



CUSTOMER'S MENTALITY AT BUSINESS CENTRES DURING PANDEMIC SITUATION

Dr. G. ASHOK KUMAR

Assistant Professor of Economics, Vivekananda College, Tiruvedakam West, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

ABSTRACT: A businessman has to meet various kinds of customers with different attitudes and habits. Customer satisfaction is the prime investment for every businessman. Customers are having bundle of wants; the wants satisfying power of the business is not only the purchasing power of the customer but also services provided by the owner of the business. Further, it is additional burden to every businessman to follow guidelines given by the Government during this pandemic situation. Hence, this study aims to observe the mentality of customers and activities of the other customers and merchants at business centres during this pandemic situation. The study based on the primary data collected from 129 respondents through online survey using Google Forms. The study observed that out of 129 respondents; 59 (45.74 per cent) respondents are awful in following pandemic guideline when going outdoor *i.e.*, maintain social distancing and hygienic practice at business centres and there is no respondent's is poor in following pandemic guidelines. Fourteen (10.85 per cent) respondents opined that the other customers are not at all satisfied in following pandemic guidelines in the business centres and 12 (9.30 per cent) respondents opined that the other customers are never mind even after the merchant advised to follow pandemic guidelines. Forty-five (34.88 per cent) respondents opined that the merchants are above standard in advising pandemic guidelines to their customers and only eight (6.20 per cent) respondents justify that the merchants are poor in professional ethics during pandemic situation. The study suggested there should be more strategic awareness programs to improve social distancing and hygienic practices among the people.

Key Words: Pandemic Situation, Pandemic Guidelines, customer attitude, customer satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

The value of customer to a business concern is immense there is no words to describe about the customer then the quote given by *Mahatma Gandhi* "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption on our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider on our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so". It is vibrant that the customers are the pillars of any business 'If there is No customer there is No Business'. The consumer rights also say that it is important to give utmost respect to every customer even they buy commodity or not buying any think but companion with a customer. Arrangement of customer supporting facilities in the business cetntre is the duty of every businessman.

At present the World facing a dangerous pandemic issue of COVID-19. As there is no vaccine, social distancing and self-hygienic practices are suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO) to prevent the spread of diseases. All the countries are initially announced lockdown to practice social distancing and self-hygiene to break the spread of disease. Later to avail essential goods to the people; the Governments relaxed the lockdown with some restrictions and guidelines for both public and businessmen during the visit of purchase. It is tough challengeable situation for both customers and businessmen to continue business with the safety measures given by the Government.

2. NEED FOR THE STUDY

A businessman has to meet various kinds of customers with different behaviours and habits. Customer satisfaction is the prime investment for every businessman. Customers are bundle of wants; the wants satisfying power of the business is not only the purchasing power of the customer but also services provided by the owner of the business. Further, it is an additional burden to every businessman to follow guidelines given by the Government during this pandemic situation. At the same time, customers also entering business centres with worried mentality in view of social distancing and hygienic practices. Keeping this contradiction situation, this study aims to observe the mentality of customers at business centre during this pandemic situation.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the respondent's views as a customer in business centres during pandemic situation.
2. To appraise the responsiveness of the business concern to satisfy their customers during pandemic situation.
3. To comprehend the level of social distancing and hygienic practices among both customers and businessmen at business centres.
4. To suggest suitable recommendation to improve safety measures to the policy makers using opinions collected from the respondents.

4. HYPOTHESES

1. **H₀**: There is no significant association between merchants' pre-arrangements and customers' activity regarding social distancing and hygienic practices at business centres.
2. **H₀**: There is no significant association between merchants' arrangements and respect towards the advice of social distancing and hygienic practices at business centres.

5. METHODOLOGY

Methodology of the study is summarized below:

Data	:	Primary data collected by online survey using Google Forms. To get reasonable data set, the questions were asked in Tamil.
Period of Study	:	The questions were distributed 46 days after the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in India.
Study Area	:	Since it is online survey, the questions were distributed all over the country and the performance scattered all over the country.
Tools	:	Percentage, Average, Likert scales, Chi-Square (χ^2) test and diagrams.

6. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY WITH ANALYSIS

The information gathered from the respondents are divided in to three parts viz, socio economic conditions of the respondents, respondents' self-observation, respondents' observation on other customers and respondent's observation on merchants of the business centre.

6.1. SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS

A person who gave good score in the socio-economic condition will have finest mindset in responding surveys related with humanities. Hence, this study collects essential socio-economic information from all the 129 respondents.

It is found that out of 129 respondents 67 (51.94 per cent) are living in urban areas. It is evident that there are 60.47 per cent respondents are women. Regarding age, most (44.96 per cent) of the respondents aged between 18 to 30 years. Considering the educational level 73 (56.59 per cent) and 49 (37.98 per cent) are post graduated and under graduated respectively remaining five (3.88 per cent) and two (1.55 per cent) are completed vocation education and school level education respectively. There are 51 (39.53 percent) and 23 (17.83 per cent) respondents are private employees and Government employees respectively, it is noteworthy that there are about 42 (43.56 per cent) respondents are students.

The economic conditions are depending upon income and expenditure; the family income of the most of the respondents *i.e.*, 41 (31.78 per cent) are Rs. 5000 to Rs. 10000, 23 (17.83 per cent) respondent's family earnings ranges between Rs. 10000 and Rs. 15000, 35 (27.13 per cent) respondent's family earn more than Rs. 18000, three (2.33 per cent) respondent's family earning ranges from Rs. 25000 to Rs. 30000 and each nine respondent's family are earning below Rs. 5000, Rs.15000 to Rs 20000 and Rs. 20000 to Rs. 25000. Considering expenditure; 18 (13.95 per cent), 24 (18.60 per cent), 15 (11.63 per cent), 16 (12.40 per cent), 10 (7.75 per cent) and 26 (20.16 per cent) respondent's family are spending below Rs. 3000, Rs. 3000 to Rs. 6000, Rs. 6000 to Rs. 9000, Rs. 9000 to Rs. 12000, Rs. 12000 to Rs.15000, Rs. 15000 to Rs. 18000 and above Rs. 18000 respectively.

It is vibrant from the above socio-economic analysis that most of the respondents are educated, employed with good salary. Hence, we can glad that the opinions gathered from the respondents will be reasonable and considerable for making suggestions to the policy makers.

6.2. RESPONDENT'S VIEWS AS A CUSTOMER IN BUSINESS CENTRES DURING PANDEMIC SITUATION

The objectives of the study focuses on both customer and merchants. First of all, the customers are self-evaluated by asking questions about himself in general and views in the place of business centre during the lockdown for the pandemic situation. The distribution of data evidence that the respondents were gave truthful opinion about themselves.

