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Bolton, R. N., Gustafsson, A., Tarasi, C. O., & Witell, L. (2022). Managing a Global Retail Brand in Different Markets: Meta-Analyses of Customer Responses to Service Encounters. *Journal of Retailing*, 98(2), 294–314. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2021.03.004>

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MANAGING A GLOBAL RETAIL BRAND ACROSS DIFFERENT MARKETS:  
META-ANALYSES OF CUSTOMERS' RESPONSES TO SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

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# MANAGING A GLOBAL RETAIL BRAND IN DIFFERENT MARKETS: META-ANALYSES OF CUSTOMER RESPONSES TO SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

## Abstract

This study investigates how retailers can leverage their brand to shape customers' satisfaction with service encounters. It develops and tests hypotheses about how brand, store, and consumer factors moderate customer responses to experience clues during retail service encounters. Six meta-regression analyses synthesize and compare results from 842 satisfaction equations describing customers' encounters with a global retailer operating 400 stores in 32 countries. The results show how customers weigh their perceptions of service encounters differently depending on brand, store, and consumer factors. In markets where customers believe the retailer has high holistic brand quality, they place less weight on experience clues within the store. In markets where customers believe the retailer's service brand promise, they place more weight on in-store experience clues. In markets where the retailer promises utilitarian value, customers weigh functional experience clues more heavily. In markets with an online purchasing channel, the effect of experience clues common to offline and online store environments is magnified, and unique clues are diminished. In addition, customers heavily weigh experience clues that fit their goals. In general, retail success factors include high brand quality (which makes customers more forgiving), a service brand promise that is mirrored in the store image (which makes customers attend to the experience clues aligned with them), and the careful monitoring and managing of retail touchpoints (to customize experience clues to each market). In this way, retailers can use customer-based strategies to effectively design and manage their global retail brand in different markets.

*Keywords:* brand, experience, global, customer satisfaction, service, store image

This paper investigates how retailers can effectively manage a global retail brand (e.g., Walmart, Amazon, Aldi, and Ikea), defined as a brand offered in multiple countries using similar and coordinated marketing strategies (Yip 1995). Retailers build brands to make their offerings salient to customers, to differentiate their offerings, to create relevance and meaning, and to build brand preference and loyalty. Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009, p. 53) conceptualized brand experience as the sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses “evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments.” Customers are influenced by sensory information via experience clues (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel 2002, p. 85), which relate to store access, atmospherics, merchandise assortments, price and promotion, communications, and branding activities (Ailawadi and Keller 2004; Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009).

Customer evaluations are based on direct encounters with the retail brand (Ailawadi and Keller 2004) and on contextual factors beyond the retailer’s control (Verhoef et al. 2009), such as the customer’s shopping goals and market characteristics. A successful retail strategy recognizes how contextual factors moderate the customer’s response to experience clues (Seiders et al. 2005). We distinguish between functional experience clues—offering utilitarian value, such as a brief waiting time—and emotional experience clues—offering hedonic value, such as fun and playfulness (Voss et al. 2003). A deep understanding of the moderating effects of brand, store, and consumer factors can guide retailers in managing experience clues (Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009; Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl 2017). Moderating factors can magnify the effects of favorable experience clues and diminish the effects of unfavorable experience clues. However, little is known about how these moderators operate, their importance, or how firms can leverage them. Prior research is primarily conceptual, and the few existing empirical studies focus on single moderators.

Our study is novel because, rather than studying main effects, we explore how customer responses to experience clues are *moderated* by brand, store, and consumer factors. It develops hypotheses about the moderating effects of customers' beliefs about the retail brand (holistic brand quality and its service brand promise), store factors (store image, availability of online purchasing), consumer factors (shopper goals), and control variables (market factors). We investigate how retailers can improve customer satisfaction with the service encounter by designing (1) experience clues that characterize retail brand encounters and (2) brand and store image factors that moderate customers' responses as well as by (3) adapting the retail brand to market and consumer contexts. Specifically, we ask the following questions:

1. How do retail brand factors (such as customers' beliefs or expectations about holistic brand quality and the service brand promise) magnify or diminish the effects of emotional and functional clues on customer satisfaction with the service encounter?
2. How do store factors (store image and availability of online purchasing channel) magnify or diminish the effects of emotional and functional experience clues on customer satisfaction with the service encounter?
3. How do consumer factors beyond the retailer's control (shopper goals such as buying, browsing, and searching) influence the effects of experience clues on customer satisfaction with the service encounter?

Our study makes several contributions to retail branding research. First, it addresses calls for research on how retailers can manage the branded customer experience (Ailawadi and Keller 2004, p. 338). Consistent with conceptual work on service strategy (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy 1993), this study identifies new mechanisms of *retail brand differentiation* based on contextual factors. It highlights the role of retail brand factors in customer service experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009). In particular, it shows how the service brand's holistic quality and brand promise can strengthen *and* weaken the effects of experience clues on customer satisfaction.

Second, our study responds to calls for a complex adaptive *system* perspective (e.g., Tax,

McCutcheon and Wilkinson 2013). Ostrom et al. (2015, p. 142) observe that “[a] service is designed to be delivered in a particular service ecosystem, but the ecosystems in other countries or regions may be very different—for example, differences in the availability of trained frontline employees, the financial and regulatory context, the technological infrastructure, the business models, and the culture associated with the service.” Responding to calls for research on global retail branding strategies (Grewal, Levy and Lehmann 2004), the present study investigates how differences in retail ecosystems (e.g., availability of online purchase, economic factors) across countries affect the design and delivery of retail brand experiences.

Third, retailer decisions to foster customer beliefs about holistic brand quality, its service brand promise, store image, and the existence of online purchasing channels moderate the effect of experience clues on customers’ assessments of their service encounters. We provide detailed knowledge on how such strategic decisions influence the consumer inside the store. For example, a store’s image might promise that its outlets are designed to make it easy to find the products. This perception will magnify experience clues such as friendly frontline employees and short waiting times, so managers must allocate sufficient resources to these aspects of the in-store experience. These insights clarify how strategic decisions that are implemented through retail technology, visual display decisions, and engagement strategies play a role in designing retail brand experiences (Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfält 2017).

