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CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN MODERN GROCERY RETAILING: EVIDENCE FROM SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT
The experience of customers has been an important factor of competitiveness in new grocery retailing, especially high-frequency and efficiency-conscious retailing environment. This paper focuses on the major drivers of customer experience in modern-day grocery retailing in Saudi Arabia, which is a market that has experienced a rapid modernization of operations and has undergone rapid digitalization. Beyond the customary culture-based approaches, the study replaces the traditional explanations with a performance-based approach which focuses on the operational efficiency, digital-physical integration, reliability and trust, ease of navigation and convenience, and professional service behavior as the key determinants of customer experience. The quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used, and the customers of supermarkets and hypermarkets located in the large cities of Saudi Arabia were surveyed. The data were discussed with the help of descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis as well as multiple regression. The results show that the operation efficiency, reliability and digital-physical integration have the highest predictive power of customer experience, and professional service conduct, as well as convenience, have also strong positive impacts. Cultural factors also function as contextual factors, and not as explanatory factors. The paper will be of value to customer experience and retailing literature in that it illustrates the shortcomings of traditional cultural models in the contemporary system-based retailing set-ups and will offer practical suggestions on how grocer retailers can employ operational excellence and integration of the omnichannel in improving customer experience.

Keywords
Customer experience; Grocery retailing; Operational efficiency; Omnichannel retailing; Digital–physical integration; Service professionalism; Saudi Arabia

1.INTRODUCTION

The competitive advantage in the new grocery retailing has turned into a customer experience as a result of growing competition, the rapid development of technologies, and more advanced consumer requirements. In the case of grocery retail, where shopping is a common activity, utilitarian and time sensitive, customer experience has a decisive impact on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and repeat shopping (Mahfooz, 2014; Kazemi, 2025). With the retail price competition and product mix being more standardized, the traditional retailers are forced to make themselves stand out in regards to the efficiency, dependability, and the convenience of the entire shopping experience.

The existing studies on customer experience and retailing in Saudi Arabia have largely revolved around the culture, social norms, and religiosity as the key determinants of consumer perceptions (Almutairi, 2022). These views were based on the previous phases of retail development where the service was evaluated using interpersonal interaction, family-based shopping, and cultural congruency. Nevertheless, the Saudi grocery retail market experienced a significant transformation over the past few years which is the result of urbanization, diversification of the economy, digitalization, and the development of new modern types of retail stores like hypermarkets, supermarkets, and e-grocery stores (Alawadh, 2024; Kazemi, 2025).

The modern grocery shopping in Saudi Arabia is becoming more high frequency, efficiency-based and hybrid digital-physical consumption patterns. In-store shopping has been complemented by mobile apps, online promotions, loyalty programs, and delivery services, and is now an omnichannel shopping experience that leaves the in-store setting (Alsaid and Almeshal, 2023; Alsulaimani, 2024). Here, the systematic performance, consistency in the reliability of its systems and the smoothness of its channel integration are more important in defining customer experience than symbolic cultural cues.

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According to recent research in the Saudi retail market, the most important factors in determining customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are the quality of service, level of operational efficiency, and the level of technological integration (Mahfooz, 2014; Shibeika, 2025). Customers are more and more influenced by factors like speed of service, availability of the products, accuracy of the transactions, and resolution of the problems. The increased dependence on experience-forming data-driven retail processes and self-service technologies also support the significance of efficiency and consistency (Alawadh, 2024; Schultz and Paetz, 2025).

In spite of these trends, much of the existing literature remains based on the culture-centric models in explaining customer experience in Saudi grocery retailing. This leaves a conceptual gap between the theoretical descriptions and the realities of the retailing today. The excessive focus on cultural dimensions will create an obsolete image of the Saudi market and also under worlds the impact of operational excellence, digital-physical integration, and professional service behavior on customer experience performance (Zia, 2024).