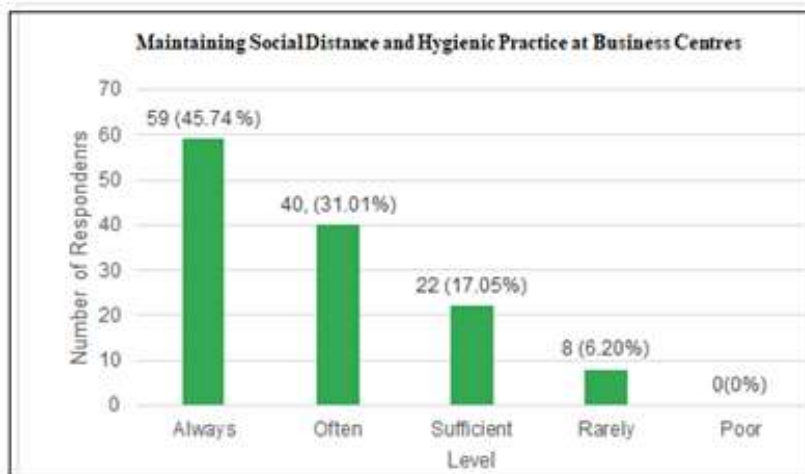
Table 5.1

Respondent's Views as a Customer in Business Centres During Pandemic Situation

S. No		Response (Number of Respondents)					Total
		Yes	No				
1	Going Out During Lockdown	95	34				129
2	Reason for Went Out	Office Work 19	To Purchase Household Things 78	Medical/ unavoidable Reasons 13	Office Work/ Emergency 17	Time pass 2	129
3	Following Pandemic Advice	Yes 127	No 2				129
4	Kind of Mask Using	Surgical Mask 32	Cotton Mask 56	N95 18	Handkerchief 23		129
5	Mentality When Going Outside	Normally 22	Tensed 12	More Carefully 95			129
6	Maintaining Social Distance and Hygienic Practice at Business Centres	Always 59	Often 40	Sufficient 22	Rarely 8	Poor 0	129
7	Duration of Return Home	Immediately will Return Home 123	Return after visiting friends or relatives house 3	Time pass with the merchant 3			129
8	Mode of Transport during Pandemic Situation	By Walk 44	By Bi-cycle 10	Motor Cycle 72	Car 3		129
9	Host with Whom When Going Out	Alone 96	Spouse 13	Parent 18	Children 2		129
10	Have the Habit of Cleaning Commodity Immediately Reached Home	Yes 114	No 15				129
11	Have the Habit of Physical Cleaning Immediately Reached Home	Yes 128	No 1				129
12	Will You follow Hygienic Practice after Lockdown over	Yes 125	No 4				129

Initially the Government authorities ordered that no one should come out without reasonable cause, everyone should 'stay home stay safe' is the moto of the lockdown. But some people are coming out knowingly or unknowingly then creates security and pandemic issues. Hence, in this study the respondents were asked whether they came out or not? The answer from the respondent are shocking because almost all the respondents were came out because of office work (14.73 per cent), to purchase necessary goods for house (60.47 per cent), for medical and unavoidable situation, for both office and emergency works (13.18 per cent) and for time pass (1.55 per cent). While questioning about masking face they replied that they are using surgical mask (24.81 per cent), cotton mask (43.41 per cent), N95 Mask 13.95 per cent) and handkerchief (17.83 per cent). It is identified that 17.05 per cent respondents in normal mindset, 9.30 per cent respondents are tensed and 76.64 per cent respondents are more careful when going outdoor.

It is awful to say that 59 (45.74 per cent) respondents only always following pandemic guideline when going outdoor *i.e.*, maintain social distancing and hygienic practice at business centres, remaining 40 (31.01 per cent) respondents are often following pandemic guidelines, 22 (17.05 per cent) respondents are following sufficient level of pandemic guidelines remaining eight (6.20 per cent) respondents are rarely following pandemic guidelines. The researcher feels comfort that no one in poor performance in maintaining social distancing and hygienic practice at outdoor. The researcher tries to know about the duration of return after the purchase over by the respondents and feel good with the outcome that 123 (95.35 per cent) respondents return their home immediately after purchase is over.



Most of the respondents (55.81 per cent) used motor cycle for transport during pandemic situation. It is gathered that 10.88 per cent respondents went outdoor along with their spouse, 13.95 per cent respondents went outdoor with their parent and 74.42 per cent respondents are went alone. It is unsafe that two (1.55 per cent) respondents are went along with children.

Out of 129 respondents, 15 (11.63 per cent) respondents are not having habit of cleaning commodity after reaching home. In the meantime only one (0.78 per cent) respondent don't have the habit of cleaning himself. One twenty-five (96.90 per cent) respondents assured that they will follow the social distancing and hygienic practices even after lockdown is over.

Considering respondents' self-evaluation few of them only lazy in following pandemic guidelines like not stay home, going out with children, no habit of physical cleaning and commodity cleaning.

At this juncture the methods followed for physical cleaning and cleaning the commodities are asked from the respondents. For both physical and commodity cleaning most of the respondents used water mixed with turmeric powder immediately reached home. Some respondents using water mixed with salt for cleaning commodities. Some other respondents using liquids like Dettol for physical cleaning. Hot water bath also followed by some respondents.

