

# Marketing Determinants of Customer Experience in Hypermarkets in Egypt

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## **Abstract**

In today's fierce competition environment, the best avenue that retailers (Hypermarkets) can differentiate themselves is through the creation of memorable customer experience. Despite the recognition of the importance of customer experience in the literature, there is a paucity of empirical research in this area. Thus, this study is an endeavor to address this gap in the literature and explore the major determinants influencing customer experience in the hypermarket sector in Egypt.

In order to pursue this objective, a mixed research design was adopted. Firstly, a qualitative exploratory study was carried out, then a conceptual framework that investigates the relationship between both product related factors and market related factors on one side and customer experience on the other side was proposed. Secondly, this framework was tested by means of a survey of Egyptian shoppers in the hypermarkets.

Structured questionnaires were used to gather data using a non-probability quota sampling technique from customers who go shopping in hypermarkets in Egypt. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis.

The main research findings supported that both product related factors (product assortment, product quality and price perception) and market related factors (atmosphere, convenience, personal interaction, and customer to customer interactions) significantly and positively contribute to customer experience. Besides, atmosphere was found to be the most significant determinant of customer experience, followed by price perception, then, service convenience.

By understanding these key determinants detected in this research, retailers and marketing managers can develop their strategies for providing a superior customer experience that set them apart from competition. Incorporating customer experience in retailers' business operations will enable them to have a new source of differentiation.

**Keywords:** *Customer experience, Product related factors, Market related factors, Hypermarkets.*

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## **Introduction**

Nowadays, competing in the marketplace has become increasingly difficult coupled with the similarity of the products and services offered by businesses. Besides, other factors such as advanced technology, sophisticated and demanded customers, traditional methods of offering goods and services have made firms moving beyond goods and services to focus more on customer matters (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Other researchers argued that brands have become commoditized and no longer sufficient as a means of differentiation (Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Christopher et al., (1991) were among the first to anticipate service commoditization. They indicated that the focus for competitive differentiation has shifted from creating design tangible features to provide service benefits. In turn services became generic and were substituted by relationship marketing strategies that inevitably have become generic likewise. According to many reports in Barnes (2002), customer relationship management failed to deliver the expected levels of value for customers and profitability for organizations (Palmer, 2010). . Amid all of this, contemporary customers demand not only competent services but also unique and memorable experiences that accompany the delivery of products and services. Consequently, customer experience may be a new mean of competition in markets and the successor of customer relationship management (Nasermoadeli et al., 2013; Palmer, 2010; Verhoef et al., 2009).

Customer experience has received an increased interest among academicians and practitioners because of the shift from service-based economy into experience-based economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, Schmitt 1999, 2010; Verhoef et al., 2009; Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). Since then; customer experience has emerged as a holistic perspective and a multidimensional concept comprising customer sensorial, emotional, cognitive, physical and social responses (Verhoef et al., 2009; Brakus et al., 2009; Gentile et al., 2007; Yang and He, 2011; Bagdare and Jain, 2013).

It is not very surprising that there is a plenty of articles on customer experience that have been published recently, however most of these studies were predominantly conceptual and emphasized on customer experience from the Western perspectives. After a careful review of the extant marketing literature, it has been found that few attempts were taken to uncover the multidimensional nature of customer experience and explore the factors which significantly influence the customer experience.

In fact, the concept of experience has applied in different contexts such as transport, travel, restaurants, tourism. Nevertheless, identifying the determinants of customer experience has been particularly challenging due to the lack of empirical research chiefly in hypermarket sector which is regarded as a retailing format. Several researchers have introduced the conceptual model of customer experience in retailing and called for more empirical research in this area (Grewal et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009).

Thus, the overall aim of this research is to enhance the academic understanding and serve as a complement (sequel) to the previous conceptual researches through empirically identifying and exploring the main determinants of customer experience within the context of a major retailing industry like the hypermarket sector. In this respect, the research is guided by the following research objectives that emanated from literature review. First, Examine the influence of product related factors, more specifically (product assortment, product quality

and price perception) on customer experience in hypermarkets. Second, explore the influence of market related factors, more specifically (atmosphere, convenience, personal interaction, customer to customer interaction) on customer experience in hypermarkets.

## **Literature Review**

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the concept of customer experience and various interpretations and conceptualizations of customer experience and its determinants did exist. In the following paragraphs a brief review of literature regarding customer experience and its determinants is provided.

### ***Customer Experience***

Significant interest has been given to creating experiences for consumers. Consumer experience takes place during the customers' searching for and purchasing products, delivery of services and consumption (Brakus et al., 2009). Experience is an often-used term that has been increasingly debated since beginning of 2000 (Caru and Cova, 2007) however that concept is still ill-defined (Walter et al., 2010).