Fourth, our study demonstrates how a *meta-analytic approach* can help managers to better understand the customization and localization of global retail brands. Our meta-analyses synthesize four external data sources with 1.5 million customer surveys from a global retailer operating more than 400 stores in 32 countries in North American, Europe, and Asia. These analyses use hierarchical linear models (HLMs) to control for how customers are nested within

stores and stores within countries. This approach can help managers reconcile conflicting views—each based on a single market—about how customers view retail experiences.

The following section summarizes prior work on retail branding and its relevance to in-store service encounters. We then develop hypotheses about the moderating effects of contextual factors on customer responses to experience clues when forming satisfaction judgments. Our empirical work merges five data sources to create a comprehensive database describing customers' experiences with a single retailer. Six meta-regression analyses synthesize and compare the results from 842 satisfaction equations describing customers' encounters with a global retailer operating 400 stores in 32 countries. We use meta-analysis to understand how the regression coefficients (effect sizes) vary depending on differences in retail strategy execution (brand, store, and consumer factors). To test the external validity and the robustness of our results, we replicated the consumer satisfaction survey for retailers in the same industry in the USA.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A strong retail brand is a promise of future satisfaction. It is a blend of what the retailer says the brand is, what others say, and how the retailer delivers on the brand promise from the customer's viewpoint (Berry 2000). Customers' beliefs are based on their brand experiences and service encounters (Bitner and Wang 2014). A service encounter is the dyadic interaction between a customer and the retailer. Customers use in-store experience clues to assess how the retailer delivers on its brand promise, where each encounter contributes to their overall satisfaction.

### Main Effects of Experience Clues

Marketers have emphasized the multi-dimensional nature of the customer experience (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel 2002; Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009), including how brand stimuli influence the holistic experience. Every service encounter is shaped by the customer's internal and subjective responses to experience clues (Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello 2015). An experience

clue is “anything that can be perceived or sensed—or recognized by its absence” (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel 2002, p. 86). A clue might be provided by the sensory appeal of the physical (e.g., pleasant and relaxing) or social (e.g., friendly employees) environment.

Functional versus Emotional Experience Clues. We distinguish between functional and emotional experience clues. Functional clues signal information about the utilitarian aspects of service; they are interpreted by the logical part of the brain (cf. Nyffenegger et al. 2015), such as evaluations of waiting times. Emotional clues arise from smells, sounds, sights, tastes, and textures of the product and environment—including “mechanics” (emitted by *things*) and “humanics” (emitted by *people*). Retailers must manage emotional clues as rigorously as functional clues to provide a superior customer experience (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel 2002).

#### Conceptual Model of Contextual Moderating Effects on Experience Clues in Service Encounters

To study service encounters in the retailing ecosystem, our ultimate dependent variable is customer satisfaction modeled as a function of experience clues (Figure 1). More than 50 studies have modeled how customer satisfaction *levels* depend on product attributes and (some) experience clues (Szymanski and Henard 2001). They typically focus on the antecedents of customer satisfaction with goods (rather than retail experiences) and assess main effects, not moderating effects (Taylor 1997). Our focal dependent variables are *the effect sizes of retail experience clues* that influence customer satisfaction (Figure 1, left side). We study the effect sizes of key experience clues for the cooperating retailer, including ease-of-use, frontline employees, waiting time, frustration, ideas and inspiration, and expectancy-disconfirmation.

In our meta-analyses, the moderating contextual factors are brand, store, consumer, and market factors (control variables). See the top of Figure 1. First, the retail ecosystem varies in regard to *brand* factors, such as customers’ beliefs about the brand’s holistic brand quality and the service brand promise. The cooperating retailer’s managers believe these brand factors—gained



through experience and from marketing communications—are critical to the success of its business. Second, the ecosystem varies in regard to *store* factors, such as the attractiveness of its outlets and products, and *consumer* factors, such as shopper goals (e.g., browsing); they lead customers to attend to different experience clues. Third, the retail ecosystem varies due to market (cultural and socio-economic) factors, which we treat as control variables.

\*\* Figure 1 here \*\*

### HOW THE RETAIL BRAND CONTEXT MODERATES EXPERIENCE CLUES

This section develops theory-based hypotheses about how the retail context moderates the effects of experience clues on customer satisfaction, thereby explaining variation across customers and retail ecosystems. Retailing thought leaders have called for more research on contextual moderators in customer evaluations of the retail experience (Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009). However, there have been few studies of moderator variables (as shown in Web Appendix Table A1). To our knowledge, there are no systematic and comprehensive studies of how context variables jointly moderate customers' experience clues, thereby influencing their evaluations of their retail brand experiences. We address this knowledge gap by developing and testing hypotheses about how retail ecosystem variables moderate the effects of experience clues on satisfaction with the service encounter.

We draw on theoretical work in judgment and decision making (Weber and Johnson 2009), focusing on the psychological processes of attention, information integration, and learning. Customers engage in constructive processing, relying on specific beliefs to interpret their experiences during service encounters (Payne, Bettman and Johnson 1992). Our hypotheses build upon a substantial body of research suggesting that customer preferences are often constructed and context-dependent (cf., Slovic and Lichtenstein 1983). For example, compromise and attraction effects are examples of shifting preferences based on different considerations in a choice situation

(Dhar and Simonson 2003). Thus, the customer's interpretation of their retail service encounter is inference-based; their judgments are constructed by drawing on prior beliefs about and experience with the brand and store (Kardes, Posavac and Cronley 2004; Payne, Bettman and Johnson 1992; Verhoef et al. 2009).

### Effect Sizes of Experience Clues as Dependent Variables

Our dependent variables are the effect sizes measuring customer responses to two emotional and three functional experience clues. We focus on these five clues because they have been identified by prior research as important in retail ecosystems, actionable by managers, and directly related to retail brand perceptions (Seiders et al. 2007). They heavily influence consumers' behavior, and the cooperating retailer uses them as key performance indicators. The functional experience clues are frontline employees, waiting time, and ease-of-use; the emotional clues are frustration and ideas and inspiration. We also study expectancy-disconfirmation (same/better/worse than expected) because it is central to customer satisfaction. However, the emotional/functional distinction does not apply to expectancy-disconfirmation because the (cognitive) recognition of a discrepancy is considered to have a (affective) fulfillment response (Oliver 2014). Hence, we do not develop hypotheses about expectancy-disconfirmation, but we include it and offer a post hoc analysis.