6.3. RESPONDENT'S PERCEPTION ON OTHER CUSTOMERS VISITED THE BUSINESS CENTRE

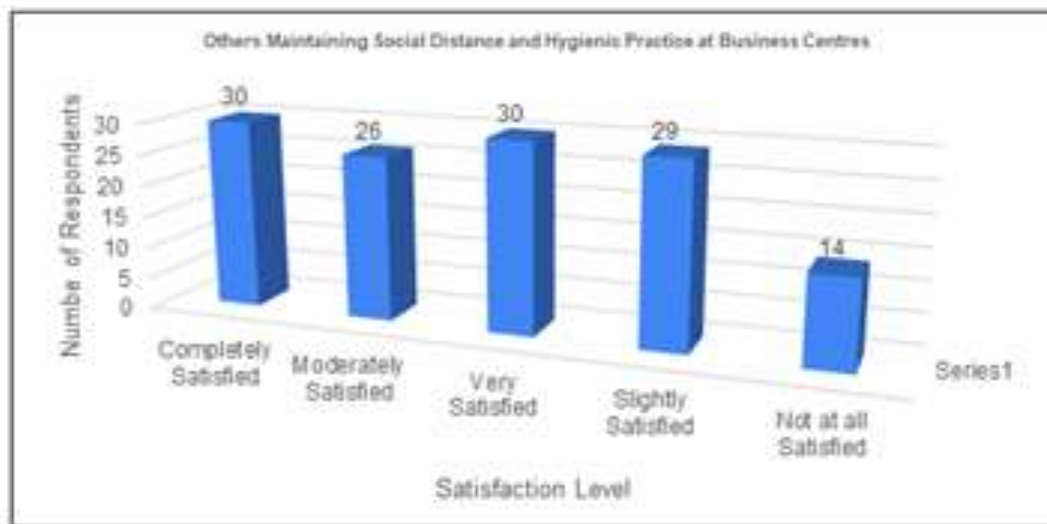
The opinion about other customers who were visited the business centre are gathered in the study.

Table 2

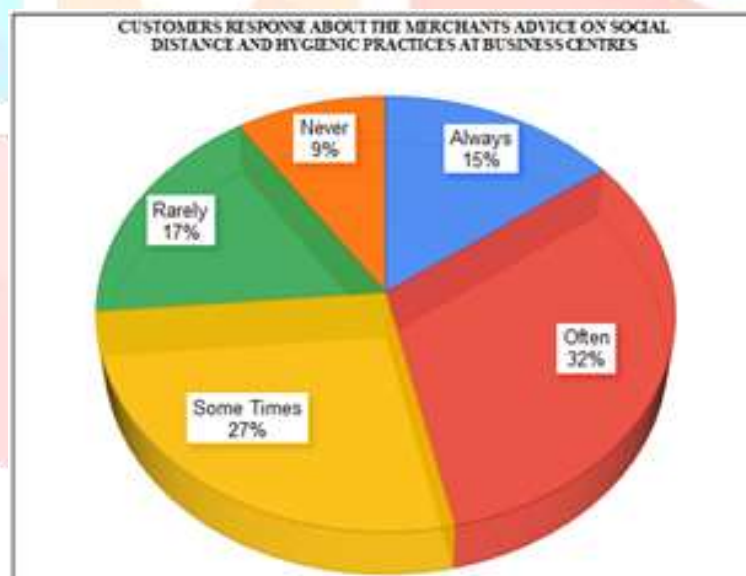
Respondent's Perception on Other Customers Visited the Business Centre

S. No.	Particulars	Opinion (Number of Respondents)					Total
		Completely Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Not at all Satisfied	
1	Others Maintaining Social Distance and Hygienic Practice at Business Centres	30	26	30	29	14	129
2	Customers Response about the Merchant's Advice on Social Distancing and Hygienic Practices at Business Centres	Always 19	Often 41	Some Times 35	Rarely 22	Never 12	129
3	Respondent's Reaction about the Customer who are not following Social Distancing and Hygienic Practices at Business Centres	Will Advise 78	I don't Need It 6	Appeal to the Owner 11	Keep Distance 34	-	129

Out of 129 respondents, 30 (23.26 per cent) respondents opined about the other customers that they are completely satisfied about pandemic guidelines *i.e.*, maintaining social distance and hygienic practices at out door and at business centre, 26 (20.16 per cent) respondents opined that other customers moderately satisfied. Another 30 (23.26 per cent) respondents are opined that other customers are very satisfied, 29 (22.48 per cent) respondents replied that the other customers are slightly satisfied and 14 (10.85 per cent) respondents answered that the other customers are not at all satisfied in following pandemic guidelines in the business centres.



