

A Study on the Service Quality Attributes of Parlour Service Employees and Their Contribution to Customer Satisfaction in the Beauty Care Service Industry

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ABSTRACT: *Evolving consumer lifestyles are driving the beauty and beauty care industry across the world. Unlike the past, people are investing a sizeable portion of their income towards self-grooming. 'Looking and feeling good' has gained immense precedence as it is thought to ensure personal and professional success. There has always been an urge among women to be admired and appreciated for their looks and beauty and to meet this end, they have been engaged in self-grooming since time immemorial. Women adorn themselves with the best of clothing and finery and take the help of beauty care services to groom themselves. Since the past three decades, the beauty and the beauty care industry in India is witnessing a boom, thanks to the increased number of women entering the workforce and the vast amount of disposable income they hold. Globalisation, media proliferation, increased awareness of brands etc. has contributed immensely towards growth of the beauty and the beauty care industry. The contribution of beauty towards increasing confidence levels and assuring success at the personal and professional front has helped the industry gain considerable momentum. The beauty care industry bears great responsibility of transforming their customers into self-confident and empowered human beings. The human resources factor is very important in the beauty care industry as they are the considered 'the enablers and enhancers' of beauty. They are responsible for actually performing the service on the customers and creating a special bond between themselves and the customers. It is this bond created between the service employee and the customer which results into customer satisfaction, subsequently leading to customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction at the beauty parlour can be largely attributed to the skill sets and unique capabilities possessed by the parlour service employees.*

Keywords: *women consumers, parlour service employee, beauty care industry, beauty care service industry, beauty parlours*

Date of Submission: 04-11-2017

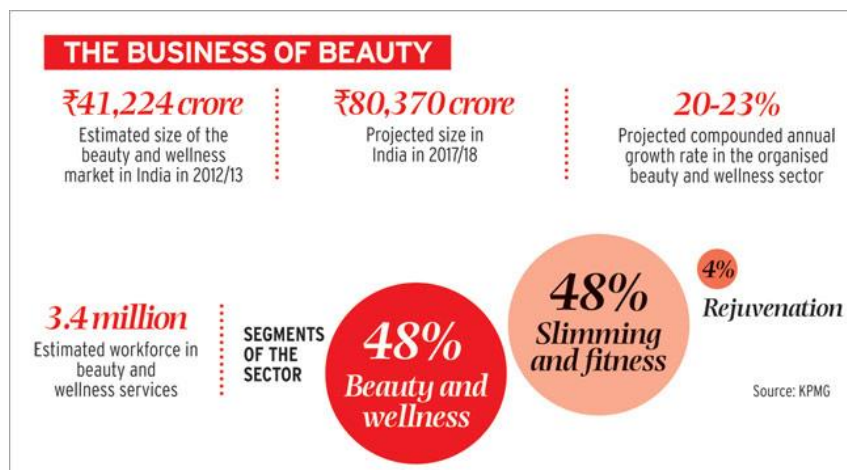
Date of acceptance: 14-11-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, the beauty and wellness industry is booming. This can be attributed to the changing demographics in India since the past 2 – 3 decades. Globalisation, urbanization, awareness about brands, proliferation of media and the great urge among Indians to look and feel good is propelling this industry towards rapid growth. The beauty business in India is growing at a rate of 15 - 20% annually.

The beauty care market in India consists of cosmetic products, cosmetic treatment centres, parlours, salons and spas. The major contributors towards the revenues of salon and parlour industry are the women segment. Men and women are becoming more and more aware about their looks and personality and they are even willing to pay a premium for their self-grooming and beauty enhancement. The 'feel good' factor is catching up with Indians and visiting salons/parlours and spas has become a part of their lifestyle. Visit to a beauty salon gives individuals a chance to experience some special moments, pampering and grooming themselves and at the end of the service, they end up feeling good and confident.

