The Effect of Integrated Experiential Marketing on Brand Identification and Customer Intention

A Study on Global Fast Fashion Brands in Taiwan

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Abstract—**This study aims to examine the effect of integrated in-store and online experiential marketing on customer brand identification and purchase intention. This study selects the international fast fashion brand ZARA as the main research object, mainly because ZARA is a major international clothing retailer and pioneer of fast fashion principles which is very popular among young ethnic groups in Taiwan. Different from local clothing brands, most of which either sell via online stores or brick-and-mortar stores, ZARA has successfully promoted online marketing in Taiwan, and still invests in physical stores to create an experience atmosphere. This study believes that fast fashion brands, such as ZARA, can provide high service quality by integrating virtual and real experiential marketing, which shall enable consumers to generate experiential value and brand identity, and hence to enhance customers' purchase intention of their products. The main target customers of these international fast fashion brands are young people, both online and offline. When most fast fashion brands are quite successful at online sales, why do they still open physical stores as luxury brands? Research results show that physical store management can help to improve the customer relationship and hence has positive effect on brand identification and purchase intention.**

Keywords- Experiential marketing; Internet communication; Brand identification; Customer intention; Fast fashion.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are four international apparel retailing chains popular in Taiwan among young adults, namely, ZARA, Uniqlo, H&M, and GAP. These so-called fast fashion brands have revolutionized the fashion industry by following a strategy known as fast fashion, democratizing couture and bringing trendy, affordable items to the masses, especially to the Internet generations of young adults and teenagers. Therefore, these international brands are quite successful in online sales. In Taiwan, all of these clothing brands have both physical and online stores. One might ask why would

these fast fashion chains set up physical stores like high-priced clothing brands? All of the four major brands have opened physical stores in big cities in Taiwan. While young customers tend to choose the cheaper products among similar styles, they also favor higher quality. One of the differences between virtual and physical stores is that online stores can offer cheap products and special discounts to entice customers to buy. On the other hand, for the physical stores, in addition to completely delivering the style and concept of the brand and the goods, they provide customers more services with the brand's specific shopping atmosphere and experiences. Therefore, it raises the question: can integrating real and virtual sales establish a stronger and better relationship with consumers?

While online shopping is growing, it is difficult to completely present the style and the corresponding concepts of the brand and its products to the customers. The problem can be resolved in the physical stores by providing more services, store atmosphere and shopping experience to consumers. Therefore, this study aims to examine if the physical stores can strengthen the quality of online store communication, and if integrating real and virtual sales can establish a stronger relationship with consumers and better relationship quality. To this end, this study takes the international fast fashion chain ZARA as the research object, and tries to understand if clothing quality can improve the quality of relationships with customers, if the experience marketing of physical stores can improve the quality of relationships with young consumers, and if the store atmosphere of a physical store can improve the quality of relationships with young consumers.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In Section II, we present the literature review. In Section III, we describe our research method. The experiment and discussion are shown in Section IV. Finally, the conclusion and ideas for future work are presented in Section V.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on issues such as service quality, store atmosphere, brand identification, experiential marketing, experiential value, purchase intention, customer satisfaction, and Internet communication quality.

A. Service Quality

Services consist of a series of processes and activities. Services possess three well documented characteristics, namely, intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability. Services and consumption occur and exist simultaneously. Customers feel the service in the process of interactions, and the service quality is the subjective perception of consumers [1]. Customers perceive the service through the overall perception of the overall quality of the services. When the services are provided, whether these services meet consumers' perceptions and expectations will critically influence their repurchase intention [2][3]. However, it could be difficult for a firm to understand how the customers perceive services and service quality.

Nowadays, consumers are demanding increasingly higher service quality. When they are provided the services, they have expectations. If the consumers feel that their demands are satisfied and respected, they will think about buying the products. Moreover, if they feel that the products or services are satisfactory during the purchasing process, they would have the idea of repurchase or recommending it to friends and relatives. In addition, if the service does not provide what the customers wants, one will have to let the customer feel satisfied during the waiting process [4].

Many researchers have discussed the service quality dimensions. Juran proposed dimensions for service quality, such as internal quality, hardware quality, software quality, timely response, psychological quality [5]. Zeithaml, Parasuram and Berry proposed a service quality model based on tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy [6].

To improve the service quality, ZARA tries to give warm and professional assistance to the consumers and to quickly respond to customers' preference on the product. To this end, ZARA takes a different selling approach than the traditional ways by introducing the Self-Service Check Out Technology that links the online and offline experiences together and create more value for their customers.

