Understanding the customer experience-loyalty link: A moderated mediation model[*]

Marco Ieva[**], Cristina Ziliani[***]

Abstract

Multiple studies have focused on Customer Experience and its relationship with Customer Loyalty. Despite such attention, two research gaps are still open with reference to the Experience-Loyalty link: the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction and the moderating role of consumer characteristics. This study employs a moderated mediation analysis of the relationship between Customer Experience and Customer Loyalty by including Customer Satisfaction as a mediator and Shopping Enjoyment as a moderator. An online survey on almost three thousand consumers is run with reference to grocery retailing. Results show the role of Customer Satisfaction as a mediator. Shopping Enjoyment interacts with the Negative Affective Customer Experience dimension in its relationship with Customer Satisfaction.

Keyword: Customer experience, customer loyalty, shopping enjoyment, moderated mediation, partial least squares.

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Introduction

Customer Experience (CE) is a key and complex multidimensional concept in marketing (De Keyser et al., 2015). "CE is the evolvement of a person's sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioural responses to a firm or brand by living through a journey of touchpoints along pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase situations" (Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl, 2017, p. 8). Multiple studies have attempted to attain a comprehensive understanding of CE and its impact on consumer attitudes and behaviours (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Managers are increasingly adopting CE Management (CEM), which is a comprehensive approach for designing CE with the final goal of achieving long-term customer loyalty (Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl, 2017). In academic research, however, the relationship between CE and Customer Loyalty has been addressed only by a few studies (e.g. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Klaus et al., 2013) and more effort is needed on this topic (Brun et al., 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). In fact, two main research gaps are still open. First, there is no consistency in literature on the role played by Customer Satisfaction in the Experience-Loyalty link: while some studies consider Customer Satisfaction a mediator in this relationship, other studies omit to consider it, or regard Customer Satisfaction as an outcome – as well as Loyalty or Word of Mouth. Therefore, more research is needed to clarify this point. Second, few studies explore the role of consumer characteristics in influencing the Experience-Loyalty link. Given that CE is, to a certain extent, subjective and personal (Lipkin, 2016), it is key to understand how personal consumer characteristics interact with the perception and the effect of CE on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty.

In this scenario, this study aims to provide three contributions. First, we shed light on the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction in the relationship between CE dimensions and Customer Loyalty. Second, the relative contribution of each CE dimension on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty is estimated. Third, we respond to the call for more research on the moderating role of consumer characteristics coming from several authors in this area (Manser Payne, Peltier and Barger, 2017; Bustamante and Rubio, 2017). In this respect, this study focuses on the role of a specific consumer characteristic, namely, Shopping Enjoyment: it is considered as a potential moderator of the relationship among CE dimensions, Satisfaction and Loyalty.

Therefore, our research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Does Satisfaction mediate the relationship between CE and Customer Loyalty?

RQ2: Does Shopping Enjoyment moderate the relationship between CE dimensions and Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty?

By means of a survey on almost three thousand shoppers in supermarket retailing, the study sheds light on the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction and provides interesting results as far as the relative impact of each specific

CE dimension. Moreover, Shopping Enjoyment is found to moderate the relationship between CE and Customer Satisfaction. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, it reviews previous research on CE and presents the study's conceptual development and research hypotheses. Then, it employs a Partial Least Square analysis to test the theoretical framework by means of a moderated mediation model. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results, implications for retailers and conclusions.

1. Theoretical background and conceptual development

CE is a personal and dynamic process: each customer is engaged differently and across all the different stages of the shopping journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). CE is a complex construct that involves multiple dimensions, such as cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial and social (Schmitt, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). It could be said that CE is the "sum" of cognitions, feelings, sensations, and social and physical responses triggered by an experience provider. CE encompasses the period during which all customer-firm or customer-employee interactions related to a core offering may occur: CE thus involves all the pre- and post-core interactions, together with the interactions related to the core product or service (Voorhees et al., 2017). For an extensive review on CE and related current issues, we refer to Kranzbühler et al. (2018).