For some researchers (e.g. Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009), customer experience is considered as a customer's individual and subjective response to any contact with the provider. The subjectivity nature of experience is explained by Schmitt (1999; p.60) who clarify experience as "*private events that occur in response to some stimulation*" and "*inherently personal*", *existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical and intellectual*".

Some definitions define experience as a mental phenomenon (Sundbo, 2015; Sundbo, 2009). They argued that experience is something that takes place in customer s' minds and consider it as a mental journey that leaves the customers with memories. Some definitions conceptualized experience as purely emotional (Hui and Bateson 1991; Lee, 2010).In contrast to this perspective, other scholars clarified that experience takes a more holistic approach and focuses not only on emotional responses but also on sensitive, physical and cognitive responses (Brakus et al., 2009; Gentile et al., 2007)

Besides, another perspective of customer experience definition is that customer experience originates from a cumulative evaluation of all interactions over the customer`s journey (Gentile et al., 2007; Tyan and Mckenzie (2009); Verhoef et al., 2009).Accordingly, in the literature, different scholars and researchers addressed basic perspectives of the nature of customer experience. However, there is no agreement on one certain definition of customer experience. Many scholars provided their own definition therefore, the term has gone through a number of developments over the years.

In sum, the basis of all these definitions that customer experience is an emotional connection between the customer and service provider and experience is subjective and internal to customers that depend on touch points or moments of truth (Garg et al, 2014).

Customer experience is widely considered as a multi-facet concept (Nasermoadeli et al., 2013; Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Brakus, et al., 2009). However the first who presented the idea of multi-aspects of customer experience was Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) when they clarified that consumption has experiential aspects.

Ultimately, in the experience literature, there is a tendency to categorize customer experience into multiple experience dimensions mentioned in previous studies namely; sensory, affective, cognitive, physical and social.

### ***Sensory Experience***

Sensory experience refers to aesthetics and sensorial perceptions about the product and the surroundings (Nagasawa, 2008 and Schmitt, 1999). The foundation of sensory experience will be through interaction of all five human senses like smell, sound, touch, taste, sight (Hulton, et al., 2009). It also arouses esthetic pleasure, beauty and satisfaction (Gentile et al., 2007) and formed memory in the mind (Kumar et al., 2013). Customer viewpoint on products and services will be based on their sensory experience (Yuan and Wu, 2008).

### ***Affective Experience***

It can also be called emotional experience which involves customer's inner feelings, moods and emotions during the shopping trip (Yang and He, 2011). In addition Roos, (1999) argued that strong brand switching behavior will be the result of negative emotions' responses. Customers who have an emotional commitment tend to invest more in their relationships than others who don't have (Mattila, 2001).

### ***Cognitive Experience***

It can be referred to as intellectual experience which includes connection to consumers' thinking and conscious mental processes (Gentile et al., 2007). Intellectual experience arises through think marketing (Kumar, et al., 2013) which aims to generate cognitive and problem-solving experiences and encourage customers to creativity thinking (Schmitt, 1999).

### ***Physical Experience***

It targets the consumer actions, physical behaviors, lifestyles and is so related to bodily experiences induced by interactions with brand (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus et al., 2009). Physical or behavioral experience is the outcome of act marketing (Kumar et al., 2013) which aims to enrich customers' lives by presenting methods of doing something and alternative lifestyle (Schmitt, 1999).

### ***Social Experience***

According to Schmitt (1999) social or relational experience is about how good or bad the relationship is with others and society. "Taking into account individuals' desires to be a part of social context (e.g. to their self-esteem)" (Schmitt, 2010). Social experience can be the consumption of an offering together with other people (Gentile, et al., 2007) and relating to reference group (Brakus et al., 2009). Mass media and peer groups play a significant role on individuals through socialization way.

### ***Determinants of Customer Experience***

A stream of research in retailing has shown that determinants were categorized in two groups: product related factors (i.e. product assortment, product quality and price perception) and market related factors (i.e. Atmosphere, convenience and personal interaction, customer to customer interaction) (Berry et al., 2002; Siu and Wong, 2002, Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Skallerud et al., 2009; Mittal and Gupta, 2012).

### ***Product related Factors***

According to Pan and Zinkhan, (2006); Mittal and Gupta, (2012), product related factors pertain to product features and attributes like product assortment, quality of merchandise and price.

