

Emotional Determinants of Retail Customer Experience

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ABSTRACT

Emotions play a key role in shaping the experience of a customer in a retail store in all the successive stages of shopping leading to pleasurable moments. A positive retail customer experience contributes to retail performance in terms of duration of stay, satisfaction, increased sale, store image, loyalty, and many other beneficial responses for the retailer. The present study is focussed on the emotional determinants of retail customer experience. The study is grounded in the theories of emotional satisfaction and builds on the earlier work done in this area. This study is based on a survey of customers adopting mall intercept technique. It is found that the emotional determinants of retail customer experience are grouped into nine factors ranging from staff, personalisation, ambience, and aesthetics to its window shopping appeal. They can be suitably managed by using carefully selected retail elements. The present study contributes significantly in providing an insight into the factors leading to emotional experience of customers in the retail store and brings out important implications for retailers in terms of creating positive retail customer experience.

Keyword: Emotions, Retail, Customer Experience, Shopping, Retail Environment

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are regarded as a powerful driving force in consumer decision making. Customers derive a great amount of pleasure when they are emotionally touched. Stores use a variety of innovative ways to arouse customers' emotions and satisfy them. The focus of retailing is shifting from mere transactions to providing shopping experiences. Terblanche and Boshoff (2001) defined retail customer experience as all the elements that encourage or inhibit customers during their contact with a retailer. Customers engage themselves into a variety of activities while selecting a retail store, shopping and post shopping stages, leading to a complete experience determining their satisfaction levels and repeat visits. Customer satisfaction is regarded as primary determining factor for repeat shopping and purchase behaviour. The greater the degree to which the customer experiences satisfaction with a retailer, greater would be the probability to revisit (Wong & Shoal, 2003). Customer experience in the retail stores may be interesting, involving, absorbing, entertaining, satisfying, different, pleasurable, memorable, or beyond expectations. These experiences also reshape the expectations and influence future purchase behaviour.

Positive customer experience has been found to be related with longer duration of stay, increased spend on different products, feeling to visit again and recommend to other customers.

Shopping in modern retail stores is essentially a sensory and emotional experience which attempts to engage, entertain, involve, and absorb the customers through all five senses. Music, lights, colours, displays, fragrances, soft and cozy ambience, and many more elements shape up shoppers mood and behaviour. Colours, lighting, music, arrangements, ambient scents, and layout influence consumer responses in a variety of ways. The right sensory stimuli, if applied appropriately, can calm, relax, de-stress, energise, improve mood, influence decision-making and the propensity to spend (Soars, 2009). Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Voss (2002) proposed a conceptual model describing the effect of store environment dimensions – design, social and ambient, on consumer decision making. The model explains that store environmental dimensions influence consumer's perception of store choice criteria – namely interpersonal service quality, shopping experience costs and merchandise value (mediated through perceived quality, price and shopping experience costs), and these perceptions, in turn, affect store patronage intentions.

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They found that design cues have a strong influence on shopping experience costs – time/effort cost and psychic cost. Creating a superior in-store shopping experience is critical, and could provide competitive weapon for brick and mortar retailers in the face of growing competition from online retailers.

The customer's retailing experience consists of a series of elements - (a) related to actual functioning of retail (logical dimension – price, merchandise, service etc.) and (b) emotional dimension involving five senses and the environment (Knee, 2002). The present study focuses on the emotional dimension of customer experience in the retail stores. Emotions are defined as “a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisal of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and the person having it” (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999). Dubé-Rioux (1990) observed that the affective reports of customers are highly predictive of level of satisfaction and may be more predictive of level of satisfaction than are cognitive evaluations. It was further observed that affective evaluations also play an important role in the level of satisfaction experienced by customers in their encounter with retailers. It has been found that negative emotion decreases, whereas, positive emotion increases the customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1994). Swinyard (1993) found that mood, involvement and shopping experience have significant effects on shopping intentions. It was further reported that mood and involvement interact to affect shopping experiences, and shopping experience has a significant effect on shopping intentions. Customers having good shopping experience had significantly more favourable shopping intentions than those with bad shopping experiences. It was also found that shopping experience also has a significant effect on the mood.

