SYNOPSIS

Convenience is considered as an important component of customer behaviour due to factors such as rapid changes in socio-economic conditions, technological advancements, and hypercompetitive marketplace. Recent industry reports have also found that time starved customers are willing to pay a premium price to retailers who provide goods at locations convenient to customers. Furthermore, emergence of online retailers have widened the scope of customer convenience which is not just restricted to convenient location but also includes convenient operating hours, convenient payment options, convenient selection and evaluation of products etc. Berry et al. (2002) coined the term ‘service convenience’ which was defined as perceived time and effort saved by customers while purchasing and using a service. Based on stages of customer purchase behaviour, they have proposed five types of service convenience viz. decision convenience, access convenience, benefit convenience, transaction convenience, and post benefit convenience. In the current business scenario, it is of utmost importance for brick and mortar stores to gain insights into the factors that have a significant effect on service convenience across various stages of customer purchase behaviour and the potential positive consequences of providing service convenience to customers.

Recent service marketing literature has indicated that customers tend to engage in certain voluntary and discretionary behaviours that not only influence their own service experience but also impacts performance of a service provider. Such voluntary or discretionary behaviours are termed as customer citizenship behaviours. Four types of customer citizenship behaviours have been identified from literature review viz. spreading positive word of mouth about the service provider, displaying cooperative behaviour that respect service quality
provisions of the service provider, actively participating in the improvement of service organisation, and exhibiting pro-social behaviour by helping other customers at the service facility. Given the importance of both service convenience and customer citizenship behaviour, it is vital to study the effect of service convenience on customer citizenship behaviours.

Five factors that influence customers’ perception of service convenience have been identified from the literature review. These are store brand equity, store atmosphere, store design/layout, customer information, and employee responsiveness. Cue Utilisation theory has indicated that customers use store brand equity as time and effort saving heuristics while deciding on the store from which they prefer to purchase desired products. According to Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, customers perception of store atmosphere and store design/layout influences their emotional states (pleasure and arousal), which in turn affects their perceived time and effort expenditure while locating and selecting products inside a retail store. Technology Acceptance Model has also posited that the type of store layout employed by a retailer affects customers’ perceived ease of navigation within a store.

Information Richness theory has postulated that customers’ perception of available information, provided by their service provider, enhances their understanding of product/service related issues thereby providing them with service convenience across various stages of their purchase behaviour. Furthermore, Service Quality literature has touted the importance of employee responsiveness in reducing customers’ time and psychic costs while dealing with their service provider. Based on prior studies, it is hypothesized that access convenience has a positive impact on decision convenience. In addition, Social Exchange theory has suggested that customers reciprocate by eliciting citizenship behaviours on receiving service convenience at various stages of their purchase behaviour. Review of
past studies have also shown that customer satisfaction is one of the positive outcomes of service convenience, as well as an antecedent of customer citizenship behaviour. This implied that customer satisfaction may potentially act as a mediator in the relationship between service convenience and customer citizenship behaviours.

Based on the review of literature, following research gaps have been identified:

(i) There is a need to identify the factors that affect service convenience and to empirically examine their impact on five service convenience types.

(ii) The extent to which the above five service convenience types influence customer citizenship behaviours has not been empirically investigated.

(iii) The mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between service convenience types and customer citizenship behaviours has received limited attention.

In order to address the above research gaps, the following objectives of the study are formulated:

(i) To identify the factors affecting customers’ perception of service convenience and to study their relative impact on five types of service convenience (i.e. decision convenience, access convenience, benefit convenience, transaction convenience, and post-benefit convenience).

(ii) To examine the impact of five types of service convenience on customer citizenship behaviours (viz. word of mouth behaviour, customer cooperation behaviour, customer participation behaviour, and customer helping other customers at the retail store); and

(iii) To investigate the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between five types service convenience and customer citizenship behaviours.
Building on these objectives, a conceptual model is developed postulating the relationships between identified factors affecting service convenience, five types of service convenience, customer satisfaction, and four customer citizenship behaviours (viz. word of mouth behaviour, customer cooperation behaviour, customer participation behaviour, and customer helping other customers at the retail store. Following hypotheses are formulated: (i) five factors (viz. store brand equity, store atmosphere, store layout, customer information and employee responsiveness) have a positive impact on service convenience types; (ii) Five types of service convenience have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and four customer citizenship behaviours; and (iii) customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service convenience types and four customer citizenship behaviours.

The conceptual model is empirically tested in the context of Indian retail industry. The focus is on food and grocery retailing as it forms the largest category of the Indian retail market. A structured questionnaire is developed in which items to measure customers’ perception of the relevant marketing constructs were adopted from prior studies. Responses are elicited on seven point likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Data is collected from 601 existing customers of food and grocery retailers in the city of Chennai using a two stage sampling process. In the first stage, five major retailers are identified with the help of a market research agency. Thereafter, six store locations of each of the above retailers are selected in a way that broadly covers the city of Chennai. In the second stage, respondents are intercepted at each of the store locations using systematic random sampling.

Partial Least Square based Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is used as data analysis tool mainly because: (i) one of the objectives of this study is exploratory in nature (i.e. to identify the factors affecting customers’ perception of service convenience); (ii) the measurement model contains both reflective as well as formative constructs (i.e. access
convenience); (iii) the conceptual framework developed is complex in nature as it contains 15 underlying constructs measured by 50 items coupled with 42 hypothesized relationships; and (iv) PLS-SEM provides flexibility in handling non-normal data.

The results have indicated that the reliability and validity of all the underlying constructs in the measurement model can be deemed as satisfactory. The findings of the study have suggested that identified factors have a significant and positive impact on five types of service convenience. It is found that (i) access convenience has the most significant and positive impact on decision convenience followed by customer information and store brand equity; (ii) store atmosphere has the most significant and positive impact on benefit convenience followed by customer information and employee responsiveness; (iii) Store atmosphere has the most significant and positive impact on transaction convenience followed by employee responsiveness and customer information; (iv) both customer information and employee responsiveness have a significant and positive impact on post-benefit convenience.

According to the results of the study, four types of service convenience (except access convenience) have a significant and positive impact on customer satisfaction. The findings have also indicated that (i) only post-benefit convenience has a significant and positive impact on word of mouth behaviour, (ii) three types of service convenience (viz. decision convenience, benefit convenience, and post-benefit convenience) have a significant and positive impact on customer cooperation behaviour; (iii) four types of service convenience (except access convenience) have a significant and positive impact on customer participation behaviour; (iv) three types of service convenience (viz. decision convenience, benefit convenience and transaction convenience) have a significant and positive impact on customer helping other customers at the retail store. Overall, it is found that customer satisfaction
partially mediates the relationship between the five service convenience types and four customer citizenship behaviours.

Based on the above findings, a number of recommendations have been provided for the benefit of the retailers. Thereafter, the theoretical contributions made by the study towards the service convenience literature have been mentioned. To conclude, the limitations of the study are addressed along with future research directions.

**Keywords:** Service Convenience, Customer Citizenship Behaviour, Customer Satisfaction, Store Brand Equity, Store Atmosphere, Store Design/Layout, Customer Information, Employee Responsiveness, Partial Least Square.