#### ***Product Assortment***

In traditional retail stores, shelf space is limited, thus the major assortment issue which encounters retailers involves which products and in what number they should be placed on the shelf space (Koul and Mishra, 2013). Product assortment can be depicted by two characteristics including assortment width and assortment depth (Shallerud et al., 2009; Chernv, 2011; Toporowski and Lademann, 2014). Based on Yoo et al., (1998), product assortment as one of the store characteristics can induce positive emotional responses for shoppers and these emotions, in turn can influence consumers' store attitude. Besides, Verhoef et al., 2009 proposed conceptual model in which they argued that assortment can be a vital determinant of superior customer experience.

#### ***Product Quality***

The quality of products has been shown to be of high importance in shaping customer experience (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Chebat and Michon, 2003; Terblanche and Boshoff, 2006; Alan et al., 2015; Bujisic, 2014). Similarly, extant research empirically investigated the relationship between food quality and customer experience in the context of restaurants (Ali and Ru, 2015; Jaini et al., 2015; Ali et al., 2014).

#### ***Price Perception***

Perceived price is defined as the customer perception of what is given or sacrificed from getting a product or service (Aga and Safakli, 2007; Sumaedi et al., 2011; p.90). The customer perception of the price is more important than the actual prices. Price perception addresses how the customer comprehends price information (Ismail and Melewar, 2008).

Besides, little empirical research discussed the association between price perception and customer experience. In a study carried on hotel context by Ismail and Melewar, (2008), it was evident that the perceived price of services affects customer experience during service consumption. However, Bujisic, (2014) also clarified that no relationship was found between perceived price fairness in the beverage establishments and cognitive experiential state. Other researchers theoretically argued about the impact of price and assortment (Carreira et al., 2013; Verhoef et al., 2009 ; Grewal et al.,2009; Kalmedevi, 2010) on customer experience creation.

### ***Market related Factors***

Based on Pan and Zinkhan (2006), market related factors are concerned with the retailer of interest, such as store atmosphere, convenience of shopping and interactions with both customers and store employees.

### ***Atmosphere***

Atmosphere is a term that is firstly introduced by Kotler (1973) who explained it as the design of store environment that can generate certain buyer emotions and consequently influence their purchasing behavior. Bitner (1992) also made up the term "servicescape" to depict the physical environment which is different from natural and social environment. Based on literature, customer experience is influenced by the atmosphere cues in different contexts (Jaini et al., 2015; Alan et al., 2015; Pareigis et al., 2012; Joshi and Kulkarni, 2012; Cameron et al., 2003; Walter and Edvardsson, 2012). In addition, Farias et al., (2014) theoretically asserted that there is a positive relationship between the retail controllable variables such as store atmosphere cues and the customer experience.

### ***Convenience***

Convenience can be described as the ability to reduce time and effort consumers spend on product and service acquisition (Brown,1990).In retail area convenience is defined in terms of location, car parking, ease of way-finding and operating hours (Bell, 1999). Most of literature work has reported the importance of convenience as one of the essential elements of the shopping experience (Bagdare, 2014; Li et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2011). Srivastava and Kaul (2014) also proved that location, utilities and entertainment are considered as descriptors of convenience and perceived convenience leading to favorable customer experience and in turn leading to customer satisfaction. However, more work needs to be done to empirically investigate the impact of convenience on customer experience in hypermarket retail format.

### ***Personal Interaction***

Personal interaction is considered as a point of contact between the customer and company employees (Bitner, 1990). Several researchers evaluated the quality of personal interaction by the service employee competence, listening skills and levels of dedication (Chandon et al., 1997; Keng et al., 2007). Interactions during service delivery have been shown to have a significant impact on customer experience. The importance of employee-customer interactions was highlighted in the tourism sector (Cetin et al., 2014), in the universities (Garg et al., 2014) as well as within the retail sector (Bagdare, 2012; Chodchuang and Haron, 2012).

### ***Customer to customer Interaction***

Customer to customer interaction, (henceforth CCI) is defined as the direct interaction between unacquainted customers encountered in the servicescape (Martin 1996; Huang and Hsu, 2010). Customers to customer interactions are also considered as a potential motive in the service process that will have an impact on the affective state of consumer experience (Wirtz and Bateson, 1999). Besides, Brotoco et al., (2012) results showed that evaluations of customer experience that simply emphasizes the aspects of a firm performance (e.g service quality) may be incomplete in contexts where customer share the service facility. In conceptual framework proposed by Verhoef et al., 2009, experience encompasses more than just a simple assessment of employee performance. They shed the light on the role of other customers played in the store and how the experience of one customer can impact the other. Similarly, Andajani et al., (2014) theoretically argued that social environment is considered as an uncontrollable contributing factor of customer experience. Also, extant scholars argued that customer to customer interactions have been regarded so critical in engendering memorable customer experience (Walter et al., 2010; Pareigis, et al.,2011; Nasermodeli et al., 2013).