Previous literature has identified a variety of dimensions of CE (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007). However, only some of them are consistently present in the main studies as far as CE in retailing is concerned. Specifically, the sensorial, affective, cognitive and social dimensions are consistently identified - with some differences in terminology - in major and recent studies on CE (e.g. Brun et al., 2017; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009; Bustamante and Rubio, 2017).

The cognitive dimension of the CE is related to the cognitive efforts that take place within the experience: consumers are stimulated to think and be cognitively involved during the experience with a given brand or company (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Brun et al., 2017). The affective component refers to the positive and negative emotions occurring during the experience. For instance, interest, joy, sadness, anger are positive and negative emotions that can arise during the interaction with a given brand and that are part of CE as far as its affective dimension is concerned. The social dimension includes all the human interactions with peers or employees that take place and the feeling of being part of a community (Brun et al., 2017;

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Bustamante and Rubio, 2017). The sensorial component has to do with the senses of consumers that are solicited during the experience (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007), namely sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell (Brun et al., 2017). In the present study, the behavioural component of CE has not been taken into account because it has not been identified as a relevant dimension in the theoretical conceptualization of previous studies on CE in retailing (e.g. Bustamante and Rubio, 2017; Srinastava and Kaul, 2016).

Literature reveals that CE has the potential to influence customer attitudes and lead consumers to try new products, visit the store and develop or enhance their loyalty (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009; Brun et al., 2017). Despite the emerging academic interest and the relevance of the relationship between CE and Customer Loyalty, there is no agreement on the role of Customer Satisfaction with respect to this relationship. There is abundant academic research on the link between Satisfaction and Loyalty in multiple environments and industries (e.g. Shankar, Smith and Rangaswamy, 2003; Homburg and Giering, 2001). Satisfaction has been defined as a cognitive-affective consumer state stemming from cognitive evaluations and related emotions (Bignè, Andreu and Gnoth, 2005). Satisfaction is commonly conceptualized as the immediate antecedent of Loyalty and it has been found to positively influence Loyalty (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). However, when it comes to identify the interplay between CE and Customer Loyalty, there is no clarity on the role of Customer Satisfaction. Table 1 summarizes the main studies that have related CE and similar concepts (e.g. Brand Experience, In-store CE, Service Experience) with Customer Loyalty, and highlights the eventual role of Customer Satisfaction in this respect. Table 1 displays three different situations: Satisfaction is employed as a mediating variable in the link between CE and Loyalty (e.g., Bustamante and Rubio, 2017; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009); Satisfaction is employed as a separate outcome together with other outcomes such as Word of Mouth or Loyalty (e.g., Klaus et al., 2013; Klaus and Maklan, 2013); Satisfaction is completely overlooked in the CE-Loyalty link (e.g., Srinastava and Kaul, 2016; Brun et al., 2017).

The present study points to the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction in the CE-Loyalty link. Preliminary support has already been provided on the effect of CE on Satisfaction: Andreu et al. (2006) show that the emotions related to shopping experience have the potential to influence Customer Satisfaction. This relationship has been further highlighted by Bustamante and Rubio (2017), that have argued that the experience with the store shapes the consumer evaluation of the store itself. Satisfaction has also been previously identified as a key positive determinant of Loyalty and as a key mediator in

the relationship between Service Quality and Service Loyalty (Walsh, Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2008). Therefore, we argue that a great CE is supposed to affect Customer Satisfaction which in turn positively influences Loyalty. Specifically, we hypothesize that all CE dimensions have an indirect impact on Customer Loyalty through Customer Satisfaction.

