EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMER ATTITUDE CONSIDERING THEIR CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract: Consumers are considered the turning point of all marketing activities, and successful marketing starts with understanding the why and how of consumer behavior. Studying and investigating the factors influencing consumer behavior and investigating the rate of effect of each one of these factors on their behavior leads to access to some knowledge and understanding about consumer behavior so that marketers will be able to supply a product which conforms to the consumers' needs and wants. In other words, they can provide goods that are the outcomes of the factors affecting consumer behavior and can create utmost satisfaction in them. This research seeks to explore the effect of experiential marketing is divided into five classes in this research: sensory experiences, feel experiences, cognitive experiences, physical experiences and social identity experiences. The statistical population of the present research includes customers of Ball Store in Rasht city. The research data were collected through a questionnaire, responded by 297 people. The data were then analyzed using PLS software. All of the hypotheses were confirmed except for the one related to cognitive experiences. According to the results obtained in this rese, cognitive experiences has no effect on individuals' customer involvement.

Keywords: Experiential Marketing, Attitude, Customer Involvement

INTRODUCTION

It is very difficult to get aware of the whys of consumers' purchase behavior and the purchase decision-making process. The response to this question roots in the consumers' thoughts and ideas. Kotler& Armstrong (2001) point out that when a consumer does the behavior of purchase decision-making, there exist a stimulusresponse model and the black box concept. Consumer behavior is shaped in such a way that many stimulating and motivating factors together with the factors and stimuli of marketing enter a consumers' black box and he or she shows a particular reaction. The marketer wants to know how these stimuli change and appear as different reactions in consumers' black box. Marketers' success in influencing consumer behavior depends to a large extent on their correct understanding of

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consumer behavior. The information related to consumer behavior can be used to help predict their actions in the market. Therefore, it is essential to know about the factors affecting purchasers' behavior and what these factors have to do with purchasers' decision to purchase a product. Since consumers are considered the turning point of all marketing activities, successful marketing starts with understanding the why and how of consumer behavior. Studying and investigating the factors influencing consumer behavior and investigating the rate of effect of each one of these factors on their behavior leads to access to some knowledge and understanding about consumer behavior so that marketers will be able to supply a product which conforms to the consumers' needs and wants. In other words, they can provide goods that are the outcomes of the factors affecting consumer behavior and can create utmost satisfaction in them. In order to understand consumer behavior, it is necessary to get to know about their customer involvement structure as well as their attitude, and this term is often used for understandingconsumer behavior in relation to a particular subject. Many researchers consider this variable the most important variable in marketing literature due to the high rate of its prediction in purchase behavior.

The theoretical fundamentals of the research are dealt with in the next section, which will be followed by research methodology and findings. The article will finally end with conclusion and discussion.

THE THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF THE RESEARCH

Any decision made by a consumer involves a phenomenon called attitude by psychologists. There are different definitions for attitude, some of which are mentioned in the following:

Attitude refers to the learned assumptions in response to a particular object in a favorable or unfavorable way.

Attitude is one's way of thinking, feeling and acting as to some aspects of the environment including stores, television programs or a product. Turgeon, a modern theorist about attitude defines it in this way: one's degree of feeling toward a stimulus. Attitude refers to the long-term organizing of motivational, emotional, perceptive and cognitive processes with regard to some environmental aspects. On this basis, one's attitude represents his way of thinking, feeling as well as reactions that he has toward his surrounding environment (for example, toward a store, product or a television program). Considering consumer behavior, one can define attitude in the following way: "a consumer's evaluative tendency for or against an element in the market nearby forms his attitude (Vistad *et al.*, 2013).

It is very important to know about employees' attitude in order to understand and predict their behavior. Managers focus attention on the type of employees' attitude since attitude influences one's behavior. For example, less absenteeism is observed for a worker or employee who is satisfied with his job. Therefore, if a manager wants to reduce absenteeism, he should act in such a way that employees have a positive attitude toward their jobs. The important point is that attitude can be controlled and managers can amuse employees with affairs which are on the surface compatible with their attitude type (Jun *et al.*, 2013).

The management gives a considerable importance to employees' attitude, which has a relation with behaviors which have sensitivity for the organization. Generally, employees have a set of constant and identifiable attitudes toward their workplace, some of which are as follow: payments, the workplace conditions, job descriptions, and so on. A person may have thousands of attitudes, but a limited number of attitudes toward jobs are focused on in organizational behavior, which are the following: job satisfaction, the degree to which one knows his job and has active participation in it, and organizational commitment (an index showing one's loyalty to the organization) (Jun *et al.*, 2013).