### Brand Factors

Brands are universal signals that operate across countries and cultures. Marketing communications help build brand awareness, knowledge, image, and attachment (Keller 2003). Service brand equity is created when consumers respond more favorably to its marketing actions than they do to those of competing retailers; it encompasses holistic brand quality and specific brand associations (Keller 2003). The services literature emphasizes this twofold distinction (Berry 2000; Brodie, Whittome and Brush 2009). Customers' beliefs and expectations about holistic brand quality are created by external marketing that concerns the company's reputation rather than specific

characteristics of the service offer. In contrast, customers' beliefs and expectations about the service brand promise arise from brand associations created by external marketing about what the service brand stands for *and* through the service experience associated with the delivery of the brand promise, thereby creating a distinctive image (Bitner 1995). To illustrate, a customer might perceive that Walmart supermarkets are low in holistic brand quality yet they may believe its distinctive service brand promise: "Save money. Live better." As well as these two dimensions, brand share of wallet is often considered a source of competitive advantage (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy 1993). Hence, we propose hypotheses for customer beliefs about holistic brand quality and the service brand promise and control for brand share of wallet.

Holistic Brand Quality. The *main* effect of customer beliefs about holistic brand quality are well understood (e.g., Erdem, Zhao and Valenzuela 2004). In addition, customers' beliefs about holistic brand quality contribute to their expectations prior to the service encounter, thereby influencing their perceptions of experience clues. Boulding, Kalra, and Staelin (1999) developed and tested a model in which a customer's assessment of a retail service encounter is a blend of their perceptions of experience clues and prior beliefs about holistic brand quality—where the weights are consistent with a Bayesian updating process. In their model, prior beliefs about holistic brand quality influence the customer's perceptions of experience clues. This process leads to a "quality double-whammy"—whereby customers see what they expect to see—which diminishes the weight placed on new information obtained during the service encounter. Consistent with this notion, we believe that markets characterized by beliefs of high *Holistic Brand Quality* create a perceptual lens that diminishes the importance of experience clues characterizing a specific service encounter—a negative moderating effect.

This prediction is consistent with Voss, Godfrey, and Seiders's (2010) model of the satisfaction-repurchase link in which moderating effects depend on whether a service attribute is a

complement or substitute—which arises from the relative magnitudes of satiation and inertia effects in a purchase category. Their model predicts that a high-quality relationship creates a substitute effect that diminishes the effect of satisfaction *on repurchase* for durable purchase categories in which customers can become satiated. We extend this notion about substitute effects to our model of customers' evaluations of retail service encounters. If beliefs of holistic brand quality moderate the attribute-satisfaction link, then a substitute effect implies that high holistic brand quality diminishes the effects of experience clues on customer satisfaction.

H<sub>1a</sub>: When the retailer has created favorable customer perceptions of *Holistic Brand Quality* in a market, customers weigh functional and emotional experience clues less heavily compared to markets with less favorable perceptions (negative moderating effect).

Service Brand Promise. In contrast to holistic brand quality (a summary judgment), beliefs about concrete brand attributes are related to its function (Keller 2003; Snelders and Schoormans 2004)—that is, its service brand promise. For example, a customer might believe—and expect—the holistic brand quality of the Starbucks experience to be high, whereas they have a concrete belief in Starbucks's brand promise: “To inspire and nurture the human spirit: one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.” Construal level theory states that people's mental representations of stimuli that are psychologically near are low level and concrete, while stimuli that are psychologically distant are high level and abstract (Dhar and Kim 2007). Thus, customers' concrete belief in the service brand promise can increase attention to and consideration of experience clues. Continuing the example, their beliefs and expectations about the Starbucks brand promise might increase attention to the actions of the barista who serves the customer. The *Service Brand Promise* operates through multiple mechanisms, including attention, learning, signaling, inference, and affordance. Through conscious and non-conscious processes, concrete beliefs about the service brand promise magnify the effect of brand stimuli (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello 2009; Erdem et al. 1999). Customer brand beliefs and experiences lead to more concrete mental

construal, influencing preferences (Hamilton and Thompson 2007). Hence, we believe that the effect of experience clues on customer satisfaction will be larger in markets where customers hold concrete beliefs about the service brand promise.

H<sub>1b</sub> When customers in a given market believe the retailer's *Service Brand Promise*, they weigh functional and emotional experience clues more heavily compared to markets with low levels of belief (positive moderating effect).

### Store Factors

Store image is conceptually distinct from brand image. Customers may have different perceptions of each store in a chain due to differences in accessibility, store atmosphere, store price perceptions, and merchandise assortment (Ailawadi and Keller 2004). For example, a customer's perceptions of a particular Starbucks outlet can be different from his/her perceptions of another outlet and from his/her perceptions of the service brand. For example, the atmospherics of a suburban outlet might be very different from the atmospherics of an airport outlet. We investigate two store factors—store image and the existence of an online purchasing channel.

Store Image. Following Hartman and Spiro (2005, p. 1115), we conceptualize store image as “the gestalt of perceptions and attributes linked to a store as reflected in associations held in memory”—that is, the overall attitude toward the specific store. For example, although two stores in the same chain sell the same quality of branded goods, one store might be more (or less) tidy, clean, and well-stocked. It might also have different staffing levels, leading to different wait times and service levels. The gestalt of these perceptions will be considered in conjunction with other associations held in memory. In-store experiences should be designed to be engaging, connecting the customer with the firm in a personal and memorable way (Zomerdijk and Voss 2010).

According to cognitive fit theory, the retail brand context and experience clues must be *congruent* to be effective (Hong, Thong and Tam 2004). Congruent sensory experiences include smells, sights, sounds, tastes, and social interactions that reinforce the store image. The term “branded

service encounter” is used to describe encounters where in-store experience clues (e.g., employee behavior) are congruent with the service brand promise (Sirianni et al. 2013), where congruent clues create favorable perceptions of the store image that are key in an omni-channel context.

The customer learns new information from the service encounter and integrates it into their perceptions of the retail brand (Erdem et al. 1999; Hartman and Spiro 2005). New experiences during service encounters are evaluated against comparison standards that are stored in memory and compared to the brand promise. The brand promise embodied in the retailer’s store image has the potential to magnify or diminish the effects of the retailer’s actions (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy 1993, p. 85). Addressing customers’ hedonic and utilitarian motives enhances satisfaction (Chitturi, Raghunathan and Mahajan 2008). The cooperating retailer offers *Hedonic Value* by promising a pleasant and relaxing environment and “products-I-like”; it offers *Utilitarian Value* by promising that information and products will be easy-to-find (Seiders et al. 2005; Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann 2003). Customers who believe and expect that the retailer will provide hedonic value will attend to congruent *emotional* clues, such as inspiring ideas. Customers who believe the retailer’s promise of utilitarian value (easy-to-find) will attend to congruent *functional* clues, such as helpful employees. In sum, customers will attend to experience clues that are congruent with the retail brand promise about value. In this study, two store image clues relate to hedonic value, a pleasant and relaxing environment and products-I-like, and one store image clue relates to utilitarian value, easy-to-find.

