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FROM SERVICE QUALITY TO TOURIST EXPERIENCE: A REVIEW FROM SERVQUAL TO CONSUMER NEUROSCIENCE

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Abstract

The literature on service quality and consumer satisfaction needs to integrate the new methods and study techniques provided by consumer neuroscience. The review of studies in the field of tourism from the consumer neuroscience perspective allows us to identify the conceptual and methodological changes necessary to achieve an advance in the science of the study of consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The article aims to analyze how the conceptual and methodological changes in the study of the tourism experience from the lessons learned in the literature on marketing, quality management and services, with the incorporation of more advanced study techniques, such as neuromarketing. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the integration among consumer behaviour and consumer neuroscience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality in tourism experience

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985:42) outline that “service quality perceptions result from a comparison of customer expectations with actual service performance”. These authors explain that service quality is a form of attitude, which is related but not equivalent to satisfaction. Service quality results from a comparison of customer’s expectations and perceptions of provider performance. In addition, they propose a scale for measuring customer perceptions of service quality: SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). As evidenced by the literature, the SERVQUAL scale has been widely applied to study consumer behavior in different types of services, such as the tourism sector (e.g., Shafiq, Mostafiz and Taniguchi, 2019). However, Buttle (1996) raises certain criticisms of SERVQUAL, among others: (1) SERVQUAL is based on a disconfirmation paradigm, (2) service quality is measured in terms of perception-expectation gaps, (3) SERVQUAL is focused on service delivery process, (4) SERVQUAL’s dimensions are not universals and their stability depend on context; (4) the meaning and measurement of expectations has some issues to resolve; (5) SERVQUAL proposes that service quality is a global construct, not directly linked to particular encounters.

In this regard, Koenig-Lewis and Palmer (2014) discuss the role of expectations on the evaluation of service quality, as the disconfirmation model evaluates cognitive measures of expectations and perceptions of service quality. For instance, expectations may embrace different conceptualizations. Thus, Higgs, Polonsky and Hollick (2005) explain that expectations can be described from four perspectives: forecast or predictive expectations, normative or desired expectations, ideal expectations, and minimum tolerable or adequate expectations. Furthermore, Koenig-Lewis and Palmer (2014) underline the role of affective anticipation for measuring service quality and satisfaction. Thus, they examine the relationship among cognition, affect, and emotions in consumer behaviour. This line of research is receiving increasing attention in the field of tourism, such as Nordhom, Scuttari and Pechlaner (2018)’ work.

Tourist experience from a consumer neuroscience perspective

The consumer behavior literature has recognized service encounters (Vorhees et al., 2017) and the global evaluation after several encounters with the service (Parasuraman,

Zeithmal and Berry, 1988). In this regard, Vorhees et al. (2017) explain that service encounter is any discrete interaction between the customer and the service provider related to a core service offering, as service experience is the period of time and space during which all service encounters related to a core service offering may occur. According to Bastiaansen et al. (2019), for hospitality, tourism and leisure, experiences become the core business. They define experience as a dynamic, emotional and individual process, as experience is related to “within-person, predominantly emotional, dynamic process that develops over time. A measure for experience should therefore ideally be able to track emotions continuously over time” (Bastiaansen et al., 2019:652).

As diverse studies use self-report measures to evaluate emotions in consumer behaviour, alternative techniques are receiving attention in the literature. In this new research framework, there are terms such as consumer neuroscience, neuromarketing, and neotourism. In general terms, Agarwal and Dutta (2015) explain that consumer neuroscience is the academic research results from the combination of marketing, neuroscience and psychology. On the other hand, Cherubino et al. (2019) describe “neuromarketing” as the application of consumer neuroscience to reach specific market research goals using neurophysiological tools, such as eye tracking and electroencephalography, among others. Robaina-Calderín and Martin-Santana (2021) outline that the synergy of different disciplines, such as neuroscience and marketing, nurture new areas of knowledge, such as neuromarketing. In this regard, Moral-Moral (2021) notes that neuromarketing has scarce application in the field of tourism. Studies on neuromarketing in tourism include, among others, Bastiaansen et al. (2018) and Mengual-Recuerda et al. (2021), among others. This new area of knowledge makes it feasible, for example, to evaluate service experiences in real time and identify causes of consumer behavior that, consciously or unconsciously, the tourist does not report.

METHODS

The methodology applied consists of the selection and analysis of relevant articles available in scientific databases, mainly Web of Science and Scopus. The main objective is to determine what, how and to what degree consumer neuroscience is directing its attention to the study of the tourism experience in all its phases, and what gaps remain to be resolved in terms of the study of service quality, satisfaction, emotions and tourist loyalty. Among the terms used in the search for articles are, among others, neuroscience, neuromarketing, neurotourism, and tourist.

FINDINGS OR ANTICIPATED FINDINGS

The literature review allows conclusions to be drawn in at least two areas: scope of study and applied techniques. At the level of scope, the need for more neuromarketing studies for different tourism scenarios and types of tourists is recognized. At the technical level, there is an opportunity for improvement in terms of replication studies of techniques and tools to contrast the results of previous studies and consolidate this field of knowledge.

IMPLICATIONS

The integration of consumer neuroscience into the study of the tourist experience has significant implications for lessons learned in service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This requires integrating conceptually and methodologically the scope of consumer neuroscience with the consumer behavior literature. It also requires

interdisciplinary cooperation between marketing and quality management professionals and other areas of science.

CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of tourist experience management demands the integration of the lessons learned in the classic consumer behavior literature with the conclusions obtained from the application of more innovative methods and techniques from neuroscience.

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