

Psychological Empowerment, Emotional Intelligence, and Perceived Organizational Support: A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Service Performance in the Retail Sector

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ABSTRACT

In an era where service excellence is a strategic necessity, the psychological and organizational well-being of frontline employees is both realistic and highly desirable due to its direct impact on customer satisfaction. Their internal motivation and the support they receive from the organization make them well-positioned to act as the primary drivers for the long-term sustainability of the retail economy. The purpose of this study is to specifically bring out the significance of Psychological Empowerment (PE), Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) for encouraging superior Service Performance (SP) by blending the internal psychological traits of employees with the external support systems of the organization. The literature supports that these three elements are essential in ensuring an employee's success and supporting them as sustainable human capital for the growth of a retail enterprise. The study reveals that because of the distinctive nature of frontline roles, which require high emotional labor, these factors equally serve as a role model for service excellence and contribute immensely to the operational efficiency of major retail hubs. In keeping with this, the study proposes a conceptual model to understand the interrelationship between these variables and their collective impact on service delivery.

Keywords: Psychological Empowerment, Emotional Intelligence, Perceived Organisational Support, Service Performance, Retail Sector, Frontline Employees

INTRODUCTION

The retail industry in India has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fast-paced sectors, accounting for approximately 10% of the country's GDP and 8% of its total employment (IBEF, 2024). Despite fluctuations in the broader labor market noted by an unemployment rate of 7.1% in late 2023 (CMIE, 2023) the organized retail segment continues to expand, driven by rising consumer aspirations and urbanization. In this competitive landscape, the "service encounter" between the frontline employee and the customer is the primary point of value creation. Consequently, the quality of Service Performance (SP) is no longer merely an operational metric but a strategic necessity for organizational survival.

The modern service environment requires frontline staff to perform at high levels of efficiency while managing complex interpersonal dynamics. This creates a reliance on Human Capital, where individual psychological resources are as vital as physical infrastructure. Psychological Empowerment (PE), defined through the four-dimensional cognitions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, provides the motivational basis for employees to take initiative (Spreitzer, 1995). Simultaneously, because retail roles involve significant "emotional labor," Emotional Intelligence (EI) becomes a critical resource for managing interpersonal stress and ensuring service consistency (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

However, internal traits alone are insufficient without a supportive organizational climate. Based on Social Exchange Theory (Eisenberg et al. 1986), Perceived Organisational Support (POS) represents the employee's perception that the firm values their contribution and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986). A strong sense of POS creates a reciprocity norm, where employees feel a felt obligation to perform better. While previous research has explored these variables in isolation, there is a lack of a unified conceptual model that integrates PE, EI, and POS as concurrent predictors of Service Performance within the retail sector. This study seeks to bridge this gap by proposing a model that highlights how these three factors collectively drive service excellence (Heskett et al. 1994). Thus, by virtue of their intrinsic psychological resources and being grounded in the reciprocity of the workplace, frontline employees encompass the potential for service innovation that is realized through the synergy of empowerment and emotional resilience. Based on this overview, the study demonstrates the logical necessity of the relationship between individual psychological traits and organizational support, which in turn can induce superior service standards and operational efficiency in the retail sector. Therefore, this study aims to propose a conceptual framework for a high-performance service model that specifically links the roles of Psychological Empowerment, Emotional Intelligence, and Perceived Organisational Support with Service Performance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

Service excellence is a complex emerging priority that all sectors of the modern service economy are striving to achieve. Alhelalat et al. (2017) detailed that in the globalized marketplace, organizations must integrate psychological and organizational resources to effectively meet the rising expectations of consumers. According to the World Trade Organization (2023), "the service sector now represents the backbone of the global economy, accounting for over two-thirds of global GDP and providing the vast majority of jobs in developing and developed nations alike." Compared to other industries, the contribution of the organized retail sector to enhancing national service standards and providing high-touch consumer experiences is worth mentioning. Chen and Peng (2021) stated that since the retail sector's contributions are based on the direct interactions and psychological engagement of frontline staff, understanding their performance drivers is essential for institutional success. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is recognized as a fundamental determinant of performance in high-interaction service roles. Salovey and Mayer (1990) conceptualize EI as the ability to monitor and regulate feelings to guide thought and action. Recent evidence from the service sector indicates that EI significantly enhances an employee's ability to manage workplace stress and improve service quality. Meenaprabha et al. (2025), in their study on the banking industry, found that EI has a direct, significant impact on the overall quality of service provided to customers, suggesting that high emotional awareness is a prerequisite for service excellence. Furthermore, Goleman (1998) posits that for roles involving high customer interaction, EI is twice as critical as technical proficiency for achieving success. This is further supported by Kumar et al. (2025), whose research highlights that EI not only improves individual productivity but also serves as a key driver for employee engagement. In demanding service environments, Salameh-Ayanian et al. (2025) argue that the importance of EI in managers and staff becomes even more critical during turbulent times, as it allows them to maintain consistent performance despite external pressures. Additionally, research by Karimi et al. (2021) demonstrates that EI is a strong predictor of both employee well-being and the psychological empowerment of the staff, creating a holistic internal environment conducive to better performance. Lima et al. (2022) also emphasize that the management of EI in the workplace is directly linked to measurable improvements in employee output. This study, therefore, posits that when frontline staff accurately perceive and regulate customer emotions, they can effectively tailor service delivery to meet specific needs.