Sheu et al. (2009) indicate that a way of changing consumer attitude is execution of experiential marketing, because it makes consumers' minds engaged and thus changes their attitude toward a product or service. They describe experiential marketing and Customer involvement. In marketing literature, customers' experience has not been dealt with as a discrete part and most studies have focused on measuring customer satisfaction and quality of services, among which customers' experience has also been mentioned. Customer experience is known as a key factor for companies in creating customer loyalty to the brand name, channels and services, and organizations should identify and organize all factors focused on by customers in their own purchase process in order to create a satisfactory experience in customers (Raz et al., 2008). For access to and maintenance of competition, marketers should provide products and services proportionate with consumers' position and should find out how these products or services can promote the pre-consumption experience. Schmidt (1999) claimed earlier that experiences are shaped through interactions among different psychological events. All businesses should provide memorable events for their consumers. When a consumer receives a satisfactory experience in his first experience of consuming a goods or service, he will have more expectations for subsequent experiences and this makes it difficult for companies to maintain customers. Schmidt (1999) found in his research that companies can do their marketing activities vie experience and by understanding customers' feeling, ideas and actions about the company and the brand. Moreover, organizations should identify and organize all factors focused on by customers in their own purchase process in order to create a satisfactory experience in customers (Piper *et al.*, 2008).

Pine & Gilmore (1998) believe that experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the scene and uses goods as the factors behind the scene in order to engage people in such a way that a memorable event is created.

Only when a customer is willing to pay for this experience, it can be considered an economic suggestion. They also mentioned in this book that experience is the fourth economic fund after materials, goods and services, and it is also an economic fund distinct from services, as services are distinct from goods. Purchasing a kind of experience means spending time in order to enjoy a series of memorable events and happenings supplied by companies like a show and customers are personally on the scene of this display. Spillar &Noci (2007) regard customer experience as the evolution of the relationship between the company and customers. They assert that customer experience has roots in a series of interactions between a customer and a product; a company, or a part of an organization, which results in a kind of reaction. This experience is highly personal and requires customer's engagement at different levels (rational / cognitive, emotional, physical senses and mental-spiritual levels) (Saeidnia & Goodarzi, 2013).

The concept of experiential marketing was first set forth by American writers, Pine & Gilmore (1998). They explained their viewpoints on experiential marketing in the following way: when one purchases a service, he has actually purchased a set of intangible activities done for his right, but when he purchases an experience, he uses it in a series of interesting and memorable events displayed by the company to make him personally engaged. Schmidt defined experiential marketing in 1999 in the following way: any consumer's experience results from movements arising from direct observation or partnership in an event which creates motivation, cognitive satisfaction and purchase behavior. Schmidt asserted that experiential marketing focuses on consumer experiences and regards consumers as people who feel, act, think and communicate. Experiential marketing is a type of marketing that makes individual consumers achieve unique experiences and improve their recognition of a product or service. It creates distinction through the use of consumers' five senses with products. Distinction occurs not only through the benefits of a product, but also through creation of experience. According to him, experiential marketing focuses on consumer experience and evaluation of his position and considers a consumer as an emotional and logical person.

Experiential marketinghas been defined as a managerial process of actions in order to create and provide experience for consumers and satisfy their psychological needs during the consumption process and then enhance their degree of loyalty via the unique value of experience. The chief nature of experiential marketing is to help consumers to find access to self-actualization, and it has three main features;

- 1. Consumer loyalty is the ultimate goal.
- 2. Consumers' demand is the starting point.
- 3. Consumers' communication is the tool.

Experiential marketing creates sensitive communication with consumers in short communication and dialogues and attracts them mentally. Due to engagement

of consumers, the experiential marketing approach in the design of marketing strategy has challenged the researchers of marketing regarding interaction with consumers (Krishna, 2012).

Sheu *et al.* (2009) believe that experiential marketing is assessed by considering the following components:

- ✓ Feel experiences
- ✓ Cognitive experiences
- ✓ Physical experiences
- ✓ Identityexperiences
- ✓ Socialexperiences

Each one of these type of experience will be introduced in the following:

Feel experiences

Experiential marketing stimulates customers' feelings and inner emotions with the aim of creating stimulating experiences ranging from a relatively positive feeling associated with a brand to emotions related to happiness and pride. For the proper function of emotional marketing, we not only need consumer's tendency for engagement in the selection of an idea or thought, but we also need a near understanding of the stimulus that can release special feelings. Standard emotional advertisements lack the two due to its targeting emotions and feelings while in use. Creating a successful emotional ambush at an international scale is difficult, because a stimulus which conveys a feeling in a displayed situation is different in another culture (Sheu *et al.*, 2009).