B. Store Atmosphere

Kotler et al. [7] have shown that elaborately designed shopping environments could trigger certain emotions and further increase customers' purchase intention. According to Kotler, the sensory channels for atmosphere are sight, sound, scent and touch [8]. Taking these channels into account for the design of the stores could establish some specific atmosphere, which would create some physical as well as psychological experience to the customers, and very likely impact their buying decision [9]. To understand how consumers choose products, one must take both "personal factors" and "situational factors" into consideration, and "situational factors" tend to be more critical than "personal factors" [10][11]. Since the service is intangible, the customer will assess its quality based on some of the most common clues: the store's physical environment design, furnishings, lighting, sound effects, interaction with the service personnel, etc. Berman and Evans [12] categorize the store's atmosphere into five different kinds: (1) external environment: awnings, display windows, buildings, parking lots; (2) general indoor environment: floor plan, color, sound, lighting, smell, temperature, cashier location; (3) store layout: product combination, customer flow, traffic flow planning, waiting time, department location; (4) internal display: product display, shelf/box, poster, label, promotion tag; (5) human variables: crowdedness, customer traits, salesperson attitude and employee uniforms. ZARA conveys the brand's concept with the image of the display window. Its spacious shopping space with bright light and neutral color creates a stylish and comfortable shopping environment. In addition, there are mirrors everywhere in the accessories area for customer to try on items.

C. Brand Identification

Brand identity can convey to consumers information about the logos, concepts and products of the brand. Consumers' recognition of brands includes symbolism, emotions, associations, self-identification, etc. [13]. Consumers are more willing to purchase products that are identifying to their self-images [14], and these products make it easier to build brand identity [15]. Some consumers tend to associate their social status with brands, and think they can improve their personal image by buying brand goods [16], and therefore, to them, brands usually have a strong appeal [17].

When consumers recognize a brand, they are more willing to pick the brand's products as the first choice for purchase. Many consumers choose to use their favorite brands when they purchase goods. They also recommend relatives and friends to use these brand goods, which indirectly helps to promote the brand companies. Some consumers think that ZARA clothing is more fashionable and diversified, and it not only fits their own body shape, but also represents their personal styles.

Brand identity is highly related to perceived values which can be defined with different dimensions, such as active value and passive value [18], functional value, social value, and emotional value [19]. Kepferer defines brand identity with six facets, namely, physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image [20].

D. Experiential Marketing

Schmitt proposed a strategic framework for experiential marketing, in which consumers are viewed as rational and emotional human beings who take pleasurable experiences into purchase decision [21]. Therefore, marketers can create various experiences to intrigue customers and to affect their purchase intention, such as sensory experiences, affective experiences, cognitive experiences, physical experiences, and social-identity experiences. These experiences can be implemented through communications, visual and verbal identity, product presence, electronic media, etc.

Pine and Gilmore pointed out that an experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event [22]. In the process of purchasing, consumers not only focus on functions, but also on personal taste, stimulating or certain feelings thus creating an unforgettable experience. The impression will make consumers connect with the brand of the product. When the consumer feels a stimulating and special experience, it will affect the consumer's willingness to purchase.

To create pleasurable and memorable shopping experiences for the consumers, ZARA offers fresh assortments of designer-style garments and accessories for relatively low prices in sophisticated stores in prime locations in order to draw masses of fashion-conscious repeat customers. For Taiwanese consumers, ZARA has been well-known before it has set up a store in Taiwan. Its unique operating model and stylish clothing brings to consumers a different experience than other stores.

E. Experiential Values

Value refers to the results of consumers' assessments and comparison about the goods. Perceived value is the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given, which represents a tradeoff of the critical give and get components [23]. The value of experience comes from the consumers' interactions with the retail entity and services [24]. Experiential value varies with different people, time, and places [18]. Experiential value can be enhanced through interaction, but it may hinder the consumer's purpose [25]. After comparing the services and products, the value perceived by the consumers, and the results will influence the purchase intention.

F. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to three measuring indices, namely, the possibility of consumers purchasing the product [26], whether they will consider purchasing the product, and whether they will recommend the product to friends and relatives as a measure of purchase intention [23]. The higher the willingness to buy, the greater the chance of purchase. Therefore, purchase intention can be used as a predictive consumer's subjective view of a product [27].

G. Internet Communication Quality

In the era of e-commerce, the Internet is used interactively for two-way communication and transactions, with the main method of online communication being e-mail. Some of the sites reviewed also provided online ordering and payment systems, although these varied greatly regarding geographical limitations, merchandise ranges and levels of security [28]. Zeithaml et al. pointed out that communication and control processes in the delivery of service quality. Instantly sharing the brand's information on the Internet to the customers, such as backgrounds, content, plans, activities, goals, would help to make customers understand the firm and its brand [6]. On ZARA's official website, customers can see the background information, design