The beauty and wellness market is estimated to double to US\$ 14.88 billion by 2017/18 from US\$ 7.63 billion in 2012/13 as per a KPMG Wellness Sector report released in April 2014. As per this report, it has been projected that the workforce requirements in this industry will grow from 3.4 million in 2013 to 12.1 million in 2022 (Mishra A; 2014). The salaries of make-up and beauty professionals is also expected to increase considerably. With the entry of many international players in the beauty and beauty care segment, this sector has become extremely competitive. Even national players have upgraded their products and services to match the competition and this has resulted in the benefit of the consumers. Nowadays, consumers looking for beauty care and services have a lot of choices to choose from.



(Source:<http://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/features/vlcc-clsa-everstone-kpmg-ac-nielsen-report/story/209609.html>)

Previously, beauty salons were only known for their services such as hair cutting and styling, waxing, threading, facial massages etc. but now they are judged by different yardsticks such as their infrastructure, ambience and their service quality. Beauty parlours are also offering specialised services such as hair reviving, hair revitalizing, skin toning, skin lightening, scalp conditioning etc. in addition to their existing services.

In India, the beauty care services industry is dominated by unorganised players. However, with changing lifestyles and customers giving more importance to hygiene aspects, ambience, infrastructure, service quality etc., their preference for organised companies is increasing. National players in the beauty care sector are Kaya Skin Clinic (Marico), Lakme Beauty Salons (HLL), Naturals, VLCC, Javed Habib Hair and Beauty Salons, Trends in Vogue (CavinKare), Shahnaz Hussain Beauty Salons etc. International companies in this sector are L’Oreal, Baccarose, Wella, Saks London, Jean Claude Biguine (JCB), Toni & Guy, Warren Tricomi,, Truefitt & Hill etc. Many of these companies also have their own training institutes for training beauty professionals.

The service attributes and skill sets required by service employees at the parlour are of utmost importance in the beauty care services industry. The success of any parlour depends upon their unique skill sets of managing, servicing and retaining customers. Rather than the infrastructure and ambience of the parlour, customers give utmost importance to the quality of services offered by the parlour employee. Customer satisfaction and resulting customer loyalty is directly attributed to the service quality offered by the parlour contact employee.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The beauty care services industry in India has gained momentum due to several reasons. Indians are embracing western trends and fashion and are giving prime importance to grooming services. Growing disposable income of middle class in general and women in particular, increasing media exposure and awareness about brands is driving this industry manifolds. Customers are non-hesitant to spend on their grooming and beauty enhancement as long as they are offered something novel and different (Kaur Amanpreet, 2014).

The concept of customer satisfaction was primarily introduced in the field of marketing by Cardozo in 1965. Subsequently this concept has been widely studied as the success of businesses depends heavily on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has its origins in the needs and wants of customers. As per the interpretations of various authors and researchers, it is a feeling which is an outcome of the process of evaluation by the customer as to what has been received against what was expected from a particular product or service. Satisfaction is the customer’s evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met their needs and expectations (Bitner & Zeithaml, 2003). It has been deduced that high service quality can result into high levels of customer satisfaction which in turn increases customer loyalty (Kumar, Kee and Manshor, 2009).

Customer satisfaction is the key to success for all organisations and helps them gain a competitive advantage in an extremely competitive marketing environment (Cengiz 2010). Customer satisfaction results from an evaluative process that compares the expectations of the customer prior to purchase with perceptions of performance during and after the consumption experience (R.L. Oliver, 1980).

A study was conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 482 respondents (230 female, 252 male) who were customers of beauty parlours, to identify the service quality dimensions as a point of communication for

developing relationship with the customers. It was concluded through the study that customers gave highest preference to service quality. The implications for marketers and managers of beauty parlours was that they should increase the range of their services, provide the necessary facilities and equipments for servicing customers, provide effective communication and pricing system and provide the right environment and ambience for their customers (Shahbazi S., et al; 2013).

