

The Satisfaction of the Purchase Experience at ZARA: Methodological Proposal

La satisfacción de la experiencia de compra en ZARA: propuesta metodológica

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Abstract:

The customer experience is a concept widely studied and applied to the retail industry, and Zara is no exception. The company has been able to maintain its leading position in the fashion industry thanks to its business strategy focused primarily on the customer and its ability to provide an experience that is satisfactory enough to build customer loyalty. This article is the result of research on the shopping experience of customers at Zara (both online and offline), today. The results obtained from the research provide very relevant data to learn more in depth about the strengths and weaknesses of the company with respect to seeking customer satisfaction. So, we can say that the waiting time at checkouts, fitting rooms, the lack of friendliness of employees, store staff, and poor customer service make the shopping experience less pleasant for customers and,

on the contrary, there are customers who think as it is, everything is perfect, and nothing should be changed. To conclude, we can state that Zara is currently making changes both online ("store mode" App) and in the physical store (as well as the refurbished stores), to improve the shopping experience of its customers, making stores more innovative thanks to the technology as is the case of Zara Plaza de España (Madrid).

Keywords:

Zara; customer experience; questionnaires; personal interviews; technology

Resumen:

La experiencia de cliente es un concepto ampliamente estudiado y aplicado a la industria del *retail*, y Zara no es la excepción. La empresa ha sabido mantener su posición de líder en la industria de la moda gracias a su estrategia de negocio centrada fundamentalmente en el cliente y su capacidad para proporcionar una experiencia lo suficientemente satisfactoria que hace fidelizarlos. El presente artículo es el resultado de una investigación sobre la experiencia de compra de los clientes en Zara (tanto online como offline), en la actualidad. Los resultados obtenidos de la investigación aportan datos muy relevantes para conocer más en profundidad los puntos fuertes y débiles de la empresa con respecto a buscar la satisfacción de sus clientes. Así pues, podemos decir que el tiempo de espera en las cajas, en probadores, la falta de amabilidad de los empleados, de personal en tienda y mala atención al cliente, hacen que la experiencia de compra sea menos agradable para los clientes y, por el contrario, hay clientes que piensan que tal y como está todo esta perfecto, y no debe de cambiarse nada. Para concluir podemos afirmar que en la actualidad Zara está realizando cambios tanto online (App "modo tienda") como en tienda física (así como las tiendas reformadas), para mejorar la experiencia de compra de sus clientes, haciendo tiendas más innovadoras gracias a la tecnología como es el caso de Zara Plaza de España (Madrid).

Palabras clave:

Zara; experiencia de cliente; cuestionarios; entrevistas personales; tecnología

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the ICT revolution has given rise to what we now know as the "experience economy". A product or service becomes an experience if, after being purchased, it produces in the customer a better or equal vision of what he wanted. You have to understand the customer so that he relates emotionally to the brand. Companies have gone from knowing the customer (using *CRM tools*), to understanding the customer (experiential marketing) (González de la Hoz, 2015).

Customer experience is not a new term, but rather its origins date back to 1977, but especially in the 80s, the term "service science" began to be used, although the theory become more relevant at the end of the 90s what we know today as "Experiencia de Cliente" or "*Customer Experience*". The objective of the experience is to obtain

profitability through the company's strategy, for which satisfaction, loyalty, loyalty, engagement, recommendation and that customers become fans must be achieved (Alcaide and Díez, 2019). Service science is a scientific specialty of management and engineering that a company (that offers its services) performs for and with another company (that receives them). Science creates knowledge and service generates monetary value (Martínez and Lázaro, 2007).

For Córdoba and Genís (2018), there are different stages in the customer experience in 2005 the customer is not called a person but *stakeholders*, on some occasion subscriber or user, companies do not worry about asking the customer for their experience, year 2008 global economic crisis companies seek to save costs and reduce staff, but in 2014 everything changes since person and need are the essential reason for companies. Terms like buyer, word and experience go hand in hand. Companies value experience. Organizations such as Ikea, Fnac, NH hotels, Iberia, Bankia, etc., have chosen to include loyalty strategies with their customers that they did not have before.

