

# Lifestyle, Work, and Social Lives of Retail Employees

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**Abstract:** *In the history of vocations, the most significant modifications of life and work have been the domination of the service sector. This economic transformation has had a significant influence on people's identities, attitudes, and perceptions, leading to societal change. While, retail globalisation has brought about major changes in society and the lives of those who are directly or indirectly affected. Retail superstores, malls, and Marts are rapidly transforming the Indian urban landscape and way of life. The organised businesses have ushered in a new era of work and job hunting for the city's jobless young. This research investigates how workers respond to difficulties posed by labour market dynamics and emerging types of workplace socialisation. It also focuses on employees' perspectives and attitudes towards their work.*

**Keywords:** service sector, societal change, retail globalisation, workplace socialisation, job hunting

## 1. Organised Retail in Amritsar

Up until now, city people's only option for making a living has been through traditional business. Up until a few BPOs and call centers popped up in the city, retail has been the most sought - after career path, particularly for young people. The top brands in fashion, consumer lifestyle, food, and grocery products are being drawn to malls, stores, malls, and supermarkets. The city's Mall Road and Lawrence Road also known as the "road of malls" are two locations that are particularly becoming known as hotspots for retail development. The Jalandhar - Amritsar highway, Mall Road, Ranjit Avenue, Green Avenue, Lawrence Road, and Kennedy Avenue are the locations of the other upcoming projects. For those looking for work, modern retail chains are becoming popular choices. Hence, with the launching of Mall/ Mart/Stores there has been a tremendous inclination of job seekers towards retail jobs.

## 2. Methodology

100 respondents (mall employees) were selected randomly from the malls/ marts and stores in Amritsar city and were interviewed with the help of interview schedule which comprised of both open and closed ended questions. Observation was made on the various aspects of their life including their living style, place of work, working conditions, interpersonal skills and dealing. After the complete collection of primary data, the information was compressed into meaningful and manageable categories which were assigned codes systematically. Then it was further subjected to tabulation and finally interpretation.

### The Profile of the Employees -

The socio - economic profile of the respondents reflect that the average age of the mall/ store employees was 15 - 34 years. Majority of the respondents are Hindus, others are Christians, Sikhs and a very few of them are Muslim. The respondents belong to different caste groups. Predominantly, they are the Brahmins and Khatri's. Majority are unmarried, Majority hails from nuclear families and are largely concentrated in significant positions like Customer Care

Executive, general manager, store manager, assistant manager depending upon the educational qualifications and retail experience. On an average, salary of employees ranges between Rs 2500 - 8500. The employees use both public and private automobiles for commuting to workplace. Majority uses a two - wheeler to come to their workplace others used public means of transport and only a very few had a four wheeler. A few who hold higher qualifications or experience are paid more than Rs 8500. The employees are basically arts and commerce graduates and speak local language (Punjabi) and Hindi as the main medium of conversing with the customers

### Push factors

Working lives have undergone enormous changes with the incoming of marts and branded stores in the city. There are number of reasons why more and more people are interested in making career in organised retail. Table 1 indicates motivations of respondents to work in retail sector.

**Table 1:** Motivation to Work at malls/stores

Motivated	Response	Percentage
Economic + incentive	62	36.04
Brand/ prestige	55	31.97
Gain retail experience/ Avenues for growth	30	17.44
Timely salary	9	5.23
Short duration of job/free to do side work	11	6.39
Independence	3	1.74
Safe environment	2	1.16
<b>Total</b>	<b>172*</b>	<b>99.97</b>

- Multiple Responses

Organized retail is characterized by formal labour contracts and employment benefits, as opposed to informal work at shops/ traditional retail that exposes them to exploitation. Unlike unorganised sector the organised sector provides them with professionalism, good work environment, and friendly atmosphere. Other than this many of the girls and boys work at malls/stores because of the Brand and the prestige attached to the store name (31.97%), to gain retail experience (17.44%) and further improve their chances for growth by entering into market at an early age.

