KIDS' SHOPPING EXPERIENCE: AN EXPLANATORY STUDY TO IDENTIFY THE GAPS

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ABSTRACT

Shopping experience is something which doesn't reflect profit directly in numbers and retailers are still working on it continuously to extend it up to the maximum level. But the fact is that there is no end line of this race. At the same time it is true that children's shopping experience has not been taken into count, when children become independent buyers and the kids' wear market is the fastest growing market in the apparel sector. This research paper is an attempt to illuminate the importance of providing children an exclusive shopping experience as well as to identify the gaps.

KEYWORDS: Customer Experience, Children's shopping Experience, Enjoyment in Shopping, Barriers in Shopping

Received: Jun 23, 2020; **Accepted:** Jul 14, 2020; **Published:** Aug 12, 2020; **Paper Id.:** IJRMDEC20201

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of experience factor (Chiara Gentile, 2007) is rapidly growing towards deciding the success of a company and researchers are becoming more passionate about it. But being more specific towards retailing, it can be said, low price and innovative products cannot be the only strategies to sustain in the current competitive retail environment. The customer's shopping experience has become a big player in the current retail business model. Customer experience is again a big topic which varies with respect to the retailing model as well as the product, which the retailer must understand.

Again, shopping experience is not only about the product or service, it could be anything that a customer experiences throughout a complete shopping activity. To provide an excellent shopping experience, first the retailers should recognize the importance of customer experience and should acknowledge customer experience management (Grewal, 2009). Customer experience management approach originated to lead the customer experience which gives a win-win scenario for both retailers and customers.

There are three basic segments in apparel and fashion retail industry, i.e. women's wear, men's wear and kids wear. Kids wear is the most profit-making category among all. "India is on a brand binge in the kids wear space," says brand strategist Harish Bijoor (Singh, 2016). Now the status conscious parents, especially mothers, make choices about their children's garments influenced by the current trend, which is a big opportunity for the brands to get maximum out of it. As the retailers talk a lot about customer satisfaction, keeping the contribution figure of kids' wear in mind, now the biggest question is whether the satisfaction of kids matters for the fashion retailer or not? If yes, then is the apparel and fashion retail industry ready to serve an exclusive shopping experience to the kids

as well?

The language of fashion trends is no more a secret recipe for the children, not so the brands are. So the brands are upcoming with wide range of material and designs focusing on the new generation kids who were very passionate about latest trends as well as brands. Experts, retailers, parents and some of the others talked about safety of kids, so while purchasing outfits for children, they were giving importance to check the characteristics or properties of the garments.

The fashion market growth had driven by the 8 to 9% GDP growth and a positive investment interest for the people of India (Gugnani & Brahma, 2015). Among the three segments, kids' market in the apparel industry was the fastest growing sector in India. In 2012, the Indian kids wear market was expected 10.5% CAGR (compound average growth rate) in the contiguous decade (Gugnani & Brahma, 2015). And the next year in 2013, it had been seen that the kids' wear market contribution was 20% (approx. USD 8.3 billion) in the Indian apparel market but due to the higher growth rate of 10.5%, its share was expected to increase to 22% by 2023 (Gugnani & Brahma, 2015). According to McKinsey's Fashion Scope (Imran Amed, 2019) Indian apparel market will be the 6th largest market in the world in 2022 which will be worth \$59.3 billion. The CAGR of Men's wear market is 8.5% and for Women's wear market, it is 9% (Gugnani, 2015). So looking at the contribution as well as the growth rate of kids' wear section in the apparel market its quiet impressive as compared to men's wear and women's wear markets.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Customer Experience

The theory of customer experience (Holbrook, 1982) came into discussion in mid-1980s. Customer experience interpreted as an expansion of the concept of relationship (Gentile, 2007) between the customer and company. The customer experience arises from intercommunication (Shaw, 2002) between a customer and any part of the company, it can be any product or the service. There could be different levels of customers involvement, i.e. physical, emotional, spiritual and rational (Schm, 1999) with the company's offerings. The evaluation of customer experience (Shaw, 2002) can be done in different parameters at different period of time, depending on customer's expectations, which can be different time to time.

2.2. Shopping Experience

The cycle of shopping experience starts with a customer's entry into a bricks and mortar store or an online shopping app or website and ends with the exit from the store or website or app, irrespective of a successful shopping or not, and the experience can be positive or negative. Because every time a customer goes for shopping, he or she always feels something (Martinez & Ribes, 2008). It can be anything, like feeling some sort of excitement, getting bored, surprised or confused with any product; or in terms of service being served, a customer can feel being well served, insulted or ignored, etc.

