



The influence of multiple types of service convenience on behavioral intentions: The mediating role of consumer satisfaction in a Taiwanese leisure setting

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ABSTRACT

Service organizations are looking for ways to better deliver consumer value and to increase consumers' purchase intentions. Organizations can differentiate themselves by making their services easier to consume, that is, more convenient. Service convenience is complex and is comprised of five convenience types, namely, decision, access, transaction, benefit, and post-benefit. Research into service convenience has examined how these types of convenience affect consumers' experiences and intentions, but limited research has studied it within a leisure setting. With data collected from a sample of 443 Taiwanese, this research uses mediated regression to examine the influence of the five types of convenience on consumers' behavioral intentions, and the mediating role satisfaction plays in the relationship. The findings indicate that only benefit and post-benefit convenience are associated with improved behavioral intentions and that satisfaction partially mediates the relationship for those two types of convenience. The implications for theory and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Convenience is the ability to reduce consumers' non-monetary costs (i.e., time, energy and effort) when purchasing or using goods and services (Berry et al., 2002; Farquhar and Rowley, 2009; Seiders et al., 2007). Some firms position themselves as convenience-focused and use this benefit as a source of competitive advantage (Seiders et al., 2000). For example, financial institutions increasingly promote Internet banking services as a means of saving consumers time and effort (Gerrard and Cunningham, 2004; McLain, 2006). The importance of each type of convenience is likely to vary across services and will also differ across consumer segments; those who see themselves as time-poor are likely to place a greater value on convenience (Berry, 1979). However, features that organizations have integrated to reduce effort, energy or costs do not necessarily deliver consumer-perceived convenience. For example, shopping malls are increasingly perceived as inefficient, with consumers going back to strip shopping areas because they find malls too crowded and difficult to access (Seiders et al., 2000). Building consumer-focused convenience into service offerings is

important in marketing to consumers who are increasingly time-poor.

The early service research examined convenience using various single item measures which were related to consumers' perception of the use of time or effort. More recently, authors have identified that there are different types of convenience related to the stages of the service encounter (Berry et al., 2002; Colwell et al., 2008; Seiders et al., 2000, 2005, 2007). Seiders et al. (2000) proposed that there are four types of convenience, which Berry et al. (2002) expanded to five types of convenience: (1) decision convenience; (2) access convenience; (3) transaction convenience; (4) benefit convenience; and (5) post-benefit convenience. Researchers have since used these five types of convenience to better understand the role of convenience within various service contexts and countries (Colwell et al., 2008; Dai et al., 2008; Geissler et al., 2006; Seiders et al., 2005, 2007).

The goal of improving service encounters is to increase positive consumer outcomes, where satisfaction is one such outcome (Grace and O'Cass, 2004; Voss and Parasuraman, 1995). Researchers have found that there is a positive association between consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, including loyalty and repurchase intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Mason et al., 2006; Wong, 2004; Zboja and Voorhees, 2006), although the link between intentions and behavior has not always been supported in past research (see, for example, Richetin et al., 2010; Westaby, 2005).

Behavioral measures of loyalty are often included in service quality models as an outcome variable (Bloemer et al.,

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1998; Colwell et al., 2008). However, research also suggests that satisfaction influences consumers' preferences and positive recommendations to others (Bloemer et al., 1999; Cronin et al., 2000). Therefore, building convenience into the service delivery process will not only increase consumers' level of service satisfaction, but will also increase the likelihood that consumers will behave positively in the future (e.g., form intentions to repurchase and spread positive word-of-mouth).

Service quality has been found to directly affect behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Gremler and Brown, 1996) and has also been shown to indirectly influence behavioral intentions through value and satisfaction. Several authors have found that consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and behavioral intentions (i.e., Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Athanassopoulos, 2000; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Bloemer et al., 1998; Chenet et al., 1999; Cronin et al., 2000; Thrane, 2002; Tian-Cole and Crompton, 2003; Tian-Cole and Iillum, 2006). Research has also explored the role of alternative mediators between service quality and behavioral intentions, such as competitive intensity, consumer involvement, and household income (see Seiders et al., 2005, for a review of mediators between satisfaction and repurchase).

This study seeks to examine whether the five types of service convenience influence consumers' behavioral intentions in the context of Taiwanese health clubs, thereby extending the application of the types of service convenience beyond US retailing (Seiders et al., 2005, 2007), US museums (Geissler et al., 2006), Canadian Internet services (Colwell et al., 2008), and Chinese online shopping (Dai et al., 2008). The study also examines whether the convenience to intentions association is mediated by consumer satisfaction, as proposed by Seiders et al. (2007).