In our study we consider Customer Loyalty in behavioural terms, consistently with the majority of previous research on the relationship between CE and Customer Loyalty (e.g. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Klaus and Maklan, 2013; Brun et al. 2017). In this respect, Loyalty is intended as the tendency towards displaying behaviours that are favourable towards the company, such as recommending the company to others and considering the company the first choice when it comes to purchasing a given product or service.

Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Customer Satisfaction mediates the effects of CE dimensions – cognitive (H1a), affective positive (H1b), affective negative (H1c), sensorial (H1d) and social (H1e) on Customer Loyalty.

Table 1 – Main empirical studies on the link between CE and Customer Loyalty

Source	Key findings on the CE-Loyalty link	Type of CE	Type of Customer Loyalty	Role of Customer Satisfaction in the CE-Loyalty link
Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009)	Brand Experience has a positive direct effect on Customer Loyalty and a positive indirect effect through Satisfaction	Brand Experience	Brand Loyalty	Mediator
Iglesias, Singh and Batista-Foguet (2011)	Brand Experience has no direct effect on Brand Loyalty but a positive direct effect through Affective Commitment	Brand Experience	Brand Loyalty	Not included
Rose et al. (2012)	Online CE positively impacts Satisfaction which in turns positively impacts Customer Loyalty	Affective and Cognitive Experiential States of Online CE	Online Repurchase intention	Mediator
Klaus and Maklan (2013)	CE Quality has a positive and significant direct effect on Customer Loyalty and an indirect effect through Satisfaction	CE Quality	Loyalty Intentions	Outcome and Mediator

Klaus *et al.* (2013)	CE quality has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty	CE Quality	Loyalty Intentions	Outcome only
Srivastava and Kaul (2016)	CE positively influences Attitudinal and Behavioural Loyalty	CE based on Strategic Experiential Modules	Attitudinal Loyalty, Behavioural Loyalty and Share of Wallet	Not included
Brun *et al.* (2017)	Four out of six CE dimensions impact Customer Loyalty	CE based on Strategic Experiential Modules	Attitudinal and Behavioural Loyalty	Not included
Bustamante and Rubio (2017)	In-store CE has a positive direct impact on Customer Loyalty and a positive indirect impact through Customer Satisfaction	In-Store CE based on Strategic Experiential Modules	Store Loyalty	Mediator
Roy (2018)	CE Quality positively impacts Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty	CE Quality	Behavioural Loyalty	Outcome only

While there is empirical support on the general positive effect of CE on Customer Loyalty, few studies have identified in what situations or under which conditions this effect could vary. Individual psychographics are believed to affect how consumers live an experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Kranzbühler et al., 2018). Recent studies have attracted attention to the need for identification of the moderating role of consumer characteristics in the CE-Loyalty link (e.g., Bustamante and Rubio, 2017). For instance Roy (2018) has found that the effect of CE on Customer Loyalty is stronger for hedonic services versus utilitarian services. Verhoef et al. (2009) argue that the customer's retail experience is created both by elements controlled by the retailer (service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price, store brand) and by elements outside his/her control, such as shopping motivations. Among these, Shopping Enjoyment has gained relevance in retail studies and it has been found to be significant in explaining several consumer attitudes, such as store loyalty and channel usage intentions, even in utilitarian settings such as retail grocery (e.g., Martos-Partal and Gonzàlez-Benito, 2013; Frasquet, Mollà and Ruiz, 2015). The enjoyment gained from shopping involves a status of fun and excitement deriving from the experience (Forsythe et al., 2006). Shopping Enjoyment is strictly related to the concept of shopping experience: previous studies have argued that consumers who enjoy shopping tend to consider the shopping experience more as a pleasure

(Sproles and Kendall, 1986). Academic research indicates that Shopping Enjoyment has no significant relationship with (Mägi, 2003) or a negative effect on store loyalty (Ailawadi, Pauwels and Steenkamp, 2008), but no research has related it yet with CE. It would be therefore important to identify how Shopping Enjoyment interacts with CE dimensions in their relationship with Customer Loyalty. Specifically, it could be argued that Shopping Enjoyment moderates the contribution of the affective dimension of CE to Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty. Given that Shopping Enjoyment is a consumer characteristic related to consumer emotions, it can be expected that Shopping Enjoyment could interact with the affective CE dimensions. Therefore, this study hypothesized that consumers displaying high Shopping Enjoyment might be more likely to have their Satisfaction and Loyalty to the retailer influenced by the positive and negative affective dimensions of the CE.