2.3. Kids' Shopping Experience

Today's children understand the brands and their products. They follow their favourite celebrities and players, which keeps them more informed about the current fashion trends and this makes children independent buyers (Malhotra, 2013). The purchasing habit or behaviour of the children are changing day by day and the strong desire leads to pressure on their parents to come up with some changes in their purchase decisions for their children.

H1. Children's role in selecting their garments (Y) is independent of their age group (X).

The family income size and patterns is changing rapidly and it more or less made the children more informed, which is increasing the brand consciousness (Banerjee, 2014) among them. This upgrading knowledge and the consequent behaviour of the kids is a big opportunity for the brands. Apart from brand consciousness behaviour, there is also another factor which matters for parents while selecting a garment for their child, which is hand feel. And when it's about hand feel before buy a garment, we first think about offline retail stores. Also the factor of hand feel plays a part in parents' decision whether to allow their children to shop on their own or not.

H2. Allowing the kids in selecting their garments (Y) is independent of age group of kids (X).

2.4. Physical Customer Experience

The physical element of customer satisfaction in all the substantial aspects will always be the first priority and advancement in technology would always innovatively lead the industry to achieve this objective. And over the centuries as it has been noted that the stand out factor would not only depend on substantial factors; rather, customer experience and the emotions (Shaw, 2002) would be the differentiators. People believe some of the physical categories that are a part of great customer experience are product, price, service, quality, variety, environment, availability, accessibility, location, etc.

H3. Difficulty in physical accessibility of garments from the shelf of any store (Y) for kids is independent of their age group (X).

2.5. Emotional Customer Experience

The Philosophy Three (Seven Philosophy to Build Great Customer Experience) (Shaw, 2002) states that stimulation driven planned emotions instigated by the experience of the customer is regarded as an achievement and the emotion should be planned that someone wish to stimulate. Some of the emotions that can be stimulated are love, surprise and enjoyment (Shaw, 2002). And the sub-element of these three categories can be as follows:

- Love: adoption, believe, gentleness, empathy, loyalty, care, geniality, etc.
- Surprise: upset, astonishment, wonder, etc.
- Enjoyment: happiness, consolation, pleasure, joy, delight, satisfaction, excitement, ecstasy, satisfaction, fulfilment, exhilaration, etc.

H4. Kids' readiness or willingness to communicate with the sales person to explain their needs (Y) is independent of their age group (X).

2.6. Online Vs. Offline Shopping Experience

Surfing for the online products available was a very popular consumer activity but it differs from offline shopping in terms of appeal to customer. Depending on the consumers there are two major categories, the ones who prefer shopping offline as they like to handle the product and see them and the other category that does not like to invest much time on shopping (Li, 1999) and value their comfort more so they prefer shopping online. The choice of the medium the customer prefers is majorly driven by the product they were looking for and another prominent factor was their mood, which played a vital role while making the decisions (Nicholson, 2002). Hence, when involved in shopping for pleasure, the customers were more likely to choose physical stores for hedonic (Nicholson, 2002) fashion products.

2.7. Enjoyment in Shopping

Shopping was seen more as a fun activity that results in joyful or delighted (Jin, 2004) feelings. Customers, especially the regular shoppers, like to see themselves in a state of enjoyment rather than excitement (Bell, 1999). Consumers adapt to their surroundings and produce measures of evaluation that reflect their interaction with the environment (Griffin, 2000), which leads to the increasing demand of an interactive environment inside the stores.

H5. The demand of interactiveness of any store (Y) is independent of age group of kids (X).

2.8. Attributes of Shopping Experience

The customer experience currents strengthen while flowing more towards 'innovation to imitation' (Shaw, 2002) tend to diminish proactively and other traditional parameters like price, quality, feature and service losing their power to distinguish between companies and if not taken care at this stage, in no time a company would have to lose its customers who would quickly switch to the others, offering great customer experiences. Some of the attributes of shopping experience (Burke, 2002) are product information, service, convenience, speed of shopping, fun of shopping, privacy, etc.

H6. Kids understanding on product information (Y) is independent of their age group (X).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Procedure

"It is essential that a literature review is question-led." (Booth, 2016) and the questions should be designed focusing on the aim (Randolph, 2009) of the research. A systematic literature review and hypothesis development was selected as the initial phase of the research methodology for this research paper because it was particularly suited to the objectives, where the aim was to understand the shopping experience for kids and to identify the gaps as well.