In a study conducted in Western Mumbai on 220 women respondents (age group 20 to > 40 years) to understand as to which factors influences women to visit beauty parlours, it was concluded that women belonging to different age groups vary with respect to their perceptions regarding visit to beauty parlour. Very young and young women feel that it is necessary to visit parlours whereas elderly women feel that it is not necessary. Very young women do not give importance to professional salons whereas middle age and elderly women prefer services from professional salons. With respect to demographics it was seen that as qualification increases, the necessity for ambience factor also increases. More than married women it is unmarried women who feel greater need for availing services of a beauty parlour (Savla Swati et al; 2014).

In the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh a study was carried out on the beauty care service industry to measure the service quality and customer satisfaction level at high-end women's parlours. The aim of the study was also to find the factors that create customer satisfaction, to evaluate the service quality factors at parlours and to find out the attributes of service employees preferred by the customers. When factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis) was carried out on sixteen variables, four service quality factors were derived which are Support & Facility Factor, Employee Performance Factor, Customer Relation Factor and Communication Factor. With respect to the Employee Performance factor, the knowledge, behaviour and credibility of the employee were the main variables constituting the factor. The findings show that customers give a lot of importance to issues such as the service provider's behaviour, his/her knowledge, the parlour environment, the counselling capabilities and the affordability of the parlours (Khan P.I. et al, 2011).

A study was conducted in Bangladesh to study consumer perception regarding service quality dimensions like tangibility, reliability, accessibility, empathy and responsiveness using SERVQUAL model. The responses of 162 women customers of beauty parlours was solicited and it was concluded through the study that out of the five factors, responsiveness was found to be most influential with respect to customer satisfaction and the other four factors were found to be insignificant in comparison. It means caring for the customer and giving personalised attention to the customer would eventually lead to customer satisfaction (Azad S, 2015).

A study was conducted in Bangkok to investigate an effectiveness of organizational commitment, service quality, and customer satisfaction factors that influence customer loyalty. The respondents consisted of 480 hair dressers and customers of hair salons in Bangkok and surrounding metropolitan areas. It was concluded through the study that employee engagement has a direct influence on the quality of service resulting into customer satisfaction. Effective employee engagement positively impacts the business performance and quality of service rendered (Khahan Na-Nan, Ekkasit Sanamthong and Madaoh Sulong, 2015).

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the Indian beauty care services industry.
2. To analyse the preference of women consumers for specific parlour employee to perform services.
3. To understand the qualities and attributes of the parlour contact employee.
4. To find out if there exists an association between the preference for the services of a particular parlour employee and customer satisfaction.

2. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H_{1O} : There is no significant association between the preference of a particular parlour employee and customer satisfaction

H_{1A} : There is significant association between the preference for a particular parlour employee and customer satisfaction

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is in continuation to studies being conducted on women consumers of Mumbai with a particular emphasis on working women. Working women have multiple responsibilities both on the personal and professional front. Dressing well, looking and feeling good and confident features high on their priority list. To meet this end, they purchase goods that helps enhance their personality and avail services of grooming companies such as parlours and spas. The service employees at the parlour or salons contribute greatly towards customer satisfaction resulting into customer loyalty.

Sample Description: Working women in the age group 21 to 35 years

Sample size: 102 respondents

Area of research: Select suburbs of Mumbai

Type of study: Descriptive cross sectional research

Data collection tool: Questionnaire

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

Description of service under study:

Parlour services: Organised and unorganised beauty salons/parlours offering services such as haircuts, clean-ups, facials, waxing, threading and facial beauty massages and treatments.

The secondary data sources for this research are paper based sources such as books, journals, research papers, periodicals, newspapers and magazines. Also electronic sources were accessed for the study such as on-line databases, newspaper articles, online research papers and the internet.

