Building on the review of literature discussed in Chapter 2, Chapter 4 proposes a conceptual framework that addresses the research gaps and the objective of the study identified in Chapter 3. It is followed by discussion on the hypothesized relationships among the various constructs in the proposed conceptual framework.

4.1 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Keeping in view the objectives of this study, following conceptual framework has been proposed based on the literature review. It is given in Figure 1 below:
4.1.1 Factors Affecting Service Convenience: Definitions

The potential factors affecting customers’ perception of service convenience as identified from literature review are store brand equity, store atmosphere, store design/layout, customer information, and employee responsiveness. The definition of the above identified factors is given below:

i) **Store Brand Equity**: It is defined as the differential effect of a brand (i.e. store name) on customers’ response to marketing activities of a retail store vis-à-vis its competing stores. This is consistent with Kotler (1991) and Keller (1993).

ii) **Store Atmosphere**: Based on Kotler (1973), it is defined as the buying environment of a retail store that creates positive affect in the minds if customers thereby enhancing their likelihood of making a purchase.

iii) **Store Design/Layout**: Following Bitner (1992), it is defined as the arrangement of products inside a retail store in a way that facilitates service performance from the perspective of both customers and employees.

iv) **Customer Information**: In accordance with Daft and Lengel (1986) and Oh et al. (2009), it is defined as the ability of the available information provided by a retailer that enhances customers’ understanding of the products/services offered by the retail store.

v) **Employee Responsiveness**: Consistent with Zeithaml et al. (2013), it is defined as the willingness of the front line employees to help customers and provide prompt service to them at the retail store.
The conceptual framework proposes that customers’ perception of the identified five factors has a positive impact on their perception of service convenience across five stages of their purchase behaviour.

4.1.2 Types of Service Convenience: Definitions

Based on Berry et al. (2002), service convenience is defined as time and effect saved by the customers during the purchase ad usage of product/services offered by a retailer. Consistent with service convenience literature, five types of service convenience are considered in this study based on the stages of purchase behaviour which customers go through while dealing with a retailer. These are decision convenience, access convenience, benefit convenience, transaction convenience, and post-benefit convenience. Consistent with Berry et al. (2002), the aforesaid five types of service convenience are defined as following:

i) Decision Convenience: It is defined as the time and effort saved by customers while deciding on the retail store from which they prefer to purchase products/services.

ii) Access Convenience: It is defined as the time and effort saved by customers while establishing contact with a retail store.

iii) Benefit Convenience: It is defined as time and effort saved by customers while searching for and evaluating products inside the retail store.

iv) Transaction Convenience: It is defined as time and effort saved by customers while concluding their transaction for the selected products at the retail store.

v) Post-Benefit Convenience: It is defined as time and effort saved by customers while re-establishing contact with the retail store to receive after sales service particularly related to product return/exchange.
According to the proposed conceptual framework, customers’ favourable perception of five types of service convenience has a positive impact on two positive outcomes viz. customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behaviour.

4.1.3 Outcomes of Service Convenience

Based on literature review, this study establishes two potential outcomes of service convenience viz. customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behaviour. Consistent with Groth (2005) and Bove et al. (2009), customer citizenship behaviour is defined as voluntary or discretionary behaviour exhibited by the customers at the retail store that improves the overall performance of their retailer and also enhance their own service experience as well as that of other customers at the retail store. Furthermore, four types of customer citizenship behaviours are considered in this study viz. word of mouth behaviour (Groth, 2005; Bove et al., 2009; Johnson and Rapp, 2010), customer cooperation behaviour at the retail store (Bettencourt, 1997; Keh and Teo, 2001; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007), Customer participation behaviour at the retail store (Bettencourt, 1997; Keh and Teo, 2001; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007; Bove et al., 2009; Bartikowski and Walsh, 2011), and Customer helping other customers at the retail store (Groth, 2005; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007; Bove et al., 2009; Bartikowski and Walsh, 2011). The definitions of customer satisfaction and abovementioned four types of customer citizenship behaviours are as follows:

i) **Customer Satisfaction:** Based on Expectancy Disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1981), it is defined as a post purchase evaluation product/services by customers of the extent to which products/services offered by a retail store meets their expectations.

ii) **Word of Mouth Behaviour:** Following Anderson (1998) and Bove et al. (2009), it is defined as favourable, informal, person to person communication between the customers and
others (mainly family members, relatives and friends) regarding the overall service performance of a retailer.

iii) Customer Cooperation Behaviour: In line with Bettencourt (1997), it is defined as the discretionary or voluntary behaviour shown by customers that aims to respect the service quality provisions of their retailer.

iv) Customer Participation Behaviour: In line with Bettencourt (1997), it is defined as voluntary or discretionary behaviour displayed by customers that indicates towards their active and responsible involvement in the governance and development of their retailer.

v) Customer Helping Customers: In line with Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007), it is defined as voluntary or discretionary socially supportive behaviour exhibited by customers, towards other customers, inside the retail store.

