CHAPTER-VI

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION
FINDINGS

Customers’ satisfaction is a prerequisite for attaining success in any business. The quality of marketing is reflected in the right products, right price and right quality delivered to the end customers. Hence, creating a strong brand image encourages the customers to clearly identify the products and services of an organization. The study of brand equity is invaluable, as it helps the stores to develop a unique store mix that would enhance the brand image. Therefore the congruence in the elements of brand equity and store attributes is most essential. It helps the retailers to identify effective store associations among the customers. Choosing the right store attributes tend to enhance brand equity.

The brand equity of supermarkets is reflected in customers’ response towards the store attributes. This helps the retailers to perpetuate their name for long duration with the customers. The present study was to identify the impact of retail store attributes on brand equity of supermarkets.

The objectives framed in the study are more appropriate to examine the existence of brand equity among the customers of supermarkets. The relationship between store attributes and brand equity elements are examined. The contributions of retail store attributes in creating favorable associations are identified. The present study attempts to assess the brand equity in the context of supermarkets in Chennai city.
The analysis part of the study reveals that brand awareness, perceived quality, brand performance, brand association and brand loyalty are the main building blocks of brand equity. It also indicates that brand loyalty is a major contributor to brand equity. The analysis further shows that the retail store associations like price, advertising, relationship retailing, sales promotion, store environment, store location and product assortment influences brand equity and its dimensions.

The study included a sample size of 610 customers. Convenience sampling is used to collect the primary data. This chapter is aimed to present the main findings of this research. The statistical techniques like percentage analysis, ‘t’ test, One way Anova, Multiple Regression, K-means Cluster analysis, non –parametric chi-square test, discriminant analysis Confirmatory Factor analysis and Structural Equation Modeling are used and the results obtained are present as under.

This chapter is purported to recapitulate the main findings, suggestions and conclusion emerging from the study.
DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The respondents' profile through percentage analysis ascertains that Age is one of the significant factors influencing purchase in supermarkets. A maximum of 38% are in the age group of 30-35 and a minimum of 13% belongs to the age group of below 30. It shows that the brand equity of supermarkets relies on middle age group people.

Among the total respondents, 57% are female and 43% are male. It is identified that 71.3% of the respondents are married.

Education is one of the factors that urge the customers to visit supermarkets for purchase. A maximum of 50.2% of the respondents are under graduates and a minimum of 8% of the respondents are qualified up to Higher Secondary. This shows that the level of awareness about supermarkets is significantly higher among the educated customers than others.

Occupation is another significant factor that stimulates customers to visit to the stores. There were customers of diverse occupational status. A maximum of 35.74% of the respondents are salaried and a minimum of 3.28% of the respondents are students.

The income of the respondents influences the frequency of visits made to the supermarkets. It is found that a maximum of 35.1% of the respondents is in the income
group of Rs.30001-40000 and a minimum of 9.8% of the respondents are in the income
group of up to Rs.20001 and above.

Family size of the respondents is also a decisive factor in determining the
customers’ amount of purchase made in a supermarket. A maximum of 50% of the
respondents’ family consists of 4-6 members and a minimum of 20% of the respondents’
family consists of above 6 members.

It is understood that 24.92% of the respondents’ choice is Reliance, 23.28% of the
respondents’ preference are More, 19.67% of the respondents’ choice are Nilgiris,
16.72% of the respondents are found to visit Spencers and 15.41% of the respondents’
choice of supermarket is Heritage Fresh.

Customers’ duration of association with the supermarket is an influencing factor
of brand equity. It is found that a maximum of 42.8% of the respondents were found to be
associated with the store for more than 9 months and a minimum of 9.3% of the
respondents are associated with the supermarket for less than 3 months.

