 individuals offer valuable insights, the sample size may not be representative of the entire population of customers in Delhi NCR. The findings may not accurately reflect the views and behaviours of all customers in the region.

CONCLUSION:

The analysis of factors influencing customer loyalty to retail stores in Delhi NCR reveals several key insights. Price competitiveness emerges as a critical factor, with 25.2% of respondents considering it important. This indicates a strong emphasis on value for money among consumers in the region. Product quality closely follows, with 18.9% highlighting its significance, suggesting that while price matters, customers are also discerning about the products they purchase. Location is also crucial, with 14.5% citing it as a key factor. Interestingly, 41.5% of respondents consider all these factors important, indicating that a combination of price, product quality, and location drives their choice of retail store.

Customer service plays a pivotal role in customer loyalty, as emphasised by 57.2% of respondents who consider it very important.

Regarding shopping frequency, 53.5% shop daily, indicating a high level of loyalty. Additionally, 20.1% shop weekly, showing a consistent preference. However, 11.9% shop occasionally, suggesting lower loyalty. These findings suggest that most respondents exhibit a strong loyalty to their favourite retail store, influenced by factors like location, product range, customer service, and brand perception. Product variety significantly influences customer loyalty, with 96.2% considering it important. A diverse product range caters to diverse preferences, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and building loyalty. Moreover, a varied product selection can create a unique selling proposition, setting a store apart from competitors and enhancing its appeal.

The overall shopping experience is crucial, with 58.5% considering it very important and 34% somewhat important. This highlights the impact of store ambiance, customer service, ease of navigation, and product availability on customer perception and loyalty. Focusing on delivering exceptional shopping experiences could be key for retailers in Delhi NCR to enhance loyalty and drive repeat business. Promotional offers and discounts are significant, with 37.1% indicating a substantial impact on loyalty. However, 14.5% do not find them influential, suggesting that factors like product quality and customer service are also crucial. Loyalty programs are generally well-received, with 50.3% "very satisfied" and 45.9% "somewhat satisfied." This indicates that while loyalty programs are appreciated, there is room for improvement to increase satisfaction levels further.

In conclusion, the data highlights the multifaceted nature of customer loyalty in Delhi NCR's retail sector. While price, product quality, and location are key factors, customer service emerges as a crucial determinant. Retailers should focus on delivering exceptional customer service experiences to enhance loyalty.

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APPENDIX:

How often do you shop at your favorite retail store in Delhi NCR?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally

What role does the variety of products play in your loyalty to a retail store?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- I'm unsure

How important is the overall shopping experience in determining your loyalty?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- I'm not sure

How do promotional offers and discounts influence your loyalty to a retail store?

- A lot
- Somewhat
- Not much
- Not at all

How satisfied are you with the loyalty programs offered by retail stores in Delhi NCR?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not satisfied
- I don't know

How important is the convenience of payment methods in determining your loyalty?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- I'm unsure