## **Exploratory Qualitative Research**

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with customers of different sex and ages. The researcher aims at identifying marketing determinants of customer experience in hypermarkets in Egypt to add the relevance of the factors already discussed in review of literature. In order to achieve this purpose, the researcher followed a semi-structured interview format; thereby allowing the scope to ask more probing questions when necessary, make an open interview which helps in revealing new ideas and varying the sequence of questions.

The researcher utilized an interview guide that allowed 13 questions to be asked. The interviewees were customers who had a good overall knowledge of hypermarkets operating in Egypt and often visited them. The central focus of interviews was to grasp more information on the elements like personal interaction, atmosphere, customer to customer interactions, product quality, price perception and product assortment as well as information on how these factors influence the experiences of customers.

## **The Need for Further Research**

The literature review in line with the exploratory evidence assist to a better comprehension of the nature of the problem being studied. Based on thorough review of the extant literature on customer experience, conduction in-depth interviews with customers, and the analysis of secondary data, the researcher can address the research problem *which is "the exploration of the major marketing determinants influencing customer experience in hypermarket sector in Egypt"*.

Despite the recognition of the importance of creating customer experience in today's marketplace, scant empirical research to capture the true meaning of the concept has been conducted. Most research on customer experience is conceptual in nature and hence the empirical base is little. The academic marketing literature investigating the collective impact of the various determinants of customer experience is limited. These determinants have typically been examined in previous studies independently from each other.

The other academic side of problem is that the experience concept has been applied in different contexts, and little has been done to explore its application in context of a major retailing industry like hypermarkets. To date, the research related to customer experience and its determinants in Egypt has been narrow and limited in scope especially in hypermarket sector.

Regarding practical research gap, the Egyptian retail sector will continue its growth over the next few years as well as more hypermarkets will sprout in several places in Egypt. Accordingly, hypermarkets will deal with more sophisticated and demanding customers as well as new and unexpected competitors. Thus, Hypermarkets have to find new and innovative methods for distinguishing themselves in order to face stiff competition in Egyptian arena." Which represented a practical gap". The study therefore, focuses on the customer experience as a differentiating strategy and seeks to investigate series of factors which contribute to customer experience so as to enable retailers to apply that new approach in their hypermarkets. It is worth noting that new approach will eliminate phenomena of lowering prices as a means of competition and makes a shift from just " delivery-focused" service economy to emphasize more on creating memorable experiences.

To sum up, the focus of this research will be on filling these gaps in the literature and identifying the impact of product related factors and market related factors on customer experience in hypermarket retail format.

## Research Hypotheses

H1: product related factors are significantly and positively contributed to customer experience

H1a: Product assortment is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

H1b: Product quality is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

H1c: Favorable price perception is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience

H2: Market related factors are significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

H2a: Atmosphere is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

H2b: Convenience is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

H2c: Personal interaction is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

H2d: Customer to customer interaction is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.

## Proposed Research Model

Determinants that contribute to customer experience in hypermarkets in Egypt were grouped in to two categories as illustrated in the following figure 4.2.

- Product related factors which involve product quality, product assortment, price perception.
- Market related factors which involve atmosphere, personal interaction, customer to customer interaction, convenience.