Though the merchants are asked the customers to follow pandemic guidelines some of the customers are not responding properly. In this regard 19 (14.73 per cent) respondents opined that the other customers always obeying the pandemic advise of the merchants, 41 (31.78 per cent), 35 (27.13 per cent) and 22 (17.05 per cent) respondents opined that the other customers are often obeying, sometimes obeying and rarely obeying the advice of the merchants receptively. It is underprivileged to say that 12 (9.30 per cent) respondents opined that the other customers are never mind about the merchant's advice. Hence, it is suggested to create more awareness among people to follow the pandemic rules for not only safe them but also others in the society and around them.



At this juncture the researcher asked the respondents about their willingness to advise the people who are not following the social distancing and hygienic practices. Out of 129 respondents 78 (60.47 per cent) respondents replied that they often advise such kind of customers, 34 (26.36 per cent) respondents replied that they will keep distance from them, 11 (8.53 per cent) replied that they will appeal to the merchants and remaining six (4.65 per cent) replied they don't need to advise them.

Considering other customer's behavior some of the customers are not in the mind set of following social distancing and hygienic practices. They should be educated about the seriousness of pandemic diseases.

6.4. RESPONDENT'S PERCEPTION ON MERCHANTS OF BUSINESS CENTRES DURING PANDEMIC SITUATION

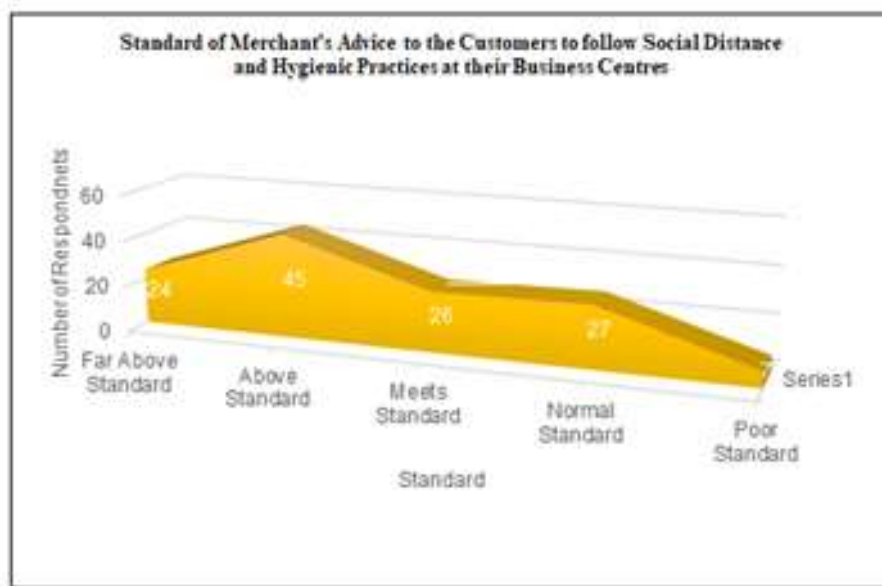
The main objective of this study is to understand the correlation between customers behavior and merchant attitude during pandemic situation. According the perception were gathered from the respondents about the merchants of the business centre visited during pandemic situation.