There are three pillars of the *Customer Experience model*: the first would be brand personality, the second would be customer orientation and the third would be digital transformation (Pozo, 2019). Companies are embedding digital technology to drive change and growth (Accenture, 2017). AI (artificial intelligence), IoT (internet of things), VR (virtual reality), AR (augmented reality) or big data, autonomous vehicles, printing in three or four dimensions or *blockchain* are the product of a great technological impulse. The growth of data available through algorithms is leading to technological disruption (De la Torre, 2018).

In the first decade of this century companies are challenged to prosper financially in the face of a difficult economic environment, marketing played a very important role. Companies standardize their products and services less, are oriented to more niches and towards personalization. They understand that their goal is to have a constructive dialogue with their customers, understanding their demands individually, and based on this, offer the customer the product or service they want (Kotler et al. , 2012). This way of thinking has been the cornerstone of customer orientation, as customers are not all the same (Fader and Toms, 2018). The marketing department must take control of the CX (*Customer Experience*), since it has customer data and this helps them to analyze and understand customer needs. A differentiation strategy is to focus on the customer for most companies (Pemberton, 2018).

Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen (2005) propose that organizations have to differentiate themselves from each other and many have integrated multichannel strategy but fail to offer their customers a brand experience and as a solution propose to share and manage the customer database throughout the organization. Multichannel is no longer enough and has changed towards omnichannel, it is a tactic and channel management that aims to unite and arrange all channels so that the customer can enjoy a unique experience. The purpose is to have communication with the client in the interactions he has with the organization and act in the moment (Oliva and Dadalt, 2016). As Villani (2018) states,

having a good omnichannel strategy will allow the buyer to have a uniform experience across all channels and touchpoints, regardless of the communication channel used. Thanks to competition, the omnichannel strategy will improve in the future, due to the rise of new technologies.

Shostak (1987), states that the basis of any service positioning strategy is the service itself. The 4Ps of the marketing mix are limited and positioning strategies revolve around the product. The products have been designed to reach certain markets and can be physically modified to reach certain niches, as was the case with the Jeep brand that went from being a military vehicle to being a family car. In the opinion of Pine II and Gilmore (1998), the experience occurs when a memorable event is created, that is, they will be remembered facts for a long period of time and cause a felt and remembered mental impact. They distinguish four clearly differentiated economies: agrarian (where mothers make a birthday cake for their child), industrial (mothers begin to pay for certain elaborate ingredients), services (parents no longer make the cake, but order it from a pastry shop paying a very high price for it), and experience (parents subcontract the entire birthday party to a specialized trade).

For Schmitt (1999), there are differences between traditional marketing and experiential marketing, since the first sees customers as rational beings concerned about the functional characteristics and benefits of products and the second sees them as rational beings, but also emotional concerned with having pleasurable experiences. For the author, there are five types of experiences, and they are: sensory (sense), affective (feeling), cognitive (thinking), physical, behaviors and lifestyles (Act) and social identity (relate). The ultimate goal of experiential marketing is to create holistic experiences. There are four fundamental characteristics in such marketing, and they are: customer experience, holistic experience, rational consumers - emotional and methods - tools, are eclectic.

The neuroscientist Damasio (2018), refers to *neuromarketing* and in his studies exposes the way in which emotions influence the processes of decision making and reasoning. It raises how emotional processes influence human behavior, but especially in decision-making. Emotions arise when the brain visualizes images of objects, an event that happens instantly or in the past and are remembered. For this author the emotion can be felt in 3 ways: through the body, by the brain and through drugs or natural products. Emotions are not learned and are predictable.