Psychological Empowerment (PE) represents a primary internal driver of service excellence. Following Spreitzer's (1995) multidimensional framework, PE enables employees to experience a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in their work roles. Recent longitudinal studies by Zhou and Wang (2026) confirm that empowerment leads to sustained work engagement, providing the long-term energy necessary for maintaining high-level performance in demanding service environments. The impact of PE is particularly pronounced in the retail and service industries. Juyumaya (2022) demonstrates that PE exerts a strong, direct positive impact on task performance, a relationship that is further sustained by increased self-efficacy and affective commitment among staff. Furthermore, Al-Hassani et al. (2024) highlight the role of PE in fostering "proactive workplace performance," suggesting that empowered employees do not just follow scripts but actively seek to improve service delivery. In a broader organizational context,

Afzali et al. (2014) link PE with organizational learning, noting that when employees feel psychologically empowered, they are more likely to utilize organizational resources effectively to improve job performance. This is supported by Chiang and Hsieh (2012), whose comparative analysis reveals that an employee's internal psychological state often holds a stronger direct influence on job performance than external organizational support alone. Consequently, this study posits that PE serves as a critical internal mechanism that transforms individual motivation into measurable service outcomes. Psychological Empowerment (PE) represents a primary internal driver of service excellence. Following Spreitzer's (1995) multidimensional framework, PE enables employees to experience a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in their work roles. Recent longitudinal studies by Zhou and Wang (2026) confirm that empowerment leads to sustained work engagement, providing the long-term energy necessary for maintaining high-level performance in demanding service environments.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) reflects the employee's belief regarding the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), POS fosters a "reciprocity norm," where employees feel a psychological obligation to repay organizational care through enhanced job effort and loyalty. Empirical evidence from Chiang and Hsieh (2012) highlights that organizational support serves as a vital foundation for effective service delivery, as it directly influences an individual's willingness to go beyond their formal job descriptions. The impact of POS is particularly critical in service-heavy environments where emotional exhaustion is a risk. Kurtessis et al. (2017), in their comprehensive meta-analysis, found that POS is strongly related to favorable outcomes for both employees (e.g., increased job satisfaction and reduced stress) and organizations (e.g., increased performance and commitment). This is further supported by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), state that when employees perceive high support, they exhibit lower levels of burnout and a significantly higher commitment to quality service delivery. Furthermore, Ahmed and Nawaz (2015) demonstrate that POS acts as a primary catalyst for "Organizational Citizenship Behavior" (OCB), where employees engage in helpful, non-mandatory actions that improve the overall service environment. In the context of the retail sector, where frontline staff face constant pressure, Juyumaya (2022) notes that the presence of organizational support can moderate the relationship between internal psychological states and final task performance. Consequently, this study posits that POS provides the necessary environmental security that allows internal traits like Emotional Intelligence and Empowerment to translate into superior Service Performance (SP).