Initially, theory was considered an unwelcome distraction from the fundamentally pragmatic intent of the science of research synthesis (Booth, 2016). But now, methods for searching the literature for theory in a systematic way are beginning to be proposed (Carroll, 2015). This phase of the research methodology consisted of development of a theoretical framework supporting the analysis of shopping experience and the attributes that influence shopping experience in retail stores. In this phase the focus was to search for the need and importance of shopping experience through a theoretical investigation. This first phase of the methodology commenced with primary qualitative research through **Ogawa and Malen's** method (Randolph, 2009), which includes eight steps of review, but six steps are followed for this research as discussed below.

Step-1: Audit trail (Randolph, 2009) : In this step all the search were documented as a clear evidence to hold up each finding. First of all a random search was done in different scholarly databases and journals like Google scholar, Elsevier, Science Direct, Journal of Retailing, European Management Journal, The Service Industries Journal, International Journal of Electronics Commerce, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Service, Emerald Insight, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, European Management Journal, etc. using keywords like customer experience, attributes, shopping, kids, online vs. offline, retail, environment, barriers and so on. In this search more than 50 research papers, articles and survey reports are reviewed.

Step-2: Define the review aim (Randolph, 2009) : After doing a random and extended search of research papers, articles, reports, etc., in this stage the picture became clearer, those that were relevant for the research were retained and all the unwanted ones were ignored.

Step-3: Relevant literature search (Randolph, 2009) :This step along with the qualitative research reports, non-research reports such as newspaper articles, minutes of meetings, memos, etc. were also included in the review irrespective of having more or less value (Rodney T. Ogawa, 1991)than qualitative research reports. A number of articles from different websites and other documents such as reports of UN Technopak, Images Business of Fashion and NIFT academic reports, etc. were also explored.

Step-4: Classify collected documents (Randolph, 2009) : In this step the whole review was classified into two main categories i.e. theoretical concepts of shopping experience and kids' wear market analysis in apparel to justify the need and scope of this research.

Table 1: Classification of the documents

Category of documents	Contents
Theoretical concepts of shopping experience	Meaning of customer experience, physical and emotional customer experience, shopping experience, its attributes and barriers, in-store environment, etc.
Kids' wear market study	Retail market study specifically in apparel, comparison of kids wear market with men's wear and women's wear market.

Step-5: Summary database making (Randolph, 2009) : In this step the relevant information was noted down by casual reading and the writing of literature review started from this stage.

Step-6: Hypothesized casual linkages identification (Randolph, 2009) :In this step after the summary database was created and the search for linkage between the literature summary outcome and the objective of the research through defining multiple hypothesis, which included factors like product information, fun of shopping, shopping environment, barriers in shopping, etc.

After understanding the theoretical framework, it was necessary to have observation and analysis on the current scenario inside the apparel retail stores. So the next phase of the methodology started with observation of the activities of kids inside the apparel stores, the parents/guardians with them while shopping and the salespeople inside the stores by doing several store visits, mention in Table-2, to evaluate the nature of emotional responses of kids for shopping and at the same time to understand the parents' and guardian's thinking towards kids' shopping capability and barriers to their shopping experience.

Table 2: Stores visited during research

Category	Store Name
Departmental Stores	Big Bazaar, Pantaloons, Max Fashion, Reliance Trends, Shoppers Stop, Westside, Decathlon, Iconic Kids, etc.
Brand Specific Stores	Gap Kids, Tommy Hilfiger Kids, UCB Kids, Gini and Jony, Mother Care, Tomato, BIBA Girls, etc.

As per the CLT (Central Limit Theorem) the sample size 30 is considered large enough in normal distribution. In the survey, convenience sampling method had been adopted and 120 samples had been surveyed during this research, on those who go for shopping with the children.

3.2. Data Analysis

The statistical technique had been adopted to do the data analysis that were collected from the survey. Most of the hypothesis variable were reshaped from previous literature and Chi-square test of independence method was used for hypothesis (H1 to H6) testing, which was done in SPSS software.

The survey outcome data was processed through Chi-square test to examine the dependency between two categorical variables (Todd Michael Franke, 2011). Chi-square test can be done with only discrete data but in this research kids age was a variable which was continuous. So during the questionnaire design the kids age was classified into four age groups and each age group considered as a discrete unit. The chi-square test of independence checks whether the two variables were significantly associate or not (Todd Michael Franke, 2011). Chi-square test give the results in numerical test values which indicates the rejecting or not rejecting the null hypothesis (Zibran, 2012). The null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis can be written as:

H_{null} : Variable Y is independent of variable X.