Donovan, Rossiter, Marcolyn and Nesdale (1994) reported that emotional responses induced by the store environment can affect the time and money that consumers spend in the store. Shoppers' emotional states within the store predict actual purchase behaviour – not just attitudes or intentions. Pleasure induced by store environments appears to be a strong cause of consumers spending extra time in the store and spending more money

than intended. Consumers draw emotional benefits in part from the important values and themes that define and give meaning to their lives. Pullman and Gross (2004) found that experience design aim at creating emotional connection with the customers through careful planning of tangible and intangible elements in physical and relational contexts. The experience designs are primarily concerned with (1) the affective or emotional nature of customer reactions to the service design and encounter, and (2) the connection between these affective states and loyalty behaviours. Their study found that design elements and loyalty behaviour are strongly mediated by eliciting emotional responses. Healy, Beverland, Oppewal and Sands (2007) found that the retail experience is an emotional labyrinth in addition to being a physical store layout. The combinations of static and dynamic elements supply a rich tapestry of hedonic activity, which provides customers with rich emotional benefits. Berry and Carbone (2007) explained that emotional connectivity with customers de-commoditises a business, helps elevate a brand beyond price and features a higher level of meaning and commitment for customers. Bagdare and Jain (2013) found that retail customer experience is expressed as joy, mood, leisure and distinctiveness. The review of related literature firmly establishes that different elements present in the retail store determine emotional responses of customers, which in turn shapes the customer experience.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to explore the emotional determinants of Retail Customer Experience.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used for the present study. Survey research technique was adopted to obtain the responses. The data was collected with the help of a scale to measure customers' responses about retail store elements leading to emotional responses of the customers. The responses were obtained on a five point Likert type scale anchored as “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. This scale was aimed at identifying factors leading to emotional processing in the retail context for shopping decisions resulting into positive

customer experience, and had a total of 26 items. The data was collected from four different locations in the city of Indore (India) using mall intercept survey. A total of 708 valid responses were obtained after removing incomplete responses and outliers. The data was analysed using exploratory factor analysis for analyzing structural composition of emotional determinants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were first checked for sampling adequacy through Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and for significance using Bartlett test of Sphericity. It was later analysed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation rotation method. Four items with low communalities cross loadings and low factor loadings were removed from the original scale. EFA resulted into nine factor structure of Emotional Determinants with acceptable range of factor loadings. All the factors have been labelled as per their constituent elements and description available in the literature. The scale reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha with the value .863. Factor loadings and respective variance are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The total variance of these factors is 64.571%.

The factors of emotional determinants of retail customer experience are discussed as under:

1. Store Staff,
2. Personalisation,
3. Sensory appeal,
4. Store Design,
5. Store ambience,
6. Customer engagement,
7. Store aesthetics,
8. Customer delight,
9. Window shopping.

Store Staff

This factor has a variance of 8.696% and is composed of four elements – staff members have pleasant physical appearance (.773), customers are served with smile (.728), staff is smartly dressed up (.648), and friendliness (.621). Customers like to meet good looking, smart

store staff who treats them in a nice and courteous manner. Appearance, dress, gestures and attitude of the store staff make a major impact on the shopping mood and experience. Customers feel that the store has taken efforts for customer care, support and courtesy. Quality and performance of store staff has been reported to be one of the important dimension of retail store (Sinha & Banerjee, 2004; Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder & Lueg, 2005; Hart, Farrell, Stachow, Reed & Cadogan, 2007; Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros & Schlesinger, 2009). Poor performance of store staff may cause serious damages to customer experience in the retail store.

Personalisation

This factor has a variance of 8.226% and is composed of three elements – greetings on special occasions (.787), personalised services (.749), and special incentives to regular customers (.640). Retailers make efforts to build an emotional bond with customers by way of personalisation. Sending cards or messages, making calls to greet, personalising by using the first name of customer or adapting the services as liked by them, offering discounts and special privileges to regular customers are widely used in organized retailing to give them a special status and retention. Berry (1983) and Berry and Gresham (1986) opined that personal attention, treating the customer as client, individualizing services, tailoring it, adding a touch of grace, making the client feel special is the heart and soul of relationship retailing.

