

# Differences in Perception of Wholesalers About Retailers' Ethical Behaviour

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to explore empirically the demographic differences in the perceptions of wholesalers about the ethical retail practices. The study is based upon the data obtained from randomly selected seventy wholesale firms from a northern Indian city by conducting in depth interviews through a specific designed schedule. All the demographic variables viz. age, qualification, experience and types of products depict insignificant mean differences in the perceptions of wholesalers regarding the ethical retail practices. Wholesalers viewed retailers unethical in terms of not making payments on time and not paying exact amount on credit sales, which create serious problems for the wholesalers who are liable to manufacturers. The study is confined to Indian and the future study can cover more countries. A comparative study of different stakeholders' perceptions about retail ethics can also be conducted. Retailers depends upon wholesalers as the latter provide the regular and uninterrupted supply of merchandise to the former even on credit basis. The retailers are expected to maintain sound relations on the basis of ethical practices with them. In the extant literature there is not even a single study on demographic differences in the perceptions of wholesalers about ethical retail practices in Indian context. This study thus fills the gap in literature on retailing ethics.*

**Keywords:** *Ethics, Wholesalers, Retailers, Demographics, Merchandise*

## INTRODUCTION

The area that has been less focused by the researchers in the retailing ethics literature is, demographics differences in perceptions of wholesalers about ethical issues in retailing operations (Arbuthnot,1997). As wholesalers and

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retailers form the significant part of the distribution chain in the marketing of products (Mallen, 1996) by acting as an intermediary link between the manufacturers and the customers. In fact, the success of the manufacturer and the customer satisfaction are affected by the functioning of these middlemen. They provide a wide range of services to both the producers as well as the consumers by reducing the amount of efforts required by the manufacturer in distributing his product to the final consumers and providing a vast market coverage to his products (Fassin, 2009). They increase the efficiency of exchange and lead to higher performance (Fynes, Brians and Chris Voss, 2002) by providing immediate delivery of goods to the consumers at places convenient and accessible to them. The retailers mostly purchase merchandise from wholesalers for reselling the same to the ultimate consumers (Fernando, 2009, p. 5; Kaptein, 2008; Lavorata and Pontier 2005; Kujala, 2002; Whysall, 1998; Lusch and Vargo, 1998). Wholesaler refers to any individual or business firm selling goods in relatively large quantities to buyers (retailers) other than the ultimate consumers. In addition, they assist retailers in advertising and promoting the products and provide financial assistance as well by selling goods on credit and thus, helping retailers to operate with small working capital (Arbuthnot, 1997). In return retailers being in final touch with customers are expected to fulfil the expectations of wholesalers in an ethical manner. Thus, differences in perceptions of wholesalers about ethical retail practices need further investigation both theoretically as well as empirically.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several research studies on ethics in retailing have been conducted during the past three decades. Most of these studies examined the ethical perceptions of retailers, salespeople, customers (Sharma and Sharma, 2013, 2012, 2011 and 2009; Sarma, 2007; Lavorata and Pontier, 2005; Dubinsky et al., 2004; Whysall, 2000, 1998; Deshpande, 1997; Levy and Dubinsky, 1983; Dornoff and Tankersley, 1975). Among the existing studies, Dawson (1997) observed ethical standards changing with age and years of experience for both men and women. Further, Whysall (1998) unearthed ethical relationship in retailing by citing examples of British companies facing problems of ethical nature and Abratt *et al.* (1999) explored the ethical beliefs of executives, managers and retail salespeople

in South Africa. The results highlight the difference in the ethical beliefs of executives, managers and salespeople and indicate salespeople as doing something more unethical than managers and executives regarding both work related and customer related factors. Again in another study, Whysall (2000) presented a framework of stakeholders in retailing and discussed the significance of these stakeholders by citing several ethical issues in retailing to demonstrate the benefits that accrue from applying a stakeholder approach. In addition, Honeycutt *et al.* (2001) explored the perceptions of automobile salespeople regarding legal and ethical behaviour and its relationship with age, education and method of compensation. The findings indicated that ethical perception was significantly associated in all five situations, while legal perception was significant only in two situations and education was insignificantly associated with ethical behaviour. The study by Kujala (2001) suggested a framework for analysing managers' attitude towards moral issues in stakeholder relations. The framework has various types of stakeholders, viz., customers, employees, competitors, owners, suppliers, community, government, financiers and the environment. Moreover, Ergeneli and Ankan (2002) found no significant difference in ethical perceptions based on gender, while female salespeople had more ethical score than their male counterparts at two age groups viz. below 20 years of age and age group of 40-49 years. In their study, Dubinsky *et al.* (2004) suggested some guidelines to retail managers regarding how to address the ethical issues of their salespeople.

