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## **CUSTOMER SERVICES IN APPAREL RETAILING: PERCEPTIONS OF RETAILERS AND ELDERLY CONSUMERS**

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The purpose of this research was to compare retailers' and elderly consumers' perceptions of the importance of various customer services offered by apparel retailers. A self-administered questionnaire, using a 22-item, modified version of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1994) SERVQUAL to assess perceptions of customer services, was constructed and pretested for this descriptive survey. Results were concluded from a random sample of elderly consumers and apparel retailers in the State of Texas. Both retailer and elderly consumers reported moderate to high levels of importance for all service items. "Providing services as promised" was rated very high by both retailers and elderly consumers while "having operating hours convenient to all" was the service considered least important. The scale items were also factored into five groups: reliability, tangibles, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. All factors were considered important; however, retailers perceived responsiveness to be the most important factor while elderly consumers perceived reliability to be most important. The order of importance of the factors between the two groups was substantially different, most notable with the factor labeled "responsiveness." When trying to attract mature customers, a fundamental understanding of the most important services, such as providing services as promised, should be encouraged as the industry adjusts its retail environment and plans its service strategy.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1994). Alternative scales for measuring service quality: A comparative assessment based on psychometric and diagnostic criteria. Journal of Retailing 70(3), 201-230.