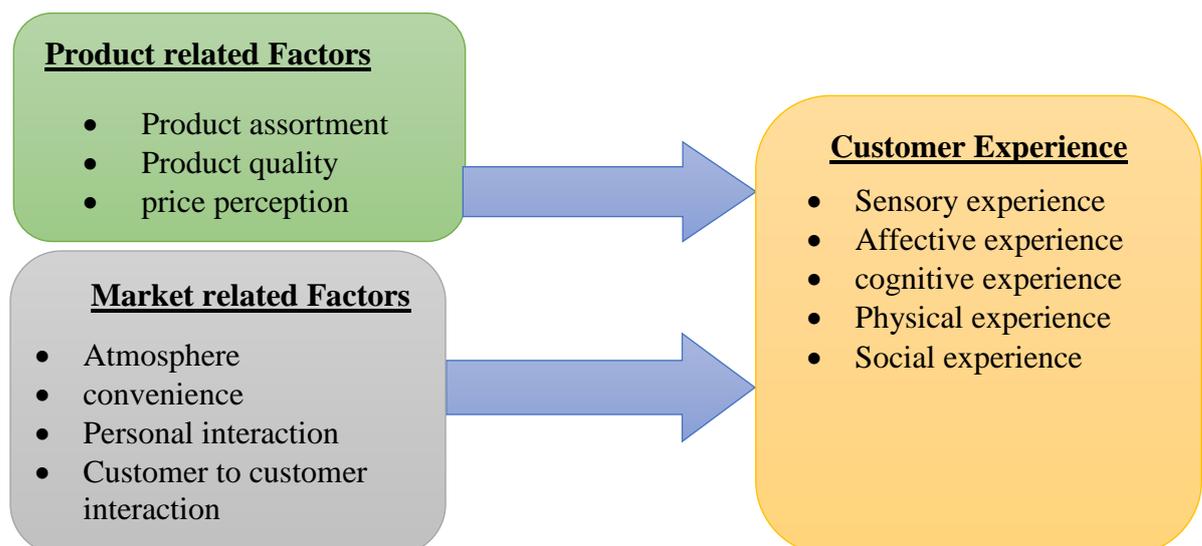


Figure1: Research Model

## **Research Methodology**

### *Research Design and Approach*

The researcher adopts combination of deductive and inductive approach to meet the purpose of the study. The descriptive research is also supported by single cross sectional data collection design; where all data required was gathered only once from every respondent over a short period of time. Qualitative research was adopted to test for the presence of new constructs that can be significant for the study and not thoroughly discussed in prior literature, and to grasp customers' perspectives in this area for more in depth understanding. In addition, quantitative research was chosen in this study since it generates valuable data from a large sample in order to draw general conclusions. Quantitative approach is suitable for generalization.

### *Research population and Sampling design*

The target population of current research involves all shopping customers in three selected hypermarkets (Carrefour, spinneys and hyperone) in Egypt. Since most branches of selected hypermarkets are located in Cairo and Giza city, the researcher emphasize on these branches to represent the population site. A non-probability quota sample design is utilized because the population is heterogeneous, exceed millions and no sampling frame is available. Accordingly, the sample size of 384 units is obtained by reviewing statistical tables in (Saunders et al., 2009; p.219; Collis and Hussey, 2009; p.211).

### *Data collection*

Structured self-administered questionnaire was utilized to gather data from customers who go shopping in hypermarkets in Egypt. The questionnaire was designed in English language taking into consideration the data required and scale items utilized in testing hypotheses. Since the target group study is Egyptian customers, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic and was reviewed by peers and marketing professors. As well as, the data collection process began on November 1th and ended on January 28th, 2016. Further, 480 printed questionnaires were distributed to customers, only (384) questionnaires were returned complete and valid for the analysis.

### *Variables and Measurements*

In this research, variables can be categorized in two sets:

- Product related factors and market related factors (independent variables) :  
Product related factors include product quality, price perception and product assortment while market related factors constitute atmosphere, convenience, personal interaction and customer to customer interaction.
- Customer experience (dependent variable)

To be able to test hypotheses, the constructs included in the proposed research model needed to be translated into multi-item measures. All items are rated on a five point likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree.

### *Data analysis techniques*

Descriptive statistics is utilized to describe the basic features of sample data and provide simple summaries about the sample and measures. Next, Cronbach's alpha is conducted to test the reliability of all multi-item scales. Confirmatory factor analysis is also employed to test the validity of used scales. Finally, testing hypotheses through multiple regression analysis.

## Results of Hypothesis testing

This research depended on various statistical techniques, including Pearson correlation between marketing determinants and customer experience as well as multiple regression analysis to explore the most significant determinants that influence customer experience (see appendix I). The tested results of all research hypotheses are shown as follow:

### ***H1: Product related factors are significantly and positively contributed to customer experience***

The hypothesis is supported indicating the existence of positive and significant relationship between product related factors and customer experience ( $\beta = .425$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

#### ***H1a: Product assortment is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.***

The results indicates that hypothesis is totally approved because product assortment is positively and significantly related to customer experience as a total construct ( $\beta = .116$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Besides, this hypothesis is partially approved as product assortment is significantly related to cognitive experience which is considered a sub construct.

#### ***H1b: Product quality is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.***

The analysis reveals that product quality positively and significantly influences customer experience as total construct ( $\beta = .141$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also, a significant and positive association is found between product quality and dimensions of customer experience (sensory, affective, cognitive, physical and social). Hence, H2b is totally confirmed.

#### ***H1c: Favorable price perception is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience***

This hypothesis is totally supported since favorable perceived price by customers will have positive impact on their experience ( $\beta = .157$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also, perceived price is significantly associated with some of sub-constructs which are affective, physical, and social experience and consequently H2C is partially supported.

### ***H2: Market related factors are significantly and positively contributed to customer experience***

This hypothesis is approved since customer experience is positively and significantly influenced by market related factor ( $\beta = .564$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This implies that positive customer experience is driven by atmosphere, convenience, interactions of service providers and customers as well as interactions between customers themselves.

