

# **Increasing Brand Loyalty Through Customer Experience Strategies**

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## **Abstract**

*Retail Managers Aim To Drive Sales Revenue And Increase Profitability By Building Customer Loyalty And Improving Customer Experience. In Retail, Managers Should Analyse Customer Experience As A Tool For Differentiation, Which Can Be Leveraged To Increase Sales, Generate Word-Of-Mouth, And Create A Competitive Advantage. Retail Managers May Not Fully Understand The Customer Experience Strategy, Focusing Instead On Employee Training And Service. Using A Qualitative, Multiple Case Study Approach, It Investigated How Retail Managers Built Customer Loyalty And Improved Customer Service. Based On Olivier's Confirmation-Expectations Theory, This Study Was Conceptually Framed. Data Was Collected From Company Policies, Websites, And Campaign Flyers. Building And Sustaining Brand Loyalty, Store Image, And Competitive Advantage Emerged As Themes From The Thematic Analysis Of Data And Documents. This Research May Be Helpful To Retail Managers Interested In Increasing Revenue, Improving Margins, And Increasing Profitability By Providing A Better Customer Experience. This Research May Bring About Social Change. Increased Employment Opportunities May Increase Business Activity And Tax Revenue For Local Communities.*

**Keywords**—*Strategies Retailers; Brand Loyalty; Customer Experience; Customer Experience Strategies; Customer Experience Management; Competitive Advantage*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A brand's loyalty is influenced by its constant interaction with its customers (Bilgili&Ozkul, 2015). Using creative strategies to improve and manage customer experience can help retailers distinguish their businesses from their competitors, according to Greve (2014) and Klaus (2014). The need for retailers to provide superior goods and services goes beyond superior products and services (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). It is imperative to evaluate and measure the level of customer experience delivery to identify all potential obstacles which might adversely affect customer experience delivery and encourage repeat purchases. Businesses must compete on a high level, ensuring excellent customer service throughout the purchasing process (Klaus, 2014), and managing customer expectations throughout the purchasing process. Developing genuine brand loyalty could help businesses build a strong business image and attract new customers while retaining current customers.

By gathering information about the customers' environment, retail managers can alter customer behavior through customer experience strategies (Shilpa & Rajnish, 2013). A Business must align its capabilities with the customers to satisfy their immediate and general needs (Bilgili&Ozkul, 2015). For retail managers to sustain profitability and build brand loyalty, they must establish trustworthy customer relationships (Klaus, 2014; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). According to Nagengast, Evanschitzky, Blut, & Rudolph (2014), 80% of retail customers switch companies because of poor customer service. Poor customer experience strategies lead to loss of revenue for some retail managers, as customers are driven to other retailers. A specific business challenge facing retail managers is failing to build brand loyalty and improve customer service.

This study provides ideas for creative retail strategies for local retail establishments. When these strategies are implemented, they will enhance customer satisfaction and repeat business, increase profitability, increase brand loyalty, strengthen the local economy, promote growth and development, increase tax revenues, and enhance customer loyalty.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Expectation-confirmation Theory

Customers' intentions to repurchase or discontinue a product or service, their satisfaction with the product or service, and their brand loyalty are all part of ECT, as per Joo and Choi (2016). (Hsiao, 2016) ECT involves predicting a customer's future behavior regarding repurchasing a product or service. According to the ECT framework, the customer demonstrates preconceptions about an item or service before a purchase (Joo & Choi, 2016). When the customer uses a product or service, they evaluate its performance. Customers' initial expectations are compared to their perception of the product or service's performance to confirm their initial presumptions (Joo & Choi). As a result, the customer formulates a purchase intention or discontinuation decision based on whether the product or service meets their expectations (Joo & Choi, 2016). According to Atappattu, Sedera, Ravichandran, & Grover (2016), customer expectations and perceived performance influence ECT confirmation, whereas customer satisfaction affects ECT confirmation.

### Customer Experience

Rousseau (2015) defines customer experience as the experience consumers want when shopping (where and how they want to shop). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) described a broad, emotional, and sensory concept of customer experience. Rather than viewing customer experience as merely a point of sale, they viewed it holistically and subjectively. More than ever before, success in retail is based on how products or services are offered for sale. Shopping has created an experiential paradigm shift (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). A customer's perception and relationship with the shopping environment influence the customer experience, either positively or negatively, according to Rousseau (2015). Customers are more likely to return to a store if they have a good experience within the environment (Rawson, Duncan, & Jones, 2013).

