

FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION IN CHAIN STORES

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Abstract

This research endeavors to meticulously investigate the underpinnings of customer dissatisfaction within chain stores, particularly focusing on the prism of service quality. Employing an applied approach through correlational descriptive research, a cohort of 86 customers from these chain stores became the focal point for data collection. Using a thoughtfully constructed questionnaire comprising 20 discerning indicators, the study sought to probe the depths of customer dissatisfaction in these retail environments. The study reveals an essential nexus between the quality of services rendered in these stores and the resultant levels of customer loyalty and satisfaction. An intriguing revelation emerges, shedding light on instances where product pricing occasionally surpassed city averages (rated at 4.15), signaling an important area for improvement. The research culminates in proposing strategic solutions aimed at rectifying these discrepancies, underscoring the imperative nature of addressing pricing disparities to comprehensively enhance customer satisfaction within these chain stores.

Keywords: *customer satisfaction; customer experience; sales; chain store; customer loyalty; social networks*

1.Introduction

With the transition from the traditional economy and the intensification of competition in new dimensions, the customer has become the main pillar and focal point of all organizational activities. From a competitive standpoint, the survival and continuity of organizations depend on identifying and attracting new customers while also maintaining existing ones (Tabavar, 2017). Nowadays, creating unique experiences has become one of the most important management goals (Mohammadian and Naeli, 2018). In this new era, customer satisfaction has emerged as one of the key dimensions of quality management systems and organizational excellence models. Obtaining quality certificates has become a principle for organizations to improve processes, strategies, and

gain credibility (Tabesh et al., 2018). Analyzing the level of customer satisfaction provides a comprehensive picture of the company's performance in achieving financial goals and enables timely planning and decision-making for company managers. Alongside the growing importance of customer satisfaction, developed countries have begun designing and developing models specifically for this purpose. Typically, these countries select national customer satisfaction indices like the National Customer Satisfaction Index of the United States and the National Customer Satisfaction Index of Europe as the foundational models. These models are then modified according to the macro-environmental factors that govern the economy of each country, sometimes incorporating additional variables.

In many countries over the past two decades, with the introduction of models such as comprehensive quality management, the European Foundation for Quality Management, and the expansion of quality performance, all of which have been developed with the aim of satisfying customer demands, issues such as customer satisfaction and paying attention to their needs have been given special importance (Foladgar and Saqai, 2018). Creating a great customer experience is one of the primary goals in today's retail environment. Achieving this allows stores to establish a sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, effective customer experience management during interactions with the store plays a significant role in fostering long-lasting and valuable relationships with customers (Shafiei et al., 2018). Both service quality and product quality are crucial factors in determining customer satisfaction. The Covid-19 crisis has had unprecedented impacts on various sectors such as tourism, production, marketing, and services (Samedi and Parvizenzad, 2021). Additionally, globalization has greatly intensified, leading to an increased demand for quick purchase of consumer goods in countries. Consequently, the number of chain stores has been on the rise (Tran, 2020). Shopping centers and large chain stores are expanding in different countries, all aiming to gain a larger market share. Given the significant number of shopping centers, it becomes crucial to create a pleasant experience for customers. This can increase product sales and generate more profits by adopting suitable approaches and understanding customer preferences (Shafiei et al., 2018).

Chain stores are a type of company that has emerged in recent years, primarily in the fast-moving consumer goods sector, operating at the retail level in various countries. They aim to attract customers and gain market share by promoting a 'permanent discount' slogan. The quality of products and services can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction, which is crucial for the success of the organization (Zhong and Moon, 2020). Clear relationships have been identified between quality, value, satisfaction, and behavior, indicating that service quality and value influence customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Additionally, the empirical results presented here demonstrate that the perceived value of a service product plays a substantial role in shaping behavioral intentions (Tran, 2020). Therefore, in today's competitive conditions, one of the challenges faced by chain stores is to identify the factors that contribute to customer dissatisfaction in their stores. This enables them to address the underlying causes through planning and implement appropriate solutions.

