

TYOLOGY OF MODERATORS OF THE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION—REPURCHASE INTENTION RELATIONSHIP: ESCAPE ASSISTANTS AND CAPTURE ASSISTANTS

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ABSTRACT

Over the past several decades, the relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions has received substantial attention in the services marketing literature. Addressing the complexity of this relationship, a stream of research into moderator variables is accumulating (Homburg and Giering, 2001; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Arkes and Ayton, 1999; Homburg and Giering, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2002; von Wangenheim, 2003; Homburg *et al.*, 2003). The present research proposes a classification of moderators into two managerially meaningful groups. The proposed typology is inspired by frameworks provided by Dick and Basu (1994), Jones and Sasser (1995), and Schnaars (1998) for thinking about the relationship between satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior. The first group of moderators induces / helps customers leave a relationship and is, therefore, termed Escape Assistants. Here the customer is satisfied but, due to the presence of Escape Assistants, does not plan a re-purchase. This type of moderating effect is more present at high satisfaction levels. The second group of moderators forces customers to stay in the relationship and is, therefore, termed Capture Assistants. Here the customer is not satisfied yet, due to the presence of Capture Assistants, plans a repurchase. This type of moderating effect is more present at low satisfaction levels.

The present research, as an initial step towards validating the proposed typology of moderators, seeks to empirically classify variables as Escape Assistant and Capture Assistant, respectively. It speculates that variety seeking tendencies (i.e., consumer's desire to satisfy a need with multiple brands of a product or service) is an example of an Escape Assistant. It further speculates that switching cost (i.e., economic and non-economic costs associated with moving from one provider to another) is an example of a Capture Assistant. Both, switching cost and variety seeking tendencies, are therefore said to impact the strength of the relationship. Two associated hypotheses were formulated. It is further speculated that these impacts are likely contingent on the service category (Mägi, 2003). Hence, this possibility is evaluated in a post-hoc manner.

The data for empirically addressing the research hypotheses were collected from about 180 customers of each; cell phone services, restaurant services, banking services, and grocery stores. The participants were asked to complete self-administered questionnaires. Existing scales were used to measure the various constructs. Following customary procedures for assessing moderating effects (Aiken and West 1991, Sharma, Durand, Gur-Arie 1981), the hypothesized relationships were tested by formulating a series of hierarchical multiple regression equations. The analysis was performed with standardized independent and moderator variables. The results reveal three significant moderating effects. Confirming the existence of Capture Assistants, for banking and phone services, switching costs significantly moderate the satisfaction-repurchase intention relationship. Confirming the existence of Escape Assistants, for restaurant services, variety seeking significantly moderates the satisfaction-repurchase intention relationship.

The three significant findings were followed up with post-hoc probing. Per Sharma, Durand and Gur-Arie's (1981) recommendation of splitting the sample in half, the respondents were grouped into high and low segments based upon their respective values on the moderator variables. The median responses on the significant moderator variables were used as the cut offs for forming the low and high segments. The relationship between satisfaction and retention was then analyzed by segment. Further confirming the existence of Capture Assistants for the phone services, as satisfaction increases the effect of switching costs decreases. Despite low satisfaction levels, customers with high perceived switching costs have higher repurchase intentions when compared to customers with low switching costs. A similar pattern was found for the banking services. Further confirmation of the existence of Escape Assistants for the restaurant industry, the findings suggest that when satisfaction increases above a certain level, customers begin to be affected by variety seeking. At higher satisfaction levels, low variety seekers seem to have higher repurchase intentions when compared with high variety seekers.

The managerial implications for Capture and Escape Assistants are vastly different. Capture assistants to include switching costs may be viewed as erected barriers for detaining customers in a relationship without the need to satisfy them (Jones, Reynolds, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty, 2007). It seems that investments in customer satisfaction can be substituted with investments into barriers. For Escape Assistants, striving for customer delight (very high satisfaction levels) may not be the best strategy as these investments may not always be strong enough to offset the countervailing effects of Escape Assistants.

References available upon request