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Retail Strategy, Shopping Experience, And Consumer Loyalty in South Asian Super Shops: A Systematic Review of Empirical Evidence

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ABSTRACT: The retail landscape in South Asia is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by the proliferation of organised super shops and modern trade formats. Despite substantial practitioner interest, academic understanding of how product-centric and customer-centric retail strategies jointly shape customer experience and loyalty in this region remains fragmented. This paper presents a structured review of empirical studies published between 2010 and 2024 that examine product-centricity, customer-centricity, customer experience, and loyalty in the context of South Asian super shops—defined here as large-format organised grocery and general merchandise retailers operating in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Following a systematic search and screening protocol, 62 peer-reviewed articles were retained for thematic synthesis. The review identifies four dominant thematic clusters: (i) the strategic tension between product-centric and customer-centric orientations; (ii) the multi-dimensionality of in-store and omnichannel customer experience; (iii) the antecedents and mediators of customer loyalty; and (iv) cross-national moderating factors including cultural values, income heterogeneity, and digital infrastructure. The review concludes with a consolidated research agenda and practical recommendations for retail managers and policymakers seeking to strengthen customer retention in South Asia's competitive grocery retail environment.

KEYWORDS: Product-Centricity; Customer-Centricity; Customer Experience; Customer Loyalty; Super Shops; South Asia; Systematic Review; Retail Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Organised retail in South Asia has expanded at a remarkable pace over the past two decades. The region's combined retail market—spanning Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—is estimated to exceed USD 1.2 trillion, with the organised segment, including super shops, hypermarkets, and department stores, accounting for a growing share as urbanisation accelerates and disposable incomes rise [1]. Super shops, understood here as large-format, self-service retail outlets offering a broad assortment of grocery, household, and general merchandise products under one roof, have emerged as the most visible embodiment of this transition from informal bazaars and neighbourhood kiranas to modern trade formats [2].

The competitive dynamics of this environment have prompted both practitioners and academics to interrogate two overarching strategic orientations: product-centricity, which foregrounds product assortment depth, pricing, and category management as the primary sources of competitive advantage; and customer-centricity, which prioritises the understanding and fulfilment of individual customer needs as the organising logic of the firm [3]. While these orientations are sometimes presented as mutually exclusive, the emerging consensus in the retail strategy literature suggests that they are better understood as complementary poles of a strategic continuum, with the most successful retailers calibrating their position along this continuum in response to market conditions and customer segment characteristics [4].

Customer experience—the holistic impression formed by a customer across all cognitive, affective, and behavioural interactions with a retailer—has attracted increasing scholarly attention as a mediating construct linking retail strategy to loyalty outcomes [5]. In the South Asian context, customer experience in super shops is shaped by a distinctive constellation of factors: the juxtaposition

of modern retail formats against deeply embedded cultural shopping norms; wide variation in consumer digital literacy; and persistent infrastructure gaps that affect both in-store service delivery and omnichannel integration [6]. These contextual specificities make South Asia a theoretically rich yet insufficiently studied setting for retail experience research.

Customer loyalty—encompassing attitudinal commitment, repeat patronage, and positive word-of-mouth—represents the ultimate commercial outcome of successful retail strategy and experience management [7]. In markets characterised by rapid competitive entry and low switching costs, as is increasingly the case in South Asian organised retail, loyalty is a particularly valuable yet elusive asset. Despite a growing body of empirical work on each of these constructs individually, no systematic review has yet integrated findings across product-centricity, customer-centricity, customer experience, and loyalty specifically within the South Asian super shop context. This gap motivates the present review.

This paper makes four contributions to the literature. First, it consolidates empirical evidence from 62 peer-reviewed studies spanning 14 years, providing a more comprehensive synthesis than any prior narrative review. Second, it surfaces the theoretical frameworks most commonly employed in this literature and assesses their explanatory adequacy. Third, it identifies methodological patterns and limitations that constrain the cumulative development of knowledge. Fourth, it articulates a structured research agenda to guide future inquiry. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the systematic review methodology; Section 3 synthesises findings across four thematic clusters; Section 4 discusses cross-cutting theoretical and empirical issues; and Section 5 concludes with implications and future research directions.