Frequency of Visits made by the customers is also an important element in
determining brand equity. It is understood from the analysis that a maximum of 53.8% of
the respondents visit the store once a week and a minimum of 6.2% of the respondents
visit the store to purchase once a month.
FACTORS INFLUENCING ELEMENTS OF BRAND EQUITY AND RETAIL STORE ATTRIBUTES

In the following section, a detailed examination of the findings with respect to various hypotheses formulated for the study is attempted.

The first specific objective of the study was to analyze the relationship between elements of brand equity and customer demographics.

t-test for elements of brand equity is performed to identify whether there exists any variation in the perception of elements of brand equity between male and female customers, married and unmarried customers. For this purpose the following hypotheses are framed and tested.

- There is no significant difference between elements of the brand equity with respect to male and female customers.

- There is no significant difference between elements of the brand equity with respect to married and unmarried customers.

The result of the study generally confirmed to the hypotheses. On the basis of the t-test computed, it had been observed that based on the gender customers do not vary in their responses with respect to brand equity elements excepting in the case of brand association. The results of the t-test reveal that there exists no difference with respect to
elements of brand equity among male and female customers in elements like brand awareness, brand performance, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

This result revealed that the customers’ opinion with regard to brand association were significantly different. This may be due to the fact that, today customers irrespective of their individual personality traits, they are equally exposed to the products available in the market. Hence, the male and female customers’ possess a similar level of awareness and opinion towards the stores’ offerings. Since brand association is a unique element which is found to vary among each individual, the results show variation in the opinion of male and female customers.

**From the t-test** it is found that the married and unmarried customers do not vary in their perceptions on brand loyalty and brand association. Whereas these customers vary in their opinion about brand awareness, performance, and perceived quality. This implies that the married and unmarried customers differ in their opinion about brand awareness, brand performance, perceived quality.

When compared with the unmarried, married customers lay more emphasis on supermarkets’ functioning and the quality of the products offered. It can be concluded that the married customers depict a higher level of interest for their household purchases from a supermarket. They tend to evaluate the supermarkets based on its attributes. So their level of awareness about the products, brands, promotions of the supermarket is considerably high. Their expectations from the supermarket are again based on its functional performance, quality of products offered, etc. Whereas the unmarried
customers are significantly different because they frequently change the store, as they consume for their individual satisfaction than for their family.

**ANOVA FOR BRAND EQUITY ELEMENTS AND CUSTOMER DEMOGRAPHICS**

The present research focuses on the five dimensions of brand equity, namely brand awareness, brand performance, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty. These dimensions are considered as dependent variables. The demographics and other purchase patterns of customers are considered as independent in nature.

Anova by using Duncan Multiple range test is performed to identify whether there exists any difference in the perception towards elements of brand equity among the age, educational qualification, duration of association and frequency of store visits among the customers. The Duncans Multiple range test gives a pairwise test result as well as provides descriptive presentation of significant difference among means.
For this purpose the following hypothesis are framed:

- There is no significant difference between the elements of the brand equity amongst customer age groups.
- There is no significant difference between elements of the brand equity amongst educational qualification of customers.
- There is no significant difference between elements of the brand equity amongst frequency of customers’ store visits.
- There is no significant difference between elements of the brand equity amongst duration of association with the store.

- It is understood from the One-way Anova test performed showed that there exists a significant difference between the age group of customers and brand equity dimensions since the p value is less than 0.05.

Based on Duncan’s Multiple Range test it is found that the customers in the age group of 30-40 significantly differ and lead in mean scores than other categories for brand awareness, perceived quality. With respect to brand performance, brand association, brand loyalty customers in the age group of 40-50 had shown higher preferences. The results of the One way Anova indicate that the youngsters are highly influenced by the performance of products and quality of service. It is very much inspiring to note that the customers in the middle age group, i.e., between40-50 were found to be more favorably associated with the supermarkets’ merchandise, price, quality and other such attributes. Specifically, customers of
40-50 age categories have developed the capacity of recollecting the supermarket through different associations. These associations are helpful in easy identification of the store and its offerings.