Therefore, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H2a: Shopping Enjoyment moderates the relationship between the Positive Affective CE dimension and Customer Satisfaction

H2b: Shopping Enjoyment moderates the relationship between the Negative Affective CE dimension and Customer Satisfaction

H3a: Shopping Enjoyment moderates the relationship between the Positive Affective CE dimension and Customer Loyalty

H3b: Shopping Enjoyment moderates the relationship between the Negative Affective CE dimension and Customer Loyalty.

Figure 1 displays the theoretical framework of the study, showing the moderated mediation model where Customer Satisfaction is employed as a mediator of the relationship between CE and Customer Loyalty and Shopping Enjoyment is regarded as moderator of the relationship between CE and both Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty.

Figure 1 – The theoretical model
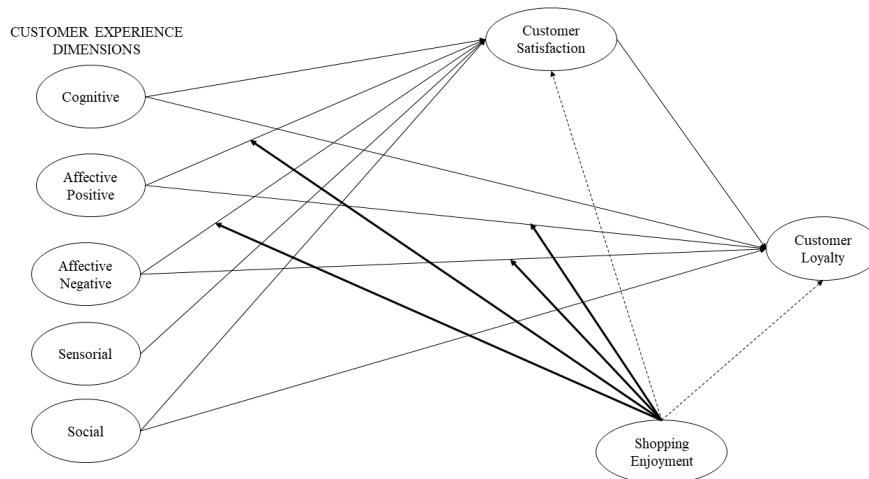
2. Methodology

Data were collected by means of an online survey conducted in Italy using the Nielsen online consumer panel. We asked respondents to answer the survey with reference to the retailer that attains the highest share of their wallet for grocery shopping. Constructs were measured by means of measurement scales available in the literature of reference. CE dimensions were measured by adapting the scales from Brun et al. (2017) and Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, (2009) to the retail context. Specifically, the following dimensions were measured: cognitive, positive and negative affective, sensorial and social. In this study, we do not consider CE as a holistic second (or third) order construct as in other studies. On the contrary, we consider the relative role of each CE dimension in its relationship with Satisfaction and Loyalty as in Klaus et al. (2013) and Brun et al. (2017). Loyalty was measured by means of a four-item scale adapted from Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996). Satisfaction with the retailer was measured by adapting previous scales from Mattila and Wirtz (2001). The Shopping Enjoyment scale was adapted from Konus, Verhoef and Neslin (2008) and Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994).

After data cleaning, a total of 2,924 responses were collected. Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis was employed to conduct a moderated mediation analysis by means of SmartPLS. Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis

was employed due to the following reasons, as suggested by Peng and Lai (2012): the emerging status of theoretical contributions in this area, the violation of the assumption of normality of residuals and the moderate correlation among exogenous variables, such as the CE dimensions.