Sensory Appeal

This factor has a variance of 8.105% and is composed of three elements – background music (.778), theme decor (.698), and pleasant fragrance (.634). Retailers arouse emotionally by engaging the customers through sensorial experience using relevant clues. The effect of music, visual appeal and fragrance on retail customer experience has been studied extensively (Chebat & Michon, 2003; Soars, 2009). Literature on effect of background music clearly and firmly establishes the fact that the presence of music stimulus influences the shopping experience in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses in terms of attitudes and perceptions, time and money spend, and mood and feelings, in retail settings (Milliman, 1982, 1986; Oakes, 2000; Yalch & Spengenberg, 2000). It is a powerful invisible force that surrounds shoppers even

if they do not pay deliberate attention, it interacts with them effortlessly. Appropriate music engages, entertains, energises refreshes, involves and creates a pleasurable memorable experience for the shoppers, and has a direct impact on shopping experience by influencing the purchase needs, overall affective evaluations, and service evaluations (Herrington & Capella, 1994, 1996).

Store Design

This factor has a variance of 7.490% and is composed of four elements – warm welcome to the customer (.677), store image and customers' lifestyle (.669), interior design (.663), and colour scheme (.555). Associating store design with the customers' lifestyle is essential specifically in the case of leisure or personal lifestyle stores. Such stores heavily rely on hedonic value derived through emotional engagement. They place greater importance on the entertainment value, the ambience, design, visual merchandise and other peripheral facilities (Sinha & Banerjee, 2004). The design of the store is largely based on contemporary themes related to fashion and current trends in the market. It not only creates and enhances store image, but also make the customers feel themselves associated with the store brand and offerings. Warm welcome by the staff members further makes the customers feel special and important, and connect emotionally. Use of bright and attractive colours or any other colour scheme related to the likings of the target customers makes significant impact on their moods and behaviour. It has been reported that a limited colour pallet was more effective in drawing participants to products and enhancing enjoyment than using a wide range of colours (Ballantine, Jack & Parsons, 2010).

Store Ambience

This factor has a variance of 6.993% and is composed of three elements – adequate lighting (.840), quality of air (.771), and attractive and appealing entrance (.569). Ambience has been reported as an important factor influencing customer experience by creating a pleasant feeling (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1993; Smith & Burns, 1996; Babin & Attaway, 2000; Bitner, 1992; Michon, Yu, Smith & Chebat, 2007). Lifestyle stores tend to attract shoppers on the bases if ambience of the store. The shoppers want a comfortable store, as they tend to stay for longer on each visit. The lighting and attractive decors

of the store are important factors affecting store choice (Sinha & Banerjee, 2004). The appropriate use of lighting, such as product spotlighting and dim ambient lighting was found effective in establishing a playful mentality for enhancing enjoyment (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010).

Customer Engagement

This factor has a variance of 6.934% and is composed of three elements – stylish store (.720), in-store entertainment (.685), and suggestions are valued (.622). Modern lifestyle stores are known for style, elegance and multisensory appeals. The style of the store gives it a unique image and helps the customer in associating themselves with the store. Entertaining shopping experience is found to result in retail patronage behaviour (Ibrahim & Wee, 2002). A large number of retail stores organize a variety of live events such as games, musical performances, fashion shows, contests etc. Recorded audio-visual on digital media using large screens also keeps the customer engaged by setting the mood, and relaxing and refreshing them. In certain cases customer participation in the events further enhances the customer engagement.

Store Aesthetics

This factor has a variance of 6.545% and is composed of two elements – beautiful store interiors (.836), and designer fixtures and furnishings (.811). Aesthetics play a key role in sustaining the interest and involvement of the retail customers. It deals with artistic, design and beautification related dimensions of visual appeal. Retail atmospherics, composed of both tangible elements (the building, carpeting, fixtures, point-of-purchase decorations) and intangible elements (colours, music, temperature, scents) comprise service experiences (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997; Hoffman & Turley, 2002). Aesthetically appealing atmospheres enhances hedonic appeal and create a feeling of pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Creating a themed atmospherics or using experience designers is becoming a common practice in experience retail stores to create a pleasurable feeling among shoppers.