Recent studies indicate that in highly standardized and advanced technology-driven retail systems, culture is more of a contextual moderator than a customer experience driver (Kazemi, 2025). Cultural norms remain to only determine the boundaries of acceptability and expectations of appropriateness in service provision, which cannot be used to offset inefficiencies, service failures, and poor integration of digital. Customer trust and satisfaction in contemporary grocery retail is increasingly created by the bases of consistent performance, transparency and professionalism (Shibeika, 2025).

Considering the above changes, this research revisits the issue of customer experience in contemporary grocery retailing in Saudi Arabia through a new conceptual framework that incorporates the current consumption trends and retailing practices. The study does not use culture as the key explanatory variable but relies on operational efficiency, digital-physical integration, reliability and trust, ease of navigation and convenience, and professional service conduct as the key determinants of customer experience. Cultural influences are recognized as the conditional context that affects expectations but fails to influence experience evaluation directly.

Through this point of view, this study contributes two critical points. First, it contributes to the customer experience theory and proves the inefficiency of the traditional culture-centric models in the efficiency-based and digitally intelligent retail space. Second, it offers useful guidance to grocery retailers in Saudi Arabia because it will help them to understand the experience dimensions that are the most important to modern consumers, and the experience will subsequently guide the managerial strategies to enhance service quality and consumer loyalty.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Customer experience in contemporary groceries retailing.

Customer experience is commonly known to be a multidimensional construct that involves cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions of customers towards their interactions with a retailer in the platform of various touchpoints. Customer experience is also given specific significance in grocery retailing because of the routine and repeatability of shopping, low switching costs, and the high level of competition between retailers (Mahfooz, 2014). Due to the high level of standardization of the grocery products, the differentiation is becoming more and more based on the service performance, the quality of experience instead of the products attribute per se.

In Saudi Arabia, previous studies have shown that the dimensions of service quality used (reliability, responsiveness, and assurance) have a strong relationship with customer satisfaction and loyalty at a supermarket and hypermarket (Mahfooz, 2014; Shibeika, 2025). These results mean that grocery retailers are rated by customers according to the effectiveness and consistency of the service delivery. Consequently, customer experience in the grocery retailing is coming to be perceived as a performance-based construct, defined by operational implementation instead of symbolic or affective signals per se.

2.2 Operational Efficiency and Service Performance.

The key factor in customer experience in high-frequency retail setting is operational efficiency. When used in relation to grocery retailing, efficiency is a measure of speed of service, availability of goods, correctness of transactions, and dependability of operational process. The empirical investigations of the Saudi retail setting have shown that customer satisfaction and trust directly impact negatively in the event of operational failures (long wait times, stock-outs, or pricing errors) (Mahfooz, 2014; Kazemi, 2025).

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With the growth and development of the Saudi grocery industry, customers have become less patient with inefficiencies and service failures. Kazemi (2025) indicates that the growing size and professionalization of Saudi enterprise-scale retail have increased customer requirements in terms of standardized and error-free service provision. This means that operational efficiency has become an underlying component of customer experience, which forms the immediate satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

2.3 Omnichannel Experience and Digital-Physical Integration.

Customers experience has been changed radically by the adoption of digital technologies that have ensured high rates of adoption of technology in grocery retailing. The customers are becoming more active participants in the hybrid shopping experience, which involves both physical shopping and online shopping (mechanized through mobile applications, online promotions, loyalty programs, and home delivery) (Alsaid & Almeshal, 2023; Alsulaimani, 2024). This integration has increased customer experience outside physical store into an ongoing process of an omnichannel. The literature on the Saudi context shows that customer interest in e-grocery and omnichannel services is largely determined by perceived usefulness, ease of use, and trust with regard to digital platforms (Alsulaimani, 2024; Almutairi, A. S., 2024). Alsaid and Almeshal (2023) also state that smooth alignment of online with offline channels leads to customer convenience and satisfaction, which confirms the importance of digital-physical integration as one of the drivers of the core experience.