### Customer Experience Management (CEM)

Having a customer-centric perspective on the organization gives the organization a better understanding of the customer's point of contact with the organization (Duplessis & DeVries, 2016). The CEM department focuses on all aspects of a company's operations, from web design to customer service. Customer satisfaction and delivery of the ultimate customer experience must be the focus of every subset of the organization (Duplessis & DeVries). Though insiders may perceive meat and produce departments and the front end as distinct operational departments within a retail establishment, customers do not. Customers' perception of the organization as a whole is influenced by a negative experience they have with a particular department. (Arineli, 2016). Customers form profound perceptions over time by interacting with an organization and hearing what other customers say (Klaus & Maklan, 2013).

### Brand Loyalty and Customer Experience

Whether retail stores succeed depends on how well their customers receive their products and services. A business's sales volume, profitability, and inventory turnover correlate positively with customer response; contrary, the opposite occurs (Gupta, 2014). It is most likely that a customer who has a positive experience with customer service will return and spread the word about the experience (Klaus, 2014). As retail managers navigate this competitive and dynamic sector, operations, tactical, and strategic costs increase. Retail managers have historically achieved brand loyalty through a wide assortment of goods and services and strategic store locations (Alhouti et al., 2015). Nevertheless, retailers must innovate because of competition from discount retailers, department stores, and online retailers. There are more stores than ever before, and they are more technologically advanced (Kitapci et al., 2013).

Consumer behavior and attitudes are two dimensions of brand loyalty developed in the 1950s. An organization's ability to retain its customers is also dependent on its brand loyalty. Price sensitivity is lower among loyal customers. Increasing loyalty may reduce marketing expenditures to attract new customers, and reducing price sensitivity may improve profit margins (Chahal & Dutta, 2014; Dhurup et al., 2013). In addition to monitoring customers' shopping habits and rewarding loyalty, loyalty programs can be used to familiarize them with the brand and familiarize them with the benefits it offers. Customers might be more satisfied with loyalty programs and be more committed to them overall (Zhibin & Bennett, 2014).

### Competitive Advantage and Customer Experience

Business and marketing research have changed significantly since the 1990s (Klaus, 2014). Consumer brands focused on high turnover, then service marketing was developed, and now meaningful customer experiences are created. Researchers observed a distinct change in customer behavior (especially when the Internet became widespread) and organizational strategy during the 1990s during the shift from consumer brands to service marketing. Herstein, Gilboa & Gamliel (2014) emphasize the importance of the customer-organizational relationship and the historical offering of goods and services. Rather than only focusing on

organizational functions, customer-organization interactions focused on a more community-centric relationship. Developing community-centric relationships allowed firms to formulate an intentional strategy for competitive advantage through those relationships primarily built on exchanging goods and services. (Klaus & Maklan, 2013) Achieving more market share and retaining existing customers require an outstanding customer experience.

#### Strategic Customer Experience Management

Customer experience strategy must be managed efficiently by modern organizations. This includes ensuring customers have an unforgettable shopping experience throughout all phases of the customer interaction and managing their expectations before, during, and after the purchase. It is more complicated than customer service or satisfaction because customer experience is relational rather than functional (Klaus, 2014).

Knowledge management tactics must be aligned with strategic objectives to optimize customer experience interactions. A large amount of knowledge is available from customers. Prakash, Sahney, & Vohra (2015) recommend that this knowledge be utilized for determining product demand, consumer behavior, competitive advantage, and future target markets. In addition, to achieve desired objectives such as customer retention, repeat business, and loyalty, strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation must be proactive and expeditious (Klaus & Maklan, 2013).

#### Conceptual Framework

Olivier's expectation-confirmation theory (ECT) of 1977 guided this qualitative case study (Oghuma et al., 2016). A customer experience survey determines whether customers' expectations are met (Klaus, 2014). The nucleus of the ECT is the perceptual value that individual customers assign to a company's functional and emotional interactions. Lee, Lee, and Lee (2015) examined brand loyalty and customer expectations in drug marketing using ECT. Oghuma et al. (2016) relate perceived service quality to brand loyalty among message instant mobile customers. This study utilized ECT because evaluating and implementing customer experience strategies and brand loyalty can directly relate to customers' evaluation and expectations. When evaluating present and forming future strategies for a business, understanding the customers' expectations is crucial (Komarov & Avdeeva, 2015). Retail managers must implement customer experience strategies to minimize or eliminate gaps between customer expectations and the actual level of service they receive. As a retail manager, you want to ensure that your customers are satisfied with your product or service (Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Komarov & Avdeeva, 2015).

### **III. METHOD**

As Kraus et al. (2020) outlined, the authors conducted a systematic literature review to structure existing research on the topic of interest. The authors used various techniques and procedures to accomplish the set objectives of the systematic review. Based on the content of the articles, the final grouping was determined. A qualitative research methodology includes five main elements: phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, grounded theory, and case studies, according to Morse (2015). Khan, 2014; Yin, 2014). Qualitative research helps researchers understand participants' feelings about events, environments, and objects. Researchers use case study design to answer how and why research questions (Dumez, 2015; Tetnowski, 2015; Yin, 2014). The researcher used a qualitative multiple case study design to collect data from literature and company documents. Real-life experiences and everyday thoughts of research participants were reflected in the findings.