H<sub>2a</sub>: When the brand store image promises *Hedonic Value* (pleasant and relaxing environment, products-I-like), customers will weigh emotional clues (e.g., frustration, ideas and inspiration) more heavily and functional clues (ease-of-use, frontline employees, waiting time) less heavily.

H<sub>2b</sub>: When the brand store image promises *Utilitarian Value* (easy-to-find), customers will weigh functional clues (ease-of-use, frontline employees, and waiting time) more heavily and emotional clues (frustration, ideas and inspiration) less heavily.

Online purchasing channel. Retail websites provide opportunities for the retailer to offer information and engage with customers. The participating retailer had websites in every country but had not introduced e-commerce (i.e., online purchasing) in all countries. This feature made it possible to assess how the availability of online purchasing changed customers' responses to experience clues. Research in domain-specific reasoning has shown that customers do not necessarily use knowledge from one domain, such as an online purchasing channel, when reasoning about another domain, such as a store (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Burton 1995). Research has shown that customers weigh in-store experiences more heavily than online experiences when forming expectations about retail service (Verhagen and Van Dolen 2009).

Bhatnagar, Lurie, and Zeithaml (2003) developed and tested a mathematical model of cross-domain expectations transfer in which experiences that are more prominent or prototypical are weighed more heavily. Their results from two experiments confirmed that customers' beliefs about retail service attributes are weighed more heavily when the focus of the firm's operations is primarily offline, and the retailer started as a traditional store. They suggested that retailers can influence the extent to which customers use online experiences in forming offline beliefs by positioning their website and store as being more (or less) similar or as one channel being more prominent than the other. The cooperating retailer began as a traditional chain of stores and subsequently added online channels in some markets. Hence, we believe that customers will weigh the effects of shared experience clues (i.e., common to both channels) more heavily when the retailer makes an *Online Purchase Available* to reinforce them. This prediction should hold for experience clues that are comparable across the store and website, such as ideas and inspiration and waiting time. However, the presence of the online channel should diminish the effects of any experience clue that is unique to the store, such as frontline employees.

H<sub>3</sub>: Customers in markets where the retailer makes *Online Purchase Available* will weigh

*shared* experience clues (ideas and inspiration, waiting time) more heavily and *unique* experience clues (frontline employees) less heavily than those in markets without it.

### Consumer Factors: Shopper Goals

Experience clues can be viewed as means or mechanisms that enable customers to achieve their goals. Depending on a customer's goals, two identical service encounters may produce very different outcomes and feelings (Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009; Puccinelli et al. 2009). The retailing literature distinguishes between utilitarian and hedonic motives (e.g., Chitturi, Raghunathan and Mahajan 2008). Focal shopping goals are often assigned to three categories of buying, browsing, and searching. *Browsing* is a hedonic goal dominated by exploratory behavior (Bloch and Richins 1983); it occurs when the customer has no immediate intention of making a purchase. *Buying* is primarily a utilitarian goal. It is different from searching, which includes information acquisition, knowledge building, and deliberation.

When they are shopping, customers retrieve information from memory in response to specific clues (Lynch and Srull 1982). They use highly selective information processing that depends on their goals, construal level, and task conditions. For example, in a multi-channel banking study, Van Birgelen, De Jong, and De Ruyter (2006) found that a close fit between the customer's goal (routine/non-routine) and experience clues influenced the importance of satisfaction as an antecedent of repeat purchase intentions. Their study drew on *cognitive* fit theory from the decision sciences (Hong, Thong and Tam 2004). Gillespie, Muehling, and Kareklas (2018) showed that *affective* fit—whereby clues align with an individual's emotional state—is important. Appraisals of goal relevance and fit contribute to evaluations (Nyer 1997).

In sum, theoretical and empirical work suggests that customers pay more attention to experience clues that are congruent with their goals—and weigh them more heavily in forming their judgments. Based on cognitive and affective fit theory, we believe that functional clues are



more congruent with (utilitarian) buying, whereas emotional clues are more congruent with (hedonic) browsing—thereby influencing their effect sizes.

H<sub>4a</sub>: Customers who are *Buying* (a utilitarian goal) weigh functional clues (e.g., ease-of-use, frontline employees, waiting time) more heavily than customers pursuing a hedonic goal.

H<sub>4b</sub>: Customers who are *Browsing* (a hedonic goal) weigh emotional clues (e.g., frustration, ideas and inspiration) more heavily than customers pursuing a utilitarian goal.

#### Control Variables: Market Factors

Our framework has focused on moderator effects that are theoretically important for retail strategy and actionable by managers. However, our meta-analyses incorporate additional moderators as control variables—that is, factors that are beyond the retailer’s control and to which it must adapt. Market factors, including economic and cultural variables, influence customer satisfaction in retail markets (Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009), so our meta-analyses will control for them.

#### META-ANALYSIS: METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Our study is the first to use meta-analysis to investigate how retail brand context moderates the effect of experience clues on customer satisfaction with a service encounter. Szymanski and Henard (2001) performed a meta-analysis of 50 studies of satisfaction to investigate how comparison standards (expectations versus performance), types of offering (services versus goods), and method factors moderated satisfaction antecedents of expectations, disconfirmation, equity, and performance, but they did not investigate the brand or the context factors. They found that choice of comparison standard and type of offering (both held constant in our study) moderated the relationship between affect and satisfaction. Studies suggest that satisfaction judgments are context-dependent but that they typically investigate one or two product markets and focus on interactions among attributes *within* a market. Instead, our study investigates systematic differences in the effects of experience clues *across* retail ecosystems.

Meta-analysis is best suited for our study because we have large amounts of data collected

across many stores and countries. Using meta-analysis to compare effect sizes is a parsimonious and straightforward way to understand multiple moderator effects on customer satisfaction.