With grocery retailing growing data-driven, customer experience is predetermined by the possibility of the retailer to make digital and physical touchpoints aligned into a smooth and connective system (Alawadh, 2024). This change highlights the increased significance of technological ability in customer experience development.

2.4 Reliability, Trust, and Professional Service Conduct.

The element of trust is essential in customer experience in retail grocery business especially in areas that experience regular buying and customer-retailer interactions. In the modern retail industry, trust is mainly established by consistent service delivery, openness of information and resolved problem solving and not by interpersonal familiarity (Shibeika, 2025).

The professional service behavior is important in enhancing trust perceptions. According to the findings of Shibeika (2025), employee competence, efficiency and professionalism are of great importance in customer loyalty in the Saudi retailing sector. The respectful treatment is more and more related by customers with the clarity of communication, the speed of service, and the compliance with the standards of the service but not with the culturally symbolic gestures. This is indicative of a more general shift to standardized professionalism of contemporary retail systems.

2.5 Convenience and Ease of navigation in Grocery Retailing.

The prevailing theme in the modern grocery retail research is convenience. Linear store designs, convenient navigation, and efficient product placement supply less physical and mental efforts during shopping and add a positive value to customer experience (Almutairi, 2022). The customers in high-frequency shopping settings appreciate the retailers that make it easy and fast to accomplish tasks.

Saudi supermarkets have shown that the design of stores and services flow have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and shopping efficiency (Mahfooz, 2014; Almutairi, 2022). The higher the frequency of shopping, the more sensitive the customers are to inconvenience, which confirms the validity of the notion that navigational simplicity is a cumulative experience driver.

2.6 Repositioning Culture in the Contemporary Customer Experience models.

The studies of Saudi consumer behavior have traditionally focused on such cultural variables as social norms, religiosity, and family orientation (Almutairi, 2022). Although these drivers are still considered in the formation of the overall perception of suitability, as per recent studies, their explanatory abilities decrease in the presence of highly standardized and technologically facilitated retail settings (Kazemi, 2025).

In its argument, Alawadh (2024) asserts that the variability in service delivery is minimized by data-driven retail systems and automation of process which restrict the impact of interpersonal interactions and culture-based interactions on the customer experience. Culture in this sense is a contextual moderator and so it influences acceptable limits of the service but does not directly influence the outcome of the experience.

