



Why do customers switch? More satiated or less satisfied



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether restaurant customers switch to other restaurants due to satiation or diminished satisfaction. To achieve its objectives, this study extended well-known relationships among perceived quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions by including satiation and further examined the role of satiation on switching intentions. The results of this study showed that satiation was negatively associated with satisfaction but differed from diminished satisfaction. Further, the study results endorsed that satiation significantly influenced switching intentions, whereas satisfaction did not. This supports that customers switch to other restaurants not because they are less satisfied but because they are satiated. Regarding the relationship between perceived quality and satiation, service quality and food quality considerably reduced satiation levels, whereas physical surroundings were associated with an increase in satiation. In addition, satiation fully mediated the relationship between perceived quality and switching intentions, which emphasizes the importance of satiation in customer switching intentions. Findings and implications are provided in the main body of this paper.

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1. Introduction

An ample body of literature has suggested that satisfaction is a direct antecedent of various forms of behavioral intentions, such as repurchase intentions and switching intentions (Oliver, 1993, 1999, 2009). Customer satisfaction can be increased when he or she receives high quality products or services. Thus, increasing satisfaction through better products or services is accepted as an essential step leading to customers' repurchase intentions and/or reducing switching intentions. Contrary to the notion that satisfied customers show higher levels of repurchase intentions (Oliver, 1993, 1999, 2009), recent studies in consumer research have suggested that even satisfied customers may eventually stop repeat patronage (Verhoef, 2003; Agustin and Singh, 2005; Seiders et al., 2005; Jang and Feng, 2007).

Academically, why satisfied consumers exhibit switching behaviors can be explained from two theoretical perspectives. The first is optimal arousal theory, which explains that people have a satisfactory (i.e., optimal) level of arousal to when they consume products or services and they switch when they cannot achieve this optimal level of arousal (Zuckerman, 1969). More specifically, consumers perceive a certain level of arousal after each consumption experience, and repeated consumption causes a decrease in arousal levels. Once perceived arousal falls short of its optimal level,

consumers switch brands or products (Zuckerman, 1969). Second, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggested that affect is important in determining approach and avoidance behaviors. In other words, changes in arousal levels and affect are critical in explaining switching behaviors. Holistically, considering both optimal arousal theory (Zuckerman, 1969) and Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) conceptual framework, satisfaction may not fully account for customers' switching behaviors because satisfaction is largely based on a cognitive evaluation (i.e., disconfirmation between expectations and actual performance), which may not reflect the change in arousal compared to previous consumption experiences (Oliver, 1999).

Hence, to fully understand consumers' switching behaviors, it is necessary to consider additional constructs, such as satiation, which can capture both affective evaluations and changes in arousal (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977). The term satiation refers to the decline in overall enjoyment after repeated consumption (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977; Redden, 2008; Galak et al., 2009). More specifically, satiation can be understood as a combination of two opposite affects (i.e., positive and negative affects) after repeated experiences, as well as reflecting the change in overall enjoyment at the same time. Thus, from the perspective that switching behaviors can be explained by changes in arousal level (Zuckerman, 1969) and affect (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), satiation may provide a more clear explanation for consumers' switching behaviors (Carroll et al., 1982; McAlister, 1982).

Marketing studies have stressed the importance of controlling consumers' switching behaviors because it reduces marketing costs significantly (Rust and Zahorik, 1993; Mittal and Lassar, 1998). In order to manage switching behaviors, efforts have been made to

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examine the role of satiation in various consumption experiences (Redden, 2008; Galak et al., 2009). Despite its importance and the possibility that satisfied customers may exhibit switching behaviors, previous literature and the restaurant industry have put their efforts toward identifying how to increase satisfaction in order to keep their customers' loyalty levels high (Voss et al., 2010).

The main goal of this study is to identify the role of satiation within the conceptual relationships among perceived quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions focusing on restaurant customers. More specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to investigate whether or not satiation can be seen as the direct opposite of satisfaction (i.e., diminished satisfaction), (2) to examine the roles of both satiation and satisfaction in explaining customers' switching intentions, and (3) to identify which dimensions of perceived quality stimulate or reduce customers' satiation in restaurants.

The results of this study are expected to provide important implications to the academic literature, as well as the industry. Theoretically, this study would contribute to the current literature by arguing satiation is a different construct from satisfaction. Also, if the role of satiation in increasing customers' switching intention is determined, then this study would provide evidence that satiation should be utilized when the main concern of a study is set to find antecedents of switching intentions. Empirically, the results of this study would help establish marketing strategies, suggesting that controlling satiation would be more important than increasing satisfaction in order to reduce customers' switching intentions. Lastly, by identifying specific dimensions of perceived quality that increase or decrease satiation levels, restaurant marketers could utilize the results of this study to provide dining experiences that control customers' satiation levels.

