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In-store shopping hassles: Conceptualization and classification

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In-store shopping hassles: Conceptualization and classification

Abstract

A positive shopping experience provides retailers with a competitive advantage. However, retail environments pose numerous hassles that may negatively affect consumer experiences.

Integrating perspectives from attribution theory and expectation theory, we examine the concept of shopping hassle and how it differs from that of retail service failure. Furthermore, we utilize qualitative approaches to explore what shopping episodes consumers perceive as hassles.

Conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews in Study 1, we develop a classification framework of in-store shopping hassles. In Study 2, we use a critical incident technique approach to gain a further understanding of types of shopping hassle.

Keywords: consumer experience; retail environments; shopping hassle; service failure

In-store shopping hassles: Conceptualization and classification

Introduction

Consumer satisfaction is a key indicator of a successful business in the retail industry. Consumer satisfaction is positively associated with store sales (Gomez *et al.*, 2004) and profits (Anderson and Mittal, 2000), as well as consumers' repurchase intentions (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001), the share of spending (Cooil *et al.*, 2007; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010), and the word of mouth (Anderson, 1998). As a result, it comes as no surprise that retailers attempt to identify factors that affect consumer satisfaction. In an attempt to improve satisfaction, retailers often utilize strategies focusing on attractive promotional offers, targeted marketing, and better prices. However, recent research suggests that the consumers' shopping experience, among other factors, is by far the most critical determinant of consumer satisfaction (Francioni *et al.*, 2018; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Terblanche, 2018). Notably, despite an increase in e-commerce, mobile applications, and other digital technology advancements such as voice-activated shopping (for a review, see Lee and Lee, 2019), a considerable number of consumers still choose to visit physical stores for various reasons (Skrovan, 2017). In response to this phenomenon, for example, online retailers such as Bonobos and Warby Parker have been expanding into physical locations (Zumbach, 2019). Additionally, J.C. Penny has recently announced its plan to remodel its stores to provide consumers with better shopping environments and more interactive experiences (Kapner, 2019).

In-store shopping experiences are exceptionally diverse. A retail environment contains various components such as products, people, physical environments, policies, and procedures

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(Babin *et al.*, 2013; Garaus, 2017), and consumers typically have a series of contacts with those components over time (Yoon and Park, 2018). Much of the research on shopping experiences centres on the retail environments that produce positive experiences (e.g., Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006; Sherman *et al.*, 1997; Van Rompay *et al.*, 2012). However, consumers' negative experiences can harm service providers more than positive experiences can benefit them (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Luo and Homburg, 2008; Rust and Oliver, 2000; Mittal *et al.*, 1998). Thus, it is reasonable to contend that the environmental factors that negatively affect shoppers' experiences are important to identify.

Consumer experiences are often subjective and internal (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Paul *et al.*, 2016). That is, when consumers encounter the same unpleasant environment, some consumers may appraise it as more negative than others. When describing negative shopping experiences, consumers often use the term – shopping hassle. Shopping hassle includes troubles or difficulties that consumers subjectively experience throughout the retail service process. Perhaps, various in-store shopping environments may pose numerous hassles for consumers. However, identifying all the events that comprise shopping hassles may be an impossible task because there may be too numerous episodes. Considering this characteristic of shopping hassle, the present research aims to conceptualize shopping hassle and then provide its classification framework that is amenable to systematic investigation by both researchers and practitioners.

Conceptualization of shopping hassle

Stemming from appraisal theory in psychology (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), the term – hassle – is described as an experience that is appraised as harmful or threatening to one's

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psychological well-being (Lazarus, 1984). Thus, hassles are considered subjectively experienced situations (Ivancevich, 1986) and obstacles that disrupt goal-directed behaviour (Lazarus, 1990). The topic of hassles has been examined mainly in psychology and organisation research. For example, daily hassles are negatively associated with psychological health (Lazarus, 1984; Sarafino and Ewing, 1999; Sarid *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, hassles, such as equipment malfunction, inappropriate behaviour of co-workers, or a number of meetings, are commonly encountered in work environments (Zohar, 1999; Luong and Rogelberg, 2005) and negatively affect job performance and satisfaction (Ivancevich, 1986).

In the marketing context, consumers frequently experience shopping hassles (Machleit *et al.*, 2005). While shopping hassles can be a major source of consumer satisfaction, research on shopping hassle has gained relatively insufficient attention. Furthermore, to our knowledge, there has been no attempt to distinguish a shopping hassle from a retail service failure, the term that is often used synonymously. In what follows, we make a conceptual distinction between shopping hassle and retail service failure by drawing on attribution theory and expectation theory.