Meyer and Schwager (2007), state that customer experience is a response of customers with any contact either direct or indirect with the company. The direct relationship would occur at the time of purchase, use or service and the indirect, it would be unforeseen encounters with products, services, or brands of the company, and is reflected through suggestions or verbal criticism of other buyers, advertising, news reports, reviews, etc. On the other hand, for authors such as Rubalcaba and Cortijo (2020) the customer experience would be the result of the perceptions of a customer after interacting with any part of the company.

On the other hand, according to Hernández (2021), customer experience is a qualitative vision of any relationship (or lack thereof) that an individual has with a company in all states of the course of the purchase through the points that unite them to invent experiences that originate a profitable company and live experiences that drive satisfactory sensations.

In the case of *Zara*, its improvement in the shopping experience was maintained even though physical stores were closed during confinement (2020), selling exclusively online. The company continued to deliver the products purchased online giving the customer the possibility of receiving them at home or that could be stored in the warehouse until the end of the confinement. At this stage, the return times of the products were extended by 30 days when they could be returned to the stores and the delivery times were 2-3 business days and provided a customer service telephone number (Vázquez, 2020). Another way that *Zara* had to improve the shopping experience, as a result of Covid-19, was through innovation since it enabled the "store mode" in its app (as of September 14, 2020), where the physical and virtual store were integrated through said application, omnichannel is intended and know the stock (since it is integrated). It was activated only in 25 establishments in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, Bilbao or Malaga). The novelties included was that the customer can buy in the store of his choice virtually just by entering a postal code, street or city, check the hours of the trade, but also book a fitting room (only if you are physically in store), locate items and know through a map the exact point of the establishment where they are and can be picked up at the point of sale of 30 minutes. Among its functionalities, we must also highlight the possibility of *electronic ticket* (Gracia, 2020).

Zara considers the customer at the center and engine of decision-making and that has led it to bet on innovation (Isla, 2021). Innovation is the fundamental piece to offer unique experiences that satisfy your customers, strengthening the trust placed by your buyers. It has an end and it is the customer. Its innovation has a double purpose: on the one hand, to improve the shopping experience through its sales channels and on the other, sustainability. Its projects focus on three areas: being able to connect to buy at any time and place, the synchronization of processes (design, manufacturing, purchasing, logistics, transport, distribution and sales), and providing technological tools for the purchasing process (Inditex.com 2021).

Finally, we cannot fail to mention a clear example to further improve the shopping experience in the *Zara* store in Plaza de España in Madrid (opened on April 8, 2022), based on the *flaship concept*. It is the largest store in the world with an area of 7,700 square meters where technology is the key piece from the moment the customer enters the store, having a *QR code* that tells the customer how is the distribution of each floor (lady, gentleman and child). In addition, in the plants it has specific areas such as lingerie (atelier), *beauty* (makeup), shoe and accessories and the collection of sports equipment and even the client can have a coffee accompanied by a sweet. It is about making a unique experience (Mateos, 2022). This *Zara* is more visible on the street and

has a showroom point that calls more to enter the public that passes by, in fact, the fluorine colors that are a trend in social networks call more attention to enter, this call for attention that is made from outside, is reinforced from inside the premises with the way in which the garments are placed and this added to the new sections, makes it a Premium experience (Chacón, 2022).

2. Methodology

To address this research proposal, a quantitative analytical methodology is proposed, developed in two phases:

- Phase 1. Sample design, questionnaire construction, measurement, data analysis and presentation of results.
- Phase 2: Preparation, selection, classification and conduct of F2F interviews.

Phase 1: A survey is carried out through a questionnaire through the Google Form platform, it is a structured questionnaire composed of 18 closed (14), open (1) and semi-open (3) questions.

The questionnaire is divided into three clearly differentiated phases: in a first part s on questions of a general nature, in a second phase are more specific questions about the application (IOP) and on the shopping experience and finally, an open question where it is intended to know the opinion on how *Zara* should improve according to the customer's shopping experience.