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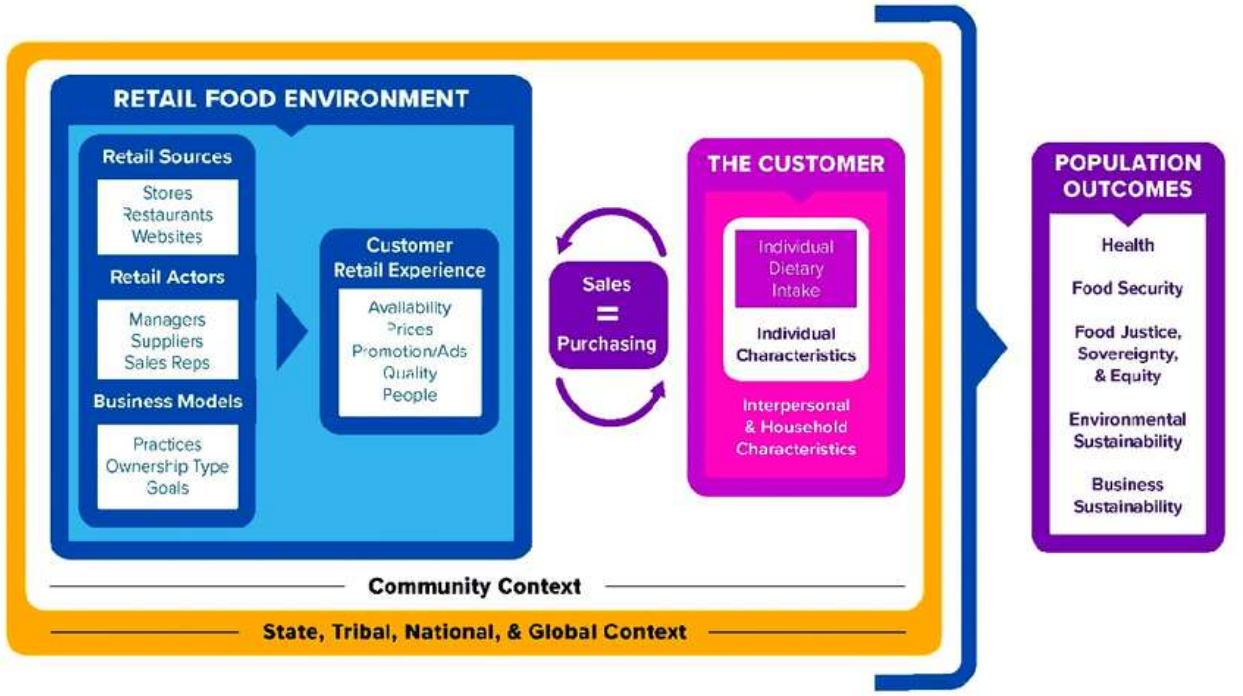
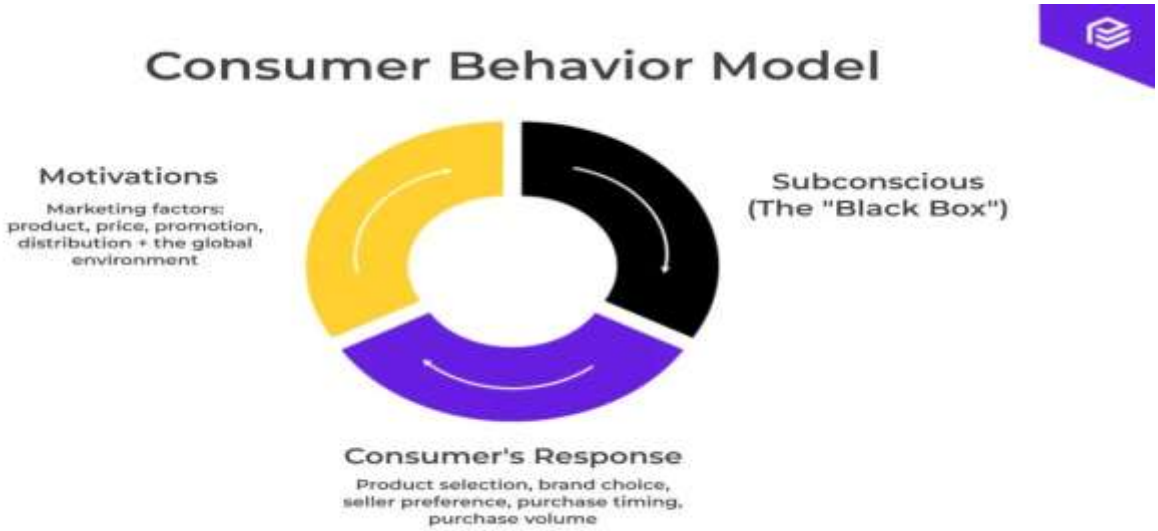
2.7 Summary and Research Gap

The analyzed literature shows that there has been a significant change in the factors of customer experience in Saudi grocery retailing. Although in the previous literature it was based on cultural and interpersonal factors, the recent evidence points to the increasing significance of operational efficiency, digital-physical integration, reliability, convenience, and professional service conduct. Nevertheless, current studies have failed to combine these modern drivers into coherent customer experience model, still tending to use concept models that are largely based on culture and are not as relevant to the current situation in the market.