Attribution theory

Negative events that individuals experience are likely to generate attributional responses. Attribution theory deals with aspects of causal inferences – why events have occurred. Weiner (1980/2013) provides a categorisation scheme that classifies causes by three dimensions: locus of causality, stability, and controllability. First, the locus of causality addresses the question of whether an event is due to the self or other external factors. In consumer contexts, the cause of a problem may reside with a consumer or with a service provider (Folkes, 1988). The former cause

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is internal to the consumer whereas the latter is external to the consumer. The locus of causality gives some important implications to differentiate hassling experiences from service failures. Since service failures are caused by service providers' mistakes or defects referring to external causes (Gronroos, 1988; Palmer *et al.*, 2000), service failures tend to have the unidirectionality of influence from service providers to consumers. In comparison, shopping hassles are likely to come from not only external causes but also internal causes. For example, when a shopper is feeling under time pressure (which is an internal cause), an event that is typically ignored or considered to be positive may take a negative tone. Thus, shopping hassles tend to have the bidirectionality of influence.

Second, controllability refers to the degree to which a cause was perceived to be under the firm's volitional control (Weiner, 2000). Consumers typically perceive a service failure to be under the control of service providers. For this reason, when a service failure occurs, consumers tend to expect subsequent service recoveries from the service providers (Wirtz and Mattila, 2004). In comparison, shopping hassles tend to be more consumer-related than firm-related. For example, a specific item may not be found because of the consumer's unique style and thus service providers are not obliged to offer recoveries.

Lastly, the stability dimension assesses the degree to which a cause is seen as relatively permanent (Weiner, 2018). When it comes to this stability dimension, shopping hassles can be viewed as unstable attribution rather than stable attribution. Consumers may attribute the hassle to a circumstantial cause or bad luck and consider it a distinct occurrence, neglecting to ask themselves why it happens. However, when consumers experience repeated similar problems, they perceive such problems to be stable and thus are likely to ask a service provider to offer compensation.

Expectation theory

Previous research makes a distinction between will expectations and should expectations (Boulding *et al.*, 1993; Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Will expectations represent what consumers believe will happen during service encounters, whereas should expectations represent what consumers should be offered during service encounters (Boulding *et al.*, 1993). A should expectation is different from a will expectation in that the former represents a normative standard, whereas the latter is predictive in nature (Yim *et al.*, 2003; Yi, 1990).

Along this line, Zeithaml *et al.* (1993) propose the concepts of adequate service and desired service by employing the zone of tolerance. Consumers enter a service process with a consciously or subconsciously held view of what constitutes an acceptable, less than acceptable, and more than acceptable level of service, on the basis of their prior experiences, the firm's image, or secondary data sources (Johnston, 1995). Even when a consumer has not used a particular service before, it is likely that the consumer has a norm about what is acceptable or unacceptable.

These concepts help us distinguish between shopping hassles and retail service failures in terms of consumers' recovery expectations. Service recovery refers to the actions and activities that service providers perform to restore the loss experienced by consumers in service delivery (Hess *et al.*, 2003). Examples of recovery actions include apologies and monetary compensations such as refunds, coupons, and price discounts (Jung and Seock, 2017). Previous research suggests that recovery expectations are determined by various individual differences such as cultural orientations (Ringberg *et al.*, 2007) and race (Baker *et al.*, 2008). Extending this stream

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of research, we contend that recovery expectations are also dependent on whether to be considered a shopping hassle or a service failure. Specifically, when a service failure incident occurs, consumers tend to feel victimized by the incident (Mattila, 2001) and thus have stronger normative expectations (should-expectations) for recovery than those who are in a shopping hassle situation. For this reason, service failures fall outside the zone of tolerance, the consumer expectations which are considered unacceptable, and thus require adequate service recoveries such as an apology and monetary compensation. In comparison, shopping hassle experiences would fall within the zone of tolerance, the consumer expectations which are considered acceptable, and thus recovery expectations are relatively weak. A summary of the conceptual distinction between shopping hassle and retail service failure is shown in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Overview of studies

With the conceptual distinction in mind, we explore the characteristics of shopping hassles and develop a classification framework of the in-store hassling experiences. Given the insufficient knowledge of shopping hassles, we begin with an in-depth interview approach. In Study 1, we conduct a series of interviews to identify types of shopping hassle. Building on the findings of the interviews, Study 2 uses a critical incident technique (CIT) approach (Bitner *et al.*, 1990), in which we incorporate an online survey to gain a further understanding of the types of shopping hassles.

Study 1

In this study, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews. Using a convenience sample of undergraduate students, we recruited 12 respondents (8 women) at a large public university in exchange for extra credit. College students are considered one of the most active shopping groups (Seock and Bailey, 2008). All respondents had shopping hassle experiences and voluntarily shared them for the study. Respondents were told that the purpose of the study was to examine shopping-related hassles in physical locations. Upon agreeing to participate, respondents were told that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. Each interview was held at a meeting room and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were voice-recorded with the permission of respondents and transcribed.