2.Theoretical foundations and research background

2.1.Customer satisfaction

Studies have demonstrated that factors such as shopping experience and shopping convenience significantly impact customer satisfaction (Hin To et al., 2020). Previous research has also shown that service quality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction. A model incorporating perceived quality of services and products, perceived value, and perceived image as factors influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty was developed and evaluated using various models and quality assessments (Tabesh et al., 2018). Our primary focus is on increasing the number of customers. Customer satisfaction drives sales growth, while dissatisfaction can lead to a decline in sales. Studies indicate that an unsatisfied customer tends to share their dissatisfaction

with at least three other people, which negatively impacts the organization's credibility (Fouladgar, 2018). Customer dissatisfaction has a greater influence than customer satisfaction because negative information regarding service and product performance more readily influences the judgment and decisions of other customers (Malshe et al., 2022). Customer complaints represent valuable feedback for organizations, and addressing service-related complaints provides an opportunity to resolve existing issues, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction.

2.2.Customer experience

The significance of the customer experience is such that it conceals any negative aspects of the service and contributes to rebuilding the relationship with customers (Roozen, 2019). It is evident that companies should prioritize the creation of positive experiences in order to captivate customers' minds (Micut et al., 2019). Consequently, generating memorable experiences becomes crucial for retaining existing customers and attracting new ones. Essentially, the customer experience encompasses a series of interactions between the customer and the product, which elicit certain feelings, actions, or reactions from the customer (Imbuget al., 2018). Therefore, emphasizing customer-centricity is a strategic approach to generate value, satisfaction, differentiation, and customer loyalty (Fernandes, 2019).

2.3.Sale

Sales are undeniably one of the most critical aspects of marketing. For service companies in the market, pricing holds great importance as it is closely intertwined with all marketing variables that determine sales volume, company profitability, longevity, and financial stability (Samadi, 2021).Through their daily interactions with customers, salespeople have the opportunity to gather valuable market information. They should share this information with the company's marketing department and actively contribute to the development of marketing strategies (Gonzalez, 2019).Sales and marketing often operate with distinct orientations. Four significant factors that create a divide between sales and marketing include: 1) scope and focus of activities, 2) time horizon, 3) knowledge resources, and 4) relationship with the environment. Similarly, Hamburg and Jensen (2007) highlighted a noteworthy distinction between the intellectual realms of sales and marketing. They asserted that sales tend to have a short-term focus with an orientation towards customers, while marketing tends to have a long-term perspective with an orientation towards the product (Biemans et al., 2022).

3.The necessity of market regulation and customer satisfaction

Today, organizations and economic enterprises view customers not merely as consumers, but as individuals of paramount importance. Effective and efficient customer relationship management, as well as the creation and delivery of value to customers, have become focal points of interest and attention for researchers and managers across economic enterprises.In today's world, we observe mature markets that possess distinct characteristics compared to the past. Suppliers in the industrial and consumer goods market now encounter customers with unlimited demands, yet who are less influenced by traditional marketing tools. Within the concept of marketing, it is widely believed that the achievement of organizational goals depends entirely on the identification and fulfillment of needs and demands within target markets, ultimately providing customer satisfaction in a more favorable and effective manner.In this highly dynamic market, customers expect organizations to offer the highest value at the most suitable price. In fact, organizations now regard customer value as their 'future source of competitive advantage.'Value from the customer's perspective has gained significant attention among management researchers recently. The crucial point is that value is determined from the customer's viewpoint in the market, based on their perception of what they pay and what they receive. It is not determined in the factory or through the desires and assumptions of the supplier. Value lies in what the customer actually receives, rather than what is produced.