CREATIVE COGNITIVE EXPERIENCES (THINK EXPERIENCE)

Intellectual marketing aims at creating think and rational experiences and the experience of problem-solving by engaging customer creativity. What is focused on by this type of marketing is customer's convergent and divergent thinking via an element of surprise, curiosity and stimulation. This type of marketing is widely used in product design, retailing, communication and many other industries (Sheu *et al.*, 2009).

PHYSICAL, BEHAVIORAL EXPERIENCES AND LIFE STYLE (ACT EXPERIENCE)

Actexperiences enrich customers' life by targeting their physical experiences and show them another different way of doing things, living and other suggested relations. Logical approaches to behavior (for instance, theories of logical behavior) are just one of the various alternatives of behavior change. Changes in ways of living and behaviors are often inherently more motivational, revelatory and emotional, and are usually influenced by famous faces (Sheu *et al.*, 2009).

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES ARISING FROM RELATION WITH A REFERENCE GROUP OR CULTURE (RELATEEXPERIENCE)

Relate experiences include aspects of sensory, emotional, intellectual and practical experiences, although they exceed individuals' personal and private feelings and as a result they connect an individual to something out of his private mode. The communication campaign is for one's desire for self-actualization (for example, an ideal "ego" in future with whom he wants to be in relation). These experiences respond the need of "being understood positively by others". They also relate an individual to a wider system (a dependent culture, a country etc.).

These five "SEMs" have special structures and rules and care should be taken about advertising about them, because these categories have clear-cut limits and borders but none is a complete independent structure; rather they are all in complete interaction with one another. As a rule, marketers should make strategic attempts to create an interrelated general experience which simultaneously has the features of these five components (Sheu *et al.*, 2009).

As it was mentioned at the very beginning of the discussion, experiential marketing makes individuals mentally engaged with a product or service and then their attitude toward the product or service will change. Therefore, customer involvement variable has been regarded as the mediating variable in this research and will be dealt with in later discussions.

The concept of customer involvement plays an important role in the interpretation of modern consumer behavior. This claim is substantiated by various studies that have dealt with the relationship between decision-making of purchase and consumption and consumer Customer involvement. The importance of dealing with the concept of customer involvement lies in its performance as a motivational force that can describe different stages in the consumer's decision-making process including widespread search for information, duration of decision-making process, formation of beliefs, attitudes and ideas, as well as behavioral outcomes such as different search behaviors, change of brand, commitment to brand, brand loyalty, repeated use of the product and shopping enjoyment (Rayburn & Voss, 2013).

An important issue in consumer behavior is the processing of information by consumers. Information processing by consumers is a process whereby consumers are encountered with information, pay attention to it, understand it, keep in their minds and then restore it for future use. One of the problems that have been reported over and over and which are encountered by marketers is to make consumers perceive, understand and recall the information related to a goods or service.

An important factor in information processing is consumer Customer involvement. This concept has attracted much attention during the past two decades (Daayi&Hassanzadeh, 2010).

Customer involvement hasoriginated from social psychology and is a conception of ego's engagement that refers to the relations between an individual, a goal or a subject. Some connect research on customer involvement to the studies done by Allport (1943). He asserted that customer involvement is one of the fundamental behaviors that originate from ego's engagement. However, Krugman used customer involvement in marketing. Using the learning theory, he found that individuals better recall advertisements that are displayed at the beginning or at the end. Krugman (1965) asserted that advertisements have a low level of Customer involvement. Since he made his important claim about television advertising, customer involvement structure has turned into an important factor in the study of efficiency of advertising (Wang, 2014).

After measurement of customer involvement via propaganda by Krugman, this concept was connected to marketing and consumer behavior. Since then and especially following an increase in studies on consumer behavior during the 1980s, further attention was focused on the concept and measurement of customer involvement in relation to objects such as a product, message, purchase, advertising or activity. Consumers are regarded as people engaged with different advertises and advertising media. Although there is no precise definition of customer involvement in marketing field, there is a consensus about it and that is: customer involvement is an individual level and an internal variable that refers to personal dependency with goals or events (Dvir, 2012).