The sample of this research has been made to 214 people in total, of which 204 individuals are surveyed at the foot of the *Zara* store located in the Plaza Norte Shopping Center (C.C. Plaza Norte, S.S. de los Reyes (Madrid), the questionnaires are carried out from Monday to Friday between July 1 to 7 with an influx of two thousand one hundred people a day (according to data from the *Zara* trade) , and the rest, that is, 10 individuals conducted the personal interview, at the La Vaguada Shopping Center (C.C. La Vaguada (Madrid). The sample is made up of the firm's customers who go to the physical point of sale to make their purchases, so that when they leave the store and through the survey, they can express their perception of their experience in the purchase made.

Below is a table (Table 1) showing the most appropriate type of questions selected to carry out the questionnaire through Google Form based on the authors Pedro López - Roldán and Sandra Fachelli (2015).

Table 1
Classification of the questions chosen in the questionnaire

QUESTIONS	QUESTIONNAIRE
<p>DEPENDING ON THE NATURE OF THE CONTENT</p>	<p>In fact: Questions related to events, behaviors and characteristics of people's social life, concrete and objective, external and easy to specify age, sex ...</p> <p>Google Form Questionnaire: Question 1: Select your gender Question 2: Would you tell us your age?</p> <p>Opinion: They seek to know the criterion, judgment, thinking on certain issues, debated or not so debated.</p> <p>Google Form Questionnaire: Question 12: Have you had any negative shopping experience at ZARA? If the above answer is yes, you could. Briefly describe the problem you had.</p>
<p>ACCORDING TO THE FUNCTION IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE</p>	<p>Filter questions: Questions prior to other or other questions with the aim of selecting respondents to answer</p> <p>Google Form Questionnaire: Question 3: Do you buy at ZARA? If you do not buy. at Zara the survey has ended.</p> <p>Battery questions: Set of questions on the same different issue, which complement each other, determining different thematic sections or aspects investigated.</p> <p>Google Form Questionnaire: Question 4: How often do you usually shop at Zara (online or in store)?</p> <p>Question 5: Do you usually buy online or physically?</p> <p>Question 6: Do you have downloaded the ZARA App to your mobile?</p>

DEPENDING ON THE TYPE OF RESPONSE	<p>Open-ended questions: They only contain the question and do not previously establish any possibility of an answer that is left to the respondent's criteria.</p> <p>Google Form Questionnaire: Question 18: What would you improve about the shopping experience at Zara?</p>
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Note. Source: own elaboration on the model of Pedro López-Roldán and Sandra Fachelli (2015).

Phase 2: A face-to-face or F2F interview is carried out inside the physical store located in the C.C. La Vaguada (Madrid), made inside the store to the clients of the firm. The interview is composed of 6 open questions where the respondent is left to answer freely on the questions posed. The client is asked to make evaluations on the following terms or moments:

Table 2
Values, Variables and Opinion complementary to the Questionnaire

VALUES AND VARIABLES	INTERVIEW QUESTION
The shopping experience (Rate)	Question 1: What do you value most about your shopping experience?
Music (Variable)	Question 2: Is the music suitable for the store where you are shopping?
Mood (Variable)	Question 3: Does your mood influence you when making the purchase?
The price (Variable)	Question 4: Does the price of the products seem to you a determining factor when buying?
Zara as a brand associated with luxury (Value)	Question 5: Do you consider Zara a luxury brand?
Shopping experience improvements	Question 6: What do you think Zara should improve to have a good shopping experience?

The problems and opportunities arising from the use of this mixed methodology are detailed below.

In the case of questionnaires:

1. When carried out in a public space (street), respondents distrust or are afraid of the interviewer, especially people >40 years old and adolescents.
2. The “heat wave” meteorology, since the fieldwork was carried out during the months of June and July 2022.
3. Technology can be an added problem for some respondents, since they do not remember the email well or do not know how to handle the mobile phone correctly, therefore, they are lost or failed surveys and they want the interviewer to do his job of answering the questions.
4. The rigid guidelines of the company Inditex to provide data to unauthorized personnel hinders the investigation.
5. Inconvenience caused to customers when buying inside the premises and that an interviewer asked them, since it is their personal moment of shopping.