Table 3

Respondent's Perception on Merchants of Business Centres During Pandemic Situation

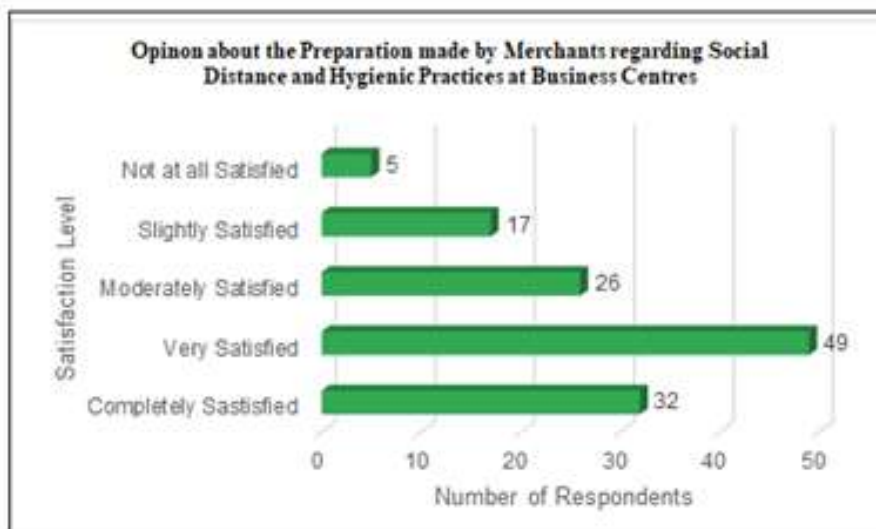
S. No.	Particulars	Opinion (Number of Respondents)					Total
		Far Above Standard	Above Standard	Meets Standard	Normal Standard	Poor Standard	
1	Standard of Merchant's Advice to the Customers to follow Social Distance and Hygienic Practices at their Business Centres	24	45	26	27	7	129
2	Opinion about the Preparation made by Merchants regarding Social Distance and Hygienic Practices at Business Centres	32	49	26	17	5	129
3	Do the Merchant Provides Sanitizer	83	46				129
4	Opinion about the Workers regarding Social Distance and Hygienic Practices at Business Centres	28	50	30	16	3	129
5	Opinion about Professional Ethics followed by the Merchant during Pandemic Situation	25	51	24	21	8	129

It is the responsiveness of the merchants to advice the customers to follow social distancing and hygienic practices at their business centre. The same is observed by the respondents. Out of 129 respondents 24 (18.60 per cent) respondents felt that the merchants are far above standard in following pandemic guidelines, 45 (34.88 per cent) respondents and opined that the merchants are above standard in advising pandemic guidelines, 26 (20.16 per cent) respondents opined that the merchants meets standard, 27 (20.93 per cent) respondents said that the merchants are in normal standard in advising pandemic guidelines and remaining seven (5.43 per cent) respondents felt bad to say that the merchants are poor standard is in advising pandemic guidelines.

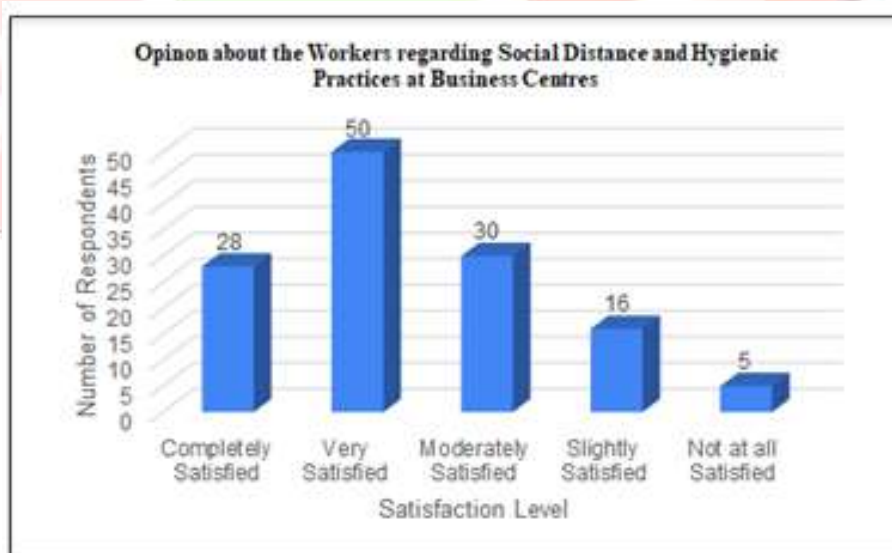


It is the duty of every merchant to make arrangements to safeguard their customers from the spread of diseases and hence the respondents asked to justify the preparations made by the merchants regarding social distancing and hygienic practices. Accordingly, out of 129 respondents, 32 (24.81 per cent) respondents said that the preparations made by the merchant is completely satisfied, 49 (37.98 per cent), 26 (20.16 per cent) and 17 (13.18