#### ***H2a: Atmosphere is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience***

This hypothesis is totally supported since atmosphere is positively and significantly associated with customer experience as a total construct ( $\beta = .176$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as well as it is partially supported where sub constructs which are cognitive and social experience is affected by atmosphere.

#### ***H2b: Convenience is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience***

The analysis demonstrate that convenience will have positive impact on customer experience as a total construct ( $\beta = .148$ ,  $p < .001$ ). further, all dimensions of customer experience is affected by convenience. As such H2b is totally confirmed.

**H2c:** *Personal interaction is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience.*

The analysis demonstrate that personal interaction will have positive impact on customer experience as a total construct ( $\beta = .138$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, the sub-construct which is social experience is influenced by personal interaction, thus H2c is partially supported.

**H2d:** *Customer to customer interaction is significantly and positively contributed to customer experience*

The results clarified that customer to customer interactions will have positive influence on customer experience as a total construct ( $\beta = .071$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, all dimensions of customer experience is affected by customer to customer interaction. As such H2b is totally confirmed.

## **Empirical Research Findings**

The research aimed to investigate the main determinants of customer experience within a major retailing industry such as the hypermarket sector in Egypt. In order to pursue this objective, a mixed research design was adopted. Firstly, a qualitative exploratory study was carried out, then a conceptual framework that investigates the relationship between product related factors, market related factors and customer experience was proposed. Secondly, this framework was tested by means of a survey of Egyptian shoppers in the hypermarkets. A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed on shoppers in the hypermarkets. Of the total 480 customer chosen, 384 responded to the questionnaire yielding response rate (80%).

In order to test the stated research hypothesis, the researcher depended on various statistical techniques, including pearson correlation between marketing determinants and customer experience as well as multiple regression analysis to explore the most significant determinants that influence customer experience.

The main research findings revealed that several determinants influencing customer experience are grouped under two categories namely: product related factors and market related factors. It was revealed that market related factors are the most critical and significant determinants that can shape a memorable customer experience. Further, atmosphere is regarded the strongest predictor of customer experience, followed by price perception. Service convenience comes in the third place.

The results indicated that the sub-construct which is cognitive experience is affected by product assortment. This means that strong interests and intellectual stimulus will be generated through provision of variety of products. Consequently, the customer will get a good perception of the hypermarket which in turn will stimulate them making more purchases. Besides, the quality of products provided by hypermarkets positively contributes to customer experience

It is worth noting that the sub-constructs which are affective, physical and social experiences are influenced by price perception. Based on the research results, positive emotions, moods and feelings among shoppers will be derived from their favorable perceptions of price. Also, price perception which basically deals with promotions, discounts, specials and offers can exert an influence on physical experiences of customers. Due to favorable perceptions of price, customers will exert some actions such as being inspired to stay a long time in that hypermarket or revisit it; make more purchases from products on discount and more spending. Lastly, setting the right price can cause shoppers to build a

connection with that hypermarket, find a sense of belonging, discuss the hypermarkets' offers and promotions with other friends or relatives and shoppers will voluntarily recommend that hypermarket to others.

Further, the findings showed store atmosphere significantly contributes to the sub constructs namely: cognitive and social experience. Hence, the cognitive assessments of the experience are based on some observable aspects such as the store design, the presentation of products, appropriate lighting as well as the color theme inside the stores. In addition to that, pleasant atmosphere attributes can encourage customers to socialize in the hypermarket, get to know new people as well as visit it with friends and relatives in order to get entertained and spend an enjoyable time.

Also, it is clear that the offering aspects of convenience in the hypermarkets (e.g. the availability of parking, late operating hours, the availability of proper information, proximity of location as well as the ease and speed of shopping process) can actively shape a superior customer experience.

Besides, the interactions between the employees and customers influence on the sub-construct (social experience). It was revealed that providing friendly and professional employees interactions with customers can lead to enhance the social experience that allows customers to build deep connection with the retailers (hypermarkets). The findings of this research also clarified that customer to customer interaction has the least significant weight on shaping customer experience. This result may be due to the lack of customers' awareness of how other shoppers can affect their own behavior and experience on one side. They may not notice the other shoppers until the interaction action impinge on their service experience either positively or negatively on the other side.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This research contributes to the literature on customer experience by more illustration to the experience concept, as well as investigation the multidimensional nature of customer experience within a major retailing context such as hypermarkets. This research also provided a validated framework which identified the major determinants that can influence customer experience from different aspects including sensory, affective, cognitive, physical and social. Two sets of determinants were studied. These are product related factors and market related factors.

As was pointed out in the literature review, most of research on customer experience is theoretically in nature. Thus, the research has empirically provided a major step forward in predicting the factors that influence customer experience in a service context. Accordingly, the results indicated the atmosphere had the greatest impact on customer experience, followed by price perception and then service convenience.