Based on prior studies, the proposed conceptual framework points out that customer satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship between five types of service convenience and four customer citizenship behaviours mentioned above.

4.2 Development of Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature, the proposed conceptual framework proposes following hypothesized relationships.

4.2.1 Relationship between Store Brand Equity and Decision Convenience

Cue Utilization theory has suggested that service brand equity is used as an extrinsic cue by customers to evaluate product/services offered by a retailer, which in turn influence their intention to purchase the above product/service from the retail store (Dodds et al., 1991). In addition, Berry et al. (2002) has observed that strong positive brand equity instils trust in the
minds of customers, thereby enabling them to visualize intangible service prior to consumption. Researchers have also posited that strong positive brand equity acts as a time and effort saving heuristics that provide convenience to customers by simplifying their choice process pertaining to selection of the retail store from which they prefer to purchase products/service (Grewal et al., 1998; Berry et al., 2002; Brady et al., 2005; Chang and Liu, 2009). Hence, it is concluded that customers use store brand equity as an extrinsic cue to simplify their decision pertaining to the selection of the retail store from which they prefer to purchase products/services. Therefore, following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Customers’ perception of store brand equity has a positive impact on their perceived decision convenience.

4.2.2 Relationship between Store Atmosphere and Service Convenience

According to Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), perception of store atmosphere creates a positive emotional state (pleasure and arousal) in the minds of the customers. It has been found that the above positive emotional state leads to customers underestimating their time and effort while searching and evaluating products inside the retail store. This is consistent with Milliman (1982), Donavan et al. (1994), Spangenberg et al. (1996) and Yalch and Spangenberg (2000). Since, the check-out counters or cash counters are also located within the premise of the retail store, it can be further posited that customers underestimate their time and effort expenditure while concluding their transactions with the retailer while perceiving a favourable store atmosphere. This is in line with Baker and Cameron (1996). The above discussion suggests that customers’ perception of store atmosphere will not only make it convenient for them to search and evaluate products inside the retail store (i.e. benefit convenience) but also make it convenient for them to conclude
their transactions for the selected products at the check-out counter (i.e. transaction convenience). Hence, following hypotheses are proposed:

H2 (a-b): Customers’ perception of store atmosphere has a positive impact on their (a) perceived benefit convenience; and (b) perceived transaction convenience.

Here, Hypotheses H2 (a) refers to the relationship between customers’ perception of store atmosphere and decision convenience, whereas Hypothesis H2 (b) refers to the relationship between customers’ perception of store atmosphere and benefit convenience.

4.2.3 Relationship between Store Design/Layout and Service Convenience

The Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) considered store design/layout as an integral component of the overall store environment, which has a significant effect on the emotional states (pleasure and arousal) experienced by customers. According to the above theory, the above emotional states influence customers’ time and effort expenditure while selecting products during their shopping trip (Bitner, 1992). Hence, it is posited that customers’ favourable perception of store design/layout creates positive emotional states in the mind of customers, which in turn reduces their time and effort expenditure while searching and evaluating products in a retail store. In addition, studies examining online retailing have likened the navigational structure of a website with store layout of the brick and mortar stores. Based on the Technology Acceptance model, the above studies have indicated that the type of store layout employed by a retailer affects customers’ psychic costs (mental effort) which influence their ability to navigate within the store (Titus and Everett, 1995; Montaya-Weiss et al., 2003; Vrechopoulos et al., 2004). The above studies found that customers’ ability to navigate affects their time and effort expenditure while
searching and evaluating products within the retail store. Hence, following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Customers’ perception of store design/layout has a positive impact on their perceived benefit convenience.

