



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

Retail stressors in the Middle East/North Africa region[☆]Mourad Touzani^{a,1}, Elizabeth C. Hirschman^{b,*}, Lamia Hechiche Salah^c^a NEOMA Business School, Boulevard André Siegfried - BP 215, 76825 Mont-Saint-Aignan Cedex, France^b Hill Richmond Smiddy, University of Virginia, College at WiseWise, Virginia, U.S.A^c Institut Supérieur de Gestion, University of Tunis, Tunisia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 December 2012

Received in revised form 4 August 2015

Accepted 5 August 2015

Available online xxx

Keywords:

MENA marketing

Retail employees

Stress

Store atmospherics

ABSTRACT

This study identifies sources of occupational stress impacting employees in the Tunisian retail sector. As with many other nations in the Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) region, Tunisia has a rapidly developing retail sector where stress levels among workers are high. Unfortunately, most contemporary retailing and salesperson research has been conducted in developed, stable Western countries and is likely to be less valid throughout the MENA region. To construct an initial platform for theory development and management practice, we conducted interviews with retail employees in home furnishings stores. Our findings both reinforce and expand prior knowledge on retail selling. We identify three categories of stress that seems to characterize the MENA cultural context: retail employees' feelings of depression within the retail store; low social status; and cultural gender and religious stereotypes. We develop a set of recommendations for improving employees' performance and reducing their stress within the MENA region.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The increasing rate of competitive changes in Western marketing environments has caused managers to consider retail employees' performance a crucial issue in their strategic plans (Johlke and Iyer, 2013). This pattern is now diffusing to emergent economies, where local firms may try to adopt Western methods, models and techniques to compete with newly-arrived international companies. As a result, managers are placing pressure on retail employees to upgrade performance and take on new responsibilities, such as gathering customer intelligence (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006).

Retail managers may also assign employees to serve as sources of information on customer expectations, attitudes and trends (Sharma et al., 2000). They expect them to be customer-oriented (Homburg et al., 2011), to build customer loyalty (De Wulf and Oderkerken-Schröder, 2003), and to display a high level of functional and emotional intelligence (Kidwell et al., 2011; Verbeke et al., 2008). All these new performance requirements come with a price for salespeople: occupational stress (see e.g., Babakus et al., 1999; Low et al., 2001).

To date, virtually all research on retail employee stress has been conducted in Western cultural contexts. However the retail environment is very different in MENA countries, where several nations (e.g., Egypt,

Libya and Tunisia) are currently undergoing rapid democratization of their economies and increased international retailer entry. In Tunisia, for example, several new European-based competitors have arrived recently in the retail sector (e.g., Carrefour, Géant, and Bricorama). These retailers have increased consumer expectations about store appearance and employees' knowledge and behavior. Traditionally in MENA countries, retail selling was not considered an honorable profession and salespeople, especially women, were treated as lower class and non-professional by both managers and customers. As international competition intensifies, local store managers are coming to realize that their retail personnel can play a vital role in combating competition. But to accomplish this, the sales occupation, itself, will probably need to be made more professional through training. This, in turn, may increase the social status of the job, causing more talented persons to seek employment in retailing.

The first theoretical contribution of this article is to supply a new, cultural perspective to the framework dealing with salespeople's stress. Our results show that several deep-seated cultural stereotypes – linked to society's view of salespeople, religion, and the family structure – contribute significantly to salespeople's anxiety and stress. The second theoretical contribution is to show that, when retail stores are seeking to position themselves internationally, the marketing actions implemented (imposing the French language, Western music, and modern décor) may lead to identity issues, alienation, and stress. Our third major contribution is to highlight the fact that store atmospherics are often designed to improve customers' experience, regardless of their effect on salesforce working conditions and their contribution to salespeople's stress. Our study is therefore an attempt to construct a foundation for both theory

[☆] We wish to thank Stephan Zielke (Aarhus University), as well as Jackie Yiptong (Human Resources and Social Development Canada) for their insightful comments on this paper.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mourad.touzani@neoma-bs.fr (M. Touzani), elizabeth524@aol.com (E.C. Hirschman), lamia.hechiche@yahoo.com (L. Hechiche Salah).

¹ Tel.: +33 2 32 82 57 97; fax: +33 2 32 82 58 34.

and practice concerning retail selling in the MENA region. Such a foundation should lead to managerial practices that increase the quality of job performance. Based on our findings, we put forward a set of recommendations for retail managers in the MENA region to guide the enhancement of retail employees' performance and occupational satisfaction.

2. Literature review

Occupational stress has been well-studied in the retail and personal selling literature. In the following, we present a synthesis of the major sources of stress faced by retail employees (see also Appendix A). No matter in what country they work, retail employees face a range of interactions involving exchange and human contact (Fish, 2005; Langerak, 2001). They have to deal with a large number of individuals (customers, suppliers, supervisors, colleagues) who have different and often contradictory expectations (Babakus et al., 1999; Langerak, 2001; Moncrief et al., 1997; Montgomery et al., 1996). *Role conflict* occurs when retail employees face simultaneous contradictory expectations, making it difficult or impossible to meet the needs of all those involved (Knight et al., 2007; Lau and Huang, 1999; Low et al., 2001). *Role ambiguity* develops when they lack the information necessary to accomplish their tasks properly or when they feel uncertain about their supervisors' requirements (Low et al., 2001). Role ambiguity has two main dimensions: internal – involving supervisor(s), colleagues, and company and professional ethics; and external – involving family, customers and non-work-related ethics (Rhoads et al., 1994; Singh and Rhoads, 1991; Singh et al., 1994). Retail employees experiencing work-family conflict report high levels of job stress (Darrat et al., 2010).