4.Components of value

In general, regarding the customer's perception of value, three main components can be presented as follows: Dissatisfiers: These are expected features in a product or service, the absence of which causes annoyance and dissatisfaction for the customer. However, their presence has a neutral effect on the customer.; Satisfiers: These are the characteristics expected and desired by the customer. Their presence leads to customer satisfaction and sometimes even delight.; Exciters: These are new and innovative features that go beyond the customer's expectations. They pleasantly surprise the customer and greatly increase their satisfaction, even to the point of delight. Irrespective of the industry and product type, organizations strive to establish a favorable position in the customer's mind. They aim to build lasting relationships, increase loyalty and satisfaction levels, and effectively meet the needs and demands of the consumer market. They produce and supply goods and services in alignment with market needs, while customers pay a price in exchange for material, human, and informational resources. However, the buyer-seller relationship is not solely influenced by the financial aspect of the exchange. The value attributed to this process by the buyer encompasses various factors beyond price and product functionality. This concept, known as 'value from the customer's point of view,' is a key factor in gaining sustainable competitive advantage in today's market-oriented and customer-centric world. It has drawn the attention of researchers and organizational managers. Now, let us examine the concept of value from the customer's perspective in the context of chain stores that provide everyday necessities. Customers expect to purchase high-quality products at the lowest possible price and within a reasonable timeframe. Particularly during periods of seasonal demand or increased product demand, customers rely on trusted stores. They know that these stores maintain product quality and do not raise prices, even when facing heightened demand. These stores consistently strive to create value for the consumer and improve consumer well-being.

5.Research background

In Table 1, we have tried to refer to some similar research in this field.

<<Table 1---about here>>

6.Research Method

Descriptive research comprises a set of methods aimed at describing the conditions or phenomena under investigation. It can be utilized to gain a better understanding of existing conditions or to assist in the decision-making process. Descriptive research can be categorized into the following types: 1) Survey research; 2) Correlation research; 3) Action research; 4) Case study; 5) Post-event research. Our research falls into the second category, which is correlation research. In correlation research, the relationship between variables is analyzed based on the research objective. Correlation research can be further divided into three categories based on purpose: bivariate correlation study, regression analysis, and correlation or covariance matrix analysis. Bivariate correlation studies aim to investigate the relationship between the variables being studied. In regression analysis, the goal is to predict one or more dependent variables (criterion) based on changes in independent variables (predictors). In some other types of research, the set of bivariate correlations among the studied variables is presented in a table known as a correlation or covariance matrix. Factor analysis and structural equations are examples of such research. Factor analysis aims to summarize a dataset or identify underlying variables (structure), while the structural equation model tests structural relationships based on theories and research findings.

7. Research Findings

This research has been conducted in an applied manner with the objective of investigating the factors that influence customer dissatisfaction in chain stores from the perspective of service quality. The research method employed is correlational descriptive research. The statistical population of the study consisted of 86 customers of chain stores. Data was collected using a questionnaire developed by the researcher, which was based on 20 indicators related to measuring customer dissatisfaction in these stores. (It should be noted that some respondents did not provide responses to certain indicators, resulting in missing data). Overall, the reporting process is divided into three parts:

First part: Identification of indicators

In this section, 20 main indicators were identified in the field of measuring customer dissatisfaction in chain stores, and these indicators are shown in Table 2:

<<Table 2---about here>>

Second part: frequency percentage of each indicator

In this section, the frequency percentage of each indicator was obtained based on the 5-option Likert scale.

8. Conclusion

In the final part, descriptive statistics were computed for each indicator, including the mean, median, standard deviation, and variance. The results from the descriptive statistics demonstrated a positive relationship between the quality of services provided in these stores and the level of customer loyalty or satisfaction. Notably, it was found that not all products are discounted, and sometimes their prices are higher compared to retail prices in the city and other shopping areas (with an average rating of 4.15). As shown in Table 3, 45 customers (52% of the respondents) agreed that this indicator had a "very high" impact on their satisfaction with these stores (similarly for other indicators). These results highlight the importance of taking action in these areas to address the prevailing conditions in these stores.

