

Moderating effect of price discounts on switching intentions of satisfied customers

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Abstract The paper looks into the determinants of switching intentions and attempts to answer why satisfied customer switch and do not maintain the relationship with current store. The study observes retail service quality as an important determinant to shape up the customer satisfaction. The paper investigate that which dimension of retail service quality scale has significant influence on customer satisfaction and switching intention to enhance the relationship and to reduce termination of relationship of customer with hypermarket to implement service quality correctly. This conceptual paper recommends price discounts has significant effect on customer satisfaction and switching intentions link.

Keywords –Retail service quality, Retail customers, Hypermarket, Switching

Paper type --Conceptual paper

I. Introduction

Retailing is largely intangible [37] and through retail experience, consumers deal with a combination of products and services in supermarkets. The inclusion of service factor in supermarket experience makes it difficult for consumers to make judgments about the quality of retail experience until they truly get involved in it through encounter. Customers evaluate the quality of service while comparing their expectations of service with the service which they receive actually in service encounter [20]. The overall service quality of retail outlet is decided based on two major factors; product quality and service quality. Services offered by hypermarkets is the determinant of success of store [60] and service quality is considered as key factor to customer value [5]. To survive in competitive conditions, firms should look for the ways how to increase the service quality [51]. In this way service quality is taken into account as significant factor for survival and to sustain competitive advantage in the presence of identical and easily imitated products.

Switching intention of consumer is sought as main issue of retailing due to its negative effects on market share and profitability of retail outlet. Now firms need to know the factors which contribute to choose another outlet and customer changes its patronage elsewhere. For this reason, it

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is very important for firm to understand the reasons of consumer switching to generate zero defection culture [62] and to maintain their long lasting relationship with customers. There is a positive and significant relationship between service quality and switching intentions which indicates the higher deficient service quality, the higher switching intention [85]. Research in retail marketing shows the positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction where retail service quality greatly influences customer satisfaction [79]. [14] said that only satisfied customers are not enough, there is a need to have extremely satisfied customers. Customer satisfaction is negatively associated with customer intentions to switch [58]. Prior studies tried to explain the phenomenon of switching intention through various models but their results cannot be generalized [55; 62] and have limited scope of application in different settings [85]. The above-mentioned discussion, collectively, propose that predicting and controlling the existing consumers' purchasing behaviors is a complicated phenomenon. The review of literature does not show the existence of any one-size-fits-all model of assessment of consumers' purchasing behaviors in the context of hypermarket. Since effective assessment of hypermarket consumers' purchasing behaviors, particularly in term of switching intention entails incorporating and measuring several cognitive and environmental variables, and even some cultural determinants, it is safe to infer that any research method/model designed for analyzing the hypermarket consumers satisfaction in terms of switch intentions should be designed in a way to be able to address any contextual particularities of the target groups, which for example are consumers of hypermarkets/supermarkets in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The general purpose of this research is to redesign an alternative a model in retail setting of Saudi Arabia which can examine the impact of retail service quality, customer satisfaction on switching intentions in the presence of newly introduced moderator as price discount.

II. Literature review

A. Retail Service Quality

According to a definition provided by [17] service quality is conformance of customer's expectations in the process of service encounters. The role of service quality in retail outlets cannot be compared with pure service or product oriented companies due to the unique nature of

retail organizations which offer a combination of goods and services [32] and service quality cannot be measured in the same way as in service industries. [23] proposed hierarchical factor structure to measure retail service quality comprising of five basic dimensions: (1) physical aspects; (2) reliability; (3) personal interaction; (4) problem solving; and (5) policy.