Lavorata and Pontier (2005) identified the ethical practices of convenience retailers and also assessed the ultimate relevance of ethical marketing for a retailer. They used 'Ethical Assessment Criteria' to analyse the traditional retailers' ethical actions. The criteria had six dimensions, viz., relation with civil society, relation with customers and suppliers, the environment, business facilities and subcontracting in emerging countries, relation with shareholders and labour and management relations. Sarma (2007) examined the ethical practices of retailers and the ethical beliefs of salespeople in Indian context. The study found that salespeople did face ethical dilemmas in relation with different stakeholders as retailers had no clear policies and code of ethics for guiding their salespeople. Sharma and Sharma (2009) found that legal norms and ethical values being followed to some extent. They found more educated and senior in age retailers as more ethical than their less educated and younger counterparts. They suggested for regular and effective vigilance over the illegal retail

practices, code of ethics by the retailers' associations and training to salesmen for fair dealing with consumers. Mulki and Jaramillo (2011) opined that ethical perceptions about the organisation amplify the impact of customer value on customer satisfaction and eventually loyalty. Casali (2011) opined that in order to reduce the likelihood of unethical business practice, organisations, governments and managers are seeking new ways to better understand what guides management for ethical decision making. The study examined the development of the managerial ethical profile (MEP) scale. Sharma and Sharma (2011) found customers perceiving retailers as respectful, polite and giving due recognition but to some extent compromising with some issues like complete truthfulness, openness and responsiveness. Sharma and Sharma (2012) studied various legal norms and ethical values in retail practices through the perception of consumers with special reference to shopping goods. It was found that retailers dealing in shopping goods were moderate in observing legal norms and ethical values. The study recommended an active role of regulatory bodies in terms of more awareness regarding legal norms and ethical values and stringent punishment to law breakers and unethical acts need to be publicised. Sharma and Sharma and Sharma (2013) empirically examine the perceptions of manufacturers about ethical practices of retailers from the data gathered from manufacturers supplying merchandise directly to the retailers. The manufacturers viewed retailers ethical in many aspects like their like respect, information and out dated products but at the same time found retailers unethical in terms of payments of bills as they delay the payments sometimes for many months causing a serious problems for the manufacturers for payments to suppliers.

## RESEARCH GAP

In the extant literature, most of the studies conducted so far in retailing ethics examined the perception of retailers, salespeople or customers but none has yet touched the demographic differences in the perceptions of wholesalers about ethical retail practices in Indian context. This study is, thus, an attempt to fill the gap in literature on retailing ethics. The study contributes conceptually and empirically to the literature and shall be beneficial for the retailers, manufacturers, regulatory bodies, researchers and policy makers.

## OBJECTIVES

- To explore the perceptions of wholesalers about ethical retail practices.
- To examine the difference in the perceptions of wholesalers belonging to different demographic groups, viz., age, qualification, experience and types of products.
- To provide insights to future researchers on the wholesaler–retailer ethical relationships.

## HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference among wholesalers belonging to different age groups regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.
2. There no significant difference among wholesalers belonging to different educational backgrounds regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.
3. There is no significant difference among wholesalers belonging to different experience groups regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.
4. There is no significant difference among wholesalers dealing in different products regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.

## Research Methods

The various aspects of Research methods are discussed as under:-

### Instrument

For gathering the primary data, a schedule was developed specifically for the study after needed review of literature and in consultation with the experts on the subject (Kaptein, 2008; Sarma, 2007; Lavorata and Pontier, 2005 Dubinsky et al., 2004; Kujala, 2001; Whysall, 2000 and Whysall, 1998). The schedule comprised of 9 items of general information and 35 other items based on five point Likert scale ranging from 5 to 1, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree (5<.....>1). The general information includes the age, qualification, experience, monthly sales and profit of the wholesalers selected as respondents. The other items represent the ethical values of retailers in their dealings with their wholesalers as their contact with wholesalers influence their conduct with ultimate markets also.