2. SYSTEMATIC REVIEW METHODOLOGY

2.1 Search Strategy and Database Selection

The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [8] to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Five electronic databases were searched: Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Google Scholar (first 200 results per query), and the Bangladesh Journals Online (BanglaJOL) repository to capture regional publications. The search period spanned January 2010 to December 2024, reflecting the period during which organised retail in South Asia reached sufficient scale to generate a meaningful empirical literature.

Search strings were constructed by combining terms from four conceptual domains: (i) retail strategy (product-centric*, customer-centric*, retail strateg*, store format*, super shop*, supermarket*, hypermarket*); (ii) customer experience (customer experience, shopping experience, in-store experience, service encounter, retail atmospherics); (iii) customer loyalty (customer loyalty, brand loyalty, store loyalty, repeat purchase, customer retention, word-of-mouth); and (iv) geographic scope (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Asia). Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to combine terms within and across domains. Reference lists of retained articles were hand-searched to identify additional eligible studies.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they: (i) reported original empirical findings (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods); (ii) examined at least one of the four focal constructs (product-centricity, customer-centricity, customer experience, or customer loyalty) in a retail setting; (iii) collected data from consumers or retail managers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka; (iv) focused on brick-and-mortar super shops or organised grocery retail formats; and (v) were published in English in peer-reviewed journals. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on e-commerce or online retail, examined informal retail formats (street markets, small kiranas), reported only conceptual or theoretical contributions without empirical data, or were conference papers or working papers without peer review.

2.3 Screening and Quality Assessment

The initial database search returned 1,847 records. After deduplication (n = 312 removed), 1,535 titles and abstracts were screened by two independent reviewers; 1,341 records were excluded at this stage for clearly failing inclusion criteria. Full texts of the remaining 194 records were assessed for eligibility; 132 were excluded after full-text review, primarily due to mismatched geographic focus (n = 61), exclusive focus on e-commerce (n = 38), or insufficient empirical content (n = 33). This yielded a final corpus of 62 eligible studies. Inter-rater agreement across the two stages of screening was assessed using Cohen's kappa; values of 0.82 (title/abstract) and 0.88 (full text) indicated substantial to near-perfect agreement [9]. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) [10], which provides standardised criteria for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. All 62 studies met the minimum quality threshold for inclusion (MMAT score ≥ 3 out of 5). Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the retained study corpus.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Retained Study Corpus (N = 62)

Characteristic	Category	N (%)
Country of Study	India	29 (46.8)
	Bangladesh	16 (25.8)
	Pakistan	11 (17.7)
	Sri Lanka	6 (9.7)
Research Method	Quantitative	44 (71.0)
	Qualitative	9 (14.5)
	Mixed Methods	9 (14.5)
Focal Construct	Customer Loyalty	38 (61.3)
	Customer Experience	29 (46.8)
	Customer-Centricity	21 (33.9)
	Product-Centricity	18 (29.0)
Publication Period	2010–2015	11 (17.7)
	2016–2020	24 (38.7)
	2021–2024	27 (43.5)

Note: Studies addressing multiple focal constructs or countries are counted more than once in sub-category totals.

3. THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

3.1 Product-Centricity in South Asian Super Shops

Product-centricity, characterised by an emphasis on product range breadth and depth, competitive pricing, private-label development, and efficient category management, constitutes the dominant strategic orientation documented in the earliest wave of empirical work on South Asian organised retail (2010–2016). Studies conducted in the Indian context consistently identified product assortment and price competitiveness as the primary drivers of store patronage, particularly among value-conscious middle-income consumers in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities [11, 12]. In Bangladesh, where organised retail was still nascent during this period, the seminal survey work of Rahman and colleagues [13] found that product freshness, variety, and shelf availability explained the majority of variance in store choice, outweighing service and experiential factors by a substantial margin.

Category management emerged as a particularly prominent sub-theme. Retailers who invested in data-driven category optimisation—tailoring their assortments to local demand patterns and seasonal preferences—achieved measurably higher basket sizes and visit frequencies [14]. The importance of private-label products as a product-centric loyalty instrument was documented across Indian [15] and Pakistani [16] contexts: private-label adoption was positively associated with perceived value and, through value, with repeat patronage. However, several studies cautioned that private-label strategies risk undermining experiential quality perceptions if product standards are not maintained [17].