Marketers' success in influencing consumer behavior depends to a large extent on their correct understanding of consumer behavior. The information related to consumer behavior can be used to help predict their actions in the market. Therefore, it is essential to know about the factors affecting purchasers' behavior and what these factors have to do with purchasers' decision to purchase a product. Since consumers are considered the turning point of all marketing activities, successful marketing starts with understanding the why and how of consumer behavior. Studying and investigating the factors influencing consumer behavior and investigating the rate of effect of each one of these factors on their behavior leads to access to some knowledge and understanding about consumer behavior so that marketers will be able to supply a product which conforms to the consumers' needs and wants. In other words, they can provide goods that are the outcomes of the factors affecting consumer behavior and can create utmost satisfaction in them. One should change customers' attitude in order to create satisfaction in them. The conceptual model of this research also seeks to investigate the relationship between the dimensions of experiential marketing and consumers' attitude through customer involvement. The conceptual model of the research is as follows:

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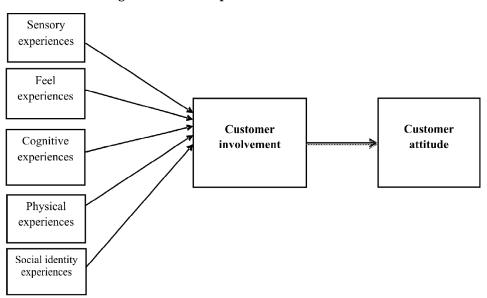


Figure 1: The conceptual model of the research

Based on what was mentioned, the research hypotheses are as follow:

- 1. Experiential marketing affects customer involvement.
 - 1-1). Sensory experiences affect customer involvement.
 - 1-2). Feel experiences affect customer involvement.
 - 1-3). Cognitive experiences affect customer involvement.
 - 1-4). Physical experiences affect customer involvement.
 - 1-5). Social identity experiences affect customer involvement.
- 2. Customer involvement affectscustomer attitude.
- 3. Experiential marketing affects customer attitude.

RESEARCH METHOD

Findings

At first, the description of the research variables has been shown in the following tables:

Table 1 Description of experiential marketing variable							
	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	
Experiential marketing	297	2.4	4.87	3.8041	0.46818	0.219	

As shown in Table 1, experiential marketing has a mean score of 3.8041 from the respondents' perspective, a standard deviation of 0.46818 and a variance equal to 0.219. The mean obtained is greater than the expected mean (score 3), and the least score related to experiential marketing variable from the respondents' perspective is 2.4 and the greatest score is 4.87.

	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
Sensory experiences	297	1	5	3.4072	0.83228	0.693
Feel experiences	297	2.33	5	3.8677	0.64232	0.413
Cognitive experiences	297	2.33	5	3.8522	0.65963	0.435
Physical experiences	297	2	5	3.7921	0.68	0.462
Social identity experiences	297	2.33	5	4.1014	0.66604	0.444

Table 2 Description of the dimensions of experiential marketing

As shown in Table 2, the greatest mean among the dimensions of experiential marketing belongs to social identity experiences with the value of 4.1014, while the least mean belongs to sensory experiences with the value of 3.4072. The most dispersion among the respondents' responses is related to sensory experiences, while the least dispersion is related to feel experiences.

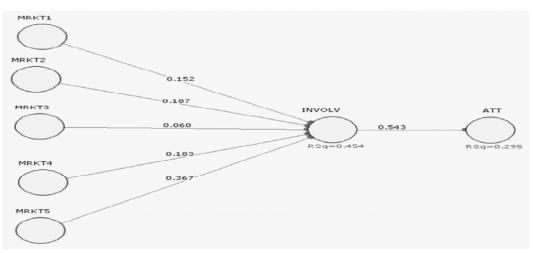
Table 3 Description of customer attitude variable							
	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	
Customer attitude	297	2.75	5	4.3471	0.4909	0.241	

Tabla 2

As shown in Table 3, customer attitude variable has a mean score of 4.3471 from the respondents' perspective, a standard deviation of 0.4909 and a variance equal to 0.241. The mean obtained is greater than the expected mean, and the least score related to customer attitude variable from the respondents' perspective is 2.75 and the greatest score is 5.

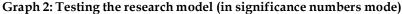
Table 4 Description of customer involvement variable							
	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	
Customer involvement	297	2.13	5	3.8708	0.60023	0.36	

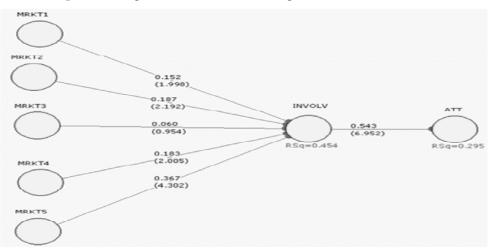
As shown in Table 4, customer involvement has a mean score of 3.8708 from the respondents' perspective, a standard deviation of 0.60023 and a variance equal to 0.36. The mean obtained is greater than the expected mean (score 3), and the least score related to customer involvement variable from the respondents' perspective is 2.13 and the greatest score is 5.