## Sample

The responses were obtained from the wholesalers from Jammu city as a list of 100 wholesalers operating in different parts of Jammu city supplying merchandise to the retailers was framed. However, the final response was available from 70 wholesalers, with a response rate of 70%. The demographic and some general information include the age, qualification, experience, type of products. The age of the respondents has been categorised into three heads viz., below average age, average age and above average age. The average age of the respondents came to be as 44 years and about half (49%) of them having below average age. About 63% of total respondents found to be as graduate and above graduate. About one third of the respondents are having less than 10 years of experience as wholesaler and one third of the respondents found to be suppliers of grocery items to the retailers (Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Wholesalers**

Variables	N	%	Variables	N	%
<b>Age:</b>			<b>Experience</b>		
Below average	34	49	0-10	22	31
Average	02	03	11-20	17	24
Above average	34	48	21-30	15	22
<b>Qualification:</b>			Above 30	16	23
Matriculate	14	20	<b>Religion</b>		
Under graduate	12	17	Hindu	69	98
Graduate and above	44	63	Sikh	01	02
<b>Employees</b>			<b>Type of Products</b>		
0-5	53	76	Grocery	21	30
6-10	09	13	Garments	12	17
11-15	02	03	Medicines	07	10
Above 15	06	08	Others	30	43

## Reliability and Validity

Reliability is an assessment of degree of consistency between multiple measurements of a construct (Hair et al., 2009, p. 161). To check the reliability, Cronbach Alpha and Split half values have been worked out (Malhotra, 2008, p. 285). The data proved quite satisfactory in terms of split half reliability as mean values obtained from both halves of respondents are quite satisfactory (Group I= 3.24 and Group II= 3.56).

Moreover, Cronbach Alpha values also proved reliable as it came to be 0.888 ( $> 0.7$ ). Validity (the extent to which a scale or set of measures accurately represent the concept of interest) assessed in terms of Content and Convergent validity (Hair et al., 2009, p. 161). The Content validity has been worked out by reviewing the literature and discussions with the experts and researchers working on similar topic. Convergent validity assesses the degree to which two measures of the same concept are correlated and it was found to be as satisfactory (Malhotra, 2008, p. 286) as the correlations between items were significant and their values were  $> 0.5$ . Moreover, communalities of all the items were also above 0.5, indicating convergent validity.

### Analysis

Factor analysis examines the underlying patterns or relationship for condensing the total data into minimum meaningful factors (Hair et al 2009, p. 128). The technique of factor analysis has been used for data reduction through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 17 Version) with Principal Component Analysis along with varimax rotation. The items having factor loadings less than 0.5 and Eigen value less than 1 were ignored for the subsequent analysis. With application of factor analysis, the data converged into five factors with 68.44% of variance explained, viz., F1 (Fairness), F2 (Billing), F3 (Long term relations), F4 (Pricing), F5 (Expiry dated products).

**Table 2: Wholesalers' Perceptions about Retailers' Ethical Behaviour**

Factors	M	SD	EV	VE	CA
F1 Fairness	3.61	0.12	8.04	31.80	0.93
F2 Fair Billing	3.17	0.25	1.91	11.62	0.81
F3 Long Term Relations	3.04	0.45	1.72	9.19	0.61
F4 Pricing and Promotion	3.14	0.38	1.49	8.33	0.64
F5 Expiry Dated Products	3.40	0.05	1.23	7.50	0.60
Grand M, SD, VE and CA	3.38	0.33		68.44	0.88

\* M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, FL = Factor Loadings, C = Commonalities, EV = Eigen values, VE = Variance Explained and CA = Cronbach Alpha

The data so collected from wholesalers have further been analysed through ANOVA for finding out the demographic differences in age, qualification, experience and type of store about ethical values in retail practices. ANOVA gives the differences in mean scores of ethical values on

the part of the respondents belonging to different demographic categories. Each one of which has been examined as under:-

**Table 3: ANOVA (Age wise)**

Factors	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age*F1	Between Groups	.972	2	.486	.880	.420
	Within Groups	37.003	67	.552		
	Total	37.975	69			
Age*F2	Between Groups	.296	2	.148	.151	.860
	Within Groups	65.647	67	.980		
	Total	65.943	69			
Age*F3	Between Groups	1.313	2	.656	.853	.431
	Within Groups	51.559	67	.770		
	Total	52.871	69			
Age*F4	Between Groups	.355	2	.177	.446	.642
	Within Groups	26.644	67	.398		
	Total	26.998	69			
Age*F5	Between Groups	.468	2	.234	.264	.769
	Within Groups	59.478	67	.888		
	Total	59.946	69			
Age*Overall	Between Groups	.092	2	.046	.169	.845
	Within Groups	18.247	67	.272		
	Total	18.339	69			