### **IV. ANALYSIS**

A qualitative case study exploring retail brands and customer experiences was conducted. "What strategies do they use?" was the overarching study question asked to examine retail managers' strategies for improving customer experience and building brand loyalty. Using triangulation in data analysis, qualitative researchers can demonstrate the trustworthiness of their research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Yin, 2014). In Yin (2014), triangulation is divided into four types: investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, data triangulation, and method triangulation. Assimilation and data analysis from various sources constitute methodological triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). Authors correlated relevant themes from documentary records and reflective journal notes with the literature and Richard L. Olivier's 1977 system theory conceptual framework (as discussed in Oghuma et al., 2016).

### **V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

Ultimately, this study aimed to identify what strategies retail managers use to increase customer satisfaction and brand loyalty among their customers. Based on the analysis of including customer suggestions, campaign fliers, literature and business documents, merchandise policy and statements, and information from the company's website, one overarching theme (building and sustaining brand loyalty) and five subthemes

(competitive advantage, store image, profitability, customer experience strategy, and employee training) were identified.

#### Overarching Theme: The importance of Building and Sustaining Loyalty

Formulating a customer experience strategy requires understanding behaviors and attitudes that contribute to brand loyalty. Customer experience strategies were determined by building and sustaining brand loyalty. Consumers' responses to retail products and services determine the success of retail stores. A positive customer response results in greater sales volume and profitability, while a negative response leads to lower sales volume and profitability (Gupta, 2014). Positive customer experiences lead to repeat shopping, positively influencing sustaining and building customer loyalty (Klaus, 2014).

Cho, Kim, & Kim (2015) discuss the ability of stores to differentiate themselves from their competitors with a unique customer experience. Evidence from the literature supports the overarching theme from data collection related to customer loyalty, brand loyalty, and customer experience. ECT also explores customer behavior that may foster repeat business within its conceptual framework. Customers must be able to identify with a communication channel used by retail managers to create relevant experiences for them.

#### Subtheme 1: Competitive Advantage

Retailers need to differentiate their products to enhance customer experience and create value (Nanda, Kuruvilla, & Murty, 2013). In addition to leadership, technology, skilled employees, and various goods and services, loyalty programs are important aspects of competitive advantage strategies (Yazdani & Murad, 2015). (MacGillavry & Wilson, 2014) Customer experience strategies may allow retail managers to differentiate their products from their competitors. Technology plays a vital role in ensuring the company's success in today's retail environment. Customer feedback is obtained, and customer concerns are addressed using technology. Retailers using data analytics can gain a competitive advantage.

The efficacy of customer experience strategy is closely aligned with the literature review concerning competitive advantage - especially product differentiation. Providing an indelible customer experience is insufficient to achieve a competitive advantage today (Keisidou et al., 2013). Products and services are barely competitive today (Keisidou et al., 2013). Retailers need to differentiate their products and enhance value creation to satisfy consumers' shopping needs (Nanda et al., 2013). When retail managers leverage customer experience to differentiate their products, they may achieve improved operational results.

#### Subtheme 2: Customer Experience Strategy

Increasing market share and retaining customers are driven by customer experience (Klaus & Maklan, 2013). Yazdani & Murad (2015) argue that customer experience highly depends on fulfilling the customer's needs.

The literature review supported the customer experience strategy theme by discussing customer experience strategies to achieve competitive advantage and build brand loyalty. Providing superior products and services meets partial customer needs (Klaus & Maklan, 2013). Preconceptions of customers greatly influence the customer experience. Customer feedback, word of mouth, retention rates, and repeat business are all considered when developing, implementing, and evaluating a customer experience strategy (Klaus & Maklan, 2013). Retail managers should formulate customer experience strategies to gain a competitive advantage and differentiate their products (Hailey, 2015).

#### Subtheme 3: Store Image

Nasermoadeli, Ling, & Maghnati, (2013) argue that store image appeals to the sensory aspects of customers, such as ambiance, cleanliness, signage, aroma, and merchandising. Hosseini, Jayashree & Malarvizhi, (2014) agree that store image is essential in connecting with customers and enhancing customer experience. The study's results matched the ECT conceptual framework in this study. As a result of ECT, we determine whether customer expectations are confirmed or dispelled due to the experience (Atapattu et al., 2016). Customer experience strategies include a store's image since it directly impacts customers' senses and emotions. Customer experience strategies include a store's image since it directly impacts customers' senses and emotions. According to the literature review, store atmospherics are crucial to customer experience strategy and ensure brand loyalty (Hosseini, Jayashree & Malarvizhi, 2014). In a study conducted in South Korea, it was found in 2015 that both customer loyalty and customer satisfaction were positively impacted by store image (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2015).