Researchers have begun conducting single-paper meta-analysis for similar reasons as well as to obtain precise estimates of effect sizes (e.g., McShane and Böckenholt 2017). A meta-analytic approach is superior to estimating satisfaction equations with cross-equation moderating effects because there is insufficient theory to completely specify all moderating effects for all antecedents. The present study considered approximately 100 moderating effects (6 effect sizes  $\times$  17 moderators).

Meta-analysis has the following three objectives: (1) synthesizing different studies' effect size values to obtain a weighted mean, (2) assessing the consistency of the results, and (3), in the case of heterogeneity, using moderator variables to explain the variability (Johnson and Huedo-Medina 2013). Marketers have increasingly used meta-analysis to investigate how variables systematically moderate the relationship between two constructs. It can also uncover systematic patterns that reflect methodological differences across studies, including research context, model specification, measurement, and estimation, but our study does not have these differences. Hence, our primary purpose is to synthesize results and investigate the moderating effects of the retail brand context.

In our study, customers with different goals are nested within stores, and stores are nested within countries—including fixed and random effects. Advanced meta-analysis methods use HLMs that can take into account the nested nature of our data (Pastor and Lazowski 2018). We begin by estimating separate satisfaction equations for customers with different goals in each store. This stage has two consequences. First, it is not necessary to consider country/market variability within each satisfaction equation because it is estimated within one country. Second, the effect sizes from these equations will be more conservative (less statistically efficient) than

those obtained from pooled data. Both features are addressed by our second stage: conducting a meta-analysis on the effect sizes to identify main and moderating effects. In the second stage, we control for metric differences across country by specifying a country-level random effect (Antweiler 2001). This random effect captures multiple unobserved country-level differences, including metric and cultural differences. Moreover, for each customer, we know the store that they visited, so we incorporated store-specific random effects to capture unique clientele effects. See a depiction of the methodology divided into steps in Figure 2.

\*\* Figure 2 and Table 1 here \*\*

### Study Context and Customer Satisfaction Database

The first step of a meta-analysis is assembling studies that address the same research question using comparable research designs. We obtained multiple data sources from a cooperating retailer that operates over 400 stores in 47 countries across North America, Europe, and Asia. The retailer sells only store brands—that is, products manufactured exclusively for the retailer and bearing its name. It is well established as a value store brand (i.e., good quality for low prices) in the global marketplace. Between 2010 and 2014, the retailer administered the same survey to a sample of customers from each store in each country. The stores are widely separated within countries, so there is no overlap of retail ecosystems. Customers were eligible to participate if they had visited one of the retailer’s stores and made at least one purchase in the past. The retailer used an online questionnaire to elicit self-reports of customers’ experiences on their *most recent* store visit.

Customers’ goals were used to identify the following market segments: (1) buying or preparing to buy, (2) browsing, or (3) searching. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics.

### Step 1: Development of Equations for Customer Satisfaction with the Service Encounter

We estimated separate equations for each customer goal/segment within each store, enabling us to represent shopper goals by dummy variables in the meta-analyses (see Figure 2, Step 1). Each

model was of the following forms:

$$(1) \text{ Customer Satisfaction}_{sg} = f_{sg}(\text{Experience Clues}_{sgj}, \text{Covariates}_{sgk}),$$

where  $s$  denotes the store ( $s = 1, \dots, 400$ ),  $g$  denotes the goal of the market segment ( $g = 1, 2, \text{ or } 3$ ),  $j$  denotes the different experience clues ( $j = 1, \dots, 15$ ), and  $k$  denotes the covariates ( $k = 1, \dots, 9$ ).

The 24 predictor variables and their measures and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Many studies show support for a non-linear relationship between satisfaction and its antecedents (Oliver 2014). Consistent with prior research, preliminary analyses indicated that the exponential functional form fit better than the linear or multiplicative functional form for all equations. Hence, the functional form of equation (1) can be written as follows:

$$(2) \quad \text{Customer Satisfaction}_{sg} = \exp(\sum \beta_{sg} X_{sg}),$$

where  $X$  denotes a vector of variables representing *Experience Clues* and *Covariates*. To avoid omitted variable bias, we included 24 predictor variables. This functional form has two attractive features. First, as it is inherently interactive, it is parsimonious in capturing any interaction effects among antecedent variables. Second, taking the natural logarithm, we can obtain a linear additive model that can be estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS). Transforming equation (2) as follows:

$$(3) \quad \ln(\text{Customer Satisfaction}_{sg}) = \sum \beta_{sg} X_{sg}$$

Customer Service Encounter versus Overall Brand Evaluation. The consumer has formed an overall evaluation of the service brand (Berry 2000), but we are not interested in overall satisfaction with the brand. Our dependent variable is a survey question that elicits a rating of satisfaction with the service encounter. We are interested in how experience clues contribute to the consumer's holistic evaluation of the service encounter *beyond* their overall evaluation of the retail service brand. So, we explicitly control for the brand evaluation in the satisfaction equation, as follows:

$$(4) \quad \ln(\text{Customer Satisfaction with Service Encounter}_{sg}) = \alpha_{sg} \ln(\text{Brand}) + \sum \beta_{sg} X_{sg}$$

Conveniently, as consumers' rating of *Customer Satisfaction with the Service Encounter* and of the overall *Brand* are measured on identical scales, this additional term will also capture any idiosyncratic effects of scale usage. Equation (4) is the functional form that we estimate.

### Steps 2 and 3: Estimation of Customer Satisfaction Equations

We used OLS to estimate equation (4) for each combination of market segment/goal (buy, browse, or search) and store.<sup>1</sup> See Figure 2, Step 2. Measures of all variables are shown in Table 1. The survey elicited information about the customer's primary goal (reported retrospectively): "What was your main reason for visiting XXX today? [Select only one.]" Most store/goal equations were estimated using 3,000 or more observations, but sample sizes were smaller in countries where data collection was difficult. Since there are 24 predictor variables, we aimed to ensure a minimum level of statistical power for all equations; this required a minimum of 100 observations for each equation. Hence, we (ultimately) estimated 930 equations, with average R-squared values of 50%. See Figure 2, Step 3. We do not show detailed results from the 930 satisfaction equations due to space limitations. The OLS results indicate that the experience clues are significant and in the expected direction for the vast majority of models. A correlation matrix has been provided in the Web Appendix, Table A2a.