Specifically, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted: starting from the relationship between the CE dimensions and Loyalty to the retailer, Satisfaction has been added as a mediator and Shopping Enjoyment as a variable moderating the mediation link. Respondents are mainly female with an average age of about 52 years. Tab. 2 displays the demographics of the sample.

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics on demographic variables

Demographic profile		
Sex	% Males	44,2
	% Females	55,8
Age	Average years	51,6
Number of household members	% 1 member	8,1
	% 2 members	25,2
	% 3 members	27,6
	% 4 members	28,9
	% 5 or more members	10,2
Affluency	% Low affluency	23,1
	% Below-average affluency	32,7
	% Above-average affluency	30,7
	% High affluency	13,5
City size	% Up to 20.000 inhabitants	16
	% 20.000 to 100.000	29,5
	% 100.000 to 500.000	25,6
	% More than 500.000	28,9

3. Results

The employed analytic strategy has two main goals: assessing the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction in the relationship between CE dimensions and Customer Loyalty (H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, H1e) and testing Shopping Enjoyment as a moderator of the relationship between the CE affective dimensions and Customer Satisfaction and the CE affective dimensions and

Customer Loyalty (H2a, H2b, H3a and H3b). To test the moderating role of Shopping Enjoyment, two interactions (Positive Affective x Shopping Enjoyment and Negative Affective x Shopping Enjoyment) have been computed by means of the two-stage approach: it is the best approach when researchers are interested in the significance of the interaction, as suggested by Henseler and Chin (2010). This approach employs the latent variable scores of the latent predictor and latent moderator variable from the main effects model. These scores are used to calculate the product indicator for the second stage analysis.

As far as each model is concerned, we adopt the analytic strategy endorsed by Hair *et al.* (2014), which entails two stages, namely the assessment of the measurement model and the evaluation of the structural model.

Results show that the measurement model is adequate, as Tab. 3 shows. First, all indicator loadings are significant and above 0,70. Second, as far as internal consistency and reliability is concerned, all composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alpha are greater or very close to 0,70. Third, all average variance extracted (AVE) values are higher than 0,50, supporting convergent validity of constructs. The analysis of the structural model's results was conducted following Hair et al. (2014). No severe issues in collinearity have been detected given that the variance inflation factor (VIF) values are below or equal to the threshold of 5 (Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2011), even though some variables display values higher than the more conservative threshold of 3. Finally, the analysis confirms discriminant validity given that almost all the values of the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) are below the recommended threshold of 0,90. Only the HTMT between the sensorial and the positive affect dimension is above 0,90. However, the examination of cross-loadings reassures that there are no severe issues in discriminant validity: as advised by Sànchez (2013), loadings of the indicators for the positive affective dimension are much higher than the cross-loadings for the sensorial dimension and vice versa. Tab. 4 shows pairwise correlations and HTMT values with reference to latent variables. The R^2 values of Customer Satisfaction (0,30) and Customer Loyalty (0,55) are in favour of a moderate explanatory power of the model (Sànchez, 2013). The overall fit of PLS path model is satisfactory (SRMR is equal to 0,06), in line with Hair et al. (2014).