## **Managerial Implications**

The results of this study provide some insights and feedbacks for retail managers in hypermarket sector. In addition, the study provides a strong evidence of the factors which contribute in creating a memorable customer experience. In the increasingly competitive retail marketplace, retail managers of hypermarkets should adopt customer experience as a key source of differentiation. Depending solely on traditional methods such as low prices and

discounts is no longer sufficient because they will move retailers' profits down in the long-term.

***Based on the findings of this Study, the following implications are proposed:***

- Retailers need to view experiences from outside in .In other words, they should identify the ingredients that shape shopping experiences from customers' point of view.
- Retailers also need to redirect their strategies to focus more on atmospheric cues such as providing attractive design features (e.g. attractive decorations, store style, product display and arrangement, natural surroundings). Other cues are proved to be important including enjoyable music, cheerful colors, suitable aromas and use of product spotlighting. Also, retailers should replace textual promotional messages with simple visual signs.
- From a managerial perspective, service convenience needs to be enhanced by improving accessibility of information inside the store. This can be achieved by using new technologies that make shopping experience easier and more convenient.
- Retailers also need to facilitate transactions inside stores such as check-out. They should ensure fast-checkout and fewer queues, thus more checkouts are required inside the stores or utilizing self-checkout.
- Moreover, it is of utmost importance that enough parking spaces are available in the hypermarkets. Extended operating hours is needed to be offered by retailers especially on the weekends and occasions. Retailers should take into their consideration the location factor. Obviously the closer the hypermarket is to where consumers live; the more convenient it is for shopping there.
- Personal interactions are also significant to customer experience in the hypermarkets. Retail managers need to ensure that employees are professional, , providing an excellent service from the first time, paying attention and care for customers as well as being well-groomed and friendly. Thus, managers should develop training programs that enhance their skills to deliver a superior customer experience.
- Coupled with this, retailers need to ensure the quality of customer to customer interactions. Retailers should take into account that a customer to customer interaction is an uncontrollable factor. However, they need to reduce the degree of its influence that may lead to a negative customer experience. This is achieved by informing employees about these interactions and training them when they should and shouldn't intervene in such interactions. Besides, retailers can put signage, recorded messages or even verbal instruction that can post codes of conducts and prevent misbehavior among shoppers. Developing customer compatibility programs will be needed to encourage positive customer interactions and discourage negative ones. Another effective way to control customer to customer interaction is by setting complains-handling procedures which enable managers to solve problems once they crop up.
- Price perception which mainly deals with promotions and discounts has been significant for customers when defining their experience. Thus, retailers should then be concerned with setting the right pricing strategies that can attract customers continuously and maximize their margins likewise.
- Product quality is another predictor of customer experience in this study, suggesting that retail managers of hypermarkets need to offer reliable and dependable products with good quality.

- Determining a customer-driven product assortment is not a simple process. This study found that wide varieties of products and brands can contribute to a positive customer experience. Certainly, retail managers should carry products that have mainstream appeal across a wide range of customers. Also, retailers should keep other products that appeal to specific consumer groups and have a highly customer loyal following.

## Limitations of the Research

The research findings have provided deeper insights into customer experience. However, the research should be viewed in the light of some limitations. These limitations are as follows:

- The study is conducted in hypermarket retail sector. Accordingly, generalizations of the findings to other service sectors should be made with caution.
- Because of time constraint, data was gathered from greater Cairo with no reference to other governorates inside Egypt.
- The other limitation of this study is concerned with the cross sectional research design. Future research needs to adopt longitudinal research design due to the dynamic nature of the phenomena (experiences).
- Many different factors influencing customer experience and it is difficult to provide a comprehensive investigation of all factors in one study. Hence, this study focused on product related factors and market related factors that influence customer experience in hypermarket sector in Egypt.
- The scale utilized for measurement of customer experience is adopted from previous research, however, some participants found it difficult to answer some questions regarding customer experience. Therefore, futures studies can address this limitation by continuing to develop a clear understanding of the five dimensions of customer experience.
- The findings of the research provide an understanding of customer experience and its determinants only from the Egyptian customer`s point of view. Hence, the cultural differences should be taken into account if the study will be applied in other countries.