Organizational stress may be linked to the sales position, control system and organizational climate and culture, as well as to the retail employee's sense of career (Tyagi, 1990). The level of the sales position, itself, can be an important source of stress, because low level retail employees may be confronted with multi-task overload (Moncrief et al. 1997). They may also feel unable to perform their assigned tasks, because they lack the required knowledge or skills (Montgomery et al. 1996). The managerial control system often permits retail employees little autonomy in the accomplishment of their jobs (Montgomery et al. 1996). Centralized control can create stress that restricts employees' freedom of action (Avolonitis and Panagopoulos, 2007) or ability to obtain intellectual stimulation (MacKenzie and Rich, 2001). This commonly occurs when salespeople are not allowed to adjust their actions to better fit customers' needs or develop creative solutions to problems (Ingram et al., 2011).

Additionally, the absence of an ethical company climate may be a major source of stress (DeConinck, 2010; Jaramillo et al., 2006; Schwepker et al., 1997). Salespeople may believe that they are expected to engage in tactics which are misleading or deceptive to customers, and therefore feel guilty (Barnes et al., 2006). Limited opportunities for advancement can also generate anxiety (Broadbridge, 2002). Indeed, it is often hard to earn a desirable income as a retail employee and some employees may be laid off during slack periods, creating a sense of job insecurity (Esbjerg et al., 2010).

The social and physical environment also affects employees' performance (Bitner, 1992; Bonnini and Goudey, 2012; Swinyard, 2003). Environmental stressors deal with the social, physical and material working conditions of the salesperson. Given increasingly stiff and sharp retail competition, customers have become more and more demanding. Supervisor/subordinate relationships can be particularly pathogenic, and in some cases supervisors may harass their subordinates. Relationships with colleagues may also be difficult (Michaels and Dixon, 1994). Conflicts within the sales force generally stem from excessive competition and rivalry generated by job demands and sales-target objectives (Lapidus et al., 1997).

3. Research context

Our research context is the Tunisian retail sector. Tunisia is an Arab-Muslim country of the MENA region. The *International Monetary Fund* (2013) ranks it among emergent countries, since it is moving from the state of a closed to an open economy and undergoing rapid growth and industrialization. Historically, Tunisia was influenced over a period of 3000 years by, among others, the Berber, Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, and Byzantine civilizations. During this time, these successive civilizations helped to mold the Tunisia of today. The conquest of North Africa by the Arabs in 647 CE turned Tunisia into an Islamic country, notably by the foundation of Kairouan, an influential religious capital in Africa (Boularès, 2012). More recently (from 1887 to 1956), Tunisia was a French protectorate. This historical period was characterized by a continuous confrontation between the two major cultural models in evidence: the Arab-Muslim and the French, leading to the acculturation in situ of a large portion of the population (Hirschman and Touzani, 2011). It was also during this period that the very first modern retail stores started to appear in Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax (Bennasr and Azouazi, 2010). Like several neighboring countries, Tunisia has lived through major historical periods and events: colonization, independence, the post-colonial era with autocratic rulers, and recently the Arab spring. Each of these periods has made a deep impact on the retail sector (Bennasr and Azouazi, 2010).

Today, compared to the US and Europe, Tunisia has a retail sector that is less organized and more traditional; small grocers and traditional independent stores lead the retail landscape. *Souks* (regular – often weekly – open-air local markets) and *bazaars* (permanent enclosed markets) contribute to the dynamism of the big cities, where they represent the heart of the *Medina*. The main players in this sector are small family retail businesses, the managers of which are often local owners who lack management expertise. While corner shops still dominate the retail trade, the informal sector and the black market are also serious competitors to the structured retail sector (Oxford Business Group, 2010). This situation is very similar to that in several other countries from the MENA region (Amine et al., 2006; Amine and Lazzaoui, 2011). The rise in purchasing power and domestic consumption, the development of transport infrastructure and the emergence of the middle class in the MENA (and specifically in Tunisia) contribute to the recent development of modern commerce (Amine and Hendaoui Ben Tanfous, 2012). Many of the new mall stores, supermarkets, and hypermarkets are indeed European franchises. In spite of this evolution, the organized retail stores have a market share that represents barely 20% and are present only in big cities (Oxford Business Group, 2010). In this context, the regulatory framework is much less transparent and detailed than in the US and Europe with respect to opening hours, employee protection, social security, and environmental considerations (Rouis and Tabor, 2013). Consequently, the status of the salesperson remains low and precarious in a region where the demands for performance are increasing, and training initiatives are very rare (Hechiche-Salah et al., 2009).

4. Research method

4.1. Approach

Our objective was to explore retailing stress factors characteristic of the MENA countries, where personal selling and retail management are greatly understudied. Burgess and Steenkamp (2006) recommend that researchers studying emergent markets do so with an open mind and note the utility of qualitative techniques for uncovering new constructs in such situations. As they put it, “simply testing one's existing theories in a vastly different contexts may lead to an imposed-etic view – i.e., committing the fallacy of assuming that constructs and theories developed in high income, industrialized countries are automatically valid in emerging markets” (p. 346). The second major motivation for the use

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10492855>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10492855>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)