### Age wise Analysis

The respondents have been classified into three categories viz. below average, average and above average wholesalers. The average age of respondents came to be 44 years through arithmetic mean. Out of the total respondents, about 49% belong to below average age group, about 48% have above average age and only 03% fall in the average age group. To find out the mean differences among different age groups regarding ethical retail practices, ANOVA has been applied. On the whole, ANOVA reveals insignificant mean differences of ethical values in retail practices among the respondents belonging to different age groups ( $F=0.845$ ,  $Sig. = 0.169$ , Table 3). When further applied factor wise, to examine the



significant mean difference in different age groups regarding individual factors constituting the overall construct of ethical retail practices, insignificant mean differences have been found in all the five factors, viz., F1 (Fairness: Sig. = .420), F2 (Billing: .860) F3 (Long term Relations: .431), F4 (Pricing: .642), F5 (Expiry dated products: .769, Table 3). All the respondents accorded similar mean scores to all the factors (Table 4).

**Table 4: Age and Qualification wise Factorial Mean Values**

Factors	Age			Qualification		
	BA N=34	A N=02	AA N=34	M N=14	UG N=12	G & PG 44
F1	3.49	3.55	3.73	3.69	3.76	3.54
F2	3.24	3.00	3.12	3.33	3.44	3.05
F3	2.90	3.17	3.18	3.05	3.64	2.88
F4	3.07	3.33	3.20	3.14	3.19	3.12
F5	3.47	3.50	3.31	3.21	3.38	3.45
Overall	3.23	3.31	3.31	3.29	3.48	3.21

\* BA = Below Average, A = Average, AA = Above Average, M = Matriculate, UG = Undergraduate, G = Graduate and PG = Post Graduate

### Qualification wise Analysis

To find out the effect of qualification on the ethical retail practices, respondents have been grouped into matriculate (20%), undergraduate (17%), graduate & above (63%) qualification groups (Table 5). ANOVA indicates insignificant mean differences in the responses of wholesalers belonging to different educational backgrounds ( $F=1.353$ , Sig. = .265, Table 5). When it is applied factor wise, to examine the significant mean difference in different qualification groups regarding individual factors constituting the overall construct of ethical retail practices, insignificant mean differences have been found in four factors out of the total five factors, viz., F1 (Fairness: Sig. = .602), F2 (Billing: .364) F4 (Pricing: .939), F5 (Expiry dated products: .707) but F3 (Long term Relations: .026) has significant mean difference (Table 5). It was found that graduate and post graduate respondents perceived retailers as less loyal (2.88) as compared to their matriculate (3.05) and undergraduate (3.64) counterparts because highly educated wholesalers are stricter regarding timely payments of bills (Table 4).

Table 5: ANOVA (Qualification Wise)

Factors	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Qualification*F1	Between Groups	.570	2	.285	.511	.602
	Within Groups	37.405	67	.558		
	Total	37.975	69			
Qualification*F2	Between Groups	1.960	2	.980	1.026	.364
	Within Groups	63.983	67	.955		
	Total	65.943	69			
Qualification*F3	Between Groups	5.448	2	2.724	3.848	.026
	Within Groups	47.424	67	.708		
	Total	52.871	69			
Qualification*F4	Between Groups	.051	2	.025	.063	.939
	Within Groups	26.947	67	.402		
	Total	26.998	69			
Qualification*F5	Between Groups	.618	2	.309	.349	.707
	Within Groups	59.329	67	.886		
	Total	59.946	69			
Qualification* Overall	Between Groups	.712	2	.356	1.353	.265
	Within Groups	17.627	67	.263		
	Total	18.339	69			

### Experience wise Analysis

On the basis of experience, respondents have been classified into four groups, viz. respondents having experience 0 to 10 years (32%), 11 to 20 years (24%), 21 to 30 years (21%) and finally above 30 years (23%) of experience as a wholesaler. For exploring the mean differences among different experienced groups of wholesalers regarding ethical retail practices, Uni-variate analysis of variance has been performed. On overall basis ANOVA portrays insignificant mean differences regarding the ethical retail practices among the respondents belonging to different experience groups, ( $F=1.080$ ,  $Sig. = .364$ ) (Table 6). Further, factor wise analysis also reveals insignificant mean differences in all the five factors F1 (Fairness:  $Sig. = .769$ ), F2 (Billing: .659) F3 (Long term Relations: .417), F4 (Pricing: .597), F5 (Expiry dated products: .170). Most of the respondents accorded same mean values for most of the factors (Table 7).