The data collection tool used was a questionnaire which was distributed among women respondents belonging to a particular criteria as mentioned above. The questionnaire had 14 questions in all out of which 6 questions were related to demographic variables, 6 questions pertaining to variables of parlour service employee'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 tools : Percentage Analysis Method, Chi square test and Correlation Analysis. SPSS (Statistical package for Social Sciences) was used for carrying out the analysis of data collected.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A) Frequency table for demographic variables

- Age : 51% respondents - 21 to 25 years, 30.4% respondents - 26 to 30, 18.6% respondents - 31 to 35 years.
- Education: 39.2% respondents - graduates, 58.8% - post graduates, 2% - other educational qualification.
- Marital status : 61.8% -single women, 38.2% - married.
- Employment status : 24.5% - self-employed, 75.5 % - employed (in service).
- Personal Annual Income : The annual income range of women respondents were as under :

2 lakhs to 4 lakhs per annum	: 38.2%
4 lakhs to 6 lakhs per annum	: 20.6%
6 lakhs to 8 lakhs per annum	: 34.3%
8 lakhs to 10 lakhs per annum	: 2.9%
10 lakhs to 12 lakhs per annum	: 2 %
Above 12 lakhs	: 2 %

(B) Frequency table : Employee Attribute variables

- Around 70% of the respondents agreed that employees should be friendly. 26.5% were undecided whereas 2.9% disagreed.
- 80% of the respondents felt that employee should have relevant knowledge about the processes carried out at the parlour. 16.7% were undecided whereas 2% disagreed.
- 74% of the respondents agreed that the employees should possess relevant skill sets associated with the beautician's job. 25.5% were undecided whereas 1% disagreed.
- 76% of the respondents felt that employees should be responsive to situations. 18.6% were undecided whereas 4.9% disagreed.
- Around 81% of respondents felt that the employee should understand the customer's needs. 15.7% were undecided whereas 2.9% disagreed.
- 82.5% respondents felt that the employee should handle complaints effectively. 15.7% respondents were undecided whereas 2% disagreed.
- Around 63% respondents preferred the services of a particular employee at the parlour. 26.5 % were undecided whereas 2.9% disagreed.
- 59.9% of the respondents felt that their satisfaction depended upon the service offered by that particular employee. 35.3% were undecided whereas 5% disagreed.

Table 1

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee * My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee	10	100.0%	0	.0%	102	100.0%
	2					

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
The employee should be friendly.	102	4.07	.882	2	5
The employee should have relevant knowledge.	102	4.32	.822	2	5
The employee should possess relevant skills.	102	4.21	.860	2	5
The employee should be responsive to situations.	102	4.20	.912	2	5
The employee should understand my needs.	102	4.26	.832	2	5
The employee should handle complaints effectively	102	4.30	.806	2	5
I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee	102	3.83	1.054	1	5
My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee	102	3.81	.920	1	5

Table 3: Test Statistics

	Chi-square	Degree of freedom	Asymp. Sig.
Employee – friendly	29.843 ^a	3	.000
Employee – relevant knowledge	56.824 ^a	3	.000
Employee relevant skills	45.216 ^a	3	.000
Employee responsive	40.275 ^a	3	.000
Employee – understand needs	47.882 ^a	3	.000
Employee – effective complaint handler	52.902 ^a	3	.000
Preference for particular parlour employee	40.157 ^a	4	.000
Satisfaction depends on services of that particular parlour employee	54.176 ^a	4	.000

- a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 25.5.
- b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20.4.

Table 4

Directional Measures						
			Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Lambda	Symmetric	.319	.074	4.047	.000
		I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee Dependent	.319	.088	3.135	.002
		My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee Dependent	.318	.082	3.377	.001
	Goodman and Kruskal tau	I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee Dependent	.182	.044		.000 ^c
		My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee Dependent	.198	.046		.000 ^c
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.						
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.						
c. Based on chi-square approximation						

Table 5

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.619			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.570	.070	6.942	.000 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.590	.073	7.313	.000 ^c
N of Valid Cases		102			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					
c. Based on normal approximation.					