Following the procedure of Thompson *et al.* (1989), we began the interviews by prompting respondents to think about their experiences of shopping hassles at any physical store. Respondents were then asked to tell their own stories about hassling experiences. The interview questions included what kinds of hassles respondents experienced and how they felt about their hassling experiences. The purpose of these open-ended questions was to gain insights into how respondents identified and perceived their shopping hassles. Respondents were given no restriction on types of stores. After the interviews were completed and transcribed, verbatim transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews were analysed with the guidelines outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Following previous research (Wooten, 2000), the analysis involved two judges (research assistants), who independently interpreted each interview and completed a memo reflecting his or her interpretation. We noted recurring patterns across the interviews with the help of these two judges. These recurring patterns were then categorised. For analysis of the

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interview data, we used open coding and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In open coding, we identified and broke down episodes into separate meaningful concepts, while we clustered those separate ones to form broader concepts by using axial coding.

Findings

Respondents reported various shopping hassles that they experienced at stores such as a grocery, pharmacy, clothing, footwear, consumer electronics, home improvement, family restaurant, department store, and car dealership. We identified two types of shopping hassles that emerged from the analysis: employee-related hassles and task-related hassles. Accordingly, we classified respondents' shopping hassle episodes into either employee-related or task-related types. We then developed groups and subgroups under each type of hassle: three groups under the employee-related hassle (Table 2) and four groups under the task-related hassle (Table 3).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Employee-related hassle. Consumer experiences of employee-related hassles varied, but all fell into one of the following three groups: employees' lack of soft skills, employees' lack of service mind, and employees' lack of competency. The lack of soft skills is associated with employees' rude attitude or unfriendly way of communication to consumers. For instance, our respondent

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perceived an employee to be rude when the employee failed to respond with pleasant greetings that she normally would expect.

The cashier was rude, and you could tell they were letting their outside life in with their job and they were taking it out on me, and I was just trying to buy stuff. I just took my stuff to the counter and she just was rude. She didn't greet me when I came to the front she was supposed to be like "how are you doing today" I didn't even get a smile, very smug.

Second, the lack of a service mind is associated with the employees' attentiveness or motivation to meet consumer needs and requests. For instance, our respondent described her experience at a clothing store where a salesperson was attending to another consumer and thus inattentive to her.

I was looking for dressy clothes and I had a lot of things in my hand. So, the salesperson asked me if I needed a dressing room and put my stuff back there. I went to the dressing room and I needed some different sizes from the store or in the back, but I noticed instead of helping me she was helping the other younger girl in the dressing room beside me. She was calling around to other stores to find her size. I was just left all by myself to get my own sizes. She was so involved with that girl, and she didn't pay attention to me anymore. So, I had to go out in the clothes I was trying on, find other sizes, go back to the dressing room. She didn't check on me or give me the service I needed.

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Third, the lack of competency involves a degree to which employees possess sufficient knowledge and experiences. Our respondent described such a hassling experience caused by unknowledgeable salespeople.

I was trying to buy software of computer because it was messed up. And I thought the salesperson knew what my problem was but didn't understand it. I kept talking to explain it over and over. I kinda had to go through different levels of salespeople until two weeks later.

Task-related hassle. Consumer experiences of task-related hassles were classified into the following four groups: unavailability of items, slow service, unreasonable policy, and poor maintenance. First, the unavailability of items is associated with out-of-stock or product-not-carried. As compared with the out-of-stock situation, the product-not-carried situation is not an issue of stock-in/-out. It refers to a situation where consumers expect that a retailer would carry what they look for, but the retailer does not. For example, one of our respondents described such an experience.

I had to go to the store for several things, one being a dress for a special event. I looked through everything the store had and tried on many of them, but I still didn't find anything I liked.

Second, slow service is related to understaffing or the shortage of checkout counters. For example, our respondent described her hassling experience due to understaffing.

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When you go in to buy the shoes and there are just 3 or 4 people there. You want to be helped in a fast and effective manner, but they just don't have enough people to help you. Usually, you are in a hurry and there are so many people in there.

Third, unreasonable policy involves unfair after-sales service or minimum charge requirements. Unfair after-sales service refers to a situation where consumers are not well informed about a conditional after-sales policy at the time of purchase. For example, our respondent described his experiences as below.

One of the features the dealership has is a tire replacement feature so if you run over something or pop your tire then they will replace your tire. So, I actually ran into a curb that had a sharp angle and it did something to the tire so my tire lost air and popped. So just last week I brought the tire to the dealership and told them I needed the tire replaced and they said just "Leave it there." So, then they called me back and said "There is a problem with your tire and the coverage doesn't cover if you ran into something like a curb. You have to run over a nail or something sharp. It can't be something you hit." So, the tire is still with them.