### Types of Product wise Analysis

The respondents have also been classified into four categories on the basis of type of products they deal with, such as grocery (30%), garments (17%), medicine (10%), others (43%). ANOVA reveals insignificant

mean differences among the wholesalers dealing in different kinds of products ( $F=1.914$  Sig. = .136) Further, factor wise analysis also discloses insignificant mean differences in four out of five factors viz. F1 (Fairness: Sig. = .156), F2 (Billing: .853) F3 (Long term Relations: .735) and F5 (Expiry dated products: .080, Table 8), while only one factor has significance mean difference i.e. F4 (Pricing: .005). The wholesalers dealing in garments and medicine considered retailers more unethical in terms of pricing (F4, Table, 9).

**Table 6: ANOVA (Experience wise)**

Factors	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Experience*F1	Between Groups	.642	3	.214	.379	.769
	Within Groups	37.332	66	.566		
	Total	37.975	69			
Experience*F2	Between Groups	1.567	3	.522	.536	.659
	Within Groups	64.375	66	.975		
	Total	65.943	69			
Experience*F3	Between Groups	2.208	3	.736	.959	.417
	Within Groups	50.663	66	.768		
	Total	52.871	69			
Experience*F4	Between Groups	.753	3	.251	.631	.597
	Within Groups	26.245	66	.398		
	Total	26.998	69			
Experience*F5	Between Groups	4.359	3	1.453	1.725	.170
	Within Groups	55.587	66	.842		
	Total	59.946	69			
Experience* Overall	Between Groups	.858	3	.286	1.080	.364
	Within Groups	17.481	66	.265		
	Total	18.339	69			

**Table 7: Experience Wise Factorial Mean Values**

Factors	Experience (Years)			
	0-10 N=22	11-20 N=17	21-30 N=15	30 Above N=16
F1	3.67	3.51	3.51	3.73
F2	3.33	3.02	3.00	3.27
F3	2.83	3.10	3.00	3.31
F4	3.03	3.14	3.11	3.31
F5	3.64	3.26	3.00	3.56
Overall	3.30	3.21	3.12	3.44

Table 8: ANOVA (Product wise)

Factors	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Type of product *F1	Between Groups	2.873	3	.958	1.801	.156
	Within Groups	35.102	66	.532		
	Total	37.975	69			
Type of product *F2	Between Groups	.772	3	.257	.261	.853
	Within Groups	65.170	66	.987		
	Total	65.943	69			
Type of product *F3	Between Groups	1.005	3	.335	.426	.735
	Within Groups	51.866	66	.786		
	Total	52.871	69			
Type of product *F4	Between Groups	4.780	3	1.593	4.733	.005
	Within Groups	22.218	66	.337		
	Total	26.998	69			
Type of product *F5	Between Groups	5.801	3	1.934	2.357	.080
	Within Groups	54.145	66	.820		
	Total	59.946	69			
Type of product * Overall	Between Groups	1.468	3	.489	1.914	.136
	Within Groups	16.872	66	.256		
	Total	18.339	69			

Table 9: Type of Product Wise Factorial Mean Values

Factors	Type of Products			
	Grocery N=21	Garments N=12	Medicines N=07	Others N=30
F1	3.74	3.47	3.07	3.70
F2	3.22	3.00	3.00	3.24
F3	3.22	3.00	2.90	2.97
F4	3.46	2.97	2.57	3.11

F5	3.64	2.92	3.86	3.30
Overall	3.46	3.07	3.08	3.26

Table 10: Testing of Hypotheses (ANOVA)

S. No	Hypotheses	F Value	Sig.	Result
H1	<i>There is no significant difference among wholesalers belonging to different age groups regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.</i>	.169	.845	Accepted
H2	<i>There no significant difference among wholesalers belonging to different educational backgrounds regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.</i>	1.353	.265	Accepted
H3	<i>There is no significant difference among wholesalers belonging to different experience groups regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.</i>	1.080	.364	Accepted
H4	<i>There is no significant difference among wholesalers dealing in different products regarding retailers' ethical behaviour.</i>	1.914	.136	Accepted

## CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

All the above demographic variables viz. age, qualification, experience and types Indian of products have insignificant mean difference in the perceptions of wholesalers regarding the ethical retailing practices.

Wholesalers viewed retailers unethical in terms of making payments on time which creates serious problems for the wholesalers who have to make prompt payments to the manufacturers and sometimes even advance payments for getting the regular supply of goods.

The wholesalers found retailers loyal only if they are given more commission and credit facilities but in case of cash sales and less margins retailers shift to other wholesalers.

The present research is restricted to the perceptual differences of wholesalers and the future research should make a comparative analysis of wholesalers along with other stakeholders about the ethical behaviour of retailers by increasing the dimensions and the sample size from other geographical areas.

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