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	63.336 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	58.811	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	32.846	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	102		
a. 16 cells (64.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.			

Correlations			
		I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee	My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee
I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee	Pearson Correlation	1	.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee	Pearson Correlation	.570**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 1 depicts that the study solicited responses from 102 respondents. Table 2 lists out all the variables under study and it can be seen that ‘Employee should have relevant knowledge’, ‘Employee should handle complaints effectively’ and ‘Employee should understand my needs’ are the most important qualities which a parlour employee should possess as per the respondents as they have higher mean values. Table 3 shows that all the variables under study are highly significant. In order to prove our hypothesis ie. “There is significant association between the preference of a particular parlour employee and customer satisfaction.”, we had conducted a cross tabulation of the two variables ‘I prefer the services of a particular parlour employee’ and ‘My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee’ and as per Table 4, we have found that there exists an association between these two variables.

Chi-square test was performed and significant relationship was found between ‘preference for a particular parlour employee’ and ‘My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee’. (Table 5). As per the Chi-square results, $\chi^2 (16, N = 102) = 63.34, p = .000$. The association between the two variables is found to be highly significant where $p < 0.001$ (Pearson’s Chi-square – Table 6). Also, we tried to find out the strength of the relationship between the two variables using the Correlation analysis we have found that there is a strong and positive correlation between the two variables where $r = .570, p = \leq .001$ (Table 7). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. It means that a significant association has been found between ‘preference for a particular parlour employee’ and ‘My satisfaction depends on services offered by that particular employee’.

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study has been conducted in a limited area, ie. Mumbai.
2. The small sample size, 102 women respondents is a great limitation as larger sample sizes would increase the accuracy of the results.
3. A select women segment (age 21 to 35 years) have been selected for this study. The consumer behaviour of women belonging to other age groups may vary.
4. The sampling technique used (Non- probability sampling) would hamper the accuracy of the results of the study.
5. This study has been restricted to the human qualities associated with the service industry (beauty parlours). Other aspects of the service industry were not explored such as pricing of service products, the ambience of service environment, the service processes involved, the promotion and distribution aspects etc.

IV. CONCLUSION

The beauty care services industry in India is booming due to several reasons such as globalisation, changing demographics and lifestyles, urbanisation, media proliferation, availability and awareness of domestic and foreign brands etc. However this industry is witnessing unprecedented growth due to the latent need among consumers to look and feel good. ‘Looking good and feeling confident’ is of utmost priority to consumers in general and women in particular. We are well aware that in India, an increasing number of women are entering

the workforce and the women's job market is becoming more and more competitive. Working women can gain an edge over others just by enhancing their looks and personalities. To meet this end, they rely on goods and services that help them enhance their physical beauty. Products such as apparels, footwear, accessories and services such as gymnasiums, spas and beauty parlours ensures their beauty and health. The success of the beauty care services industry relies heavily on their human resources. The service employees at the parlour contribute greatly towards garnering customer satisfaction by providing dedicated services. Through literature review it was gathered that caring for the customer and giving them personalised attention greatly increases customer satisfaction. Also, higher service quality results into higher levels of customer satisfaction which in turn leads to greater customer loyalty. Women consumers are very specific with respect to the parlour employee who will service them. Once they create a rapport with a particular parlour employee and are satisfied with their services, they would prefer the same employee to serve them every time they visit the parlour. Through this study we tried to find out whether there was an association between preference for a particular employee and customer satisfaction. We could conclude through the study that there exists a strong relationship between these two variables. It can therefore be concluded that customer satisfaction is associated strongly with the service quality provided by the employees of the parlour and most women consumers prefer the services of a particular parlour employee. .

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International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 4485, Journal no. 46889.

Vidya B. Panicker A Study on the Service Quality Attributes of Parlour Service Employees and Their Contribution to Customer Satisfaction in the Beauty Care Service Industry." *International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI)*, vol. 6, no. 11, 2017, pp. 22-28.