2. Literature review

2.1. Perceived quality–satisfaction–behavioral intentions

Lazarus (1991) suggested that customers' attitudes are linked to behavioral intentions via the following sequence: appraisal → emotional response → coping response. Later, Bagozzi (1992) applied this framework to explain how attitude is related to behavioral intentions. Specifically, individuals typically engage in activities (i.e., repurchasing a product) due to a desire to achieve certain outcomes. If one's appraisal of a certain activity indicates that he or she achieved the planned outcome, desire–outcome fulfillment occurs. That is followed by an affective response, such as satisfaction (Bagozzi, 1992). After the affective response (i.e., satisfaction), a coping response follows. This coping response refers to the development of favorable behavioral intentions toward the product or switching to another product or brand in an effort to maintain or increase the level of satisfaction.

The relationship among appraisal, emotional response, and coping has been applied to the service literature by extending the link as perceived quality → satisfaction → behavioral intentions (Gotlieb et al., 1994). In general, perceived quality refers to a consumer's appraisal of a product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988; Verhoef, 2003; Agustin and Singh, 2005; Seiders et al., 2005). More specifically, consumers purchase a product (i.e., a desire–outcome unit) to receive a certain level of quality, which is the appraisal (Zuckerman, 1969; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Brown and Swartz, 1989; Bolton and Drew, 1991). As a sequence, satisfaction follows perceived quality as an affective response to the quality appraisal (McAlister, 1982; Bagozzi, 1992). Thus, satisfaction is defined as a cognitive and affective reaction to an experience or consumption (Rust and Oliver, 1994). In addition, satisfaction is an antecedent of behavioral intentions (i.e., a coping behavior),

which is accepted as the subjective probability that an individual will take a particular action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974, 1975).

In this study, we did not hypothesize the relationships among perceived quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions (i.e., switching intentions). However, all the paths have been included in the analysis model and a separate model has been estimated to verify these relationships.

2.2. Satiation

The term satiation refers to a decrease in overall enjoyment after repeated exposure to the same stimulus (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977; Oliver, 1993; Redden, 2008; Poor et al., 2012). From the perspective of appetite, satiation often refers to a physiological phenomenon such as feeling full, but it is more common to understand satiation as a psychological process (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Redden and Galak, 2013). Satiation has been studied mostly as a phenomenon called “sensory-specific satiety.” For example, people tend to desire a particular food less after eating it, with little change in their desire for foods they have not eaten (Rolls et al., 1981; Carrol et al., 1982; McAlister, 1982). This drop in desire also extends to other foods with the same color, shape, or flavor (Rolls et al., 1982; Rust and Zahorik, 1993; Mittal and Lassar, 1998). Satiation is almost inevitable for every consumption or experience, such as food (Buttle and Burton, 2002; Redden, 2008), sensory experiences like massage (Nelson and Meyvis, 2008), or even social experiences like friendship (Galak et al., 2009).

Generally, a repeated consumption experience or repeated exposure to the same stimulus is viewed as the main cause of satiation (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977). Satiation can be explained by the psychological concept known as two-factor theory (Berlyne, 1970). It posits that the affective consequences of exposure to a stimulus are a function of learning and satiation. Specifically, as an individual is exposed to a novel stimulus he or she begins to learn about it. During this learning process, individuals perceive positive affect, such as joy, excitement, and so forth. However, after repeatedly being exposed to or experiencing the same stimulus he or she starts to perceive negative affect, such as boredom or tedium. Positive affect is stronger during the early stages of exposure to a novel stimulus, but repeated exposure can cause negative affect to increase rapidly. In other words, satiation can be understood as an interaction between positive and negative affect (Berlyne, 1970) and people eventually become satiated once they are exposed to the same stimulus repeatedly.

In addition to the notion that satiation is a psychological response, satiation can be understood from an economic perspective as well, for example the diminishing law of marginal utility. Generally, utility refers to the value that individuals gain from consumption or goods of all kinds, such as purchasing a toaster oven or dining at a restaurant (Greene and Baron, 2001). Marginal utility refers to the difference in utility between previous experiences and current consumption, and it is known to decrease or diminish as the frequency of consumption increases. During early consumption experiences utility increases for consumers, but the marginal utility diminishes as the frequency of consumption increases. Consumers' overall utility is maximized when marginal utility becomes zero, and consumption beyond this point can cause a decrease in overall utility. In other words, consumers may perceive satiation once marginal utility becomes zero. According to these two viewpoints, the two-factor theory and the law of diminishing marginal utility, repeated consumption experiences cause satiation.

In the restaurant industry, consumers are exposed to similar kinds of restaurants or even the same franchise (or chain) restaurants repeatedly. In other words, restaurant customers may perceive satiation after dining at the same restaurant repeatedly because they do not have much to learn about the specific

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