From the review of available literature, it is seen that the integration of individual psychological traits and organizational support focuses on Service Performance (SP) and ultimately leads to the organizational excellence of a nation by fostering employee engagement, providing high-quality service interactions, and serving the needs of the modern consumer. They contribute to service standards by providing meaningful work opportunities to the workforce, empowering them, and securing their professional well-being. They are uplifting frontline employees into the prolific human capital of the nation. So, it is possible to classify the synergy of Psychological Empowerment (PE) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a vehicle for the superior service delivery of the country. However, it is evident from the literature that management and other official authorities are giving more importance to technical training and standardized service scripts in the modern retail era, especially at the operational level. They undertake various steps and formulate policies mainly for improving transactional efficiency and give less importance to the psychological health of the staff, especially Perceived Organisational Support (POS). The non-technical sector of human resource management has been crucial in the development of service quality, which has enhanced consumer satisfaction and increased the sustainability of the retail industry. Empowered and emotionally intelligent employees can tap internal psychological resources and use them for productive purposes for the growth of the service sector. Even though there is a severe problem with service inconsistency and employee burnout in the retail industry, particularly among young frontline workers, the management did not place enough emphasis on the integrated role of PE, EI, and POS as a source of high-performance service delivery, utilizing the locally available human resources for the growth and development of the service regions, which ultimately leads to the economic progress of the nation as a whole. Current literature remains fragmented; one stream focuses on external support (POS), while another focuses on internal traits (EI or PE). However, in a high-pressure environment like retail, these factors do not act alone. There is a critical gap in understanding the **synergy** between all three. By proposing this integrated model, this study provides the first holistic view of how internal resources and external support combine to produce superior Service Performance.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is carried out with a view to proposing a conceptual framework that the retail sector might use to implement high-performance service standards through the synergy of psychological and organizational resources. The specific objectives of the study aim to provide theoretical support for the following: (i) how the internal emotional intelligence of frontline employees affects their service performance in high-interaction retail environments; (ii) how the degree of perceived organisational support provided by the firm influences service performance by creating a reciprocity-based work climate; (iii) how the psychological empowerment of the workforce encompassing meaning, competence, and impact supports the promotion of service excellence by enhancing employee autonomy; and (iv) how the integrated relationship between emotional intelligence, psychological empowerment, and perceived organisational support collectively determines the overall service performance of the organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is conceptual in nature, using the deductive approach of research. The data required were sourced from the existing literature to frame the proposed relationships between the variables considered for the study. A theoretical framework has been proposed in the present study, highlighting the role of the retail sector in promoting Service Performance (SP) by incorporating a synergistic model of internal and external drivers. The objectives are described here, explaining the relationships between the identified variables and the conceptual model proposed. In this framework, Emotional Intelligence (EI), Perceived Organisational Support (POS), and Psychological Empowerment (PE) are identified as the three core Independent Variables. One of the most imperative and peculiar features of this study is the integrated psychological work environment, which posits that service excellence is not the result of a single factor but the cumulative effect of these three distinct pillars. The effects of these independent variables on the promotion of Service Performance (SP) by retail employees are hypothesized and stated as propositions. By evaluating these factors together, the study describes how the alignment of an employee's internal traits and the organization's support systems ultimately determines the final service excellence.

CONCEPTUAL FORMULATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

Indeed, the organized retail sector is a type of high-interaction service environment that simultaneously focuses on generating economic value and superior customer experiences (Heskett et al., 1994). Retail organizations are primarily established in urban and semi-urban centers, where they draw on the regional labor force and contribute significantly to the creation of professional service opportunities and economic growth. According to Heskett et al.'s (1994) Service-Profit Chain Theory, business success is inextricably linked to employee satisfaction and productivity, which in turn drives service value. With this background in mind, retail firms operate as service providers by fulfilling the needs of a diverse consumer base, turning frontline interactions into potential competitive advantages for the nation by finding effective ways to solve customer service challenges. It is unanimously agreed that these interactions are formed to achieve multiple objectives. Parasuraman et al. (1988) argued that because of its high-contact nature, service delivery is intended to serve as a model for organizational excellence that promotes customer loyalty. Bowen and Lawler (1992) considered retail organizations to be capable of fostering service performance and sustainable growth because of their unique nature, reliance on human capital, and values based on the empowerment of their frontline staff. Due to its distinctive characteristics and the primacy of the "human element" in the service encounter, the retail sector is therefore seen as a critical driver of the service economy. It is considered a more resilient industry due to its adaptability, customer-centric nature, and the focus on "high-touch" over "high-tech" (Bitner, 1992; Gronroos, 1990). According to George (1990), service excellence can be distinguished from standard transactions by four factors: (i) employee-driven interactions; (ii) organizations that act with empathy; (iii) organizations that are performance-oriented; and (iv) organizations that foster psychological safety. According to Heskett and Sasser (2010), emotional intelligence, psychological empowerment, organizational support, leadership, and service climate are the primary sub-ideas that best describe high-performance service delivery. Hartline and Ferrell (1996) also agreed with these characteristics of service performance. But after weighing all of these factors, it turns out that Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Empowerment, and Perceived

Organisational Support are the most highly regarded characteristics of superior Service Performance (Goleman, 1998; Spreitzer, 1995; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

In order to develop solutions for the service concerns they intend to address, employees must possess emotional awareness, making it a critical component of high-performance service delivery (Goleman, 1998). According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence is “an inventive way” to realize the goals of interpersonal excellence. According to Mayer and Beltz (1998), emotionally intelligent individuals are thought of as service innovators who advocate for major behavioral change, inclusive service transformation, and philosophical change within the customer-staff dynamic. Mayer and Salovey (1997) also defined the concept of EI in the same way, emphasizing the capacity to reason about emotions to enhance thinking.