A recurring limitation in the product-centricity literature is its tendency to treat product factors as isolated antecedents of loyalty, neglecting their interactions with service and experiential variables. Only five of the eighteen product-centric studies in the corpus included customer experience as a mediating variable, and none employed a fully integrated model spanning all four focal constructs. This gap represents a significant opportunity for future research.

3.2 Customer-Centricity and Its Organisational Manifestations

Customer-centricity—understood as the strategic reorientation of retail operations around customer knowledge, segmentation, and personalised value delivery—has received growing empirical attention since approximately 2016, coinciding with the diffusion of customer relationship management (CRM) systems and loyalty programmes among South Asian super shop operators [18]. The reviewed literature identifies three primary manifestations of customercentric strategy in this context: loyalty programme design, personalisation of offers and communications, and frontline service customisation.

Loyalty programme research constitutes the largest sub-cluster within the customer-centricity theme (n = 12 studies). Across the reviewed studies, points-based loyalty programmes were found to generate statistically significant increases in visit frequency and spend per visit, but their effects on attitudinal loyalty—the emotional commitment dimension of loyalty—were more modest and context-dependent [19, 20]. Hussain and colleagues' [21] comparative study of Pakistani super shop loyalty programmes found that perceived programme value was a stronger driver of loyalty than mere programme membership, underscoring the importance of programme design quality rather than enrolment per se. A complementary finding from Sri Lanka [22] indicated that loyalty programme effectiveness was moderated by consumers' collectivist cultural orientation: consumers with stronger in-group identity showed greater programme responsiveness, suggesting that culturally attuned programme design may amplify returns.

Personalisation research, while less voluminous (n = 7 studies), yielded theoretically significant findings. In-store personalisation—achieved through trained staff who recognise and respond to regular customers' preferences—was found to exert stronger loyalty effects than digital personalisation via mobile app recommendations in the Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan contexts [23, 24]. This finding may reflect the interpersonal trust orientations characteristic of relationship-intensive commercial cultures in these markets. By contrast, Indian urban consumers showed greater responsiveness to algorithm-driven personalisation, consistent with their higher digital service maturity [25].

3.3 Customer Experience: Dimensions and Drivers

Customer experience emerged as the most theoretically heterogeneous construct in the review corpus, with studies employing a wide variety of conceptual frameworks and measurement instruments. The most frequently applied frameworks were the Customer Experience Quality (EXQ) scale of Klaus and Maklan [26], Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy model [27], and Verhoef et al.'s [28] integrative retail customer experience framework. This theoretical fragmentation complicates cross-study comparison, though it also reflects the genuine multidimensionality of the construct.

Across the reviewed studies, four dimensions of in-store customer experience consistently emerged as significant: (i) physical environment quality (store layout, cleanliness, ambient conditions such as lighting, music, and scent); (ii) service interaction quality (staff knowledge, responsiveness, and interpersonal warmth); (iii) assortment experience (the ease and pleasure of product discovery and selection); and (iv) checkout efficiency (speed, accuracy, and payment convenience). Among these, physical environment quality was most frequently studied (n = 22 studies) and showed the most consistent positive association with overall satisfaction and loyalty [29, 30].

The omnichannel dimension of customer experience—encompassing the integration of mobile apps, online ordering, and in-store digital touchpoints—represents an emerging sub-theme in the more recent literature (2019–2024). Eight studies in the corpus examined omnichannel experience in South Asian super shops, with findings suggesting that seamless channel integration amplifies loyalty effects that originate in positive physical store experiences [31, 32]. However, this integration premium was found to be contingent on consumers' digital access and literacy, variables that remain highly unequally distributed across South Asian markets [33].

3.4 Customer Loyalty: Antecedents, Mediators, and Moderators

Customer loyalty was operationalised across the corpus in three primary ways: behavioural loyalty (repeat visit frequency and share-of-wallet), attitudinal loyalty (affective commitment and preference), and composite loyalty indices combining both dimensions. Studies employing composite measures generally reported stronger associations with antecedent constructs, consistent with the theoretical position that true loyalty encompasses both behavioural and attitudinal components [34].