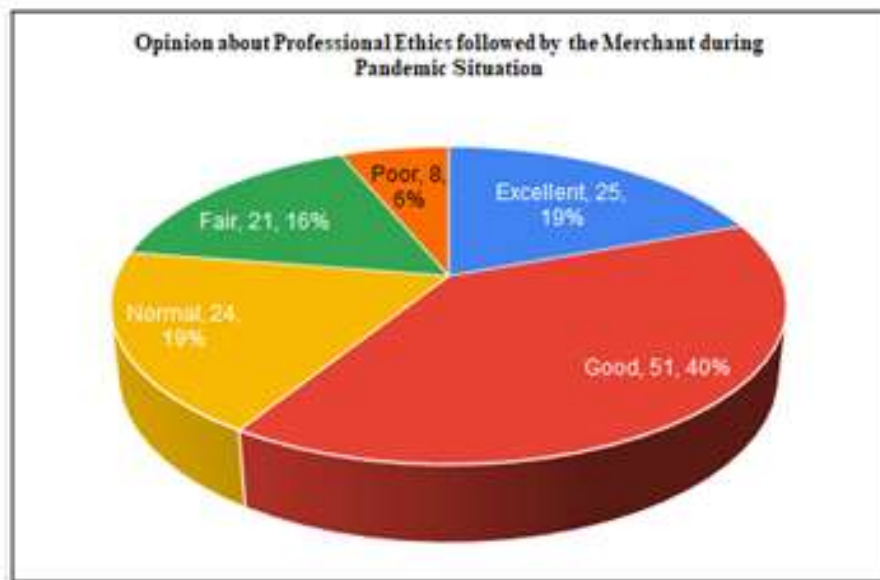
per cent) respondents supposed that the merchants are very satisfied, moderately satisfied and slightly satisfied respectively in making arrangements to safeguard the customers from pandemic diseases. Remaining five (3.88 per cent) respondents said that the merchants are not at all satisfied in such arrangements. Regarding provision of sanitizer before and after entering business centres, 83 (64.34 per cent) respondents consume the facility at the business centres and 46 (35.66 per cent) respondents are not consume the facility of sanitizer at business centres.



Workers in the business centres should follow the social distancing and hygienic practices at their work place for not only safeguard themselves but also for their customers safeguard. It is also the duty of the merchants to advise their workers to follow pandemic guidelines. The satisfaction level of the respondents in this regard is collected. Out of 129 respondents, 28 (21.71 per cent) respondents defend that the workers are completely satisfied in following social distancing and hygienic practices, 50 (38.76 per cent), 30 (23.26 per cent) and 16 (12.40 per cent) respondents defend that the workers are very satisfied, moderately satisfied and slightly satisfied respectively. Remaining five (3.88 per cent) defend that the workers are not at all satisfied in social distancing and hygienic practices.



Pandemic lockdown causes serious issues in economic conditions not only the families but also business. To compensate the economic losses some of businessmen adopt increasing price, supplying poor quality products and so on. This is not a good professional ethics. The respondents are justified the merchants regarding professional ethics, 25 (19.38 per cent) respondents justify that the merchants are excellent in following professional ethics, 51 (19.38 per cent), 24 (18.60 per cent) and 21 (16.28 per cent) respondents are justify that the merchants are good, normal and fair in following professional ethics during pandemic situation and only eight (6.20 per cent) respondents justify that the merchants are poor in professional ethics during pandemic situation.



Considering the respondents perception on merchants, almost all the merchants had prearranged facilities to maintaining social distancing and hygienic practices at their business centres. It shows their care on their customers.

6.5. HYPOTHESES TESTING

Based on above analysis the researcher raised two hypothetical statements and verify the same using chi-square test and the results are given below:

6.5.1. Hypothesis I

H₀: There is no significant association between merchants' pre-arrangements and customers' activity regarding social distancing and hygienic practices at business centres.