2. Literature review

2.1. Convenience as a complex construct

Convenience has become an important product benefit for time-constrained consumers and, as such, is increasingly of interest to marketers (Farquhar and Rowley, 2009). Time-poor consumers are looking for providers offering value that is convenient in terms of search, access, purchase and use (Seiders et al., 2000). It has been reported that 52 per cent of consumers surveyed want to spend less time shopping in the future (Seiders et al., 2000), thereby highlighting the importance of convenience. Consumers want "24/7 access to anything they want, dream or desire" (Jones, 2011). Consumers are not simply concerned with the core benefits that services deliver, they want services that are available when and where they want to consume them, that is, services that are easy to consume (Seiders et al., 2000). Delivering convenient services increases the complexity associated with managing service encounters. Service providers need to understand how modifying the types of convenience influences consumer experiences and repurchase intentions.

While, initially, convenience was measured using a single item focusing on costs or effort (Berry et al., 2002), Seiders et al. (2000) expanded the measures and proposed that there are four types of convenience. These were subsequently expanded into five types of service convenience (Berry et al., 2002; Seiders et al., 2005), where service convenience refers to "consumers' time and effort perceptions related to using or buying a service" (Berry et al., 2002, p. 5). It is those five types of convenience, namely, decision, access, transaction, benefit and post-benefit, which influence consumers' satisfaction with a service. Seiders et al. (2007) sought to empirically test the validity of the five dimensions, which they refer to as the SERVCON construct.

Decision convenience is important when consumers need to decide how to obtain a particular service given that multiple providers and delivery options are usually available. The decision process is important as consumers invest time and effort in making service purchase decisions, which, because of their high experience qualities, make evaluations prior to consumption more difficult (Nyer and Gopinath, 2005; Wirtz and Chew, 2002). When service providers render decision-making more convenient, providers may also influence consumers' evaluation of the service, as the services are easier to evaluate. For example, a health club that is externally accredited or provides potential members with reviews of its facilities may increase the service's search qualities. External accreditation and evaluations also reduce consumers' effort because they serve as a signal of quality.

Access convenience involves the perceived time and effort needed to initiate service delivery, that is, the actions required to request services and to receive them. This affects consumers because of the inseparable nature of services, which requires consumer participation for service delivery; for example, a health club's physical location and the complexity associated with joining are part of access convenience. Innovations such as Web technology allow consumers to interact with services at more locations, as well as enabling consumers to interact with organizations at times that are more accessible, that is, more conveniently.

Transaction convenience influences consumers' when they need to secure a service, and have decided to buy a service and complete the transaction. For example, it has been found that many consumers do not complete online transactions because the purchase process is too complicated, that is, it takes too much time and/or effort (Bober, 2001; Petitjean, 2010). In the context of health clubs, transaction convenience might include the need to complete detailed contracts or the requirement for people to sign up for fixed terms or to book workout classes.

Benefit convenience involves consumers' experience of the service. If consumers are inconvenienced in the delivery process it will possibly diminish the evaluation of the core benefit. For example, in a health club this could relate to whether there are trainers available, or whether members have to wait to use equipment, or are required to participate in exercise classes that are offered at inopportune times. The service encounter, therefore, is dependent both on the outcome and the process by which the service is delivered (Kouthouris and Alexandris, 2005; Liu et al., 2009), which builds directly on the idea that consumers and service providers co-create value (Vargo and Lush, 2004).

Finally, *post-benefit convenience* relates to activities after core interactions have occurred, such as booking another work-out session, completing work-out logs or receiving renewal notices. This is important as consumers often enter into ongoing relationships with their service providers, and may receive benefits on a continuing basis (Berry et al., 2002). Providing ongoing service exchanges also allows for better monitoring and remedial action in dealing with any post-purchase dissatisfaction by providing consumers with accessible (i.e., convenient) problem-solving interactions (Ramaswamy, 1996). These interactions might be even more important for services involving multiple or ongoing encounters, such as membership in a health club, which is the focus of this study. For example, health club members might get feedback on their progress, which will allow them to assess their development.

Service convenience, as proposed by Berry et al. (2002) and Seiders et al. (2005), reflects the fact that there are multiple stages in the service process and that the consumer may evaluate convenience differently at each stage. A lack of one type of convenience may mean that consumers purchase from an alternative supplier or defer consumption altogether. Several researchers have studied the role of the five types of convenience in consumer purchase behavior, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Among the

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