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The graph depicts the overall consumer pattern by connecting the retail food setting and the specific attributes of customers and the end consumption results. It demonstrates the customer retail experience based on factors of availability, pricing, promotions, quality, and people influenced by the retail sources, actors and business models. It is these retail stimuli which affect purchasing behavior, which in turn interacts with personal dietary consumption, personal traits and house or interpersonal setting. The model also shows that both conscious and subconscious decision making is mediating consumer responses, including product choice, brand choice, and purchasing timing (the black box). The end result of these interactions is the achievement of bigger population-level consequences, such as health, food security, equity, and sustainability. In the literature review, this framework underlines the fact that customer experience and customer behavior exist within broader social, cultural, and environmental settings, as opposed to being motivated by mediated shopping characteristics in isolation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in the study was a quantitative, cross-sectional research design that was applied to investigate the influence of operational, digital, and service-related dimensions on customer experience in contemporary grocery retailing in Saudi Arabia. To empirically test the relationships between the improved constructs of customer experience and the overall experience perceptions, a survey-based approach was chosen.

3.2 Study Situation and Population of interest.

The study was done in the framework of the contemporary grocery retail zones, namely, the supermarkets and hypermarkets that are situated in the big cities in Saudi Arabia. The choice of these formats was based on the fact that they have a standardized operation, have high traffic in terms of customers, and they have incorporated digital retail technologies.

The target group was that of adult consumers which had shopped recently in a contemporary grocery store. The recent shopping experience was necessary to make sure that the responses were based on the current retail practices and the service conditions.

3.3 Method of Sampling and Sample size.

The reason is that a non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized because of accessibility and the exploratory essence of the revised framework. The information was collected using a mix of both online survey and in-store distribution method.

Three hundred valid answers were aimed at make sure the statistical power of correlation and regression analyses was adequate. This was a sample size that was acceptable to the study of consumer behavior.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

The structured questionnaire was used to collect data: it included three sections:

- ✓ Demographic data, such as age, sex, level of education and frequency of shopping.
- ✓ Drivers of customer experience, which are measured:
- ✓ Operational efficiency
- ✓ Digital-physical integration
- ✓ Reliability and trust
- ✓ The user-friendliness and convenience.
- ✓ Ethical behavior in professional services.
- ✓ Total customer experience assessment.

Measurements were done on all items on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree) were used. Measurement items were based on existing retail and service quality literature and made fit to the Saudi grocery setting.

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3.5 Data Collection Procedure and Ethical considerations.

The involvement in the study was voluntary. The academic purpose of the research was explained to the respondents and anonymity and confidentiality was assured. There were no breaches of privacy and the participants could withdraw whenever they wished.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The statistical software was used to analyze the data obtained. The characteristics of respondents and the main variables were summarized through descriptive statistics. The reliability analysis was used to measure internal consistency of the measurement scales. Correlation analysis and multiple regression were used in the inferential analysis to determine the predictive power of the updated customer experience dimensions.

Table 1. Summary of Research Methodology

Methodological Component	Description
Research Design	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey design
Study Context	Modern grocery retailing (supermarkets and hypermarkets) in Saudi Arabia
Target Population	Adult consumers with recent shopping experience in modern grocery stores
Sampling Technique	Non-probability convenience sampling
Sample Size	Minimum of 300 respondents
Data Collection Instrument	Structured questionnaire
Measurement Scales	Five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Key Variables	**Operational efficiency; Digital–physical integration; Reliability and trust; Ease of navigation and convenience; Professional service conduct; Overall customer experience**
Data Collection Method	In-store and online survey distribution
Data Analysis Techniques	Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis
Ethical Considerations	Voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality assured

4. RESULTS

4.1 The demographic profile of respondents will be presented

One hundred and fifty valid questionnaires were entered into the final analysis. The respondents portrayed a heterogeneous demographic profile regarding the age, sex, level of education and frequency of shopping. Most of them said that they engaged in grocery shopping once in a week or more, which upheld the high frequency of grocery retail consumption in Saudi Arabia.