Customer satisfaction was the most frequently identified mediator between experience dimensions and loyalty (n = 31 studies), followed by perceived value (n = 18), trust (n = 14), and brand image (n = 11). In studies that jointly modelled satisfaction and trust as parallel mediators—consistent with the integrative frameworks proposed by Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol [35]—trust consistently demonstrated a stronger mediation effect in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi contexts, while satisfaction was the dominant mediator in Indian and Sri Lankan samples. This cross-national pattern may reflect differential baseline levels of institutional trust and the corresponding salience of interpersonal trust as a loyalty driver in lower-trust institutional environments.

Several studies identified significant moderators of the experience–loyalty relationship. Consumer involvement (degree of engagement with grocery shopping as an activity) moderated the effect of physical environment quality on loyalty, with high-involvement consumers showing greater sensitivity to atmospheric stimuli [36]. Income level moderated the product-centricity–loyalty link, with lower-income consumers placing greater weight on price and value perceptions and higher-income consumers valuing experiential and service dimensions more highly [37]. Cultural value dimensions— particularly collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance—were examined as moderators in six studies, with generally supportive findings for their role in shaping consumer responses to both product-centric and customer-centric retail strategies [38].

Table 2: Summary of Key Findings by Thematic Cluster

Theme	Key Findings	Dominant Frameworks	Key Gaps
Product-Centricity	Assortment & price drive patronage; private-labels linked to perceived value & loyalty	Category Mgmt Theory; Value-based Loyalty	Ignores experiential mediators; crosscountry scarcity
Customer-Centricity	Loyalty programmes boost behavioural loyalty; personalisation effects context-dependent	CRM Theory; Relationship Marketing	Attitudinal loyalty understudied; cultural moderators underexplored
Customer Experience	Physical environment strongest driver; omnichannel amplifies loyalty contingent on digital access	EXQ; Experience Economy; Verhoef et al.	Theoretical fragmentation; limited omnichannel studies
Customer Loyalty	Satisfaction & trust are key mediators; income & culture moderate antecedent effects	Oliver's Loyalty Framework; S-D Logic	Composite loyalty rare; longitudinal designs absent

Source: Authors' synthesis of reviewed studies (2010–2024).

4. CROSS-CUTTING THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL ISSUES

4.1 The Product–Customer Orientation Continuum

One of the most consistent cross-study findings is that product-centricity and customer-centricity are not inherently in tension but rather constitute complementary strategic emphases whose optimal balance varies with market maturity and consumer segment characteristics. In the earlier phases of market development—characteristic of Bangladesh in the 2010–2015 period—product-centric investments in range and price generated the largest loyalty dividends, as consumers were primarily motivated by the utilitarian benefits of one-stop shopping [13]. As markets mature and competitive imitation erodes product-centric differentiation, customer-centric investments in experience, personalisation, and relationship management become progressively more important drivers of differentiation and loyalty [18].

This developmental trajectory is consistent with the strategic framework proposed by Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin, and Day [39], who conceptualised the transition from product-centric to customer-centric organisation as a response to competitive commoditisation. The South Asian super shop literature provides empirical support for this framework across multiple national contexts, though the pace and trajectory of the transition varies considerably across countries and consumer segments. A noteworthy implication is that retailers operating across multiple South Asian markets may need to maintain differentiated strategic postures—more product-centric in less mature markets, more customer-centric in more competitive environments—rather than applying a uniform regional strategy.

4.2 Theoretical Frameworks: Adequacy and Gaps

The reviewed literature draws on a wide range of theoretical frameworks, but four dominate: the Service-Dominant Logic [40], Relationship Marketing theory [41], the Technology Acceptance Model (in omnichannel studies) [42], and various iterations of consumer behaviour frameworks derived from the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm [43]. While these frameworks have proven productive, the review identifies two notable theoretical gaps. First, no study in the corpus applied a cultural theory framework—such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions or the GLOBE project's cultural values model—in a fully integrated manner to explain cross-national differences in the experience–loyalty relationship. Cultural variables appear primarily as post-hoc moderators rather than as theoretically motivated components of an integrated model.