### Step 4: Deriving Effect Sizes for the Meta-Analyses

We calculated effect sizes for customer responses to three functional experience clues (ease of use, frontline employees, waiting time), two emotional experience clues (frustration, ideas and inspiration), and expectancy-disconfirmation. See Figure 2, Step 4. We chose these six variables given their consistent significance in the satisfaction models, their theoretical relevance (as

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<sup>1</sup> We use OLS for two reasons. First, due to the large number of observations, we do not need the gains in efficiency from system estimation. Second, OLS is highly robust with good statistical properties.

discussed earlier in the paper), and their importance to the cooperating retailer. The effect sizes were derived from equation (4), which describes customer satisfaction with the service encounter for each combination of goal and store, yielding 930 observations for each effect size. The descriptive statistics for the effect sizes are summarized in the first six rows of Table 2a.

\*\* Table 2 about here \*\*

#### Step 5: Assembling Observations for the Meta-Analyses

Using the effect sizes from the 930 equations, we prepared to perform six meta-analyses to test our hypotheses about the moderating effects of brand, store, and consumer factors on the importance of experience clues for satisfaction with the service encounter. Each meta-analysis treated the effect size of an experience clue as an outcome variable. The predictors are brand, store, consumer, and market factors, which were obtained from external sources (Figure 2, Step 5). The meta-analysis weighs the estimates of effect sizes (i.e., corrected correlations derived from the model coefficients) by the inverse of their variance to lend greater weight to more precise estimates (Borenstein 2009). A strength of this approach is that we test and control for many moderators to capture patterns—avoiding spurious relationships that might otherwise arise. Table 2b shows a correlation matrix for the variables in the meta-analysis. Three variables of interest showed relatively high collinearity, close to or above the usual cut-off of 0.70. Service Brand Promise is correlated with Brand Quality at 0.69 and with Pleasant and Relaxing at 0.83. The correlation between Pleasant and Relaxing and Brand Quality is at 0.70. We tested the effect of multicollinearity on the models by taking turns eliminating one of the variables (Mason and Perreault 1991), and the results remained consistent, some models not changing at all (i.e., Ease of Use and Frontline Employees), while for other models, by removing a variable, some of the results became somewhat stronger yet consistent in direction with the models presented in the paper.

#### Step 6: Model Specification for the Meta-Analyses

The moderators are measured separately for each store's trade area; they are obtained from the following five data sources: Global Brand Survey Report, Customer Satisfaction Survey, Euromonitor, Hofstede's cultural indices, and internal firm records. Measures for brand factors were obtained from a separate cross-national survey (not the satisfaction survey), called the Global Brand Survey Report, which the retailer uses to assess brand and customer equity in each national market. The retailer's brand communications promised an "inspiring company," "full of surprises." and "warm and human," so these measures assessed customers' concrete beliefs or expectations about the service brand promise. If the customer reports higher levels, they have higher expectations related to the retailer's claims about the brand. Measures for *Store* factors were obtained from the same brand survey (pleasant and attractive environment, easy and convenient) or internal firm records (store size, internet purchasing capability). A few store image factors were measured by average values (across all customers) of survey items from store-level data from the Customer Satisfaction Survey. For *Consumer* factors, shopper goals were represented by dummy variables for searching and browsing, with buying subsumed within the constant.

Measures of Brand, Store, and Consumer Factors. We were able to obtain matching measures of brand, store, consumer factors, and control variables for 32 of the retailer's 47 markets. These measures are all store level, so there are 331 independent observations. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics; they exhibit considerable variation because the trade areas are quite different, as shown in Table 2a (right column). These data were combined with data for each market and country. When analyzed (separately) by store and goals, there were 842 observations without missing data for buying (28%), browsing (35%), and searching (36%). See Figure 2, Step 6.

Our hypotheses predicted that brand, store, and consumer factors moderate the effect of

experience clues on satisfaction with the service encounter (Figure 2, Step 7). Algebraically:

$$(5) \quad \textit{Clue Effect Size} = g(\textit{Brand Factors}, \textit{Store Factors}, \textit{Consumer Factors}, \textit{Covariates}).$$

In meta-analyses that synthesize highly diverse studies, the effect sizes are also influenced by the purpose, study design, and methodology of the studies. In contrast, we are using estimates from identical equations across stores and markets. Since our study design and methodology are the same in all models, the effect sizes are directly comparable. Most meta-analyses use corrected correlation coefficients because these are the most comparable statistics across a variety of study designs. In our case, the study design is identical, so there are no method factors in equation (5).

Control Variables. We included a standard set of 11 covariates in all our meta-analyses to assess the moderating effect of market factors (economic and cultural) on the importance of experience clues (as measured by effect sizes). Market factors (industry growth as well as disposable income in a given country) were obtained from *Euromonitor* and publicly available databases; they were available for 32 countries. Hofstede's cultural indices for each country were obtained from Hofstede (2003). We considered household income (Seiders et al. 2005), proportion of customers who are loyalty club members (Seiders et al. 2005), and national levels of trust in the retailer (Hunneman, Verhoef and Sloot 2015). Factors such as disposable income sometimes appear in our meta-analyses. When these variables are omitted, it is because they were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.1$ ). Measures of these variables were not available for all markets; we ultimately obtained 842 observations for each meta-analysis. We will now describe the measures.

*Economic Factors.* We controlled for market differences by introducing indicator variables representing four of the five regions where the retailer operates—Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America. In this way, we were able to control for multiple differences between markets with a parsimonious set of variables. We included economic variables to capture



differences across countries within each region (Talukdar, Sudhir and Ainslie 2002). A high *growth rate* provides opportunities for retailers because customers will learn about brands and potentially change their preferences (Swait and Adamowicz 2001). Last, we controlled for *store size* (in square meters) as a surrogate for attractiveness (based on retail location literature).

*Culture.* Culture operates by influencing customers' motives and emotions, cognitive processes (e.g., abstract versus concrete thinking), categorization and information processing, and decision making (De Mooij and Hofstede 2011). Cultural and national characteristics can be expected to moderate the effects of brand image appeal, advertising, and perceptions of brand service quality (e.g., Hsieh, Pan and Setiono 2003). Steenkamp (2001) argued that Hofstede's four dimensions of cultural variation are useful because they reflect four fundamental issues of the relationship between the individual and the group (individualism), social inequality (power distance), social implications of gender (masculinity), and the handling of uncertainty in economic and social processes (uncertainty avoidance). We expect individualism and uncertainty avoidance to play an important role in explaining customers' responses to experience clues when making satisfaction judgments.