Customer Delight

This factor has a variance of 6.500% and is composed of three elements – events on special occasions (.816),

Table 1: Total Variance Explained

<i>Component</i>	<i>Initial Eigenvalues</i>			<i>Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Variance</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Variance</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
1	5.943	22.856	22.856	2.261	8.696	8.696
2	1.893	7.282	30.138	2.139	8.226	16.922
3	1.657	6.371	36.509	2.107	8.105	25.027
4	1.582	6.083	42.592	1.948	7.490	32.517
5	1.293	4.975	47.567	1.818	6.993	39.510
6	1.189	4.572	52.139	1.803	6.934	46.444
7	1.131	4.352	56.491	1.702	6.545	52.990
8	1.091	4.196	60.687	1.690	6.500	59.489
9	1.010	3.883	64.571	1.321	5.081	64.571

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrixa

<i>Retail Store Elements</i>	<i>Component</i>								
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>
Pleasant physical appearance of Staff	.773								
Customers are serviced with a smile	.728								
Staff members wear smart dress	.648								
Staff members are friendly	.621								
Greetings on special occasions		.787							
Personalized services are offered		.749							
Special privileges to regular customers		.670							
Background music is soothing.			.778						
Theme décor			.698						
Use of pleasant fragrance			.634						
Warm welcome to the customers				.677					
Match with the lifestyle of customers				.669					
Store's interior design				.663					
Colour scheme of the Store				.555					
Store has adequate lighting					.840				
Quality of air is pleasant					.771				
Entrance is attractive and appealing					.569				
Store is stylish						.720			
In-store entertainment						.685			
Suggestions are valued						.622			
Beautiful store interiors							.836		
Designer fixtures and furnishings							.811		
Events on special occasions								.816	
Visual displays are refreshed								.656	
Surprise elements for customers								.585	
Good place for window-shopping									.745

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

refreshing visual displays (.656), and surprise elements for customers (.585). Merely keeping the customer satisfied with the performance is not a sufficient condition for customer retention. It has been observed that delighted customers stay longer with the organisation. Increasing the satisfaction levels help the retailers in improving long term profitability. Customer delight leads to customer loyalty (Reichheld, 1993). Customer delight is associated with arousal of positive emotions such as joy and surprise or being happy, glad and cheerful (Plutchik, 1980; Richins, 1997). It has been observed that any event on special occasions such as National Days, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Friendship Day, Valentine's Day, or festivals not only attracts a large amount of customers, but also delight them through entertainment and exciting promotional offers.

Window Shopping

This factor has a variance of 5.081% and is composed of only one element – good place for window shopping (.745). Browsing is a major part of the shopping experience. The arrangement of merchandise; quality, variety, designs, and newness; accessibility to touch and feel the product, makes the lifestyle store an attractive places for window shopping. It provides an opportunity to the retailer to make the customer spend some time in exploring the merchandise and match with their requirement and preferences. Window shopping often results into impulse purchase owing to its sensory appeal. Visual display of promotional material in the form of flyers, posters, danglers, banners, cut-outs, stickers, decorations using traditional or digital media not only reinforces the messages and appeal but also a major attraction at point of purchase (Gijbrecchts, Campo & Goossens, 2003; Grewal, Levy & Kumar, 2009). It has also been found that use of promotional material increases immediate sales through immediate attention and impulse purchase.

CONCLUSION

Retail customer experience describes pleasurable and memorable moments in the life of a shopper. Emotions are an integral part of the joy of shopping. Emotional determinants of retail customer experience have emerged as a set of nine factors represented by 26 retail store elements. They combine to arouse the emotions of shoppers in the store with a variety of tangible and

intangible elements including staff, personalisation, ambience, aesthetics and many more. Use of right set of retail elements results in a positive customer experience. They largely deliver hedonic benefits to shoppers. The present study significantly contributes by identifying an important set of retail elements which govern emotions in retail customer experience. In the light of research findings retailers can design their retail environment to engage, involve and delight their customers.

FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The present study was focused only on emotional determinants of retail customer experience. In a similar manner a set of rational determinants can also be explored and studied. Generalisation of results requires more studies of cross – sectional and cross – cultural nature for validation purposes. There is enough scope to ascertain the combined effect of rational and emotional determinants. Moderating effect of customer characteristics, store profile and other situational factors can also be studied.

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