Opportunities for face-to-face interviews were as follows:

1. The interviewer has some control over the interviewee.
2. The interview is done "in situ", that is, within the establishment itself.
3. The information is obtained at the moment.
4. Face-to-face interviews allow the respondent to be more relaxed and as a consequence of being more relaxed people are more involved.
5. The transparency of the process since the interviewee sees the development of the interview all the time.

We can affirm that the methodology applied for this research can perfectly be applied in future lines of research in other "low cost" clothing firms such as: *Mango, H & M, Primark, Mulaya, Shein, Bohoo*, etc., but it also serves for luxury firms such as: *Gucci, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Chanel, Prada, Louis Vuitton*, etc.

3. Results

3.1. Results of the first phase

The results obtained reveal that there are two key critical factors, among others, that significantly affect the satisfaction and shopping experience of *Zara* customers and are: the waiting time at the checkouts, which makes it take a long time to go to pay for the purchased products and the queues at the fitting rooms, where the customer can choose not to buy or to take the garment without testing to the home. It is concluded that the reduction of these two factors is a key strategy to improve the shopping experience which can translate into an increase in customer loyalty and retention, as well as an improvement in brand perception.

With regard to store staff they play a very important role in customer satisfaction and loyalty. While it is true that *Zara* staff are generally helpful in terms of helping customers, some customers may perceive that store staff are not friendly enough or lack language skills (languages), to interact with customers which can be an obstacle to effective communication. In addition, the lack of personnel and the figure of "Personal Shopper", can be a limitation in terms of offering a more personalized and satisfactory purchase for customers.

Customer service is a key piece carried out by companies in order to improve the shopping experience of customers (Couso, 2007). The perception that *Zara* customers have is that it must improve, since they feel that the attention is insufficient, therefore, poor service will cause customer non-loyalty and a dissatisfied customer.

With regard to the assessment of their satisfaction of the online application, customers are not very familiar with it at the moment and only suggest that they cannot be returned online, nor can they make changes to the products through the application.

The questionnaires also serve to collect the perceptions of customers, and some suggest that nothing should be changed and that their shopping experience is perfect so, therefore, we understand that they are satisfied customers with the brand and that translates into a satisfactory shopping experience.

We can highlight other possible improvements to the in-store experience such as: establishment, product and price.

On the one hand, with respect to the store, according to the answers received, customers think that there should be a capacity in physical store, especially during the sales period, since some stores are not very large and are very crowded with the public, this makes the clothes more messy to be more crowded and does not allow them to find the products where they should be ordered. Another idea expressed by consumers would be to distribute more mirrors in stores, since considering that there are not enough, forces the consumer to use the fitting rooms in garments that they consider are not necessary to try as accessories, footwear or outdoor garments, on the other hand, they think that the fitting rooms are usually very dirty and should be cleaned (both hangers and lint).

Another appreciation that customers have made refers to the temperature (in summer), which is inside the premises. They understand that when the establishment is very full, the temperature does not allow them to make a pleasant purchase for that reason. Another action that *Zara* is carrying out is to charge for shopping bags, this has not been well received by customers who were used to not paying for bags.

With regard to products, consumers think they should expand the number of sizes, currently sizes range from XS to XXL, they believe that there should be more number of sizes both small and large since those that are available are sold out quickly, and when they are going to choose their size it is no longer available in store.

Finally, another improvement in the shopping experience that can be highlighted would be the price of the products, customers consider that they are high compared to previous seasons and, therefore, have the perception that the quality of the same is not in line with the price they are paying. This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of value perception as collected by Sievers (2021), which indicates that consumers evaluate the value of a product based on the relationship between its benefits and costs. This strategy is likely to have a negative effect on brand perception in the long run.