Last, poor maintenance involves a constant change of arrangement or out-of-order status. For example, our respondent described her hassling experience related to the constant change of arrangement.

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Going grocery shopping is usually something I do really fast because I don't have time to walk around looking for stuff. When I usually go into that store, I expect things to be in a certain location so I can get things quickly, but it seems like every time I go into there, they have changed it completely. So, I'm walking in seeing everything is different again and if drinks were over there at one point now, they have the drinks on the opposite side, and they are there now. It's a hassle because you have to go and look and it takes a lot longer when it would take me 30 minutes to pick up a few things and now it takes an hour and you ask someone for help and they don't even know where it is.

Study 2

So far, we have identified two broad themes of consumer shopping hassles: employee-related and task-related themes. Extending the findings of Study 1, this study aims to further identify new groups and verify the classification framework developed in Study 1. To this end, we employed a critical incident technique (CIT) approach. CIT is a content analysis method for qualitative data, which is often utilized to classify specific events and occurrences (Flanagan, 1954; Bitner *et al.*, 1990). The term – critical incident – is defined as “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). A critical incident in this study is defined as a specific source that consumers perceive as a shopping hassle in a significant way. CIT has been shown to fit well in exploratory research (Islam, 2014).

Using a convenience sample, we recruited 53 respondents, who completed an online questionnaire. These respondents comprised 38 undergraduate students at a large public

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university and 15 non-student adults who were recruited by some of those students. Students who participated in the study either by themselves or by recruiting non-student shoppers earned extra course credit. Of the final sample, two respondents failed to complete the survey and thus were removed from the analysis, leaving a total sample of 51 (29 women). The ethnic composition of the sample was 11.8% African American and 88.2% Caucasian. For the age composition of the sample, 86.3% of respondents ranged in age between 20 and 29; 5.9% of respondents ranged in age between 30 and 39; 7.8% of respondents ranged in age between 50 and 59. Respondents were more diverse in their demographic backgrounds, relative to those of Study 1, and voluntarily shared their shopping hassle experiences for the study.

Using an open-ended questionnaire, we asked respondents to recall two specific critical incidents: one incident relating to the employee-related hassle and another incident relating to the task-related hassle. For the employee-related hassle, respondents were asked to describe a critical incident in which they experienced an in-store shopping hassle that involved an interaction with an employee. For the task-related hassle, respondents were asked to describe a critical incident in which they experienced an in-store hassle that involved something related to the store or product but unrelated to interactions with a person. These questions were intended to distinguish between the employee-related and task-related hassles.

The respondents' descriptions of the experiences were content analysed. Two independent judges were involved in the data coding and grouping of the descriptions. Two judges were provided with the classification framework that emerged in Study 1. After completing the content-analysis task, the judges met to make comparisons. There were 8 disagreements (resulting in inter-judge reliability of 84.6%) in coding between the two judges across the 51 cases analysed for the employee-related hassle, and 4 disagreements (resulting in

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the reliability of 92.2%) across the 51 cases analysed for the task-related hassle. To resolve these disagreements, two judges compared their notes and discussed until consensus was reached. At the end of the process, new subgroups emerged.

Findings

Employee-related hassle. Within the employee-related hassle, we identified two new subgroups: discrimination and high sales pressure. We added these two under the group of employees' lack of soft skills. Discrimination involves a situation where consumers are treated unfairly. For example, one respondent described her experience as follows:

I was shopping with a close friend who is from Bogota, Colombia. My friend looks Spanish (dark hair, skin, etc.) and maybe even spoke some Spanish in the store. Some assume I am Spanish also when she and I are together as I also have darker skin and dark hair. I am white though. We went over to the store one day and decided to take a quick look around at their new clothes. We noticed that the sales lady was very theft cautious with us, but I assumed that she was with everyone. Then, the same African American saleslady looked at another employee (I guess assuming we didn't speak English, or maybe not caring) and said, "Really watch those Latinos." I had a big pile of clothes that I was going to purchase and when she said that I just dropped everything. I was so hurt. I never imagined experiencing racial discrimination.

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High sales pressure refers to a situation where an employee keeps telling a consumer to buy an item. It also involves a situation where a salesperson follows a consumer too closely and is too pushy to sell.

The salesperson would not leave us alone to sell when we wanted to browse the store and look on our own. We told him we would let him know if we needed help, but he refused to walk away.

Task-related hassle. Within the task-related hassle, we identified one new subgroup: inconsistent pricing policy across different channels. We added it under the group of the unreasonable policy. Although the frequency with which this critical incident was cited by respondents was only one, two judges decided to create this new subgroup because it could be one of the major hassles particularly to consumers who compare prices across stores.