4.2.4 Relationship between Customer Information and Service Convenience

Burke (2002) has indicated that customers seek information from their retailer at various stages of their purchase behaviour such as selection of store (decision stage), selection/evaluation of products kept in the store (benefit stage), purchase of selected products (transaction stage), and return/exchange of defective products (post-benefit stage). In this regard, the author observed that customers prefer retailers who provide information pertaining to product availability, product specifications, product price, location of products inside the retail store, store policies and procedures, payment options available to customers, toll free access to customer service, product return policies and procedures, home delivery etc. In addition, Information Richness theory has postulated that perceived rich information provided by a firm reduces customers’ psychological (time and effort) costs by clarifying their doubts and enhancing their understanding of products/services offered by the firm (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Oh et al., 2009). The above proposition is also supported by customer waiting literature which suggests that wait related information reduces the perceived waiting time of customers by minimizing their amount of stress/anxiety, thereby enhancing their acceptability of wait and their level of satisfaction (Cardozo, 1965; Davis and Heineke, 1994; Hui and Tse, 1996). Thus, it is concluded that customers’ perception of the available information influences their psychological (time and effort) expenditure thereby influencing their perceived service convenience at decision stage, benefit stage, transaction stage and post-benefit stage of their purchase behaviour. Hence, following hypotheses are proposed:
H4(a-d): Customers’ perception of information provided by their retailer has a positive impact on (a) perceived decision convenience; (b) perceived benefit convenience; (c) perceived transaction convenience; and (d) perceived post-benefit convenience.

Here, the hypotheses H4 (a-d) includes four separate hypotheses examining the relationship between customers’ perception of information provided by the retailer and their perception of (a) decision convenience; (b) benefit convenience; (c) transaction convenience; and (d) post benefit convenience.

4.2.5 Relationship between Employee Responsiveness and Service Convenience

In the context of retailing services, Baron et al. (1996) have indicated that customers seek employee assistance while searching and evaluating products within the retail store (benefit stage), while concluding their transaction for the selected products (transaction stage), and while return/exchanging defective products (post-benefit stage). Service quality literature has suggested that the level of responsiveness shown by the store employee in meeting customers’ needs and requests provides time and psychic (effort related) benefits to customers during and after their shopping trip at a retail store (Naylor and Frank, 2000). The above time and psychic benefits received by customers lead to positive outcomes such as customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Kelly et al., 1993; Johnston, 1995; Darian et al., 2001; Hocutt, et al., 2006). Thus, it is concluded that customers’ perception of responsiveness displayed by the frontline store employees provides them (i.e. customers) with service convenience at benefit stage, transaction stage, and post-benefit stage of their purchase behaviour. Hence, following hypotheses are proposed:
H5 (a–c): *Customers’ perception of employee responsiveness has a positive impact on (a) perceived benefit convenience; (b) perceived transaction convenience; and (c) perceived post-benefit convenience.*

Here, Hypothesis H5 (a–c) contains three sub hypotheses examining the relationship between customers’ perception of employee responsiveness on perceived (a) benefit convenience; (b) transaction convenience; and (c) post-benefit convenience.

### 4.2.6 Relationship between Access Convenience and Decision Convenience

The law of retail gravitation has posited that the attractiveness of a retail location is a function of distance travelled by prospective customers from their place (home or office) to the retail store (Reilly, 1931). According to Huff’s Gravity Law, the likelihood of customers visiting a retail store is inversely proportional to the travel time between customers’ home or office and the store location (Huff, 1964). In an exploratory study, Bellenger, Robertson and Greenberg (1977) have identified convenience (i.e. easy accessibility, convenient location, convenient operating hours, and availability of convenient parking facility) as important determinants of customer patronage behaviour towards a shopping centre. In the context of grocery retailing, Sinha, Banerjee and Uniyal (2002) have suggested that store proximity, store operating hours and availability of parking have a positive impact on customers’ store choice behaviour. The above discussion suggests that customers’ perception of retail store accessibility (or access convenience) has a positive effect on their store selection process (i.e. decision convenience). Thus, following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: *Customers’ perception of access convenience has a positive impact on perceived decision convenience.*
4.2.7 Relationship between Service Convenience and Customer Satisfaction

Prior studies have suggested that service convenience at five stages of their purchase behaviour enhance the level of customer satisfaction (Seiders et al., 2000; Berry et al., 2002; Colwell et al., 2008). Hence, it can be concluded that customers’ perception of five types of service convenience has a positive impact on their level of customer satisfaction towards the retailer. Thus, following hypotheses are proposed:

H7 (a-e): Customers’ perception of (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Here, Hypothesis H7 (a-e) represents five sub-hypotheses examining the relationship between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience on the level of customer satisfaction.