- It is evident from the results of Anova that there exists a significant difference between educational qualification of customers and brand equity dimensions since the p value is less than 0.01.

Based on Duncan’s Multiple Range test it is found that the professionals showed a higher level of awareness towards the supermarkets. For brand performance, perceived quality, brand association the professionally qualified were found to possess strong favorability. These test results clearly show that the educational qualification of customers shows significant variations in their attitude towards elements of brand equity. The professionally qualified customers were found to have common intentions with respect to brand equity elements compared with other categories. These classes of customers tend to stick with the same supermarket for longer duration a as they evaluate and take the memory board for purchase decision perfectly. So there is lesser chance of shifting the supermarket brand. These groups of customers like to project themselves as status symbols in the eyes of society which influences their store loyalty. While the customers with school level education exhibited different perceptions on products and services quality of supermarkets.
• The Anova test performed brings to the picture that there exists a significant
difference between the **frequency of customer visits** and brand equity elements
since the p value is less than 0.01.

• The Duncan’s Multiple Range test shows that the customers who visit more than
once a week had a greater level of awareness of supermarkets. The frequency of
retail store visits made by the customers is said to have significant impact on the
brand equity elements. The results clearly depict that the frequency of store visits
develops a positive attitude with the customers greatly. The customers who
perceive the store positively would spread constructive word-of-mouth to other
prospects. Customers develop positive intention and greater sense of attachment
to the store because of repeated visits. These groups of customers showed strong
preference towards stores’ functional performance, quality. They were also
having favorable store associations and greater loyalty of the supermarket.

• The results of Anova test performed showed that there exists a significant
difference between the **duration of association** with the supermarket and brand
equity dimensions since the p value is less than 0.01.
The Duncan’s Multiple Range test confirms that the customers who were
associated with the supermarket for more than 3 years have positive store
perceptions, association and were found to be strong loyal of the store. The
customers association with the supermarkets is a clear picture of their level of
commitment and loyalty. Also the customers who were associated with the
supermarket for longer duration, i.e., 1-2, 2-3 and above 3 years were signaling
positive signs about the stores’ functional performance. The customer perceptions
towards the quality of the product classes were found to be influenced by their
duration of association with the supermarket.

**The second specific objective of the study was to analyze the relationship**
**between retail store attributes and customer demographics.**

To accomplish this objective, the research proceeded with the following hypotheses.

- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes amongst customer age groups.
- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes and educational qualification of customers.
- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes and monthly income of customers.
- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes and frequency of store visits.
ANOVA FOR RETAIL STORE ATTRIBUTES AND CUSTOMER DEMOGRAPHICS

Retail store attributes of the present study include price, relationship retailing, advertising, sales promotion, store environment, store location and product assortment. To analyze the relationship between retail store attributes and customer demographics the variables such as age groups, educational qualification, monthly income, frequency of store visits are taken as parameters. Anova by using Duncan Multiple Range test is performed. For this purpose the following hypotheses are framed and tested.

- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes amongst customer age groups.
- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes and educational qualification of customers.
- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes and monthly income of customers.
- There is no significant difference between retail store attributes and frequency of store visits.

- It can be understood from the results of ANOVA that there exists a significant difference between the age group of customers and their opinion on retail store attributes since the p value is less than 0.01.
The Duncan’s Multiple Range test illumines the fact that the customers in the age group of below 30 and 30-40 were found to have strong preferences towards retail store advertisements. While, the customers in the age group of 40-50 and above 50 have a similar attitude towards store relations and sales promotion strategies. With respect to store ambience the 30-40 age group shows strong preference. For store location the opinion of below 30 age group were differences with other age group of customers. The customers in the age group of 30-40 and 40-50 possess a similar attitude towards product assortment. The customers in the age groups of below 30 category, 30-40 category was much more concerned regarding the in-store advertisements. It is also clear that the customers in the middle age group, i.e., 40-50 displayed a significant preference towards relationship retailing, sales promotional schemes, and product assortment of the supermarkets. These groups of customers were more open to the in-store relations. Their desire to visit the supermarket is influenced by store communications including advertising and sales promotion.

