

Furniture, department stores 'bug buyers most'

Among retail sectors, they suffer biggest dip in satisfaction: Study

By CHERYL FAITH WEE

CUSTOMER satisfaction in furniture and department stores has fallen by about 10 per cent since last year, research released yesterday claims.

The Singapore Management University's Institute of Service Excellence (ISES) looked at department stores such as Takashimaya, Robinsons and Mustafa, as well as hundreds of furniture stores.

The two categories saw the

biggest decline in eight retail sectors, which include supermarkets, petrol stations, vehicles, fashion apparel, jewellery, and clocks and watches.

Overall, customer satisfaction dropped by 3.5 per cent.

The ISES studied areas such as customer expectations, and product and service quality. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with more than 9,000 Singapore residents and tourists during the first quarter of this year.

Overall, locals and tourists

were more satisfied with service quality this year.

However, more locals also said that product quality - which includes the variety of brands on offer - had failed to meet their expectations.

ISES director Caroline Lim said: "The retail landscape is evolving. Department stores compete with online retailers. Customers expect a greater variety of brands and better price points."

For department stores, customer satisfaction decreased by about 9 per cent, compared with last year. For furniture stores, it fell by 11 per cent.

The manpower crunch may

also have contributed, said a spokesman for the Singapore Furniture Association.

Delivery times could be longer due to the lack of staff.

He also said misleading advertising and promotion could be to blame, but added that customers have a responsibility to ensure that they are satisfied with a product before they purchase it.

"Retailers should try to minimise miscommunication and not disguise the quality of their products," he said. "But customers also have to be more discerning."

He suggested they shop around and compare prices of furniture before buying.

Civil servant Joan Woo, 25, who bought an item from a major furniture store last year, said: "I did not expect very much because of the low price. But it has been only a year and its legs seem to be falling off. It would have been nice if it had lasted longer."

The study found that in department stores, the least satisfied group of customers spent an average of \$1,049 a year, while the most satisfied spent \$1,294.

Said Ms Lim: "The difference in revenue should be a strong reason for retailers to pay attention to declining satisfaction."

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