I wanted to buy a book that was advertised on their website for about \$15. But I wanted it now, so I went to the store. At the store, the book was priced at the full suggested retail price of \$25, which almost no store demands for any product.

In sum, Study 2 discovers two new subgroups under the employee-related hassle and one new subgroup under the task-related hassle (Table 4). It also displays that diverse shopping hassles can be placed within the classification framework of shopping hassles that emerged in Study 1. Table 5 summarizes the framework and frequency of the critical incidents reported in Study 2.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Discussion

A positive shopping experience provides retailers with a competitive advantage (Terblanche, 2018). One important factor that negatively affects such an experience may be a shopping hassle. In the present research, we articulate how a shopping hassle conceptually differs from a retail service failure and what shopping incidents consumers perceive to be hassles. Drawing from the perspectives of attribution theory and expectation theory, we suggest that shopping hassles, relative to retail service failures, are considered to be subjective, internal, temporary, and acceptable, thus consumers who experience shopping hassles may hold relatively low expectations for recoveries from service providers. Furthermore, we use qualitative methods to explore the characteristics of shopping hassles. In Study 1, we identify two major sources of shopping hassle – employee and shopping task – and develop a classification framework of the hassles. In particular, employee-related shopping hassles involve employees' lack of soft skills (e.g., rude attitudes), lack of service mind (e.g., inattentiveness), and lack of competency (e.g., unknowledgeable salespersons). In comparison, shopping task-related hassles involve the issues of product unavailability (e.g., stock-outs), slow service (e.g., understaffing), unreasonable policy (e.g., unfair after-sales service), and poor maintenance (e.g., out-of-order). In Study 2, in which we utilize a CIT approach, two additional dimensions (e.g., discrimination and high sales

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pressure) emerged under the category of employee-related hassle, and one additional dimension (e.g., inconsistent pricing policies) emerged under the category of task-related hassle.

Importantly, the critical incidents that consumers perceive as shopping hassles fit well within the classification framework developed in Study 1. A summary of in-store shopping hassles appears in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Consistent with our research findings, previous research suggests that consumers frequently encounter hassle experiences (Lin, 2018), and an increase in perceived hassles decreases consumer satisfaction (Hung and Hsieh, 2014). Despite such frequency and negative consequences of shopping hassle, relatively limited attention has been paid to the construct of shopping hassle in consumer research. Store environments are made up of many elements. Previous research classifies in-store elements into the ambient, design, and social factors (Garaus, 2017). While such a classification provides important insights into the positive sources of shopping experiences, it has neglected to identify negative sources of in-store elements. Given that the impact of negative experiences is more powerful than that of positive experiences (Babin and Darden, 1996), our conceptualization and classification would encourage researchers and practitioners to examine more specific dimensions of shopping hassles and their subsequent consequences to shoppers.

Contributions

To our knowledge, our research is the first to distinguish the concept of shopping hassle from the concept of retail service failure. We suggest that the consumers' experiences of shopping hassle may differ from those of retail service failure in various ways. Shopping hassles frequently occur to consumers and are considered relatively minor issues. Due to the nature of shopping hassles, however, service providers are less likely to identify consumers' experiences of shopping hassles, relative to those of retail service failures. For example, consumers' subjective experiences of hassle may be dependent on personal factors such as mood and time pressure. Supporting this, Haynes (2009) provide evidence that consumers under time pressure perceive their decisions to be more difficult and frustrating than those under no time pressure. It is also noteworthy that some types of retail service failure may operate as contributing factors in shopping hassles. For example, an out-of-stock situation is obviously considered a retail service failure. However, consumers perceive this to be a hassle because it may cause them to select another store to buy the item, make a decision on whether to postpone purchasing it or drive extra miles to get it.

Our research also contributes to the literature by presenting a classification framework that allows us to broadly identify the sources of shopping hassle. Our research reveals that two major sources of shopping hassles stem from the interaction with employees and the hindrance to shopping tasks. As our respondents indicate, these hassling experiences (although they are considered relatively minor) may determine consumer satisfaction and patronage behaviour. Thus, our research suggests that marketing practitioners should recognise the in-store sources of hassles (which have been neglected) and attempt to reduce them. In addition, marketing practitioners can benefit from information about employee-related hassles when hiring service employees. For example, retail managers may attempt to recruit those who have such

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characteristics as soft skills, friendliness, experience, motivation, knowledge, and attentiveness as a way to avoid potential hassles that can be caused by employees.