- The results of Anova test performed showed that there exists a significant difference between educational qualification of customers and retail store attributes since the p value is less than 0.01.

Based on Duncan’s Multiple Range test it is found that the professionally qualified customers exhibit higher favorability based on their mean scores
towards advertising, relationship retailing and store environment. This results shows that the educational qualification of customers shows divergent views towards the retail store attributes. The customers with professional qualification exhibited similar preference for advertising and store environmental aspects of the supermarkets. These groups of customers expect relevant information on products and its features from in-store advertisements. With respect to sales promotion, relationship retailing the Undergraduate and Postgraduate customers depicts similar perceptions. While, the customers with school level education were found to be different with the other groups. This shows that the store promotions and store relations have not created much impact to these groups. It calls for much attention from the retailers.

- As far as the **income category** is concerned, there exists a significant difference on their opinion towards retail store attributes since the p value is less than 0.01.

Based on Duncan’s Multiple Range test it is found that the customers in the monthly income category of 40001-50000 and above 50000 were found to be similar in their attitude towards price of products. For sales promotion and store environment, customers belonging to the monthly income group of 30001-40000, 40001-50000 and above 50000 category show similar opinion. The customers in the monthly income group of 40001-50000 and above 50000 were found to possess similar opinion on product assortment.
From the Anova it is understood that there exists a significant difference between the frequency of visits and their opinion on retail store attributes since the p value is less than 0.01.

Based on Duncan’s Multiple Range test it is found that the customers who visit the supermarket more than once a week, once a week and once a fortnight were similar in their opinion on the price, advertising, relationship retailing, and sales promotion. For store environment the customers who visit more than once a week and once a week were exhibiting a similar attitude. With respect to store location and product assortment the customers who visit more than once a week show higher preference. It is evident from the analysis that the frequency of retail store visits made by the customers is an indicator of their purchase aspirations. This enhances their preference for making regular store visits. Attractive and pleasant shopping environment is another major factor contributing to customers’ regular purchase decisions. Attractive window displays, visual merchandising are methods of communicating the stores’ performance to the customers. As a result, customers tend to create specific value propositions in their minds and increases their store visits.
The third specific objective was to measure the extent of contribution of Elements of brand equity in building brand equity.

To accomplish this objective the hypothesis framed was ‘Brand equity elements have no significant impact in building brand equity’. This hypothesis is tested by using **Multiple Regression Analysis**. It is clear from the results of Multiple regression analysis that the aforesaid five dimensions of brand equity influence brand equity to the extent of 73.4 per cent as the r square value is 0.734. The ANOVA test shows that the f value of 126.576 is significant at 1 per cent level.

**Multiple Regression Analysis between Independent Variables Elements of Brand Equity And Dependent Variable Brand Equity**

The results prove that **Brand awareness** has significant impact on brand equity. The familiarity of supermarkets which customer visits produces differential responses on the customers. Greater levels of brand awareness, enhance the customers’ future intention to purchase in the supermarkets. The strength of the brand’s existence in the customers’ mind is strongly influenced by the awareness towards the supermarkets.

**Brand performance** has significant impact on brand equity. This shows that the customers’ experiences with the supermarket influences their response. Customer satisfaction is influenced by the fulfillment of their desires with respect to the functional performance of the supermarkets. The supermarkets’ performance in terms of service
delivery, store relations, product quality impacts the customers’ interest to make future visits. When the store is able to create proper differentiation on these terms it develops unique position in the customers’ minds thereby influencing their choice of store purchase.

**Perceived quality** builds brand equity among customers. The customers’ intentions of selecting a supermarket for purchase decisions are affected by the quality of the stores’ products and services. This is because customers use these store attributes for evaluating the overall quality of the supermarkets in terms of ambience, product mix, services offered, etc.