4.2.8 Relationship between Service Convenience and Customer Citizenship Behaviour

Social Exchange theory has posited that individuals reciprocate towards a source which provides benefit to them (Blau, 1964). Rhodes and Eisenberger (2002) have cited that the above act of reciprocity (i.e. favourable treatment) between the two parties results in mutually beneficial outcomes. Building on the above notion, it is posited that the relationship between a retailer and its customers can be treated as a relational exchange in which retailers provide benefits to its customers (herein time and psychic benefits) at various stages of customers’ purchase behaviour i.e. provide five types of service convenience. On the other hand, customers reciprocate by engaging in display of customer citizenship behaviours. The above proposition is supported by Seiders et al. (2000), who have cited that customers who receive service convenience from their retailers reciprocate by exhibiting repurchase intentions and
spreading positive word of mouth among their family, relatives and friends. Similarly, Seiders et al. (2007) have found that customers’ favourable perception of service convenience leads to positive outcomes such as customer loyalty and positive word of mouth behaviour. In addition, Moeller et al. (2009) have showed that service convenience received by customers at various stages of their purchase behaviour increases their share of visits to the retail store as well as their share of wallet. Thus, it is concluded that customers’ favourable perception of five types of service convenience have a positive effect on their tendency to spread positive word of mouth, display cooperating behaviour at the retail store to ensure delivery of service quality, actively participate in the development of their retailer, and help other customers at the retail store. Hence, following hypotheses are proposed:

H8(a-e): Customers’ perception of (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience has a positive impact on tendency to display positive word of mouth behaviour.

H9(a-e): Customers’ perception of (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience has a positive impact on customer cooperation behaviour.

H10 (a-e): Customers’ perception of (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience has a positive impact on customer participation behaviour.

H11(a-e): Customers’ perception of (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience has a positive impact on their tendency to help other customers at the retail store.
Here, hypotheses H8 (a-e), H9 (a-e), H10 (a-e), and H11 (a-e) represents sub hypotheses to examine the relationship between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; (e) post-benefit convenience and four types of customer citizenship behaviours viz. word of mouth, customer cooperation behaviour, customer participation behaviour, and customer helping customers behaviour respectively.

4.2.9 Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Citizenship Behaviours

Researchers have touted customer satisfaction as a driver of customer citizenship behaviours. Prior studies have shown that satisfied customers engage in citizenship behaviours viz. by displaying loyalty towards their retailer, by exhibiting cooperation behaviour aimed to respect the service quality provision of their retailer and by exhibiting participation behaviour aimed to improve the overall development of their retailer (Bettencourt, 1997; Keh and Teo, 2001; Groth, 2005; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007; Bartikowski and Walsh, 2011). They have also suggested that satisfied customers also tend to spread positive word of mouth behaviour (Bettencourt, 1997; Groth, 2005; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007) and help other customers at the retail store (Groth, 2005; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007; Bartikowski and Walsh, 2011). Hence, following hypotheses are proposed:

H12 (a-d): Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customers’ tendency to engage in (a) positive word of mouth behaviour; (b) customer cooperation behaviour; (c) customer participation behaviour; and (d) helping other customers at the retail store.

Here, Hypothesis H (a-d) represents four sub hypotheses examining the relationships between customer satisfaction and (a) positive word of mouth behaviour; (b) customer cooperation behaviour; (c) customer participation behaviour; and (d) customer helping other customers at the retail store.
4.2.10 The Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction in the relationship between Service Convenience and Customer Citizenship Behaviours.

Service convenience literature has postulated that customers’ favourable perception of five types of service convenience enhances their level of satisfaction with their service provider (Seiders et al., 2000; Berry et al., 2002; Colwell et al., 2008). Furthermore, prior studies have touted that enhanced level of customer satisfaction helps service firms in eliciting customer citizenship behaviours (Bettencourt, 1997; Keh and Teo, 2001; Groth, 2005). In addition, review of service convenience literature has indicated that customers who receive service convenience from their retailer reciprocate by exhibiting customer citizenship behaviours viz. spreading positive word of mouth (Seiders et al., 2000; Seiders et al., 2007) and displaying customer loyalty (Seiders et al., 2007; Moeller et al., 2009). Hence, it is posited that customers’ favourable perception of five types of service convenience enhances the level of customer satisfaction. The above enhancement in the level of customer satisfaction in turn results in customers spreading positive word of mouth, displaying cooperative behaviour at the retail store, actively participating in the overall development of their retailer and helping other customers at the retail store. In other words, customer satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between five types of service convenience and aforesaid four customer citizenship behaviours. Thus, following hypotheses are proposed:

**H13 (a-e):** *Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience and customers’ positive word of mouth behaviour.*

**H14 (a-e):** *Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience and customer cooperation behaviour.*
**H15 (a-e):** Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience and customer participation behaviour.

**H16 (a-e):** Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience and their tendency to help other customers at the retail store.

Here, Hypotheses H 13 (a-e), H14 (a-e), H15 (a-e), and H16 (a-e) represents five sub hypotheses examining the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationships between (a) decision convenience; (b) access convenience; (c) benefit convenience; (d) transaction convenience; and (e) post-benefit convenience and four types of citizenship behaviours viz. positive word of mouth behaviour, customer cooperation behaviour, customer participation behaviour, and customer helping customers at the retail store respectively.

The research methodology adopted to empirically test the above set of hypotheses is discussed the following chapter.