methods, sales models, and annual reports. Classified information, such as lists of new products and best selling products, size chart, detailed compositions and maintenance methods, are also provided for the convenience of the consumers.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a questionnaire survey was conducted to explore the relationship between service quality, experience marketing, store atmosphere, Internet communication quality, and relationship quality, and to see how three aspects of service quality, experience marketing, and store atmosphere, impact on relationship quality with the moderation effect of Internet communication quality. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesis framework.
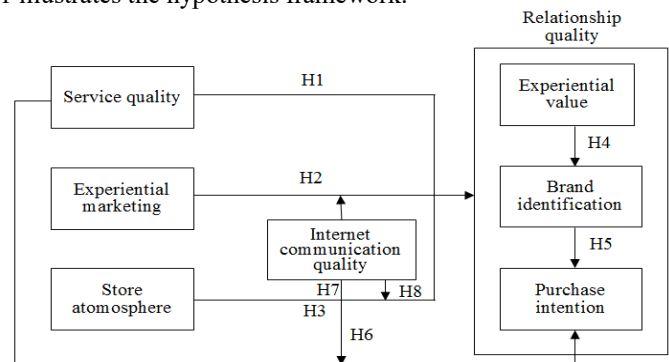

Figure 1. Research hypothesis framework.

The research hypotheses are as follows:
H1: Service quality positively affects relationship quality.
H2: Experiential marketing positively affects relationship quality.
H3: Store atmosphere positively affects relationship quality.
H4: Experiential value positively affects brand identification.
H5: Brand identification positively affects purchase intention.
H6: Internet communication quality positively enhances the relationship between service quality and purchase intention.
H7: Internet communication quality positively enhances the relation between experiential marketing and relationship quality.
H8: Internet communication quality positively enhances the relation between store atmosphere and relationship quality.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Statistical Analysis

It took three months to complete the questionnaire survey. The participants of this research were mostly young adults aged 18-40, who have ever shopped or browsed in ZARA store. A total of 592 valid questionnaires were collected. Among them, there were 248 males (47.1%) and 279 females (52.9%). The age distribution was 18-22 (29.8%), 30~40 (20.7%), 40 and above (4.2%), 18 and under (3.8%). The distribution of education was high school (19%), college (73.4%), graduate school (7.6%). The distribution of

monthly cost on apparel was $35 and less (12.3%), $35~$90 (31.5%), $90~$200 (23.7%), $200~$400 (27.9%), $400 and more (4.6%). About 47.6% of the participants have visited ZARA's website.

B. Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's α is used to check the reliability of factors. According to Nunnall [10], the greater the value of α is, the greater the reliability is. Overall, when α value is greater than 0.7, it is acceptable. When α value is less than 0.5, it is unacceptable. From Table I, one can see that all subfactors have high α value, it means the survey is reliable.

TABLE I.   CRONBACH'S α VALUE OF EACH

Factor	Subfactor	Cronbachs'α
Service quality		0.904
Store atmosphere		0.946
Experiential marketing	Sense	0.828
	Feel	0.855
	Think	0.901
	Action	0.751
	Relate	0.957
Internet communication quality	Feeling of presence	0.869
	Communication effectiveness	0.895
Relationship quality	Experiential value	0.944
	Brand identification	0.897
	Purchase intention	0.880

C. Tests of Research Hypothesis

For the first three hypotheses, this study uses multiple regression analysis to test the research hypotheses on service quality, experiential marketing and store atmosphere (independent variables) with respect to relationship quality (dependent variable). F test is used to measure the significance of the regression model. The standardized regression coefficient (beta) is applied to evaluating the predictive or explanative power of an independent variable. The results are shown in Table II where we can see that hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are correct. Moreover, since the Beta value of experiential marketing (0.638) is greater than that of store atmosphere (0.161) and service quality (0.111), it means that experiential marketing has more impact on relationship quality.

TABLE II.   MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON SERVICE QUALITY, EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING, AND STORE ATMOSPHERE VS RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	P
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.630	0.134		4.703	0.000
Service quality	0.101	0.032	0.111	3.139	0.002
Store atmosphere	0.154	0.034	0.161	4.567	0.000
Experiential marketing	0.621	0.035	0.638	17.951	0.000
R^2				0.708	
F				422.416***	

dependent variable : relationship quality
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

UnStd. coef.: Unstandardized coefficients ; Std. coef.: Standardized coefficients

In simple linear regression, F test and t test have the same statistical significance. The t value represents the significance and it always converted to p value to measure the hypothesis. To test hypothesis H4, simple linear regression analysis is conducted for experiential value (independent) and brand identification (dependent). The results are demonstrated in Table III where one can see that H4 is acceptable, that means, the experiential value has positive impact on brand identification.

TABLE III.   SIMPLE LINEAR REGRESSION ON BRAND IDENTIFICATION AND EXPERIENTIAL VALUE

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	P
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.192	0.183		11.961	0.000
Experiential value	0.588	0.035	0.594	16.940	0.000
R^2				0.353	
F				286.954***	

dependent variable: brand identification
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

To test hypothesis H5, simple linear regression analysis is conducted for brand identification (independent) and brand purchase intention (dependent). The results are demonstrated in Table IV where one can see that H5 holds, that says, brand identification positively affects purchase intention.