**Brand association** has significant impact on brand equity. The customer impressions towards the stores are influenced by the associations which they hold. The shopping experiences of the customers have an impact on their responses towards the supermarkets. As such, strong and unique store associations have a significant effect on creating brand equity.

**Brand loyalty** has significant impact on brand equity. The loyalty programs of the stores’ influences customer satisfaction considerably. A satisfied customer tends to be associated with the store for longer duration. This implies that brand loyalty is important for reducing customers’ store switching behavior. Hence brand loyalty in the long run significantly contributes to enhancing brand equity of customers.
The results of regression analysis indicate that all the elements of brand equity, such as awareness, performance, perceived quality, association and loyalty contribute to positive brand equity. It can be concluded that the impact of brand equity elements on brand equity is statistically significant.

**K-means cluster analysis** is applied in this research work to identify heterogeneous groups of customers of supermarkets. The customers are grouped into three clusters based on their preferences towards store attributes.

The first cluster of customers of 44% attached more importance to the stores’ attributes. These groups of customers were said to possess a strong awareness regarding the stores’ attributes. Hence this type of customers can be termed as “value-seeking” customers.

The second clusters of customers were found to have very low preference towards the elements of retail store attributes. It is observed that the second clusters of customers of 22% are found to lay less importance for the specific attributes of supermarkets. This group of customers can be termed as **roving** customers.

The third clusters of customers have moderate favorability of retail store elements. It is observed that the third clusters of customers of 34% were showing a mediocre preference of retail store attributes. These categories of customers are termed as “contemporary customers”.

233
A non-parametric chi-square test is used to find the proximity among various customer groups and their attitude. In the following section, chi-square test between clusters of retail store attributes has been done taking into account the demographic variables, specifically purchase patterns of customers (Duration of association, frequency of visits).

For this purpose the hypotheses framed were:

- There is no association between duration of association and clusters of customers based on retail store attributes.
- There is no association between frequency of visits and clusters of customers based on retail store attributes.

Chi-Square Tests: Retail Store Attributes and Duration of Association

From the cross tab table it is found that the maximum are contemporary customers (43.3%). The result of the chi - square test shows that the chi-square value is 35.336, p<0.01 which is statistically significant. It can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists an association between clusters of customers based on retail store attributes and duration of association with the supermarkets. This shows that the customer preferences for retail store attributes are influenced by the long term association with the supermarket.
Chi-Square Tests: Retail Store Attributes and Duration of Association

- From the cross tab it is found that the customers belonging to variety seeking cluster show higher frequency with respect to visits made (51.5%). The result of the chi-square test shows that the chi-square value is 96.532, p<0.01 which is statistically significant. It can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists an association between clusters of customers based on retail store attributes and frequency of visits made to the supermarkets. It shows that the frequency of visits to the supermarket influences the customers' attitude towards the retail store image.

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS

The fourth specific objective was to identify the retail store attributes successful in building brand equity of supermarkets.

For this objective the hypothesis framed were ‘Retail store attributes have no significant impact on creating brand equity among the customers of supermarkets’. This hypothesis is tested by performing cluster and discriminant analysis.

Discriminant analysis is used to identify predicted groups with respect to independent demographic variables or some other independent variables. The retail store mix elements are considered as an independent variable in this section. Brand equity is considered as a dependent variable in this context. This analysis is aimed at identifying
the existence of brand equity among customers based on the impact created by retail store attributes.

The efficiency of the discriminant function is estimated using the classification results. The discriminant function constructed for the present study has the efficiency of correct classification of nearly 88% and hence it may be concluded that the variables in the model are highly useful for predicting more favorable attitude towards brand equity of customers. This clearly indicates that the majority of the supermarket customers in Chennai were consistent in their attitude towards brand equity.