Chi-Square (χ^2) Test Result

Calculated Value	Table Value	Significant Level
79.133	26.296	5% level of Significance

It is clear from the table that the calculated value (79.133) is much higher than the table value (26.296). Hence, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we may conclude that there is high degree of responsibility for the merchants in arranging facilities to follow social distancing and hygienic practices in the business centre to get respectable result from the customer side.

6.5.2. Hypothesis II

H₀: There is no significant association between merchants' arrangements and respect towards advice of social distancing and hygienic practices at business centres.

Chi-Square (χ^2) Test Result

Calculated Value	Table Value	Significant Level
68.899	26.296	5% level of Significance

It is evident in the table that the calculated value (68.899) is much higher than the table value (26.296). hence, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we may conclude that there is high degree of necessity for the arrangements to facilitate social distancing and hygienic practices in the business centre and then only the customer will respond the advice of merchants regarding social distancing and hygienic practice.

7. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the survey the following suggestions were made:

- The statistical analysis clears that the prearrangements made for social distancing and hygienic practices automatically will create the mindset of every customer to follow the same. Hence, the merchants should ready to arrange sufficient facilities to get high degree of rappings from their customer.
- Merchants may often request social distancing and hygienic practices when every customer's entry to their business centre.
- Health authorities and health workers should have frequent visit to the business centres and take immediate actions on those who are not follow the pandemic guidelines without any compromise.
- Purchasing in local markets not only encourage the merchants but also safety to the customers which prevent them from unnecessary outdoor visits.
- Economist are suggested self-reliant is the way of overcome present economic situation. Hence, the households suggested to yield vegetables at kitchen garden or terrace garden. Further, it will prevent women from going outdoors for purchasing vegetables.
- The scientist suggested that this pandemic situation will continue even after lockdown over. Hence, the people should have more consciousness on prevention measures such as avoid unnecessary outdoor visits, take care of children as well as elder, consciousness on social distancing, wearing masks, personal hygienic and so on.
- If one feel physically not bad they should come forward for proper medical checkup, self-quarantines and follow medical advises.
- Keeping the environment in clean and hygienic will control the spread of pandemic diseases.
- Health authorities may conduct free health campaigns regarding pandemic diseases after lockdown over.
- A small appreciation will generate more motivation to every one accordingly the health authorities and health workers should be rewarded based on their achievements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am extremely grateful to **Dr. S. GANESAN.**, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Economics and Centre for Research, Ayya Nadar Janaki Ammal College (Autonomous), Sivakasi for his able guidance and suggestions to undertake this study. I express my heartfelt gratitude to the **MANAGEMENT** and the **PRINCIPAL** of the Vivekananda College, Tiruvedakam West, Madurai for their moral support to carry out this work. I am thankful to the **RESPONDENTS** and **GOOGLE FORMS** for enabled me to get a valuable dataset to finish the study.

REFERENCES

- ✓ Biljana Angelova and Jusuf Zekiri, (2011), “Measuring Customer Satisfaction with Service Quality Using American Customer Satisfaction Model (ACSI Model)” International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, Vol. 1, No. 3.
- ✓ Customer Satisfaction 4 BEST Ways to Keep a Customer Happy & Improve Customer Retention, <https://www.impactbnd.com/blog/the-importance-of-keeping-your-customers-happy>.
- ✓ Giese and Cote, “Defining Consumer Satisfaction”, Washington State University, Academy of Marketing Science Review Volume 2000 No. 1.
- ✓ Ha Thu Nguyen et al., (2018), “Determinants of Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in Vietnamese Life-Insurance Setting”, Sustainability 2018, 10, 1151.
- ✓ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/customer.asp>
- ✓ Karolina Ilieska, (2013), “Customer Satisfaction Index – as a Base for Strategic Marketing Management”, TEM Journal, 2(4), 327-331.
- ✓ Wadud Sharmin, (2012), “Customer satisfaction in business: A case study of Moon Travel LTD, Finland”, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Sharmin Wadud Degree Programme in Business Management Bachelor’s Thesis.