Limitations

We recognise that our studies are subject to some limitations. First, the present research is limited to shopping hassles pertaining to physical stores. However, with the proliferation of online/mobile shopping environments, it is worthwhile to develop a classification framework of online/mobile shopping hassles. In some industries (e.g., travel, banking), online/mobile channels become dominant, and consumers may experience online/mobile-specific hassles (e.g., technical issues with websites, security issues). Related to this, retailers attempt to increase consumer touchpoints by utilizing multiple channels (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). Thus, examining whether a hassling experience in one channel (e.g., in-store) carries over to influence their experience in another channel (e.g., online) may be worthy of further research. Next, using a convenience sample, we conducted studies mainly with college students from a public university. Thus, there exists an issue regarding whether our results can be generalized to other groups of consumers. Consumer diversity (e.g., age, gender, culture, ethnicity, social class) may lead to different critical shopping incidents. For example, as consumers get older, they become less sensitive to external stimuli (Moschis, 1987) and, as a result, their awareness of unfair practices (e.g., inconsistent pricing policy) may decrease. Relatedly, we had eight women out of 12 respondents in Study 1. It is well known that men and women differ significantly in how they process marketing information. For example, women (vs. men) tend to process information in more detail and such a tendency results in a greater sensitivity to environmental factors (Meyers-

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Levy and Sternthal, 1991). Thus, it is plausible that women may feel like they experience more shopping hassles, relative to men. Lastly, we also note that our sample size was relatively small, and with a larger sample size more various incidents would be added to the findings. Although respondents shared their hassle experiences that were readily accessible, there is the possibility that they only remembered some salient experiences and thus failed to identify other sources of shopping hassles.

Directions for future research

Following the structure seen in prior theory development articles (Paul and Mas, 2019; Paul, 2019), we provide directions for future research in this area and demonstrate how other researchers can utilize our conceptualization as a platform for their research. As noted earlier, shopping hassle as an area of research is still in the infancy stage. While shopping hassles are considered to negatively affect shopping experiences, little research has explored behavioural and emotional responses to shopping hassles. For example, shopping hassles inevitably incur perceived costs, such as economic cost (e.g., time spent in stores looking or waiting) and psychological cost (e.g., irritation caused by salespeople), which would be seen as negative perceptions to consumer journeys (Grewal and Roggeveen, 2020). However, it is unclear how these perceived costs would affect decision-making in terms of a pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stage. Given that not all shopping hassles would lead to negative consequences such as negative word of mouth and discontinuing patronage, it is worthwhile to investigate how consumers react to their perceived costs in their different purchase stages.

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Relatedly, consumers' perceptions of shopping hassles may vary in purchase involvement. Involvement concerns a consumer's perceived relevance and importance of a purchase situation (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). Consumer involvement is associated with satisfaction, such that the higher the degree of involvement, the greater the consumer's sensitivity to satisfaction levels (Johnston, 1995). Thus, consumers with high involvement are more likely to be sensitive to their shopping experiences and thus their satisfactory zone of tolerance will be narrow. In contrast, consumers with low involvement will have a relatively wide zone of tolerance and thus only extreme cases will be recognised. Put together, it will be interesting to examine how the same shopping hassle is perceived as a function of purchase involvement.

Furthermore, our research may be extended to luxury brand management. For example, it remains unexplored whether shoppers in luxury (vs. generic) stores are sensitive to shopping hassles (due to their high expectations) or generous with shopping hassles (due to luxury atmospherics). Linking the topic of shopping hassle to mass prestige ("Masstige") marketing (Paul, 2019) may offer interesting insights into how shopping hassle experiences are perceived by consumers who are willing to purchase premium or high-value products.

Lastly, future research may develop a scale designed to measure individual differences in shopping hassle experiences by utilizing our classification framework. The scale may incorporate the distinction between employee- and task-related hassles and establish its usefulness and validation in consumer research. The scale may be used in developing indicators that help retailers reduce consumers' hassling experiences. Additionally, it is plausible that how consumers perceive shopping hassles may be dependent on their shopping orientations. Consumers make purchases with both utilitarian and hedonic shopping orientations (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Davis *et al.*, 2014; Sarkar, 2011). Utilitarian orientations involve functional

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aspects of the shopping (e.g., shopping convenience, product availability), whereas hedonic orientations involve perceived fun or playfulness of the shopping (e.g., enjoyable shopping experience, experiential consumption). Thus, consumers with utilitarian shopping orientations may perceive a shopping task-related hassle (e.g., whether they complete the task as planned) to be a critical issue, whereas those with hedonic orientations may perceive a salesperson-related hassle (e.g., whether they have pleasant interactions with employees) to be a critical one.