The results of the above analysis show that Retail store attributes have significant impact on creating brand equity among the customers of supermarkets. This result indicates that many customers were having a favorable attitude towards brand equity of supermarkets. This shows that the retail store attributes have predicted customers’ favorability towards brand equity perfectly.
The fifth objective of the study is to identify an empirical relationship between brand equity elements and retail store attributes in the form of structural analysis.

The hypothesis framed was ‘There is no relationship between retail store attributes and brand equity elements’.

**STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL**

Structural Equation Model (SEM) is used to test this hypothesis. The results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis indicated model fit.

From the results of SEM analysis, it is understood that there exists a relationship between retail store attributes and brand equity elements.

- The results from the structured model supported this proposed relationship (t-value=13.570, p<0.001).

This leads to conclusion that sales promotion strategies of the supermarkets develop the awareness of customers. Sales promotional tools motivate the customers to visit the supermarkets for making purchases by providing relevant information on seasonal offers and discounts. Also, this encourages customers to try new launches by making a trial purchase.

- The results shows that innovative retail store designs enhances customers’ perceptions of store quality (t-value=17.613, p<0.001).

The pleasant in-store scenario postulates the customers’ behavior with respect to purchases made. This also tends to create a strong positioning of the supermarkets among
the customers. Hence, it can be considered as a major factor influencing the customers’ judgment of store and its attributes.

- The structural path between brand association and Relationship retailing was positive and significant (t-value=7.789, p<0.001).

  It is understood from the above table that Relationship retailing enhances brand association of the customers. This implies that customers’ favorability towards the store improves as a result of superior in-store services. As Relationship retailing maintained by a supermarket is unique and cannot be reproduced by competitive stores, this aspect helps to develop strong associations with the store.

- The projected relationship among brand loyalty and brand association is well supported (t-value=14.288, p<0.001).

  The structural path shown in the above model depicts a strong relationship between brand loyalty and brand association. Brand associations create value to the customers leading to brand loyalty. Customers pay attention to unique store associations. Positive associations with the supermarket are influenced by innovative retail store attributes like attractive display, colorful presentation of products, in-store music and unique store designs. This provides a reason to buy from the same supermarket more frequently. Customers’ favorability towards the store attributes influences their future purchase decisions in the supermarket and hence increases their loyalty. The customer impressions towards the stores are
influenced by the associations which they hold. The shopping experiences of the customers have an impact on their responses towards the supermarkets. As such, strong and unique store associations have a significant effect on creating brand equity.

- It is inferred from the model that brand awareness significantly leads to brand loyalty (t-value=11.896, p<0.001).

The familiarity of supermarkets which customer visits produces differential responses on the customers. Greater levels of brand awareness, enhances the customers’ future intention to purchase in the supermarkets. The strength of the brand's existence in the customer's mind is strongly influenced by the awareness towards the supermarkets. Supermarkets communicate with the customers through various marketing strategies. This increases the level of brand recognition with the customers. Well-known brand names of supermarkets increase customers' familiarity thereby creating attachment with the store. Innovative retail store designs and packaging ensure the highest degree of brand recall. This nurtures unique identity of the brand with the customers and acts as trigger for making frequent visits to the supermarket. Attracting customers' attention through brand awareness helps to invoke repeat store visits, thereby leading to loyalty.

- The relationship between brand loyalty and perceived quality is supported in this structural model (t-value=10.105, p<0.001).
Perceived quality of supermarkets builds brand loyalty. Customer perception of the quality of supermarkets’ attributes leads to value creation in their minds. This also helps in differentiating the supermarket with other stores based on its products and services delivered. Such strong positioning creates repeat purchase intention with the same store, thereby leading to loyalty. The right quality of products and services available in the supermarket equips the customers with zeal and satisfaction. Customers perceived quality expectations, when adequately met through better store service, value pricing and promotion, increases their store loyalty. Superior product/service quality of the supermarket influences customer satisfaction which develops positive loyalty. It indicates that the quality and value perceptions have considerable effect in building brand equity among customers. The customers’ intentions of selecting a supermarket for purchase decisions are affected by the quality of the stores’ products and services. This is because customers use these store attributes for evaluating the overall quality of the supermarkets in terms of ambience, product assortment, services offered etc.