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## Appendix I:

Table 1: Multiple linear regression model among product related factors, market related factors and customer experience

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient B	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	value	Sig.		
	<b>Constant</b>	.171	2.876	.004	2012.653	.001	91.4	---
<b>1</b>	<b>Product related factors</b>	.425	22.466	.001***				1.741
<b>2</b>	<b>Market related factors</b>	.564	30.311	.001***				1.741

Table 2: Pearson correlation analysis

	Customer experience	Product assortment	Product quality	Price	Atmosphere	convenience	Personal interaction	C2C interaction
Customer experience	1							
Product assortment	.612***	1						
Product quality	.728***	.552***	1					
Price	.671***	.326***	.482***	1				
Atmosphere	.789***	.418***	.499***	.502***	1			
Convenience	.803***	.417***	.539***	.528***	.663***	1		
Personal interaction	.812***	.432***	.507***	.445***	.674***	.721***	1	
C2C interaction	.673***	.304***	.461***	.342***	.539***	.577***	.705***	1

Table 3: Multiple linear Regression analysis for hypothesis testing

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.		
	Constant	.138	2.348	.019*	617.036	0.001***	92	---
1	Product assortment	.116	8.654	0.001***				1.535
2	Product quality	.141	9.286	0.001***				1.915
3	Price	.157	10.899	0.001***				1.561
4	Atmosphere	.176	9.672	0.001***				2.237
5	Convenience	.148	7.354	0.001***				2.625
6	Personal interaction	.138	8.628	0.001***				3.157
7	C2C interaction	.071	4.669	0.001***				2.099

Table 4 : Multiple linear regression model among marketing determinants and sensory experience

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient B	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.		
	Constant	2.481	27.215	.001***	36.541	.001***	40.5	---
1	Product assortment	.005	.231	.817				1.535
2	Product quality	.112	4.767	0.001***				1.915
3	Price	.004	.178	.859				1.561
4	Atmosphere	.014	.505	.614				2.237
5	Convenience	.104	3.320	0.001***				2.625
6	Personal interaction	.011	.328	.743				3.157
7	C2C interaction	.095	4.049	0.001***				2.099

Table 5: Multiple linear regression model among marketing determinants and affective experience

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient B	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.		
	Constant	2.418	24.919	.001***	39.495	.001***	42.4	---
1	Product assortment	.013	.581	.562				1.535
2	Product quality	.124	4.939	0.001***				1.915
3	Price	.055	2.296	.022*				1.561
4	Atmosphere	.001	.031	.975				2.237
5	Convenience	.135	4.064	0.001***				2.625
6	Personal interaction	.023	.648	.517				3.157
7	C2C interaction	.117	4.681	0.001***				2.099

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regression among marketing determinants and cognitive experience

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient B	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	value	Sig.		
	<b>Constant</b>	2.372	25.240	.001***	41.578	.001***	43.6	---
<b>1</b>	<b>Product assortment</b>	.046	2.146	.033*				1.535
<b>2</b>	<b>Product quality</b>	.146	5.983	0.001***				1.915
<b>3</b>	<b>Price</b>	.016	.684	.494				1.561
<b>4</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b>	.070	2.395	.017*				2.237
<b>5</b>	<b>Convenience</b>	.127	3.965	0.001***				2.625
<b>6</b>	<b>Personal interaction</b>	.030	.897	.371				3.157
<b>7</b>	<b>C2C interaction</b>	.086	3.537	0.001***				2.099

Table 7: Multiple linear Regression among marketing determinants and physical experience

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient Beta	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.		
	<b>Constant</b>	2.390	22.837	.001***	36.717	.001***	40.6	---
<b>1</b>	<b>Product assortment</b>	.024	1.002	.317				1.535
<b>2</b>	<b>Product quality</b>	.134	4.957	0.001***				1.915
<b>3</b>	<b>Price</b>	.060	2.341	.020*				1.561
<b>4</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b>	.004	.132	.895				2.237
<b>5</b>	<b>Convenience</b>	.131	3.649	0.001***				2.625
<b>6</b>	<b>Personal interaction</b>	.023	.618	.537				3.157
<b>7</b>	<b>C2C interaction</b>	.124	4.581	0.001***				2.099

Table 8: Multiple linear Regression model among marketing determinants and social experience

No	Independent variables	Estimated coefficient B	t-test		f-test		R <sup>2</sup> %	VIF
			Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.		
	<b>Constant</b>	2.019	19.602	.001***	37.262	.001***	41	---
<b>1</b>	<b>Product assortment</b>	.040	1.713	.088				1.535
<b>2</b>	<b>Product quality</b>	.087	3.248	.001***				1.915
<b>3</b>	<b>Price</b>	.071	2.798	.005**				1.561
<b>4</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b>	.084	2.629	.009**				2.237
<b>5</b>	<b>Convenience</b>	.082	2.318	.021*				2.625
<b>6</b>	<b>Personal interaction</b>	.088	2.360	.019*				3.157
<b>7</b>	<b>C2C interaction</b>	.120	4.506	0.001***				2.099