Chapter 15
Intelligent Customer Experience in a Connected Commerce Environment

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to examine the relationship between the smart customer experience and behavioral brand loyalty through relationship variables (satisfaction, trust, and brand attachment) in the retail sector. Behavioral brand loyalty was examined through positive word of mouth (proselytism), the client's intention to continue the relationship with the brand, and resistance to price increases in the context of connected commerce. A questionnaire was administered face-to-face to 302 French consumers who used smart technology during their shopping experiences. The results obtained suggest that brand attachment explains behavioral loyalty to the brand. Also, the satisfaction and trust that result from a smart customer experience have a positive effect on the customer's attachment to the brand. Finally, only the relationship that stipulates the existence of a significant link between satisfaction and proselytism has not been verified.

INTRODUCTION

Faced with an over-informed customer, with evolving behavior, and dependent on interactive technology, companies are worried about adopting new technologies to make it easier for them to buy. Moreover, retailers are trying to make their physical stores digitized in which they integrate smart technologies: interactive tablets and screens, interactive and virtual windows, order kiosks, interactive mirrors, mobile applications, interactive augmented reality technologies…(Nikhashemi et al., 2021; McLean & Wilson, 2019; Picot-Coupey, 2013). Indeed, the digitization of points of sale is dramatically changing the experi-

ence of customers in stores and the way they buy (Bennett et al., 2015). Nowadays, providing customers with an experience is essential for creating links with customers (Batat, 2018-2020; Berthiaume, 2015; Wei et al., 2019), and one of the central objectives of current retail environments (Huré et al., 2011; Shankar et al., 2011). However, customers are increasingly looking for a personalized relationship with their favorite brands that essentially lies in providing a seamless experience with them. One of the ultimate goals of experiential marketing is, moreover, the creation of interactivity, which is nowadays ensured by technological tools. Thus, the smart customer experience is a means of creating an interaction between the customer and the brand (Nikhashemi et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; Mosquera et al., 2018; Batat, 2018, 2020). Mosquera et al., (2018) state that the most important technological challenge for brands is to take advantage of the interaction that exists between the brand and the customer and to understand the preferences of the latter to provide a smart experience of personalized shopping. This will help to build customer loyalty (Ladhariet al., 2019; Renko et al., 2014). The existing studies dealing with smart technologies are conceptual and focus on the adoption of these tools by retailers such as the work of Pantano & Viassone (2014); Bennett et al., (2015); Voropanova et al., (2016); Willems et al., (2017); Fuentes et al., (2017). Although smart technology allows the company to gain a competitive advantage (Jain et al., 2017; Inman et al., 2017), and to offer its customers memorable and engaging experiences (Batat, 2018-2020; Kim et al., 2017; Bodhani, 2012; Gretzel et al., 2015; Pantano & Di Pietro, 2012), it remains however mixed empirically (Roy et al., 2017). Nonetheless, Roy et al., (2017) highlighted the lack of rigorous empirical studies on smart customer experience in the retail context, and its impact on customer behavior (Roy et al. 2017; Homburg et al., 2017; Keyoor & Sunil, 2019).The effects of the smart customer experience on satisfaction, trust, brand attachment and brand loyalty remain scarce. We will therefore try through our research to shed better theoretical and managerial light by answering the following problem: To what extent can the smart customer experience affect behavioral brand loyalty in the context of retail sales? Thus, to respond to this problem, a research model has been developed that interacts between the smart customer experience, satisfaction, trust, attachment to the brand and loyalty.

In the following paragraphs, we will first present a review of the literature on the acceptance of technological innovations. We will then detail our research methodology, and we will develop and discuss the results obtained.

LITTERATURE REVIEW

Smart Retailing

Smart retailing or connected commerce allows the reinvention of retail and the customer experience of the 21st century. Bèzes, (2019) and Roy et al., (2017) define smart distribution as being "An interactive and connected retail system that supports seamless management of different customer contact points to customize the customer experience at different points of contact". This system highlights a set of interactions between different parts of the retail world (customers, retailers, products, brands, smart objects "smart technologies" and retail channels…) The goal is to merge the digital and physical worlds to generate greater value for both customers and businesses, thereby improving the quality of purchasing experiences (Pantano& Timmermans, 2014). Indeed, Kim et al., (2017) argue that the explosion of smart technologies has provided retailers with innovative and beneficial ways to transform the buying experience of the new "hyper-connected and over-informed" consumer (Druguet et al., 2015). Thus,

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