Using this mode, one can find out about the significant relationship between the research variables. In this mode, numbers which are outside the range of (1.96 and -1.96) will be significant, meaning that if a number is between these 1.96 and -1.96 in t-test, it will be insignificant.





The results of testing the research hypotheses are as follow:

4. EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING AFFECTS CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT.

This hypothesis is assessed based on the following sub-hypotheses:

1.1. Sensory experiences affect customer involvement

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been outside the standard range and this hypothesis is thus confirmed. In other words, Ball Store's logo makes customers' minds engaged and makes the customers associate this store upon seeing similar cases. Other sensory experiences of individuals make them change their minds toward Ball Store and its products. Even some cartoon characters and the particular color of this store can create customer involvementif they are exposed to them outside the store's environment. The rate of effect of this variable on customer involvement is 0.15, showing that sensory experiences affect customer involvement up to 15 percent. Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Sheu *et al.* (2009).

1.2. Feel experiences affect customer involvement

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been outside the standard range and this hypothesis is thus confirmed. In other words, Ball Store's activities such as seasonal discountsand seasonal sales or good memories that people have with the products of this store in special parties and banquets makes customers' minds engaged with the products of this store. Feel experiences affect customer involvement up to 18 percent, which are more influential than sensory experiences. Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Sheu *et al.* (2009).

1.3. Cognitive experiences affect customer involvement.

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been inside the standard range and this hypothesis is thus not confirmed. Cognitive experiences mean a review of suggestions and critics. In other words, cognitive experiences cannot create customer involvement oBall store.

Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Sheu et al. (2009). Other researchers had found a significant relationship between these two variables.

1.4. Physical experiences affect customer involvement

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been outside the standard range and this

hypothesis is thus confirmed. Physical experiences mainly refer to experiencing the products of Ball Store in terms of good quality in comparison with other brands as well as in terms of healthy constituents. Physical experiences makes customers' minds engaged so that they only think of the products of Ball Store. The rate of effect of physical experiences on customer involvement is 18 percent, which is equal to the rate of effect of feel experiences on customer involvement. Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Sheu *et al.* (2009).

1.5. Social identity experiences affect customer involvement

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been outside the standard range and this hypothesis is thus confirmed. Social identity experiences have the meaning of continuous relationship with customers, creation of special relation and building a sense of satisfaction in customers. For this purpose, the management of Ball Store is active in a social network and makes pages with the name of the store through which he introduces the products sold in his store. These social identity experiences help create customer involvement. The rate of effect of this variable on customer involvement is 36 percent. Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Sheu *et al.* (2009).

5. CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AFFECTS CONSUMERATTITUDE.

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been outside the standard range and this hypothesis is thus confirmed. Customer involvement means that the store has a particular importance for customers and customers are interested in the products of the store and their needs of home appliances are met in this store. The products of the store are so attractive to customers that they keep thinking of them. Therefore, individuals' customer involvement affects their attitude. The rate of this influence is 54 percent, which is relatively high. . Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Krishna (2012).

6. EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING AFFECTS CONSUMER ATTITUDE.

According to the statistics obtained in the fourth part of the research, the t-statistic value between these two variables has been outside the standard range and this hypothesis is thus confirmed. In other words, sensory experiences, feel experiences, cognitive experiences, physical experiences and social identity experiences affect consumer attitude, and the rate of this influence is 48 percent. Social marketing can influence and change consumer attitude. Similar results were obtained in a similar research conducted by Wang (2014).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

It was shown in this study that all dimensions of experiential marketing except cognitive experiences affect Customer involvement. Thus, only one of the hypotheses was rejected. Cognitive experiences mean accepting critics and suggestions and removing the challenges of the market in products sales. This dimension cannot thus create customer involvement, whereas other dimensions of experiential marketing could create customer involvement. Results reveal that sensory experiences, feel experiences and interactive experiences influence Customer involvement, but cognitive experiences do not affect it.

Most managers do not pay much attention to the strategies of experiential marketing, because they assume their customers to be logical ones who make decisions with regard to the product's characteristics such as quality and price, whereas this theory no longer has validity, and there has been a shift in focus on quality and price into amusing experiences, and consumers' demands have gradually become more emotional, sentimental and amusing. The results of this research also showed this point.

Another important point shown in this research is that this type of marketing cannot create desired and favorable results only through free test, but creating a suitable environment and stimulating customers' feelings and emotions can have a considerable role for access to the desired results. On the other hand, training the staff toward a better and more accurate understanding of experiential marketing and its dimensions in order to implement it thoroughly can have very useful results.

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