<<Table 3---about here>>

Providing a solution

Solutions to increase customer satisfaction of chain stores

Since numerous chain stores are operating in both small and large cities and aiming for increased revenue, this section presents methods to enhance customer satisfaction by examining details that can effectively improve the shopping experience. These ideas have been derived from studies and market research, with the aim of significantly reducing potential unpleasant situations that customers may encounter in chain stores and ultimately fostering repeat shopping experiences. The impact of these ideas and methods extends beyond a specific case and can yield impressive results for any store. Additionally, implementing these ideas, although they may initially appear time-consuming and expensive, can lead to long-term profitability for your business. In recent years, there has been a noticeable growth of chain stores in small and large cities. These stores offer a wide range of household consumer goods and provide discounts rarely seen in retail. Consequently, it is essential for these stores to incorporate strategies that keep a large number of customers satisfied. Some general methods include:

- Targeting indirect customers

As mentioned earlier, one of the strategies to address unpleasant shopping experiences and achieve maximum customer satisfaction is to cater to the preferences and opinions of indirect buyers and customers. You may wonder, who are these indirect buyers? The best example of this customer

category is children. For instance, if a chain store notices dissatisfaction among adult customers aged 35 to 50, it can focus on creating a delightful experience for children when they visit the store. The store can offer products that appeal to children, generating excitement and making them eager to visit. Consequently, parents will be drawn in by their children's enthusiasm, leading to their own satisfaction. Parents often find joy and contentment when their children are happy. By ensuring that children enjoy the shopping experience, the store can better address any dissatisfaction among adult customers.

- Providing an online shopping experience

One of the effective strategies to achieve profitable sales and customer satisfaction is to create an engaging online shopping experience. Chain stores can enhance their customer interactions by offering a user-friendly website with a strong user interface, in addition to in-person shopping. This approach can contribute to better branding and increased sales, especially when paired with targeted advertisements, such as those found on the hyper family website. Moreover, it is advisable to develop a dedicated application for the store, complementing the website, which includes features like in-app payment and online wallet. Given the time constraints and busy lifestyles of many individuals in today's world, an efficient mobile application can simplify the shopping process and motivate customers to choose a chain store that provides these convenient features.

- Giving gifts to customers

Offering gifts to store visitors can not only increase customer satisfaction but also encourage repeat purchases. This phenomenon is rooted in the psychology of persuasion. When you provide customers with a free gift or product, it stimulates their mind and ultimately boosts sales in the long run. Satisfied customers themselves become advocates for your store, spreading positive word-of-mouth and attracting new customers. A highly effective approach to maximizing customer satisfaction is to acknowledge and celebrate their birthdays. According to a survey, this simple gesture can lead to an 88% increase in store loyalty. There are three appealing ways to accomplish this: sending a birthday card with the store logo, offering a gift directly from your store, or providing a discount on purchases made during their birthday month. Experimentation is necessary to determine the most effective method for your specific situation.

- Training employees to handle complaints

One of the most effective methods to attain customer satisfaction is through employee training. This is because individuals appreciate feeling valued and important. By training employees to effectively address initial complaints and understand the causes of customer dissatisfaction, customers will feel valued and their issues will be resolved more promptly. In situations where the staff members need to escalate a complaint to a senior employee, they should exercise caution to ensure they do not further upset the customer.

- Conduct a survey

Surveys are an excellent method for gauging customer satisfaction. They provide valuable insights by allowing you to monitor your progress, identify issues, and determine the most effective solutions. Surveys not only help pinpoint areas of improvement, but also highlight your strengths, enabling you to continue with confidence. Implementing surveys can be done by gathering feedback from customers during their shopping experience or by utilizing online forms. It is essential for chain stores to understand why consumers choose their products over competitors' offerings. By proactively identifying customer concerns, it becomes possible to prevent significant declines in sales.

- Increasing payment funds

The long queues at checkout can greatly diminish customer satisfaction in chain stores, especially when multiple counters are not open, resulting in congestion, wasted time for customers, exhausted employees, and lengthy lines. If adding or enabling additional checkout counters is not feasible, it is advisable to find ways to entertain shoppers during these extended waiting periods. Instead of bombarding customers with advertising and marketing messages, why not focus on building

friendly relationships and engaging them? Consider hiring a magician, comedian, or musician to provide entertainment during these times. Creating a pleasant queue experience can uplift employee morale and enhance the overall shopping experience for customers.