Those coming from different backgrounds also expressed gratification for availability of variety of experiences, entertainment and recreation, consumption practices and habits (Gooptu, 2009). There is a difference of life style of employees working in these stores/ marts than those working in traditional shops. Unlike traditional shops malls and stores provide free environment to the employees. It is hectic to attend customers in peak hours but also very monotonous to spend time sans customers. During their free time the employees like to spend their time by cleaning, book keeping, arranging things on stack and rows, changing display by trying to give innovative looks to their stores to attract more customers, listening music/ watching Television and do surfing on internet, gossiping with their friends and other employees or just remain idle waiting for the customers.

### Building Identity

Work place is a key institutional site for the production of identity and a sense of self for the employees. Jobs in organised retail as opposed to traditional retailing carry a high status. They draw perception of self through the overall perception of the store/ mall they work in. Unlike traditional retail organised retailing involves more of soft skills, along with assertiveness and public speaking, smartness and a clever ability to persuade customers. Employees see themselves as a part of corporate culture than mere servants as in the case of traditional retail. Titles such as customer care executive, store head, assistant manager designate them as a staff of corporate world which gives them a sense of status consistency. In order to assimilate themselves as a part of corporate world they try to maintain themselves at their best through grooming, appearance and interpersonal communication skills.

To maintain uniformity of staff and ensure goodwill of the company the lifestyle of employees plays a very important role. Employee's mode of dress is of particular importance in case of high quality retail. The total image of the store can be lowered by even one employee. Hence, the store managers prefer their sales personnel to dress in work clothes for practical as well as image building purpose and therefore they provide them with the dress code and 1 - 2 uniforms. Many of the employees do not like to wear the store uniform but has to wear out of compulsion. Perhaps, many girls prefer to get ready in their store dress room rather than wearing it from home to store, as their family find it hard to re - assimilate with the westernized dress code and their changed lifestyle which involves extended working hours, working on a public front (especially for women) leading a happening lifestyle which encourage frenzied consumerism.

### The Social Life of Employees

Working at malls/ marts is full of glamour and has lots of tasty secrets to unveil. In between the shelves, one can discover romance, humour and other realities of life in the fast aside (www.ifibeam.com). The work place is not only a place for job related tasks and earning a living. It is a depot of values, attitudes, norms, accepted procedures and forming new social relationship. Most kinds of work require constant and sometimes forceful interactions with the people and other co - workers. Some of these can be unpleasant and a

source of stress but it often happens that work place serves as a prime site for socialising with fellow workers and forming strong bonds of friendship with some of them (Volti 2008, Pp186). Work place serves as a prime site for socialising with fellow workers and forming strong bonds of friendship with some of them (Volti 2008, Pp 186). The formal and informal social interaction that takes place in the workplace imparts a set of skills, values and attitudes to the employees.

The sales person serves as the last link in the marketing chain and it affects consumer's decision on purchases. Majority of the respondents stated that they help the customers in all the possible ways. Maintaining social contacts with the customers is one of the assets to the business. Majority said that they maintained contact with their customers through Tele - calling, E - Mail, SMS (which customers regard as troublesome). Number of people visit malls/ stores daily and come in contact with employees working there that leads to establishment of new social relationship. Whereas on other hand, some employees take it as a chance to widen their chain of acknowledgement and extend social ties. Others try to keep the acquaintances to the work place only and not personal.

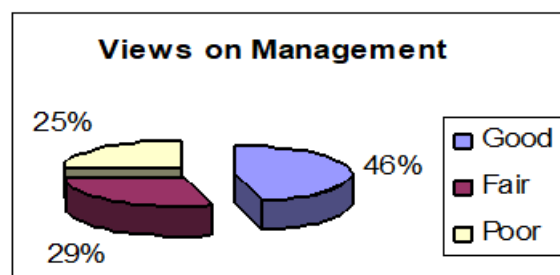


Figure 1: View of employees on mall/store management

The customer and employees relationship is more a sort of formalised relationships. To help improve motivation and performance the management attempts to develop a close relationship with workers. It was seen that less than half of the respondents (46%) stated that they had good and active management (Fig 1).

### Views of Employees on the Malls and Stores in the City

Respondents were of opinion that people prefer malls and stores for hassle free and quick shopping. More than single stores, people preferred multi assortment stores. While others were of opinion that people visit malls and stores for window shopping and entertainment. It is true that in the initial phase of introduction of malls and store the sales of malls and stores went up drastically because everyone liked to purchase from malls/stores out of enthusiasm. But now with the decline in rate of customers at malls/stores the sales have also declined as compared to the past. Customer's choices have gone up with the increase in competition and consciousness. They find lesser gratification in purchasing non exclusive goods that lies in bulk at malls/stores.