$H_{alternative}$: Variable Y is not independent of variable X.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This survey of 120 samples of parents and relatives included 30% mothers, 15% fathers and 55% having other relation with the kids mentioned in Figure-1 and also included the information related to kids of different age group starting from the 3 years to 16 years, which was categorized in 4 groups i.e. 3 to 5, 6 to 8, 9 to 12 and 13 to 16 years. The participants were talking about 28.3% kids of 3-5 years of age group, 28.3% kids of 6-8 years of age group, 29.2% kids of 9-12 years of age group and 14.2% kids of 13-16 years of age group.

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

Chi-square test was conducted to test the designed hypothesis H1 to H6. Chi-square test analysis rejected the hypotheses H2 and rest of the hypotheses (H1, H3, H4, and H5) were not rejected. The Chi-square results of H1-H6 are discussed below.

In the first hypothesis (H1) test, as per the Pearson chi-square test outcome the p-value was 0.265. As the p-value was not less than 0.05, it did not reject the null hypothesis, means kids' role in selecting garments (H1y) was independent of kids' age group (H1x). It can also be said that there was no significant change in kids' role in selecting their garments with the change in their age group or the kids of all age group had role in selecting their own garment.

For second hypothesis (H2), it had been found that the people allowing the kids for selecting their garments (H2y) was not independent of the age group of the kids (H2x). The Pearson chi-square test outcome gave the p-value 0.038. As the p-value was less than 0.05, it rejected the null hypothesis. So there was significant change in allowing the kids for shopping with the change in their age group.

Furthermore, results showed that the difficulty level for kids while shopping of their own was independent of their age group. The Pearson chi-square test report for H3 gave p-value 0.177. As the p-value was not less than 0.05, it did not reject the null hypothesis, means the difficulty in physical accessibility of garments (H3y) from the shelves in any store was independent of kids age group (H3x). So there was no significant change in the difficulty level for physically browsing of the garments with the change in the age group of the kids or kids of all age group may or may not face difficulty in

browsing garments from the shelves.

Whether the kids were ready enough or not to communicate with the sales person in the store, this behaviour of those kids was not independent of their age group, showed the Pearson chi-square test outcome for H4. The chi-square p-value for H4 was 0.103, which was not less than the critical value i.e. 0.05, means it did not reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the readiness of the kids to communicate with sales person (H4y) was independent of their age group (H4x).

The results showed that people's demand is to make the stores more interactive and enjoyable for the kids independent of kids' age group. The Pearson chi-square test outcome for H5 gave p-value 0.088. As the p-value was not less than 0.05, it did not reject the null hypothesis. So as per the results, the demand of interactiveness of store for kids (H5y) was independent of kids' age group (H5x). It can also be said there is no significant change in the demand among people with the change in their kids' age group.

The H6 test report gave the chi-square p-value for kids' understanding on different elements of garment surveyed. The results showed that the understanding of kids on three elements of garment surveyed i.e. 'Colour', 'Characters' and 'Design & Style' was independent of their age group as the chi-square p-values were 0.233, 0.667 and 0.648 respectively. As the p-values were not less than 0.05, it did not reject the null hypothesis. But for the other two elements i.e. 'Brand' and 'Price', the p-values were 0.020 and 0.006 respectively. And as the p-values were less than 0.05, it rejected the null hypothesis, means the kids understanding on 'Brand' and 'Price' was not independent of their age group.

5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The kids wear has a great market potential but there is lack of research on kids wear market as well as their experience in shopping, which may be online or offline. This research has given some indication that the kids have become independent buyers and the time has come when the current generation of kids would go to a mall, might be with their parents but would shop on their own. Kids' fashion is no more an ignorable part of Indian fashion retail industry. So it's time to think about the untold part of fashion customers. But the biggest challenge will be to convince the retailers of the necessity of investment to create an enjoyable shopping environment for kids. This study investigated people's thinking on the importance of kids shopping and the gaps in providing them a pleasant shopping experience, where more people had shown their interest to see the positive side of this research. But there were some limitations of this study, that among the 120 people investigated, there were only 45% of people who were parents and other 55% were other relatives, while during the store visits it had been seen that most of the time kids had come for shopping with their parents.

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