- The results shows that brand loyalty helps in building brand equity (t-value=12.283, p<0.001).

The loyalty programs of the stores’ influences customer satisfaction considerably. A satisfied customer tends to be associated with the store for longer duration. This implies that brand loyalty is important for reducing customers’ store switching
behavior. Hence brand loyalty in the long run significantly contributes to enhancing brand equity of customers.

Customer commitment with the supermarket is reflected in their future purchase intentions. Brand loyalty develops a sense of affiliation in the customers. This leads to positive word-of-mouth communication of the supermarkets’ offerings. Customers prefer to make a repeat purchase in the same store and reduce the chance of store switching. Brand loyalty avoids brand shifting among customers and increases the chance of re-purchase in the same store. Hence, it is concluded that brand loyalty builds brand equity with respect to supermarkets.

From the Structural Equation Model it can be concluded that Brand loyalty builds brand equity with respect to supermarkets.
SUGGESTIONS

- In India the share of young population would be the highest in the upcoming years. Retailers have to focus on formulating specific retail store mix for targeting the youths. Youths are generally more exposed to global brands, health conscious in their day-to-day living and fashion lovers.

- Today’s younger generation spend primarily on fashion accessories and prefer fast-foods, tinned foods, etc. The supermarkets have to be ready to cater these young groups and meet their expectations duly. This would develop the stores’ brand image in the long run through positive word-of-mouth.

- Customers’ impulse purchase decisions have to be increased by making attractive product mix available in the supermarket. Customer visits to the supermarkets have to be significantly improved by providing guarantees to the products purchased. Convincing the customers about the quality of the merchandise purchased is significantly important.

- Special advertising campaigns in mass media can be targeted to the prospects. This can create a higher level of awareness about the supermarkets among the customer groups.
• Technology updating is the need of the hour. Retailers have to be constantly alert regarding the competitive marketing techniques adopted. Consistently the stores’ services have to be modernized by using indigenous technology in billing, security systems, visual merchandising etc. Supermarkets can launch kiosks that can provide appropriate information about the number of brands that are available, prices of the products, promotional offers etc. This would enable the customers to make their purchasing plans accordingly.

• A number of trial packs and offers can be provided to the customers for initiating their purchase in the store. This helps the retailers to sustain regular customers and attract newcomers to their stores. Supermarkets have to create more levels of awareness among the customers with education up to school level. It can also provide for customer support desk to give clarification to the customers.

• Relationship retailing, which is a major contributor to brand loyalty and brand equity has to be enhanced by the supermarkets. In-store relations have to be constantly enhanced by the supermarkets. This can be done by identifying and catering to the individual customers needs. Through innovative programs, for instance the separate departments for male, female and kids can also easily help the customers to track their preferred product mix.

• Personalized customer service is an important factor influencing customer satisfaction. Customers evaluate the supermarkets based on the approach,
welcoming of the store staff as well as their ability to attend to the customers’ queries as required. This requires proper training of the store staff to deliver quality store service to the customers.

- Supermarkets can improve the level and width of merchandise by offering new product line viz., organics, diet products, pharmaceuticals, sugar-free categories, toys and gifts, stationeries and electronic goods. A section of luxury brands can be made available for the upper income category. This way multiple segments of customers can be targeted and attracted towards purchasing in the supermarkets. Supermarkets can enrich their product mix with more health care products and eco-friendly products. Customers have to be ensured that all the product categories can be conveniently shopped at one stop.

- Location is one of the major decisive factors for customers to make purchases in an outlet. Hence, a number of complementary stores and service providers near the store like cafeteria, ATMs, beauty salons etc can help to make more number of customers to visit the supermarket.