Table 3 – Measurement of study constructs

Construct	Item	Std. Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	CR
CE dimensions					
Cognitive	I am really focused	0,85	0,68	0,76	0,86
	My attention is captivated	0,88			
Affective Positive	I am sometimes surprised	0,85	0,69	0,76	0,87
	I sometimes feel entertained	0,90			
Affective Negative	I sometimes feel angry	0,80	0,76	0,67	0,86
	I sometimes get bored	0,83			
	I sometimes get impatient	0,82			
Sensorial	My senses are involved	0,88	0,73	0,79	0,88
	My visual sense is stimulated	0,90			
Social	I socialize	0,88	0,83	0,74	0,90
	I feel that I am a part of a community	0,85			
	I develop relationships with the staff	0,85			
Other constructs					
Customer Satisfaction	I truly enjoyed coming to [Retailer],	0,91	0,93	0,88	0,96
	I am satisfied with [Retailer]	0,95			
	The choice to buy at [Retailer] was a good one	0,95			
Customer Loyalty	I say positive things about [Retailer] to other people	0,89	0,86	0,71	0,91
	I recommend [Retailer] to someone who seeks my advice	0,89			
	I encourage friends and relatives to do business with [Retailer	0,86			
	I consider [Retailer] my first choice to buy groceries	0,72			
Shopping Enjoyment	I like shopping	0,89	0,75	0,80	0,89
	I take my time when I shop	0,90			

Table 4 – Correlations and discriminant validity results

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1-Cognitive	1	0,33	0,11	0,32	0,24	0,39	0,42	0,25
2-Affective Positive	0,23	1	0,19	0,93	0,77	0,49	0,50	0,44
3-Affective Negative	-0,09	0,07	1	0,12	0,07	0,29	0,25	0,05
4-Sensorial	0,22	0,66	0,12	1	0,73	0,40	0,41	0,37
5-Social	0,18	0,59	0,03	0,57	1	0,39	0,42	0,24
6-Customer Satisfaction	0,31	0,40	-0,25	0,33	0,34	1	0,81	0,25
7-Customer Loyalty	0,32	0,39	-0,20	0,33	0,36	0,72	1	0,24
8-Shopping Enjoyment	0,18	0,32	-0,04	0,27	0,20	0,21	0,19	1

Note: Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the construct values. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT values.

To assess the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction, we follow the procedure endorsed by Nitzl, Roldan and Cepeda (2017). First, by means of bootstrapping, the indirect effect of each CE dimension on Customer Loyalty through Customer Satisfaction is estimated. The significance of the indirect effect of the CE dimensions shows that mediation occurs: Tab. 5 displays significance tests for specific indirect effects computed by means of bootstrapping. To assess the type of mediation, we need to check whether direct effects are present. Tab. 5 shows that all the CE dimensions apart from the Sensorial one have also a direct effect on Customer Loyalty. Hence, Customer Satisfaction is found to act as a partial mediator of the effect of Cognitive, Positive and Negative Affective and Social CE dimensions on Customer Loyalty. On the contrary, Customer Satisfaction is a full mediator of the effect of the Sensorial dimension on Customer Loyalty. Empirical support has therefore been found for H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d and H1e.

The bootstrapping procedure allows also to compute the p-values of the path coefficients to identify the moderating role of Shopping Enjoyment. Results show that Shopping Enjoyment does not moderate the relationship between the Positive Affective dimension of CE and Customer Satisfaction (p > 0,05), but moderates the relationship between the Negative Affective dimension of CE and Customer Satisfaction (p < 0,01). Moreover, Shopping Enjoyment is found not to have a moderating role in the relationship between Negative (p > 0,05) and Positive (p > 0,05) Affective CE dimensions and Customer Loyalty. Results from the moderation tests are also displayed in Tab. 5.