According to the established literature, three primary characteristics of emotionally intelligent individuals enable them to play a central role in many service innovations: (i) their perceptual nature, as they accurately identify the emotions of customers; (ii) their integrative nature, which allows for the use of emotions to facilitate diverse cognitive tasks and collaborative relationships; and (iii) their regulatory status, which ensures emotional stability during high-pressure service encounters with a clear professional purpose and significant organizational impact. So, emotional intelligence has been heavily stressed in the literature and conceptualized as a means of bringing about service transformation through effective problem-solving.

These observations stressed that the cornerstone of superior service delivery is emotional intelligence. In the context of retail, frontline staff aim to bring about positive change in the customer environment in which they operate. This is made possible by tapping their internal psychological resources in a productive manner to solve service-related problems. Inconsistency in service quality is the main problem faced by the customer-facing section in the retail industry. The way in which emotionally intelligent staff solve this problem is very sustainable in nature. Firstly, they identify the emotional cues, then manage the interaction effectively, and ultimately secure customer loyalty. Thus, they offer innovative solutions to the interpersonal problems faced by the organization. The factor that considers retail staff as a type of high-performance resource is the emotional intelligence provided by them. Thus, the following proposition is framed based on the relationship between these variables:

Research Proposition 1: Emotional intelligence exhibited by frontline retail employees significantly influences the service performance.

In order to develop solutions for the operational concerns they intend to address, employees must experience a sense of meaning, competence, and self-determination, making psychological empowerment (PE) a critical component of high-performance service delivery (Spreitzer, 1995). According to Juyumaya (2022), PE is “an inventive way” to realize the goals of task performance through increased self-efficacy and affective commitment. According to Al-Hassani et al. (2024), empowered employees are thought of as service innovators who advocate for major behavioral change, inclusive service transformation, and “proactive workplace performance” rather than merely following scripts. Zhou and Wang (2026) also defined the concept of empowerment in the same way, emphasizing that it provides the long-term energy necessary for maintaining high-level performance in demanding service environments.

According to the established literature, three primary characteristics of psychologically empowered individuals enable them to play a central role in many service innovations: (i) their emancipating nature, as they possess the autonomy to improve service delivery; (ii) their proactive nature, which allows for the mastery of complex work roles and creates opportunities for new collaborative relationships; and (iii) their impactful status, which ensures that their individual efforts result in significant organizational learning and performance (Afzali et al., 2014). So, psychological empowerment has been heavily stressed in the literature and conceptualized as a means of bringing about service transformation through the effective utilization of organizational resources.

These observations stressed that the cornerstone of superior service delivery is psychological empowerment. In the context of retail, frontline staff aim to bring about positive change in the service environment in which they operate. This is made possible by tapping their internal psychological resources in a productive manner to solve service-related problems. High-stress demands and “scripted” service delivery are the main problems faced by the frontline section in the retail industry. The way in which empowered staff solve this problem is very sustainable in nature. Firstly, they find meaning in their work, then maintain sustained work engagement, and ultimately secure high levels of service performance (Zhou & Wang, 2026). Thus, they offer innovative solutions to the performance problems faced by the organization. The factor that considers retail staff as a type of high-performance resource is the psychological empowerment provided to them. Thus, the following proposition is framed based on the relationship between these variables:

Research Proposition 2: Psychological empowerment provided to frontline retail employees significantly influences the service performance.

In order to develop solutions for the operational concerns they intend to address, organizations must value employee contributions and care about their well-being, making perceived organisational support (POS) a critical component of high-performance service delivery (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to Chiang and Hsieh (2012), POS is “an inventive way” to realize the goals of effective service delivery by influencing an individual’s willingness to go beyond their formal job descriptions. According to Ahmed and Nawaz (2015), supported employees are thought of as service innovators who advocate for major behavioral change, inclusive service transformation, and “Organizational Citizenship Behavior” (OCB) within the service environment. Kurtessis et al. (2017) also defined the concept of POS in the same way, emphasizing that it is strongly related to favorable outcomes for both the employee and the organization.

According to the established literature, three primary characteristics of supported organizational environments enable employees to play a central role in many service innovations: (i) their reciprocal nature, as they foster a “reciprocity norm” where employees feel a psychological obligation to repay organizational care; (ii) their secure nature, which allows for reduced stress and creates opportunities for new collaborative relationships (Kurtessis et al., 2017); and (iii) their catalytic status, which ensures that non-mandatory helpful actions result in significant organizational impact (Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015). So, perceived organisational support has been heavily stressed in the literature and conceptualized as a means of bringing about service transformation through the creation of a supportive work climate.