- Regular updating of customer information is essential for the retailers. This can help them to frame suitable loyalty programs to the frequent shoppers. This creates lasting relationship with the customers.
• Customers’ access information of supermarkets from different touch points like internet, newspapers, mailers etc. It is essential for the retailers to constantly update new offers and schemes in these touch points. Various promotional campaigns and events in the supermarket could be conducted for enhancing brand awareness among the customers.

• Customer experience management is important in this modern decade for the retailers. From parking to security, the customers expect the best service from the supermarkets. This can be attained by providing information on online websites, entertainment in the shopping area, quick store service, attractive and spacious store design, effective product quality, etc. Facilities for customers have to be made available like ample parking space, kids play area, wash area etc. More number of billing counters can be organized during festival seasons and on the weekends. Supermarkets and its attributes can be designed to provide one-stop shopping solutions for the fulfillment of the customers’ needs.

• Customers, with different expectations visit the supermarkets. Hence, theses stores have to make the customers spend more time to enrich their shopping experience. For this purpose various recreation, leisure activities, kid’s play areas can be launched at the store. Also, there should be an adequate number of staff to respond to all the customers who visit the store. There is growing importance
witnessed for customized products in several categories. Retailers could tap this opportunity for sustaining in this sector.

- Freshness of various product categories can go a long way in maintaining a positive brand image for the retailers. This category includes new styles, promotions, new and attractive store atmospherics.

- The supermarkets should have adequate store staff to assist aged customers in their buying and checkout process. Store environment can make customers less aware of their waiting time because they are enlightened by good music, lighting, visual communications, etc. Supermarkets should have clear sign boards to ease customers’ purchases. Knowledge of product information is important for the store staff. These staff should help the customers to buy the products. Products are bought by the customers for satisfaction of particular need. So, sales staffs have to listen and attend to the customers’ requirements.

Brand equity can be sustained by rightly focusing on stores’ attributes such as offers, store environment, quality of products, and availability of the wide range of assortment.
CONCLUSION

India is at the crossroads with respect to retail sector. Customer is the focal point of marketing in this modern era. The burgeoning younger population in our nation symbolizes the huge growth potential for the organized retail sector. Branding is the key to differentiation and brand equity is contributed by its fundamentals viz., brand awareness, brand, brand performance, brand association and brand loyalty. The various retail store attributes that were found to have an impact on brand equity and its elements were price, relationship retailing, advertising, sales promotion, store environment, store location and product assortment. For enhancing brand equity retailers have to design customer-oriented store mix strategies. This requires in-depth planning and execution of retail store attributes.

Changing customer demographics are redesigning the customers shopping motives. Customers involve in whole set of activities while selecting a store and making purchases. Reaching to customers today has become increasingly complicated with the proliferation of media campaigns. Supermarkets apart from being in the food business, today, have engaged themselves in various brand building strategies. These include creating various customer touch points viz. superior store environment, in-store marketing, prompt customer service, etc. Since sixty percent of all in-store purchase decisions are impulse, it requires the retailers to plan their mix of store attributes with careful planning.
Changing customer demographic patterns and consumption decisions makes it vital for the retailers to devise value enhanced products and services. This research provides insights into creating a unique set of store attributes which leads to positive and unique brand image with the target segments. The research enunciates clear picture of the impact of store attributes in creating brand equity. It also visualizes the factors that are predominant in sustaining loyalty towards supermarkets.

The bottom line is to provide the best shopping experience for the customers which require maintaining and managing effective relationships in the long run. Focusing on the tangible and intangible cues rightly would stimulate the purchase decision of the wider customer groups with the supermarkets. Brand loyalty, the key determinant of brand equity can be ensured by the supermarkets by creating and sustaining suitable store associations. This could have lasting impact on the target segment groups. This research, hence concluded that the retail store attributes are indispensable for maintaining brand loyalty, thereby leading to brand equity in the context of supermarkets.