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Table 1. Conceptual distinctions between shopping hassle and retail service failure

Attribution Theory		Shopping Hassle	Retail Service Failure
Causality	The cause of a problem may reside with a consumer (internal) or with a firm (external).	Since shopping hassles result from internal causes as well as external causes, shopping hassles have the bidirectionality of influence.	Since retail failures are caused by service providers' mistakes (external causes), retail failures tend to have the unidirectionality of influence from service providers to consumers.
Controllability	Degree to which a cause is perceived to be under the firm's volitional control	Shopping hassles tend to be more consumer-related than firm-related, thus firms are not obliged to provide recoveries.	Consumers typically perceive a service failure to be under the firm's control, thus they expect subsequent service recoveries.
Stability	Degree to which a cause is seen as relatively permanent or temporary	Shopping hassles are viewed as unstable attributions rather than stable attributions. Consumers may attribute the hassle to a circumstantial cause or bad luck and consider it a distinct occurrence, neglecting to ask themselves why it happens.	Retail failures are viewed as stable and unstable attributions. However, when consumers experience repeated problems, they perceive such problems to be stable and ask service providers to offer service recoveries.
Expectation Theory			
Should vs. Will Expectation	A should-expectation represents a normative standard while a will-expectation is predictive in nature.	Consumers who experience shopping hassles may have will-expectations for recovery, but those recovery expectations are not strong enough to ask for recoveries.	Consumers who experience retail failures may have strong should-expectations to ask for recoveries because they feel like victims damaged by the failures.
Zone of Tolerance	Acceptable level of service	Shopping hassling experiences are within consumers' expectations which are considered acceptable (within the customer's expectation zone of tolerance).	Retail failures are outside those expectations which are considered unacceptable (outside the zone of tolerance), thus require adequate service recoveries.

Table 2. Respondents' sample descriptions for shopping hassles related to employees (Study 1)

Employee-Related Hassles	
Employees' lack of soft skills	
Rudeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cashier was rude, and you could tell they were letting their outside life in with their job and they were taking it out on me and I was just trying to buy stuff. I just took my stuff to the counter and she just was rude. She didn't greet me when I came to the front she was supposed to be like "how are you doing today" I didn't even get a smile, very smug.
Unfriendliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I got there on my lunch break, they told me it would be a 20 min waiting, came back in 20 minutes and the lady said, "well I told you it would be a wait." There were elderly people waiting for medication that had waited an hour. And towards the end I told her that they told me it would only be 20 minutes and the lady said "well do you wanna take it somewhere else" which I felt was the wrong answer.
Employees' lack of a service mind	
Inattentiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was looking for dressy clothes and I had a lot of things in my hand. So, the salesperson asked me if I needed a dressing room and put my stuff back there. I went to the dressing room and I needed some different sizes from the store or in the back, but I noticed instead of helping me she was helping the other younger girl in the dressing room beside me. She was calling around to other stores to find her size. I was just left all by myself to get my own sizes. She was so involved with that girl, and she didn't pay attention to me anymore. So, I had to go out in the clothes I was trying on, find other sizes, go back to dressing room. She didn't check on me or give me the service I needed.
Low motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I went to the store last night. It was 9 o'clock and they close at 10 so there were very few people there at that time of night. It was obvious that they saw me there. But it was also obvious that they were not paying attention to me and so I had to wait for a help, and I had to wait for someone to help me. They just were never motivated.
Employees' lack of competency	
Insufficient knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was trying to buy software of computer because it was messed up. And I thought the salesperson knew what my problem was but didn't understand it. I kept talking to explain it over and over. I kinda had to go through different levels of salespeople until two weeks later.
Inexperience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yesterday I went to the store with my wife looking for a dog gate. We got help from someone, but he didn't know if they had it or not, and unfortunately it was his first day on the job and he didn't know where anything was at, so we ended up walking around another store to find things.

Table 3. Respondents' sample descriptions for shopping hassles related to shopping tasks (Study 1)