#### Step 7: Estimation of the Meta-Analyses

To perform the regression meta-analyses, we used Comprehensive Meta Analysis (CMA) Version 3 (Borenstein et al. 2015). In the regression meta-analyses, the elasticity effect is the dependent variable, and the variance in the dependent variable is explained using the moderators enumerated above, such as measures of brand, store, and consumer goals, as well as control variables, such as customer descriptors and economic factors. We used HLM and employed a random-effects model because the studies were drawn from different populations (markets), and the true effect size varied from one population to the next. The results are reported in Tables 3 and 4. We report the results for the random effects and not for the fixed effects for three reasons. First, there is

heterogeneity across countries, as measured by the Q-statistic ( $p < 0.001$  for all models). Second, the meta-analysis is performed across countries, and random effects will take into account the country effects (Altweiler 2001). We could not take into account country differences at Step 3 since each of the individual models took into account data from within a country. Third, fixed effects models are more probable to have Type I errors than random effects models (Hunter and Schmidt 2000).

\*\* Tables 3 and 4 about here \*\*

## RESULTS

Table 3 shows the results for emotional experience clues, frustration, and ideas and inspiration as well as expectancy-disconfirmation. Since expectancy-disconfirmation could not be classified a priori as an emotional or functional clue, its meta-analysis is discussed as a post hoc analysis.

Table 4 shows the results for functional experience clues, including frontline employees, waiting time, and ease of use. While we tried to keep these models consistent for ease of comparison, we (consistently) omitted non-significant variables to avoid over-specification. The tables show the coefficients and standard errors for the context variables included in each meta-analysis. The constant can be interpreted as the average effect size for the experience clue; it is always substantial, and the null hypothesis of no effect is always rejected ( $p < .01$ ). All equations have significant ( $p < .01$ ) Q-statistics (a measure of homogeneity among the studies; if the null hypothesis fails to be rejected, the studies are homogenous), and explanatory power averages 0.25 (ranging from 0.12 to 0.42, as measured by analog R-squared). To interpret the results, we need to take into account that the dependent variables are actually effect sizes, as measured in the initial customer satisfaction models (steps 3 and 4). The negative coefficients from the meta-regression are interpreted to reduce the effect size and the positive coefficients to increase effect sizes. For example, the negative coefficients for holistic brand quality in the emotional experience models

show that emotional experience clues (frustration, ideas and inspiration) have less of an impact on customer satisfaction when the holistic brand quality is strong.

The results of the hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 6: 42% of the tests (14 of 33) of the null hypothesis of no effect are rejected ( $p < .05$ ). As expected, the effect sizes of the moderator variables are smaller than the effect sizes of the main effects. The tests of moderating effects are not affected by common method bias (Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira 2010).

#### Brand Factors: Holistic Brand Quality and the Service Brand Promise

H<sub>1a</sub> stated that *Holistic Brand Quality* would negatively moderate experience clues, and H<sub>1b</sub> stated that the *Service Brand Promise* would positively moderate experience clues. H<sub>1a</sub> is supported in three of the five meta-analyses, as follows: frustration ( $p < 0.01$ ), ideas and inspiration ( $p < 0.01$ ), and frontline employees ( $p < 0.05$ ). Regarding H<sub>1b</sub>, the effects of the *Service Brand Promise* were significant (with the expected sign) in two meta-analyses, frustration ( $p < 0.01$ ) and ideas and inspiration ( $p < 0.01$ ). See “Brand Factors” in Tables 3 and 4. Taken together, these hypotheses find support in five of the 10 tests, providing support for H<sub>1a</sub> and H<sub>1b</sub>. With the exception of frustration, the magnitude of the moderating effects for holistic brand quality and the service brand promise are small due to the lack of variability across stores and countries. First, this result implies that the retailer is effective in communicating a consistent brand promise around the world (thereby limiting variation on these brand factors). Second, since we analyze effect sizes for a single service encounter, a tiny effect on any given visit may add up to a huge advantage over many shopping trips. Third, this moderator effect would be much larger in a multi-brand study, where there is more variation in holistic brand quality. We demonstrate this feature in a replication study.

Recall that we included brand share of wallet as a control variable. It does not increase the explained variation in any of the models ( $p > 0.05$ ). We speculate that share of wallet (plus *Service*

*Brand Promise*,  $p < 0.01$ ) creates familiarity so that customers expectations are more likely to be met, diminishing the importance of expectancy-disconfirmation as an experience clue.

#### Store Factors: Store Image Providing Hedonic and Utilitarian Value

H<sub>2a</sub> and H<sub>2b</sub> predicted that store image would magnify the effect of experience clues (i.e., a positive moderating effect) when they are congruent with the store's promises of *Hedonic Value* or *Utilitarian Value*. To test these hypotheses, we investigated whether a moderating variable, when significant, would have the expected sign. We did not expect all store image factors to moderate all experience clues—unless the retailer's strategies were extremely effective. We classified the retailer's store image as follows. Pleasant and relaxing and products-I-like were considered to promise hedonic value and easy-to-find a utilitarian value. It also promised being family friendly, which could be hedonic (as a place my family enjoys) and/or functional (providing the amenities I need while shopping with family members) value, so we do not use it to test our hypotheses.

H<sub>2a</sub> predicted that when a retailer's store image promises hedonic value (e.g., pleasant and relaxing environment in that particular market), customers will assign greater weight to emotional clues (Table 3) and less weight to functional clues (Table 4). The predictions for emotional clues are not supported. However, support for H<sub>2a</sub> is provided by the fact that both pleasant and relaxing and products-I-like are significant, with negative signs in the models for functional clues (Table 4) negatively moderating incongruent clues. Pleasant and relaxing negatively moderates ease of use ( $p < 0.01$ ), and products-I-like negatively moderates frontline employees' performance ( $p < 0.01$ ).

H<sub>2b</sub> predicted that when a brand store image promises utilitarian value (e.g., high ratings of the store on easy-to-find in a particular market), a customer would assign greater weight to functional clues and less weight to emotional clues. H<sub>2b</sub> is not supported for emotional clues (Table 3) but is supported for two of the functional clues (Table 4). Easy-to-find is a positive and significant moderator for frontline employees ( $p < 0.05$ ) and waiting time ( $p < 0.01$ ). In sum, this

retailer's brand promise of hedonic value is less effective than its promise of utilitarian value.