These observations stressed that the cornerstone of superior service delivery is perceived organisational support. In the context of retail, frontline staff aim to bring about positive change in the service environment in which they operate. This is made possible by tapping the organizational resources provided in a productive manner to solve service-related problems. Emotional exhaustion and high-pressure service demands are the main problems faced by the frontline section in the retail industry. The way in which organizational support solves this problem is very sustainable in nature. Firstly, they provide environmental security, then reduce employee burnout (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), and ultimately secure high levels of service performance. Thus, they offer innovative solutions to the turnover and performance problems faced by the organization. The factor that considers retail staff as a type of high-performance resource is the perceived organisational support provided to them. Thus, the following proposition is framed based on the relationship between these variables:

Research Proposition 3: Perceived organisational support provided by the retail firm significantly influences the service performance.

Conceptual framework:

The conceptual model proposed based on the above-stated research propositions is shown in Fig. 1.

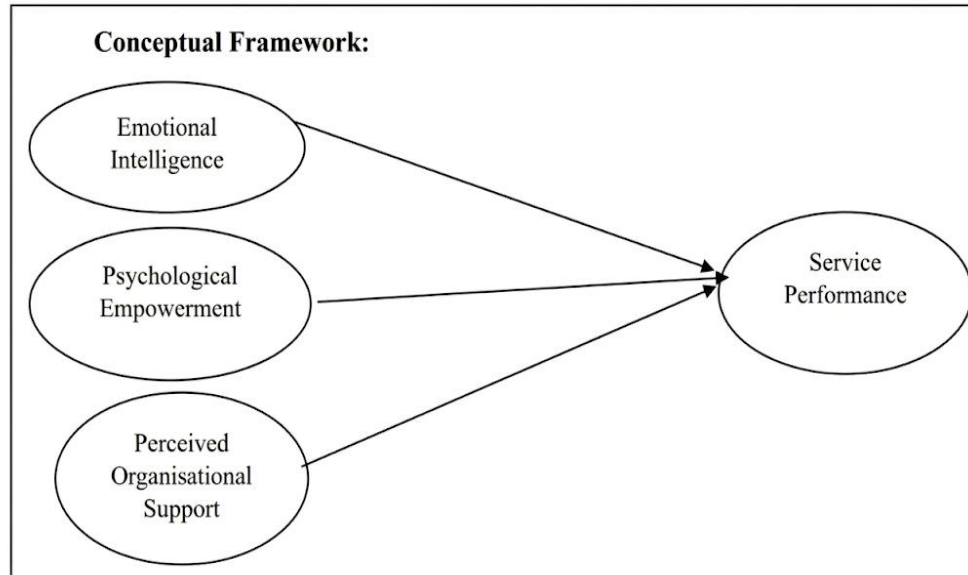


Fig 1: Conceptual Model

CONCLUSION

Organized retail firms act as guarantors of service excellence in urban and semi-urban areas by providing professional growth opportunities to their frontline employees. Even in times of market adversity and high consumer uncertainty, they are intended to satisfy the service needs of their customers through a resilient workforce. When individual employees can maintain high performance and emotional stability, their organizations, brand reputation, and consequently the service economy benefit most. The primary aim of superior service performance is organizational benefit through interpersonal innovation and the creation of social-professional value.

The distinctive characteristic of the retail sector is that it establishes itself as a high-performance service enterprise using human-centric models that focus on employee psychological states and have a direct impact on customer satisfaction. Hence, retail organizations occupy an essential part in the sustainable development of the economy due to their inclination in the service environment to address interpersonal problems that others overlook or cannot handle as efficiently or effectively as a psychologically-supported enterprise. Due to their distinctive nature, represented in the integration of Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Empowerment, and Perceived Organisational Support, frontline interactions serve as a model for service excellence and contribute to the nation's economic development beyond mere transaction completion.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the present study, after reviewing the available literature, an attempt has been made to formulate a conceptual model linking the role of Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Empowerment, and Perceived Organisational Support in promoting Service Performance. This model has been conceptually framed and supported by existing research, yet it requires broader empirical validation. Hence, based on the conceptual research model proposed here, it is suggested to carry out further studies collecting primary data from frontline retail employees specifically those in high-interaction

environments to empirically test and validate the research propositions. Such future studies could utilize structural equation modeling (SEM) to confirm the strength of these relationships across different service sub-sectors.

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