Second, the literature has been slow to incorporate institutional theory perspectives, despite the evident role of regulatory environments (consumer protection laws, payment infrastructure, data privacy regimes) in shaping what retail strategies are feasible and effective in different South Asian markets. Future research that integrates institutional and cultural theoretical lenses with the dominant consumer behaviour frameworks would substantially enrich the explanatory power of models in this domain.

4.3 Methodological Patterns and Limitations

Quantitative survey methods dominate the corpus (71.0%), with SEM and PLS-SEM the most commonly employed analytical techniques. While this methodological concentration has enabled cumulative model building, it has also generated a set of shared limitations: cross-sectional designs that preclude causal inference; convenience and snowball samples that limit generalisability; and self-reported behavioural outcomes that may diverge from actual transaction data. The absence of longitudinal designs is a particularly significant gap, as the dynamics of loyalty formation and erosion over time remain poorly understood in the South Asian organised retail context.

Qualitative work (14.5% of the corpus) has contributed valuable insights into the process mechanisms through which experience shapes loyalty, but is disproportionately concentrated in a small number of urban centres—primarily Dhaka, Mumbai, Karachi, and Colombo—leaving rural and peri-urban consumer experiences largely undocumented. Mixedmethods designs (14.5%), while methodologically sophisticated, are relatively rare and tend to be exploratory rather than explanatory in orientation. Future research should prioritise longitudinal panel designs, transaction-level data partnerships with retailers, and multi-city sampling frames that adequately represent the geographic and socioeconomic diversity of South Asian retail consumers.

5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This structured review synthesised 62 empirical studies to map the state of knowledge on product-centricity, customercentricity, customer experience, and loyalty in South Asian super shops. The review reveals a literature that has matured considerably over the past decade, with increasingly sophisticated theoretical frameworks and analytical methods. Four primary conclusions emerge. First, the strategic tension between product and customer orientation is contextually contingent: product-centric strategies dominate in earlier-stage markets, while customer-centric strategies generate greater loyalty dividends in more competitive environments. Second, customer experience—particularly physical environment quality and service interaction quality—is the most powerful proximate antecedent of loyalty across all four countries reviewed. Third, satisfaction and trust are the dominant mediating mechanisms between experience dimensions and loyalty, with trust playing a comparatively stronger role in lower institutional-trust contexts. Fourth, cultural and socioeconomic moderators substantially shape the magnitude and direction of experience–loyalty relationships, underscoring the danger of assuming pan-regional uniformity in strategy or theory.

5.2 Managerial Implications

For retail managers in South Asian super shops, the review points to three actionable priorities. First, investment in physical store environments—layout clarity, cleanliness, ambient conditions, and sensory design—is likely to yield the highest and most consistent returns across all four markets, given the robustness of physical environment effects across the reviewed studies. Second, loyalty programme design should move beyond simple points accumulation toward programmes that deliver perceived value, incorporate elements of personalisation, and are calibrated to the cultural and income characteristics of target segments. Third, retailers pursuing omnichannel integration should recognise that the experience integration premium is contingent on consumer digital access and literacy; investing in customer digital onboarding—helping customers adopt and effectively use digital touchpoints—may be a prerequisite for realising omnichannel loyalty benefits in less digitally mature segments.

5.3 Future Research Directions

The review identifies five priority directions for future research. First, longitudinal studies using panel survey data or retail transaction records are urgently needed to establish the causal dynamics of loyalty formation and the long-term effects of strategic reorientation from product-centric to customer-centric models. Second, theoretically integrated models that jointly incorporate cultural, institutional, and consumer behaviour frameworks would substantially advance explanatory power. Third, comparative studies that directly contrast super shop experiences across two or more South Asian countries—rather than studying each in isolation—would enable more rigorous conclusions about contextual moderators. Fourth, qualitative and ethnographic research in rural and peri-urban markets, where organised retail is expanding rapidly but remains understudied, would provide important boundary conditions for findings that currently derive primarily from urban samples. Fifth, as omnichannel retail continues to develop in the region, research that directly measures the integration experience across physical and digital touchpoints—rather than studying each channel in isolation—is essential for retailers navigating the transition to unified commerce models.

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