**Table 2:** Changes Seen at Marts/ Stores (customer shopping behaviour)

Category	Response	Percentage
Decline in customers/ craze fade away/ slow	29	29.59
Window shoppers are on increase, competition increasing	11	11.22
Customers choices have gone up, customers are on increase	37	37.75
People do not like fruits and vegetables from stores	3	3.06
Prefer to buy on sales/ offers	7	7.14
People have become brand conscious/ better services/ aware	10	10.20
Like self service than assistance	1	1.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>98*</b>	<b>99.98</b>

**Multiple Response**

Lowering the rates of products and use lucrative offers and schemes was the strategy practiced by store and malls to retain customers. Whereas, other said that they use advertisement to propagate. While, another few said that it was their dealings which make customers come again and again to their stores.

**Prospects and Problems**

The wide variety of consumers with unique and personal needs combined with intense competition from the retailers for their patronage makes it impossible for a single retailer to be ‘all things to all people’. Respondents said that malls/marts/ stores target higher class, upper middle class and young population and are unaffordable as they sell goods at higher prices. Hence, malls were not catering to the needs of all the classes. Whereas majority of the respondents disagreed with the above stated views. The proponents claim malls to befriend people of all classes as their prices are affordable and there is ample variety of goods, schemes and range of prices and products. Also, they provide the customers with a provision of one stop, time saving and hassle free shopping. Along with this it provides their customers with quality products, branded stuff and durable goods and do not restrict entry of anyone as they are open to people of all classes.

Attitude of store/mall employees towards exclusion of traditional retail with the coming of malls and stores was also explored in the research. Quite a number of employees agreed that malls will take over the traditional business because organised retail has made peoples dream of easy shopping come true. With the availability of goods under one roof, shopping no longer is a hectic experience rather more of entertaining activity. Further, the availability of reliable, quality brands at cheaper rates, sales, schemes and other offers that malls provide to their customers will slowly wipe the traders out of the market as they can not hold strategies of organised retailing. Malls/Marts have become a signifier of status hence people prefer to shop from a mall than an ordinary shop. High Class/Upper Middle Class/Cash Customers prefer to buy from them while lower middle class, working class/ credit buyers prefer to buy from local shops. Whilst another group of respondents hold the opposite view

Other than the prospects of organised retail the mall/Store employees were also asked to discuss their problems (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Problems Faced in Stores/Malls

Problems	Response	Percentage
Behavioural problems with manager	6	10.90
Lack of rules/ codes	4	7.27
Standing job (CCC enclosed)	9	16.36
Time consuming process of online payment	7	12.72
Complaining and rough customers	13	23.62
Problematic work shifts	4	7.27
No scope for promotion/ increase in salary	12	21.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>55*</b>	<b>99.95</b>

Respondents were asked if they would like to continue working in same store in the future. It is seen that nearly half of the respondents desired to continue their services in mart/stores they were working at present. While others expressed dissatisfaction with their present job and yet the remaining ones showed openness for the opportunities in retail.

**3. Conclusion**

It can be drawn from the findings that participation of women in the market (shops) has never been so visible but the retail expansion has introduced women as a new market workers. Along with this malls and stores have set in a new trend of employment for unemployed youth of the city. They regard retail job as ‘dignified work’ wherein they are not mere servants (as in shops) but corporate workers (with attractive designation, uniforms, clean workplaces, good lifestyle, status, attractive salary and incentives). These act as a source of mental satisfaction for the mall/store employees. On the other hand, malls/stores have a negative social repercussion on its employees. Long working hours, unpaid overtime work, lack of coordination between managers and employees, violation of rules, full time standing job with fewer breaks, favouritism in promotion and salary, work shift problems have not only been consequential in quick - switching of employees to other stores/malls but also hindered performance of the stores/malls due to mismanagement, poor standards and lack of innovation. It can not be denied that this new development model has brought in immense changes and the emergence of new entrepreneurial culture has impact on identity, attitudes and perception of the employees.

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