3.2. Results of the second phase

As we can see in the face-to-face interviews, customers agree in their answers with the questionnaires, since they think that there are too many queues at the checkouts and in changing rooms, but they also add that there should be more mirrors in the store.

The personal interview allowed to know the most used options of the App, therefore, the most used online by users is: first of all, locate items in store, that is, from the App itself you can locate in the store the exact situation where the items you want to buy are located. Secondly, the use of the electronic ticket since the application offers the option that the ticket is online within the application itself which will allow it to always be available, avoid the loss of it and thus avoid an unnecessary waste of paper thinking about being more sustainable. Thirdly, the App offers the possibility of buying and picking up in store, that is, the customer can buy the product online at home and pick up his order in the store where he has decided to make the purchase. Fourthly, the application allows the multi-return of products, which will allow the customer to save time at the checkouts, since the boxes are divided into online purchases and returns, therefore, the waiting time at the checkout decreases. Fifthly, the application itself allows you to book a fitting room for this it is necessary to be inside the store itself and the customer with this option will have the preference to make use of these before the store customers themselves.

On the other hand, customers gave their point of view on the videos they like about their in-store shopping experience. First of all, for customers an important part of the shopping experience is based on being able to touch and try on the garments in the store, the fact of being able to feel if the garment is soft on their skin is important for them when making the purchase of products.

Another feature that acquires an important weight for buyers, is the fact that there are *Zara* stores distributed by the most central and commercial areas of the capital, which means that they do not have to make a large displacement to go to the premises to buy, therefore, the purchase becomes very accessible and comfortable.

Another important reason why buyers like *Zara* is because they are self-service, that is, the customer himself is the one who decides the items he is going to buy without

anyone being able to make him change his mind or guide him in what he is looking for unless he asks for help from the sellers.

In addition, the lighting of the stores makes it possible to see the garments in a precise way, being able to see the products with total clarity and finally, the music of the place seems to them to be consistent to be able to have a quiet purchase, it does not seem to be too highto, but it does not go down and is pleasant for your ears.

The results of the research provide very interesting data since both methods are not exclusive but are complementary and when combined a more global vision of the object investigated is obtained, in this case, to know the opinion about the shopping experience in *Zara*. The tools selected for analysis are the most suitable for this type of social research.

4. Conclusions

Once the results of the research have been analyzed, we can affirm that the methodological proposal applied for this research may be adequate, since it allows in a fast and effective way the obtaining of reliable and novel data.

We can affirm that customers in general, are satisfied with their shopping experience in *Zara* both *online* and *offline*, although with nuances, which are developed below:

If the company incorporates self-checkout boxes in physical stores and increases the number of fitting rooms, the perception of customers would change regarding their shopping experience. If you also add more staff in store and that staff was friendlier to the public, it would also add value to the organization. Customer service must be a point that the company must work on if it wants to retain its customers. The best time to buy for customers is when they find the garment they like, as they can touch the garment and see how it looks on them. With regard to the application (IOP), the "store mode" is not yet used by all customers; Therefore, a unique shopping experience is being lost and customers who use it complain that the application does not allow online returns.

To conclude, we could add other improvements to the shopping experience that *Zara* has made lately in the stores that are being renovated in Madrid, such as the case of the store located in the C.C. Plaza Norte, S.S. de los Reyes (Madrid), in addition to making it with a new concept of store more minimalist and, therefore, more spacious and orderly, They are incorporating, on the one hand, self-collection boxes, they have increased the fitting rooms by a considerable number, offering a more digital image and automatic online shopping collection box (in 48 hours), and on the other hand, they are adding sections that did not exist before, as is the case of *Zara Beauty* (makeup sales area) and footwear area.

With regard to its workers, they are being encouraged to approach customers to help them in the purchase decision; in addition, they are trying to advise customers to place their garments on hangers once they leave the fitting room.

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