Service quality has become the most important factor to success of retail business and considered as an antecedent of customer satisfaction [9; 47]. Moreover customer satisfaction is considered a consequence of service quality [70]. In today's intense competition, customer is well informed, more demanding and expects service quality apart from product quality [53] so retailers are required to understand the concept of service quality in order to satisfy the needs and wants [49]. Service quality has direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction [61; 83] which subsequently produces high revenues, higher customer retention [10] through repeat purchasing behavior [22]. It is generally believed that higher levels of service quality lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction [66] which indicates significant effectiveness of the retailers' performance [52]. Excellent service quality contributes in increased customer base and value through retention of satisfied customers [86; 15]. High service quality not only attracts new customers but retains existing customers and also attracts the customers of low service quality provider [6].

B. Customer satisfaction

Satisfaction is the customer's response which indicates the level of fulfillment in terms of how pleasant or unpleasant the experience was [65].

Expectation – disconfirmation theory suggests that customer's satisfaction depends upon the difference between performance and customer's initial expectations [80]. In this way satisfaction/dissatisfaction is a result of comparison of performance of product/service with prior expectations of the customer. There are three possible results of comparison. Positive disconfirmation occurs when a customer perceives performance better than his initial expectations [3] and becomes delighted. Zero disconfirmation takes place when performance is equal to prior expectations of customer leaving him satisfied. Finally, negative disconfirmation arises when performance is lower than expected performance [3] and results in dissatisfied customers.

C. Switching Intentions

Consumer switching is the migration of consumers from one service to another [69]. Switching intention is the signal of termination of customer's relationship with current service provider partially or fully. Partial switching allows customer to keep relationship with existing firm while

adopting new behaviors [80]. Although it may be reasonable to assume that customers can be influenced to switch service providers by a single critical incident, many researchers suggest that defection may also occur from multiple problems encountered over time [44]. Extensive research shows that price and service failure [36] and consumers' perceptions about alternative attractiveness and satisfaction could be deciding factors for consumers to switch [4].

High service quality motivates customers to have strong and long lasting relationship with firm [43] whereas in case of low level of service quality affects customer intention to exit the relationship or switch [4]. It is evident through researches [29] that low service quality make few dissatisfied customers to complain but they might not switch but many dis-satisfied customers will likely to switch to other firm without complaining and will be a source of negative word of mouth. [54] says that customer satisfaction is influenced by the level of service quality through emotional and economic factors. [68] found that high switching activity can be seen in both developed and developing economies. Thus, low service quality perception is the obvious reason of high switching intentions [74]. Change in consumer's attitude towards firm or in their behaviors is provoked by poor quality or variations in firm's quality levels [8]. Poor service quality can cause switching. Service failure severity is how seriously customer perceives the service failure. Service failure causing customer's losses could be tangible, monetary loss, intangible; time or energy [75]. Retailers should prioritize their objectives by determining whether they want merely to satisfy customer with their performance or to deliver maximum level of service quality [76]. It was argued that customers will exhibit more dissatisfied behavior for increased failure frequency or if they perceive that firm had ability to prevent it [19]. Reoccurring service failure or delay in service provokes dissatisfaction in customers [27]. Attribution theory posits that high expectations result in high satisfaction [16]. According to [48] the second most common reason of switching is service encounter failure. Service encounter failure could be bad attitude or unresponsiveness from employees while dealing with customer's complaints or providing support.

Moreover dissatisfied customer will have gradual decreasing payment trend which may result in switching intentions [45]. [64] found that customer satisfaction is negatively associated with switching intent [83] It is popularly believed by [42] that satisfied customers will show less switching intention, stressing the negative relationship of customer satisfaction with switching intent whereas [7] found that dissatisfied customers are more inclined to switch.[85] found in their study that customer satisfaction and switching intent has nonlinear relationship whereas [30] announced significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intent after collecting the evidence of switching intent of even satisfied

customers. Customer satisfaction is not the promising factor to stay with firm and there is a tendency of switching brands in satisfied customers also [11] with complaint behavior [41]. Customers may have switching intentions before reaching a certain threshold of customer satisfaction. Once they reach to that threshold switching intentions start decreasing [34].