#### Subtheme 4: Profitability

There was evidence to support the profitability subtheme within the literature review. Gupta (2014) argued that positive customer experiences were associated with positive operational metrics such as revenue and profit. The decision to purchase brands with which a customer has had a positive experience is intentional on the

part of loyal customers. (Thomas, 2013) The commitment to profitability, brand equity, and sales revenue aligns with this commitment.

#### Subtheme 5: Employee training

Dwomoh (2015) advocates the importance of employee training for the survival of an organization. A literature review segment on employee training supported the subtheme derived from study findings, described as employee training. Yazdani and Murad (2015) reported that leadership, technology, employee training, and various products and services are essential to competitive advantage strategies. For the corporate strategy to be effectively implemented, Dwomoh (2015) asserts that employees must be trained consistently in customer experience.

A subtheme of employee training emerged from the data supported by the conceptual framework of this study, ECT. It is easy to understand how ECT works. When customers' expectations are met, they are satisfied with the retail establishment or the product. On the other hand, the customer may be dissatisfied if their expectation is not met positively. To meet customer expectations, employees need training. It is necessary for there to be an existing relationship between the employee and the customer. Employees must maintain close business relationships with customers once that connection has been established to understand what the customers need. Retail managers should also treat customer suggestions and needs with the utmost priority. Recurring business and increased revenue can be attributed to employee training.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Spanyi (2014) defines customer experience as a concept that encompasses decision-making before and after a purchase. A practical customer experience strategy can grow, sustain, and attract customer loyalty. Claus & Maklan (2013) advocate implementing appropriate strategies for building brand loyalty and improving customer experience. To build brand loyalty and improve customer experiences, retail managers need to implement practical strategies, according to this study. To achieve a competitive advantage and differentiate their products, retail managers must cultivate a customer experience strategy.

In retail, customer experience should be viewed as a broader strategy that considers ambiance, customer service, technology, pricing, training, and other factors. It is essential to distinguish between enhancing customer service and the whole customer experience strategy. A customer experience manager helps retailers align and realign their strategies with their organizations' operational, tactical, and strategic objectives. Training employees on customer service and brand loyalty is critical to retail management. Unless these steps are taken, a company's competitive advantage will be lost, revenue decline, customer loyalty decrease, profitability will fall, and it may be forced to shut down (Srivastava & Misra, 2014).

## VII. RECOMMENDATION

- Make customers' lives easier by providing convenience. It is crucial to customers that their shopping needs are fulfilled in the most straightforward manner possible (Czarniewski, 2014). The ultimate goal of optimizing the customer experience is to make shopping as convenient as possible. It is essential to merchandise products logically and thematically. A planogram reflecting seasonality is important - for example, jazz festival, Christmas, hurricane season, Easter, etc. Adding excitement and value to the shopping experience is essential for endcaps and floor displays.
- The retail establishment should implement online shopping or a means for customers to select items online, pay for them, and then pick up their merchandise. Modernizing and differentiating product offerings will be possible through this method. In addition to providing additional options to customers, this is also important for providing shopping convenience.
- Customers should be able to interact with you using the communication channels that are most comfortable for them. Retail managers may require more time to build customer relationships on the sales floor. Increasing awareness about loyalty cards and in-store promotions should be a priority for marketing specialists.
- Make it possible for customers to leave reviews, opinions, and suggestions on your website. Customer feedback should be acted upon promptly. Establish a team to communicate responses and respond to suggestions promptly. Conduct periodic customer surveys to determine the effectiveness of current strategies and receive customer feedback. There may be concerns about the veracity and confidentiality of customer suggestion forms, as they are archaic.
- Customer experience surveys should demonstrate that customers are valued and essential.
- Ensure you are keeping up with the latest trends in customer communication and preferences for feedback about the customer experience. Optimize customer experience and build brand loyalty with technology. It should be possible for customers to provide feedback and rate their experience on websites.

- Incorporate everyone into the formulation of customer loyalty and experience strategies. Everyone should have a say in designing successful customer experience strategies, from top executives to cashiers, because customer experience is such a broad concept.
- The Customer Experience Manager should be appointed as soon as possible. Neither organization had a Customer Experience Manager, but both had a Customer Service Manager or Front-End Manager. Customers are serviced by a company on a functional basis, not on a relationship or emotional basis, as part of the customer experience.
- Customer experience strategy and brand loyalty should be taught to all employees.
- You may consider forming strategic alliances with local colleges and other institutions to help with training costs.
- Build mutual trust with the citizenry by aggressively engaging in community outreach campaigns; pursue interests within communities through vendor relationships, stakeholder relationships, and community groups. Sports clubs can be involved in educating the population about the importance of exercise and healthy eating.

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