- Using customer relationship management software

If you utilize customer relationship management (CRM) software in your store, it can assist you in effectively managing customer satisfaction. For instance, imagine that the CRM system notifies you that a regular elderly customer has not visited the store for several weeks. In response, your employees can proactively reach out to the customer to inquire about the reason for their absence. If the customer mentions an illness or a fall, you can offer them a convenient home delivery service as a gesture of care. Alternatively, if the customer is in good health, you can provide them with a special discount coupon valid for the next seven days. These actions foster a sense of warmth, friendliness, and significance from your store to the customer.

- Increasing facilities and services

If you have a chain store with ample space, utilizing facilities to enhance the shopping experience and increase customer satisfaction can be advantageous. Creating a small playground is an excellent way to alleviate boredom for children accompanying their parents while shopping. Additionally, if feasible, consider incorporating a coffee shop or a designated area for serving hot and cold beverages. Undoubtedly, a warm drink can help alleviate customer fatigue and increase their motivation to spend more time in the store. Likewise, during hot seasons, offering refreshing cold drinks can impart a sense of rejuvenation and revitalization. Providing Wi-Fi connectivity is another attractive feature that contributes to customer satisfaction. However, before implementing this, ensure that your stores have a strong mobile signal, as it enables buyers to have a better overall shopping experience. Furthermore, it is worth considering facilities to cater to the needs of special customers. For instance, individuals with disabilities may face challenges when purchasing from any store due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure. By installing ramps for entry and exit, providing designated checkout counters, and offering assistance with carrying shopping carts, you demonstrate your commitment to caring for this segment of society.

- Activity in virtual networks

Today, smartphones have become an integral part of people's lives, providing chain stores with a unique opportunity to increase sales and enhance customer satisfaction. Utilizing the virtual space, particularly platforms like Instagram, can be beneficial. It is recommended to showcase new products on your Instagram page and announce discounts through stories. Additionally, organizing periodic contests on your social media pages and offering special discounts can help increase audience engagement. Remember, the virtual space extends beyond Instagram, so consider leveraging other social networks such as WhatsApp and Twitter to disseminate information. This not only enhances customer interaction but also presents your store as up-to-date and modern. While many chain stores focus on expanding their number of branches and product offerings to attract customers, it is crucial to recognize that attracting customers is just the first step. As discussed in this article, achieving maximum customer satisfaction is the subsequent key to success in sales and higher profitability. To provide the best shopping experience, chain stores should incorporate all the aforementioned strategies and ensure consistent delivery of quality service throughout the year, not just during peak seasons. By successfully implementing these methods consistently, you will cultivate a client base that truly values your work and fosters a positive business relationship. These loyal customers will often become advocates for your store, leading to increased sales and sustainable revenue generation in the long run.

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Disclosure statement

The authors do not have any financial or non-financial competing interest to declare.

Table 1

Research background

Researcher	The title of the research	The result of the research
Malshe (2022)	How Main Street Drives Wall Street: Customer (Dis)satisfaction, Short Sellers, and Abnormal Returns	The results show that an increase of one unit in customer satisfaction causes a 0.56% increase in financial return, while a one-unit increase in customer dissatisfaction leads to a 1.34% decrease in financial return.
Zhong (2020)	What Drives Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Happiness in Fast-Food Restaurants in China? Perceived Price, Service Quality, Food Quality, Physical Environment Quality, and the Moderating Role of Gender	Based on the findings of this research, customer dissatisfaction causes negative word of mouth advertising and has a high influence on other customers and their purchase decision. Restaurant owners and managers must consider how an outstanding experience, appropriate pricing, product quality, and value obtained may increase customer satisfaction and word of mouth, which typically leads to customer purchase decisions.
Jabeen (2022)	How hate and retaliation damage customer-brand relationship, Technological Forecasting & Social Change	Structural equation modeling results confirm the positive relationship of customer dissatisfaction. Negative word of mouth advertising causes hatred and creates a bad feeling towards the product and brand.
Budur and Poturak (2021)	Employee performance and customer loyalty: mediation effect of customer satisfaction	The results of the study showed that customer perception of employees' performance has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Furthermore, customer satisfaction showed a positive mediator between customer perception of employee performance and customer loyalty.
Samadi , Paria; Parviznejad(2021)	Simulation of Sales Scenarios in Chain Store Marketing with a Futuristic Approach	The results show that the future of the chain store market is based on creativity, innovation and effective management communication with customers.
Tran, Van Dat; Trang Le	Impact of Service Quality and Perceived	Modeling of test results shows that product quality has a positive and significant effect on customer

