CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN RETAIL STORES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Studies regarding customer experience have been mentioned in different aspects for a long period of time. For example, during the 1950s, when Levy noted that "People buy products not only for what they can do but also for what they mean" (Gardner & Levy 1955, Levy 1959, p. 118). With that in mind, the fact that a product could have a symbolic meaning was raised and analyzed, together with several other aspects that would influence a purchase decision and, therefore, the customer experience as a whole, such as emotive, nostalgia, and multisensory aspects, among others. With this in mind, it is known that customer experience has been changing until nowadays, due to the digital transformation that we are facing. This innovation has started as a new possibility for companies to have better results in periods of crisis and withstand in the market, either by offering new products and improving its services or by providing differentiated experiences for its customers during the purchase decision-making process. New customer's relationship in retail stores is also related to the change of customer's profile, who are looking moreover to practical and fast options, and normally looking for an approximation between customer and sales channel - either online or offline. For this change in the relationship and aim for an approximation, the concept of Customer Experience includes some features and actions that help companies to improve their services and, consequently, create a competitive advantage, which will be further detailed later in this study. (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Klaus & Maklan, 2011; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Pozza, 2014; Voorhees et al, 2017).

However, in 1998, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore started to analyze in more detail the term customer experience. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), at that time, the world has faced a few shifts towards the focus of its economy. For them, the world firstly moved from a focus on basic commodities to products, to, later on, shift to a service-focused society, and this last one has been responsible to result in an experience economy. In this same context, the world has been facing so far a series of changes of developments in communications, globalization and information technology. Having everything connected and integrated nowadays, customers' demands and expectations regarding a product or a service are changing as well and, therefore, changing customers' perceptions of the service experience. As claimed by the authors, "In this new experience economy, all types of business will need to consider selling not only services or products, but also experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

When looking into the Brazilian scenario, according to studies made by the Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo (FIESP, 2020), the country is positioned as the fifth largest textile producer in the world, and leads 3% of world production, although it represents less than 0.5% of international trade with exports, demonstrating a nonstrong presence in the international industry. With this in mind, the focus of Brazilian textile goods production is towards the domestic market, which shows a 97.5% participation when compared to the 2.5% of the production destined for exports, data gathered in the same studies conducted by FIESP. Therefore, it is seen that the production of textile goods in the country is very oriented to the Brazilian consumer. Besides consolidated companies within the market of womenswear, there is also a new player that stands out by being a 100% digital business and reaching the

best customer experience and satisfaction rates. This is the case of Amaro, a fashion-related business that is gaining relevance within women consumers in Brazil, especially by their data collection and use for innovation (Euromonitor, 2020).

This study aims to explore what are the most important drivers of customer experience in physical and digital stores of apparel retail in Brazil. We surveyed 247 female customers from all social classes (Brazilian Criteria, 2019) regarding the importance of 12 attributes, in terms of importance, on a 5-point scale. This preliminary study aimed to sort the most important aspects of customer experience, which you can see in descending order, in Table 1.

Order	Attribute	Average	Channel
1	Price	4,49	Both
1	Product Quality	4,49	Both
2	Dressing Room Presence	4,17	Physical
3	Fast Delivery	4,14	Online
4	No frills purchase (no cashier)	3,85	Physical
5	Augmented Reality	3,79	Both
6	E-commerce support staff (presence)	3,76	Online
7	Flagship Store Environment	3,75	Physical
8	Store Pick-up	3,60	Online
9	Online Suggestions	3,47	Online
10	Social Media Presence	3,20	Online
11	E-commerce presence	3,02	Online
12	Brand	2,68	Both

Table 1 - Attribute Preference

We can see that Price and Product Quality are tied in the first place as the most important attributes of the consumer experience. We also ran an ANOVA in SPSS to see if there was a difference in the means of different social classes (A, B1, B2, C1, C2, DE). There were no differences in any of the 12 attributes. We do not see a prevalence in attributes for physical or online stores, which shows that customers may be channel-agnostic, preferring to purchase in the channel that best suits their needs depending on the occasion. With this in mind, we aim to conduct a conjoint analysis with these attributes to find which is the best bundle to offer consumers.

Keywords: Customer Experience, E-commerce, Apparel.

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