4.2 CED Customer experience Driver descriptive statistics.

Descriptive analysis revealed that there was a great agreement between efficiency-related and convenience-related dimensions. The highest mean scores were on operational efficiency and reliability and this means that customer chiefly emphasize speed, accuracy and uniformity in grocery retailing. Digital-physical integration received high ratings as well as it shows the increasing users of mobile applications and digital based services in their shopping travels.

Navigability and professional service behavior were also rated high and this means that customers appreciate the well-organized store layouts and professional competent and efficient employee conduct.

4.3 Customer Experience In General Assessment.

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A positive customer experience was indicated in the overall customer experience scores in terms of modern grocery retailing in Saudi Arabia. Regression analysis showed that the greatest predictors of customer experience were operational efficiency, reliability, and digital-physical integration. The positive effects of the professional service conduct and convenience in navigation were also substantial and did not give way to the contextual cultural variables as the key clarifiers.

5. DISCUSSION

This study was aimed at discussing the determinants of customer experience in contemporary grocery retailing in Saudi Arabia by utilizing the updated framework that captures the current market conditions. The results present strong proof that operational effectiveness, digital-physical integration, reliability, convenience, and professional service behavior tendencies are the main determinants of customer experience in this case, as opposed to the conventional cultural dimensions. This is a substantive change in interpretation of Saudi consumer behavior that used to be dominated by cultural norms.

5.1 The High-Frequency Retailing Dominated by Operational Efficiency.

The findings have shown that customer experience in Saudi grocery retailing is best predicted by operational efficiency. This observation conforms to the high frequency and utilitarian aspect of grocery shopping where customers value speed, availability of products and accuracy of the transactions. Under these conditions, even the small elements of inefficiency like long queues, stock-outs or variations in prices can play a central role in negatively influencing customer perceptions.

This result indicates that grocery retailers are becoming increasingly judged by performance aspects by Saudi consumers in line with the global trends in contemporary retailing. The focus on efficiency can be seen as an indication of how the Saudi retail market has matured such that functional excellence has risen to become a minimum of expectation as opposed to a differentiating factor.

5.2 Digital-Physical Integration as a Key Experience Thriller.

The digital-physical integration turned out to be one of the crucial factors of the customer experience which concludes the core of omnichannel behavior in modern Saudi grocery retailing. Digital tools are no longer seen as optional elements of the shopping experience by customers but rather are considered as part of the shopping experience itself. Delivery services, mobile applications and digital promotions are now integrated in everyday shopping habit.

The results prove that smooth flow between physical and digital touchpoints lead to a higher rating of convenience and the feeling of control, which results in the improvement of the overall experience ratings. This confirms the opinion that customer experience in grocery retailing is being co-created as more interconnected systems, as opposed to in-store contact.

5.3 Reliability and Trust with Consistent Performance.

The aspect of reliability and trust was found to have a positive impact on customer experience, which was strong. Notably, trust in this form is not a culturally presupposition but operationalization in the form of steady service delivery, openness of product information and successful problem solving.

This observation is an indication of a change in building trust in contemporary Saudi retailing. Customers trust the retailers because they have shown a level of competency and predictability as opposed to the level of interpersonal familiarity or cultural symbolism. Reliability is therefore, a functional and relational aspect of customer experience.

5.4 Convenience and Ease of Navigation Role.

Customer experience also included a lot to do with ease of navigation and convenience which serves to support the idea of frictionless shopping environments. The careful layouts, rational product placement, and effective store design help to decrease the cognitive and physical effort, and such a feature is highly appreciated in grocery shopping that lacks time.

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These results highlight the aggregate impact of convenience in high-frequency retailing. The increased exposure of customers to grocery stores makes them less tolerant of complexity and the navigational simplicity becomes important force in achieving customer satisfaction and repeat business.

5.5 Professional Service Conduct about Traditional Cultural Signals.

Customer experience was positively linked to professional service conduct which suggests that the customers view the service providers with respect and quality of services based on efficiency, clarity and competence instead of cultural gestures. This is indicative of a shift towards more service expectations; with professionalism having been a universal standard of respect in contemporary retail environments.