TABLE IV.   SIMPLE LINEAR REGRESSION ON BRAND IDENTIFICATION AND PURCHASE INTENTION

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	P
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.306	0.175		13.208	0.000
Brand identification	0.554	0.033	0.593	16.872	0.000
R^2				0.352	
F				284.667***	

dependent variable: Purchase intention
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

When adding brand identification to the above simple linear regression, Beta value is reduced from 0.641 to 0.446. It indicates that brand identification is a mediator between experiential value and purchase intention, and the impact of experiential value on purchase intention is reduced.

TABLE V.   HIERACHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON EXPERIENTIAL VALUES, BRAND IDENTIFICATION AND PURCHASE INTENTION

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	P
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.127	0.164		13.001	0.000
Experiential value	0.592	0.031	0.641	19.125	0.000
R^2				0.411	
F				365.781***	
Constant	1.455	0.173		8.387	0.000
Experiential value	0.412	0.036	0.446	11.383	0.000
Brand identification	0.306	0.037	0.328	8.370	0.000
R^2				0.480	
F				241.980***	

dependent variable: Purchase intention
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

To test hypothesis H6, linear regression analysis is conducted for service quality (independent) and purchase intention (dependent) with moderation variable, Internet communication quality. In statistics, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is usually applied in multiple regression analysis, which is the ratio of variance in a model with multiple terms, divided by the variance of a model with one term alone. The results are demonstrated in Table VI, where one can see that H6 holds, that is, good Internet communication quality will enhance the impact of service quality on purchase intention.

TABLE VI. LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION QUALITY SERVICE QUALITY ON PURCHASE INTENTION WITH MODERATION EFFECT

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	VIF
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	5.220	0.033		159.219***	0.000
Service quality	0.172	0.040	0.244	4.290***	1.576
Communication quality	0.336	0.039	0.504	8.694***	1.645
Service X communication	0.050	0.025	0.094	2.016*	1.005
R^2				0.777	
F				80.585***	

dependent variable: purchase intention
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

In Table VII, the results of regression of Internet communication as moderator on experiential marketing and relationship quality indicates that hypothesis H7 does not hold.

TABLE VII. LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION QUALITY AS A MODERATOR ON EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	VIF
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	5.243	0.020		267.174***	
Experiential marketing	0.390	0.029	0.623	13.528***	2.337
communication quality	0.190	0.028	0.312	6.794***	2.330
Experiential X communication	0.020	0.012	0.049	1.636	1.005
R^2				0.776	
F				285.391***	

dependent variable: relationship quality
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

In Table VIII, the results of regression of Internet communication as moderator on store atmosphere and relationship quality indicates that hypothesis H8 does not hold.

TABLE VIII. LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION QUALITY AS A MODERATOR ON STORE ATMOSPHERE AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

	UnStd. coef.		Std. coef.	t	VIF
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	5.242	0.021		248.501***	
Store atmosphere	0.268	0.023	0.465	11.432***	1.611
communication quality	0.299	0.025	0.490	11.991***	1.621
atmosphere X communication	0.021	0.015	0.044	1.367	1.011
R^2				0.746	
F				241.822***	

dependent variable: relationship quality
*** indicate significance at the 1% levels

V. CONCLUSION

This study takes the international fast fashion chain ZARA as the research object and aims to understand the influences of service quality, experiential marketing, and store atmosphere on customer relationship quality. The results show that service quality, experience marketing and store atmosphere will affect the quality of relationship with customers. Experience marketing (ß value 0.638) has the greatest impact, store atmosphere (ß value 0.161) ranks second, and service quality (ß value 0.111) has the least impact. The value of experience affects the willingness to purchase through the mediator of the brand identity. The quality of Internet communication will positively moderate the quality of service to the willingness to purchase.

The brick-and-mortar store manages to create a customer perceptive experience to improve the quality of relationship with customers, including experience value, brand identification and purchase intention. While the store atmosphere can enhance customers' experience value and brand identification, service quality can enhance customer brand identification.

For the international fast fashion apparel chain implementing experiential marketing is useful to create experience value and further increase customers' purchase intention, while brand identification plays a role as mediator to enhance the process.

Among the participants of the questionnaire survey, 251 (47.63%) subjects have visited the ZARA webpage verification page. The Internet communication quality has shown a positive moderation effect on the degree of how the service quality, experience marketing and store atmosphere impact on the purchase intention. Therefore, for the international fast fashion apparel chain which mainly targets the young generations, to maintain and improve Web presence and communication performance can effectively increase the impact of the physical storefront experience marketing, store atmosphere and service quality on customers' purchase intention.

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