

# Cognitive–affective model of consumer satisfaction. An exploratory study within the framework of a sporting event

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to better understand the consumer satisfaction process within the framework of a sporting event. The literature reveals two different ways of introducing affect into the cognitive satisfaction model: as a mediator or as an independent factor. Empirical analysis of these rival models supports the second conceptualization. The study of the relationships among the constructs of the final hypothesized model shows that the key affective factor that determines satisfaction is “arousal”, as opposed to “pleasure”, which has a non-significant effect. The cognitive element is also important for determining satisfaction and future behavior intentions, and all of the antecedents are independent in the satisfaction process.

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## 1. Introduction

Knowledge of customer perception about the performance of a service company is a fundamental question in marketing orientation and customer-focused management. Customer satisfaction is one of the determinants of company performance that is attracting the most attention in services marketing literature on private and public organizations. The growth of leisure culture has increased sports consumption and competitiveness within the sports industry. This has forced organizations to focus on ways to outdo their competitors in satisfying consumer needs.

Studies have proliferated in the sport management literature about consumer satisfaction (e.g. Triadó et al., 1999; Murray and Howat, 2002; Greenwell et al., 2002; Van Leeuwen et al., 2002). Nevertheless, all research has focused on services such as private sports centers, public sports services or attendance at sporting events. None of them has studied specific periodic events with short operating times and repeat participation in future editions.

This research has focused on the measure of consumer satisfaction in this type of an event: a popular long-distance race organized every year by the City Council of Cartagena (Spain). The runners are in this case the consumers of the service, and municipal managers are in charge of efforts to satisfy them.

In accordance with the latest dominant perspective on the conceptualization of the satisfaction process (Mano and Oliver, 1993), cognitive and affective elements are antecedents of satisfaction, and consumer loyalty is a consequence. According to this approach this research has the following aims: (1) to select the cognitive–affective model from among the competing models available in the literature; and (2) to study the relationships among the constructs that make up the satisfaction model.

## 2. Cognitive–affective model of consumer satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction has attracted much attention in the literature because of its potential influence on consumer behavioral intentions and customer retention (Cronin et al., 2000). The literature on consumer satisfaction has focused primarily on people as cognitive beings, whereby the outcome of a comparison process between expectations and perceived performance leads to satisfaction (Wirtz and Bateson, 1999). Recently, however, several researchers proposed that cognition and affective responses to a product stimulus mold consumers’ evaluative

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judgments (Oliver, 1997). According to this latter approach, satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response; a judgment that the product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels under- or overfulfillment (Oliver, 1997). The inclusion of affect into the conceptualizations of consumer satisfaction is particularly important regarding services due to their experiential nature (Wirtz et al., 2000). Affect represents the feelings, as opposed to thinking, side of consciousness, which taps the cognitive domain (Oliver, 1997). Researchers in the field of psychology have conceptualized this variable in several ways, in particular Izard's discrete emotion model (1972, 1991) and Russell's model of affect (1980).

Russell's model suggests that affect is the mediating variable among stimuli, the cognitive process, and response behavior. Russell pointed to pleasantness/unpleasantness and arousal/quietude as the two primary orthogonal dimensions of affect which describe the internal emotional state of people *per se*.

In contrast to Izard's discrete emotion model, Russell's conceptualization is richer because the taxonomy includes low arousal effect (Oliver, 1997). This conceptualization has no discriminant validity problems (Holbrook, 1986) and its predictive and exploratory power seems to provide good external validity (Wirtz, 1994).

Moreover, Russell's framework is particularly useful in studying services for capturing human–environment and interpersonal iterations (Russell and Pratt, 1980). Hence, this research considers the two affective dimensions (arousal and pleasure) for modelling the runner satisfaction process.

The next section describes the two different ways of introducing affect into the cognitive satisfaction model that the literature proposes.

### 3. Competing models of satisfaction

The literature review shows two dissimilar approaches for modelling the customer satisfaction process. The main difference lies in the conceptualization of the relationships between disconfirmation and emotions. However, both perspectives hold the same hypothesized relations between disconfirmation and satisfaction, emotions and satisfaction, and satisfaction and loyalty. The literature of satisfaction supports these relationships as follows:

*Disconfirmation-satisfaction.* Consumers make their evaluations of the consumption experience and indicate that the comparison between the perceived outcome and some prior standard drives their satisfaction judgment (Bigné and Andreu, 2002). Thus, a positive disconfirmation would lead to a positive consumer satisfaction. Wirtz and Bateson (1999) and Spreng and Chiou (2002) empirically proved this relationship.

*Emotions-satisfaction.* The literature suggests that emotional reactions associated with the consumption experience are important in the determination of satisfaction (Matilla and Wirtz, 2000; Jayanti, 1996; Erevelles, 1988). Authors such as Mano and Oliver (1993) and Wirtz and Bateson (1999) have studied the relationships between pleasure during the consumption process and satisfaction. Likewise, Bigné and Andreu's (2002) study proves that satisfaction

increases as a function of the level of pleasure and arousal. Therefore, any element that improves the consumer's affective state would lead to a higher level of satisfaction.

*Satisfaction-loyalty.* Finally, the literature acknowledges the link between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nguyen and Leblanc, 1998) and several researchers have proved that customer satisfaction is a key determinant of future behavior intentions (e.g. Murray and Howat, 2002; Cronin et al., 2000).

Nevertheless the main difference between the two approaches is their distinct view of the relationship between disconfirmation and emotions, according to the consideration of emotions as a mediator variable or as an independent variable between cognitive evaluations and satisfaction.

#### 3.1. Emotions as a mediator between cognitive evaluations and satisfaction

This perspective suggests that emotions act as a mediator among cognitive evaluations such as perceived product performance or disconfirmation of some comparison standard, and overall satisfaction (Oliver, 1993; Oliver and Westbrook, 1993).

Bigné and Andreu (2002) explain this approach. They suggest a direct relationship between disconfirmation and emotions on the basis of the cognitive theory of emotions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). In the cognitive theory, the cognitive activity that the consumer performs to process the emotional situation produces the emotional experience. Therefore, the degree of pleasure and arousal increases as a function of the perceived disconfirmation (Wirtz and Bateson, 1999). Menon and Dubé (2000) and Oliver et al. (1997) empirically proved this relationship.

#### 3.2. Emotions as independent factors between cognitive evaluations and satisfaction

According to this approach, emotions act as independent variables that, together with a cognitive construct, explain more about satisfaction than either construct would on its own (Liljander and Strandvik, 1997). Oliver (1993) agrees with this view and suggests that disconfirmation and emotions can be different sources of satisfaction. This draws on the locus-of-causality literature in attribution theory (Oliver, 1993), where the locus dimension connects with the source of causality; that is, the cause resides either in you, in some other people, or in the situation. Thus, as Oliver (1993) points out, if the consumer understands that s/he is solely responsible for the purchase of a bad product, consumer's guilt could aggravate dissatisfaction. Alternatively, if the product is susceptible to situationally-caused failings, sadness could increase dissatisfaction. In other words, the runner can feel dissatisfaction if s/he thinks that a situational factor could be the cause of this state, independently of their cognitive evaluation. Therefore, consumers make attributions that affect the relationship between disconfirmation and emotions.

On the basis of the prior analysis of the convergent and divergent literature regarding the relationships of the diverse constructs modelling the cognitive–affective satisfaction process, this research identifies two different models of runner satisfaction (Fig. 1).

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