This finding contradicts previous conclusions that interpersonal warmth or culturally particular behaviors prevail in service ratings in Saudi Arabia. Rather, the customers seem to believe in a professionalized and standardized interaction with them, which suits the fast-moving and systemized shopping experience.

5.6 Repositioning Culture as a Moderating Factor.

Although cultural norms do still hold in providing normal expectations of what is appropriate, the results indicate that culture should be a moderator explaining variable than a major variable. Cultural fit helps in the delivery of experience but fails to offset operational failures, digital inefficiency, and service performance failures.

This understanding will eliminate the conflict between the old ways of cultural explanations and new realities in the retail world. It suggests that the contemporary Saudi grocery retailing has reached the stage when the customer experience formation is controlled by structure and technological factors, and culture defines limits instead of results.

5.7 Cited theoretical and Managerial implications.

In theory, the research will add to the body of research on customer experience by proving that culture-centric models have a decreasing explanatory power in extremely modernized retail settings. It facilitates a shift towards efficiency- and system-oriented models of grasping customer experience in new, yet fast-digitizing markets.

In the framework of management, the results suggest that the operational excellence, integration of the omnichannel, and professional quality of service should be regarded as the priority of the grocery retailers in Saudi Arabia. Technology, process optimization, and training of employees must be imposed on speed, accuracy, and consistency other than the symbolic changes in culture.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper came up with a re-conceptualized model that captured the determinants of customer experience in contemporary grocery retailing in Saudi Arabia. The results show that operational efficiency, digital-physical integration, reliability, convenience, and professional service behavior have dominated the customer experience in modern Saudi grocery retailing, as opposed to the conventional dimensions of culture.

These findings affirm that shopping of groceries in Saudi Arabia has become a time-sensitive, high-frequency, and system-oriented activity. Customers are becoming very critical on how quickly and accurately they can shop, whether the products are available, and how well the bricks and mortars stores are integrated with the online platform. These are performance-oriented criteria that now form the centre of the customer experience formation, which means that the explanation is no longer based on culture-focused models that defined earlier phases of retail evolution in the Saudi market.

Although cultural norms are also important as situational controls, which define anticipations about whether actions are appropriate or not and service levels, they are not the key forces that determine the results of the customer experience. As an alternative, culture acts as a balancing force favoring experience delivery where operational and technological foundations are successfully implemented. This repositioning follows the customer experience theory with the realities of modernizing and digitally-empowered retailing environment.

Theoretically, the research will be relevant to the literature on customer experience and retailing because it will show that the traditional cultural constructs are gaining less explanatory power in extremely standardized and technologically sophisticated retail settings. The results substantiate the use of efficiency- and system-centric approaches to customer experience in the new markets that experience a rapid shift to digital transformation.

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The research has a clear guidance to the managerial in the case of grocery retailers in Saudi Arabia. It becomes more and more competitive advantage that is acquired with the help of investments in operational excellence, the integration of omnichannel and the use of professional service standards instead of culturally symbolic service modifications. The firms which do not correspond to the standards of speed, reliability, and online convenience are likely to decline the customer experience irrespective of the cultural fit.

The study is limited in terms of its contributions. The cross-sectional study limits causal inference and cross-sectional study limit the generalization. Besides, the use of self-reported data can add response bias. Future studies may proceed with this study using longitudinal designs, probability-based sampling, or qualitative research methods to investigate the ways in which drivers of customer experience will change as increasingly retail systems move towards digitization. Comparative studies in physical, online, and physical-online grocers would also be a good insight.

To sum up, this study has proven that the customer experience in contemporary Saudi grocery retailing no longer is determined by the cultural tradition but by efficiency, reliability, digital integration, and professionalism. It is imperative that researchers and practitioners in the retail sector grasp this change in order to effectively comprehend and deal with customer experience in the fast-changing retail markets.

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