Task-Related Hassles	
Unavailable items	
Out-of-stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was trying to buy a cable for my portable device, and I went to the store and they had every cable on the list but my part. And that part cable was out of stock, so it's like out of all the ones I needed that one was out. And I was kind upset because I thought it was an issue that the store should keep that cable.
Product-not-carried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I had to go to the store for several things, one being a dress for a special event. I looked through everything the store had and tried on many of them, but I still didn't find anything I liked.
Slow service	
Understaffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you go in to buy the shoes and there are just 3 or 4 people there. You want to be helped in a fast and effective manner, but they just don't have enough people to help you. Usually you are in a hurry and there are so many people in there.
Shortage of checkout counters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We went to that store and it is large and finding stuff is hard. By time you find all your stuff the lines are so long. It always takes longer than you wanted it to and that is the one thing I don't like. It makes me the most angry when there aren't enough registers. That is my number one pet peeve for any place especially that store. Any store where they have only 3 or 4 and it always slows you down.
Unreasonable policy	
Unfair after-sales service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the features the dealership has is a tire replacement feature so if you run over something or pop your tire then they will replace your tire. So, I actually ran into a curb that had a sharp angle and it did something to the tire so my tire lost air and popped. So just last week I brought the tire to the dealership and told them I needed the tire replaced and they said just "Leave it there." So, then they called me back and said "There is a problem with your tire and the coverage doesn't cover if you ran into something like a curb. You have to run over a nail or something sharp. It can't be something you hit." So, the tire is still with them.
Minimum charge requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I went to the store to see if I could purchase a shade for an arch. They told me they didn't keep that type of shade in stock, but they could order it. But they couldn't order arch shade without ordering square one that goes underneath it. But I already had that one, so they didn't have the product I wanted. But I will say the salesman took my number and checked with his supervisor and called me back. He called to find out where I could find a window shade like that and he told me they could order it for me, but it was a 500\$ minimum order which seemed very expensive to me.
Poor maintenance	
Constant change of arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Going grocery shopping is usually something I do really fast because I don't have time to walk around looking for stuff. When I usually go into that store, I expect things to be in a certain location so I can get things quickly, but it seems like every time I go into there, they have changed it completely. So, I'm walking in seeing everything is

	<p>different again and if drinks were over there at one point now, they have the drinks on the opposite side, and they are there now. It's a hassle because you have to go and look and it takes a lot longer when it would take me 30 minutes to pick up a few things and now it takes an hour and you ask someone for help and they don't even know where it is.</p>
Out-of-order status	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It was on my lunchtime and picked up some items to try them on and went back to the dressing room area but nobody was there, so I pushed a buzzer and kept waiting. The buzzer was broken but they didn't care to put a sign there to tell you that. So, I just handed my stuff to them and told them I wasn't gonna buy there anymore, I was furious because I had limited time.

Table 4. Respondents' sample descriptions (Study 2)

Employee-Related Hassle	
Employees' lack of soft skills	
Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was shopping with a close friend who is from Bogota, Colombia. My friend looks Spanish (dark hair, skin, etc.) and maybe even spoke some Spanish in the store. Some assume I am Spanish also when she and I are together as I also have darker skin and dark hair. I am white though. We went over to the store one day and decided to take a quick look around at their new clothes. We noticed that the sales lady was very theft cautious with us, but I assumed that she was with everyone. Then, the same African American saleslady looked at another employee (I guess assuming we didn't speak English, or maybe not caring) and said, "Really watch those Latinos." I had a big pile of clothes that I was going to purchase and when she said that I just dropped everything. I was so hurt. I never imagined experiencing racial discrimination.
High sales pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The salesperson would not leave us alone to sell when we wanted to browse the store and look on our own. We told him we would let him know if we needed help, but he refused to walk away.
Task-Related Hassle	
Unreasonable policy	
Inconsistent pricing Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I wanted to buy a book that was advertised on their website for about \$15. But I wanted it now, so I went to the store. At the store, the book was priced at the full suggested retail price of \$25, which almost no store demands for any product.

Table 5. Classification framework and frequency of shopping hassle incidents (Study 2)

Groups	Percentage	No. of Incidents
Employee-Related Hassle		
Employees' lack of soft skills	(35.3)	(18)
Rudeness	19.6	10
Unfriendliness	3.9	2
Discrimination	3.9	2
High sales pressure	7.8	4
Employees' lack of a service mind	(35.3)	(18)
Inattentiveness	21.6	11
Low motivation	13.7	7
Employees' lack of competency	(29.4)	(15)
Insufficient knowledge	29.4	15
Inexperience	0.0	0
Task-Related Hassle		
Unavailable items	(41.2)	(21)
Out of stock	19.6	10
Product not carried	21.6	11
Slow service	(21.6)	(11)
Understaffing	5.9	3
Shortage of checkout counters	15.7	8
Unreasonable policy	(33.3)	(17)
Unfair After-Sales Service or Return Policy	29.4	15
Minimum Charge Requirements	1.9	1
Inconsistent Pricing Policy	1.9	1
Poor maintenance	(3.9)	(2)
Constant change of arrangement	0.0	0
Out-of-order status	3.9	2

Figure 1. Summary of in-store shopping hassles

Employee-Related Hassles		Task-Related Hassles	
Employees' lack of soft skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rudeness • Unfriendliness • Discrimination • High sales pressure 	Unavailable items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of stock • Product not carried
Employees' lack of a service mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inattentiveness • Low motivation 	Slow service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understaffing • Shortage of checkout counters
Employees' lack of competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient knowledge • Inexperience 	Unreasonable policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfair After-Sales Service or Return Policy • Minimum Charge Requirements • Inconsistent Pricing Policy
		Poor maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant change of arrangement • Out-of-order status