Table 5 – Results from the moderated mediation analysis

Path	Parameter estimate
Mediation	
Direct Effects	
Cognitive->Customer Satisfaction	0,19***
Positive Affective->Customer Satisfaction	0,24***
Negative Affective->Customer Satisfaction	-0,26***
Sensorial->Customer Satisfaction	0,10***
Social->Customer Satisfaction	0,12***
Shopping Enjoyment->Customer Satisfaction	0,05*
Cognitive->Customer Loyalty	0,09***
Negative Affective->Customer Loyalty	-0,05***
Positive Affective->Customer Loyalty	0,06**
Sensorial->Customer Loyalty	0,02
Social->Customer Loyalty	0,08***
Customer Satisfaction->Customer Loyalty	0,63***
Shopping Enjoyment-> Customer Loyalty	0,00
Indirect effects	
Cognitive->Customer Satisfaction->Customer Loyalty	0,12***
Positive Affective->Customer Satisfaction->Customer Loyalty	0,15***
Negative Affective->Customer Satisfaction->Customer Loyalty	-0,16***
Sensorial->Customer Satisfaction->Customer Loyalty	0,06***
Social->Customer Satisfaction->Customer Loyalty	0,08***
Moderation	
Shopping Enjoyment x Positive Affective->Customer Satisfaction	-0,01
Shopping Enjoyment x Positive Affective->Customer Loyalty	-0,02
Shopping Enjoyment x Negative Affective->Customer Satisfaction	0,05**
Shopping Enjoyment x Negative Affective->Customer Loyalty	0,01

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Simple slope analysis has been also conducted on the identified moderation to better describe the results (see Fig. 2). At average levels of Shopping Enjoyment, consumers displaying a higher Negative Affective perception of CE show lower Customer Satisfaction. However, for consumers displaying

high (low) levels of Shopping Enjoyment the effect of the Negative Affective CE dimension on Customer Satisfaction is weaker (stronger).

Figure 2 – Simple slope analysis
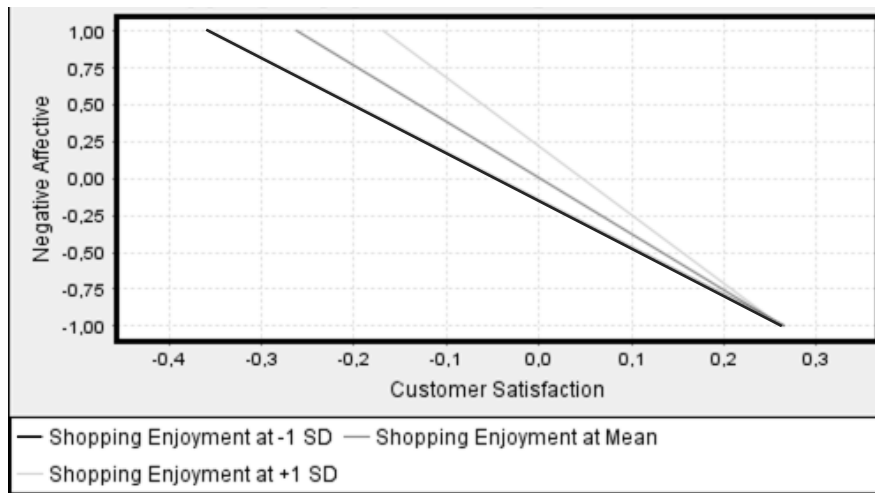
Note: The relationship between Customer Satisfaction and the Negative Affective CE dimension is displayed at different levels of Shopping Enjoyment: 1 standard deviation below and above the mean, and at the mean level. Values in the Figure are standardized.

Therefore, empirical support has been found for H2b, while no support has been found for H2a, H3a and H3b, which are rejected.

4. Discussion

This study provides the following contributions to theory and practice. First, it identifies the (partial and full) mediating role of Customer Satisfaction between CE dimensions and Customer Loyalty. Second, it estimates the specific relationships occurring between CE dimensions and Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty. Third, by shedding light on the moderating role of Shopping Enjoyment, it provides a basis to further explore the moderating role of various consumer characteristics on the contribution of CE dimensions to Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty. Below we discuss in detail these findings with respect to the literature of reference.