(2020)	Value on Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions: Evidence from Convenience Stores in Vietnam	satisfaction. Also, perceived value directly affects customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. In the case of sales personnel, their communication skills, knowledge and methods of dealing with customers are very important.
Hien to(2020)	Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction When Buying on Facebook in Vietnam	Shopping experience and ease of shopping are very effective on customer satisfaction, so even if the purchase price is higher than elsewhere, customers choose a place where they had a better shopping experience.
Fouladgar (2018)	Investigating the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer complaints and trust in Tehran Municipality	The results of the research showed that the variables of customer expectations, the perceived quality of services and their mental image have a positive and significant effect on the satisfaction of Tehran municipality customers. Also, customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on trust and a negative relationship with complaints.
Shafiei(2018)	Identifying and prioritizing dimensions affecting customer experience in retail environments; Case study: chain stores of Afogh Korosh	The findings of the present research show that the dimensions affecting the customer experience in retail environments include eight dimensions, which according to the respondents, the perceived time spent experience dimension is the most important.

Table 2*Indicators affecting customer dissatisfaction in chain stores*

Row	Indicator
1	The price of the product does not match the price listed on the shelf
2	Stacking goods behind the checkout area
3	Installation of handwritten signs
4	Lack of proper warehouse management techniques
5	The low variety of products and not completing the shopping cart due to the complete lack of required products
6	Lack of proper parking space
7	Not all goods are necessarily discounted and sometimes their prices are higher than the retail prices of the city and Tara Bar Squares.
8	Improper arrangement and shelving (difficulty carrying shopping carts or shopping carts in some parts of the store)
9	Lack of necessary coordination between government and market regulation policies
10	The performance and speed of operation of store cashiers is slow
11	Lack of store employees
12	Insist on cooperation with one or more brands
13	It takes a long time to fill the shelves when the goods run out
14	Many items are unknown to customers
15	Absence of online shopping system
16	Lack of proper ventilation and light conditions

17	Lack of proper uniforms for store personnel
18	Lack of cleanliness of the interior and exterior of the store during the supply of products
19	Inappropriate treatment of store personnel with customers
20	The product on the shelf is not the same as the product announcement label (available product label, non-existent product itself)

Table 3*Prioritization of indicators*

Rank	Indicator	Response percentage based on a 5-point Likert scale				
		very Low	Low	Medium	Much	very much
1	Not all goods are necessarily discounted and sometimes their prices are higher than the retail prices of the city and Tara Bar Squares.					
2	Lack of proper parking space					
3	The low variety of products and not completing the shopping cart due to the complete lack of required products					
4	Lack of proper warehouse management techniques					
5	Lack of necessary coordination between government and market regulation policies					
6	Lack of cleanliness of the interior and exterior of the store during the supply of products					
7	The performance and speed of operation of store cashiers is slow					
8	Lack of proper uniforms for store personnel					
9	Inappropriate treatment of store personnel with customers					
10	Stacking goods behind the checkout area					
11	Lack of store employees					
12	It takes a long time to fill the shelves when the goods run out					
13	The product on the shelf is not the same as the product announcement label (available product label, non-existent product itself)					
14	Many items are unknown to customers					
15	Lack of proper ventilation and					

	light conditions
16	Insist on cooperation with one or more brands
17	Absence of online shopping system
18	Improper arrangement and shelving (difficulty carrying shopping carts or shopping carts (in some parts of the store
19	The price of the product does not match the price listed on the shelf
20	Installation of handwritten signs