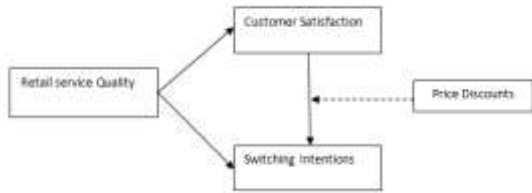


Figure1. Proposed Conceptual Model

D. Price Discounts

In marketing literature, price promotion is well discussed as an important variable [72] which plays a vital role in boosting the perceived quality and cause of increased sales and firm profitability [67]. Price discount is temporary reduction of listed price which is equally available for all the buyers [18]. Previous studies examined the relationship of store performance and sales promotion [33], effect of price and promotion strategies [13], Use of store flyers as complimentary promotional techniques compared with price promotions and discounts [50] and consequences of promotions on brands [35] but previous researches had not dealt fully with the concept of non price promotions.

Two third customers make purchase decisions in store for super market items [1] and more than 40 percent of purchase decisions are based on price and promotion factor [46]. Retailer should realize the importance of factors which influence in store purchase decisions. In store decisions are greatly influenced by the factors which are in store promotions, price mark downs, store atmospheres, displays, stock outs, store layout and services [2]. In store marketing is declared as more important factor compared to external marketing in retailer's promotion budgets [31]. According to [57] in store promotions fascinate impulse buyer and price markdowns are the source of pleasure for customers [73]. Consumer decides about their mental budget for grocery shopping in terms of money and items. Therefore saving on planned purchases induce customers to purchase more quantity of planned items and saving on unplanned items leads to more purchase of unplanned items [77; 78]. Price promotions are considered a source of increased sales [39], more visits of customers and more temptation for brand switching. On the other hand price promotions could be a major cause of decreased profits and brand equity with negatively perceived quality[24] where customers' expectations with brand becomes lower [59] and they start

doubting the positioning and its distinctiveness in market compared with other brands [25] and consequently lowering future purchase probability [28]. It is reported that price discount more than 20% of the value of product has negatively perceived by customers [26]. Customers respond differently to price promotions and exhibit more spending, product trial, more purchases [38], brand switching and store switching [56]. To be competitive, it's very important for service industries to know the degree and variation in responses of customers for critical price promotion decisions [63] and to differentiate loyal customers from switchers [73]. In addition to this marketer should have knowledge about minimum level at which effect of price discount start to tempt the customers to make purchase decisions [12]. [40] stated that stores can lure customers by offering small discounts on well known brands and giving more discount on unknown brands. Due to temporary price discount on one brand can negatively affect the sale of substitute or other competitive brands [71].

III. Methodology

The sample data is to be collected from the customers of three hypermarkets from two major cities of Saudi Arabia. Data analysis will be done by using AMOS software applying PLS SEM.

IV. Research Implications

The proposed framework establishes a starting point for empirical investigation of determinants of switching of satisfied customers. This paper develops a framework and is part of a larger study which seeks to empirically examine the proposed relationships. Empirical verification could focus on one or more links at a time. Furthermore, extensive longitudinal study could test the framework over periods of time. Measurement scales are available in the literature for all the constructs in this framework, which could be adapted to suit settings in developing nations. The model could be tested as a whole or in parts by employing appropriate statistical procedures to verify the validity of the proposed framework.

V. Conclusion

The paper is making three significant contributions to the retail marketing literature:

1-The paper contributes to the practice by scrutinizing to what extent each dimension of service quality can better explain each of the variables of satisfaction and switching intention.

2-The paper has theoretical significance to the understanding of the role of newly introduced moderator of price discount on satisfaction – switching intention links. The study offers price discount as a unique moderator to the context of hypermarket switching intention of satisfied

consumers in KSA, which can significantly interact with service quality strategies of hypermarkets. Accordingly, this study is among the first to suggest the moderating variable of price discount as the key determinants of consumers' switching intention in retailing setting and thus adding another theoretical contribution for researchers in market area.

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