The mediating role of Customer Satisfaction between CE and Customer Loyalty highlights that academics should not overlook its role as an antecedent of Customer Loyalty when studying the Experience-Loyalty link. Our

findings support previous studies (e.g. Bustamante and Rubio, 2017; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009) that have included Customer Satisfaction as a mediator. Given that Customer Satisfaction plays a partial mediating role for almost all CE dimensions, it is also important to take into account the direct relationship occurring between CE and Customer Loyalty. All the different CE dimensions have a significant relationship with Customer Satisfaction. Specifically, the positive and negative affective dimensions have the strongest influence on Customer Satisfaction, followed by the cognitive, social and sensorial dimensions. A similar ranking is found as far as the indirect effects of CE dimensions on Customer Loyalty through Customer Satisfaction. The situation is, instead, different when considering the direct effects of CE dimensions on Customer Loyalty: the Cognitive dimension is the most important, followed by the Social and the Affective dimensions. The Sensorial dimension has no direct effect on Customer Loyalty. The relative importance of the Affective and Cognitive CE dimensions in explaining Customer Satisfaction is in line with Brun *et al.* (2017), that, in different industries such as travel and banking, found similar results with respect to the CE-Loyalty relationship. These findings highlight the key role played by affect in fostering Loyalty, as found in studies in other contexts (e.g., Ieva, De Canio and Ziliani, 2018).

Finally, Shopping Enjoyment has been found to interact with the Negative Affective CE dimension in influencing Customer Satisfaction. Shoppers who tend to generally enjoy their shopping are found to be less sensitive - as far as their Satisfaction is concerned - to an Experience that turns out to be bad in emotional terms. This finding shows that the effects of the same CE might differ depending on the personal characteristics of consumers and calls for further attention on the role of consumer characteristics in the Experience-Loyalty link. Moreover, it shows that customers that do not enjoy shopping might be more likely to experience dissatisfaction if their Experience caused them to feel negative emotions.

Our study also entails several managerial implications. First, findings show that retailers are then called to design in-store and out-of-store stimuli that could trigger cognitive and affective responses from consumers in order to influence, in turn, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty. To this aim, retailers might employ in-store activities that could emotionally involve customers, such as instant gaming, events with influencers and contests. Moreover, avoiding negative emotions during the CE is also important. For instance, some supermarket retailers have started to use kiosks and screens and other devices to provide consumers with entertainment content to watch while waiting in the line for the check-out. This should play in favour of

avoiding negative emotions that could arise from the perception of the time spent waiting. Moreover, retailers should ensure that assortment, displays and shelves are well presented and readable and allow customers to do their shopping easily. Grocery retailers could also place recipes close to the shelves in order to stimulate the creativity and the cognitive processes of their customers at the point of sale. Second, retailers should carefully manage situations where their customers are upset due to a service failure: shoppers that are less hedonic and more utilitarian might have a greater chance to experience dissatisfaction and to defect.

Conclusions

To summarize, the present study shows that successfully managing the different CE dimensions might lead to develop Customer Satisfaction and, in turn, Customer Loyalty. In addition, findings show that a consumer characteristic, namely Shopping Enjoyment, can interact with the CE-Satisfaction link. Despite its contributions, the present study entails some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the interpretation of the identified relationships as largely correlational and not causal. Second, the present study did not consider the behavioural dimension of the CE that has been identified in some previous studies (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009). Future studies are called to focus on the theoretical role of the behavioural dimension within the CE and review and develop appropriate operationalizations of this construct. Third, respondents were asked to answer questions with reference to the retailer that attains the highest share of their wallet, so the results are not representative of a retailer's entire customer base. Fourth, the present study has adopted a conceptualization of Customer Loyalty in behavioural terms only. Future studies are called to expand the lens on the relationship between CE and additional types of Customer Loyalty, such as cognitive or affective Loyalty. Finally, some issues have emerged as far as the discriminant validity between the sensorial and the affective positive CE dimensions. This points to the need for improving the measurement of CE.

Further studies should include additional consumer characteristics as moderators of the CE-Satisfaction-Loyalty link: drawing from utilitarian and hedonistic shopping motivations would be an advisable research path towards this aim. Moreover, more research is needed on the antecedents of the CE dimensions, to provide insights on how the different retailer touchpoints encountered within the customer journey could influence each CE dimension.

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