#### Store Factors: Online Purchasing Channel

H<sub>3</sub> posited that customers in markets with an *Online Purchasing Channel* will weigh shared experience clues (ideas and inspiration, waiting time) more heavily and unique experience clues (frontline employees) less heavily. This moderator is significant in two relevant meta-analyses, partly supporting H<sub>3</sub>. Online shopping enhances the importance of ideas and inspiration ( $p < 0.01$ , Table 3) and waiting time ( $p < 0.01$ , Table 4).

#### Consumer Factors: Browsing as a Hedonic Goal

H<sub>4a</sub> and H<sub>4b</sub> posited that customers would assign greater weight to experience clues with higher cognitive or affective fit (i.e., a positive moderating effect). The meta-analysis parameters for customers who are browsing and searching are estimated relative to those who are buying (which is subsumed in the constant). Hence, we test these hypotheses by examining the significance of the *Browsing* coefficients only because they capture the difference between hedonic (browsing) and utilitarian (buying) segments. H<sub>4a</sub> predicted that customers who have utilitarian goals would assign greater weight to functional clues. The coefficient of *Browsing* is negative ( $p < 0.05$ , Table 4) for frontline employees but not significant for ease of use and waiting time ( $p > 0.10$ ), providing partial support for H<sub>4a</sub>. This result indicates that customers pay more attention to store personnel when buying than when browsing. H<sub>4b</sub> predicted that customers who are *Browsing* would assign greater weight to emotional clues than customers who are buying. This hypothesis of a positive moderating effect is supported for two emotional clues (frustration and ideas and inspiration,  $p < 0.01$ , Table 3). Browsing customers seek ideas and inspiration and do not want to be frustrated, so they pay more attention to both clues (but not to expectancy-disconfirmation).

We did not formulate hypotheses comparing search goals to buying goals because both are considered utilitarian. However, they are significantly different in two instances. Search goals

(versus buying) positively moderates ideas and inspiration and negatively moderates waiting time. One possible explanation is that although search is usually associated with problem solving, searching in hedonic environments and solving aesthetic/functional problems makes searching customers sensitive to ideas and inspiration ( $p < 0.01$ ) and more willing to wait ( $p < 0.01$ ).

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Expectancy-Disconfirmation

The meta-analysis for expectancy-disconfirmation is interesting because this variable is considered highly important in the satisfaction literature (Oliver 2014). Recall that the emotional/functional distinction is irrelevant for this construct. The last column of Table 3 reveals many moderator effects—although we did not make any predictions. First, *Holistic Brand Quality* has a positive moderating effect ( $p < 0.01$ ) and *Service Brand Promise* has a negative moderating effect ( $p < 0.01$ ) on disconfirmation, consistent with other experience clues ( $H_{1a}$  and  $H_{1b}$ ). Second, store image factors that promise *Hedonic Value* positively moderate disconfirmation—products-I-like ( $p < 0.05$ ). A store image factor that promises *Utilitarian Value*, easy-to-find, has a negative effect on disconfirmation ( $p < 0.01$ ). These results suggest that a concrete construal level (service brand promise, store image of easy-to-find) diminishes the importance of expectancy-disconfirmation, whereas holistic beliefs heighten its importance.

#### Control Variables: Market Factors

Market factors moderate the effect of experience clues on customer satisfaction. Industry growth and uncertainty avoidance enhance the importance of both frustration and ideas and inspiration in determining the customer's holistic evaluation of the experience ( $p < 0.01$ ). Individualism reduces the importance of waiting time ( $p < 0.01$ ), and uncertainty avoidance reduces the importance of expectancy-disconfirmation ( $p < 0.01$ ). Disposable income positively moderated the effect of disconfirmation on satisfaction. In urban settings, customers pay more attention to waiting time when judging satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ) and less attention to frontline employee availability ( $p <$

0.01). Disconfirmation was negatively moderated by urban setting ( $p < 0.01$ ). Regional covariates were significant for frustration, expectancy-disconfirmation, frontline employees, and waiting time, indicating differences in customer preferences or in the regional management of the retail brand. Regional variables that did not contribute significantly to the model ( $p > 0.1$ ) were removed.

#### Replication Study: Testing the Robustness of the Key Results

As a robustness test, we assessed the external validity of the key results by replicating the effects of holistic brand quality, service brand promise, and store image (Products-I-Like) as moderators in the relationship between experience clues and satisfaction with the service encounter. Our goal was to ascertain that the results are not only valid for the cooperating retailer but for retailers in general. Since the meta-analyses looked at effect sizes across markets, we aimed to show that the moderating effects of the brand and store factors are larger across brands within a single market than for a single brand across markets. This difference arises because our meta-analyses relied on (some) measures based on aggregated data, whereas the replication study utilizes individual-level data (Ostroff 1993).

We replicated the satisfaction survey for retailers in the same industry in the USA. The study sample consisted of 600 randomly selected U.S. consumers, aged 18 and over, from an online panel provided by Qualtrics (Prolific). The participants were given a small monetary incentive for participating. We measured the variables as in our main study. Instead of using meta-analysis, we estimated a general linear model for customer satisfaction with the service encounter as a function of two experience clues (one functional and one emotional) and with holistic brand quality, service brand promise, and store image as moderators. We also included disconfirmation and additional controls. All variables were standardized, and the model was estimated with OLS. Since the variables are standardized, the coefficients shown in Table 5 can be interpreted as effect

sizes. Note that the non-significant control variables have been excluded from this table. The results are consistent with H<sub>1a</sub>, which predicts that *Holistic Brand Quality* negatively moderates functional experience clues (easy to use,  $p < 0.05$ ), and with H<sub>1b</sub>, which predicts that *Service Brand Promise* positively moderates functional experience clues (easy to use,  $p < 0.05$ ). We did not find significant effects for emotional experience clues. We also tested the effect of a store promising *Hedonic Value* (e.g., products-I-like) and found a negative moderating effect on functional experience clues (easy to use,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting H<sub>2a</sub>. See Table 5 for the results.

This replication study provides additional support for the moderating effects of *Holistic Brand Quality*, *Service Brand Promise*, and a store image that promises *Hedonic Value*. It shows that the results are not only valid for the cooperating retailer but also for competing retailers in the same industry. We were also able to replicate the opposing effects of *Holistic Brand Quality* and *Service Brand Promise*, showing that they have differing effects on the same experience clue. Finally, the effect sizes in this study (estimated across brands at the respondent level) are much larger than the corresponding effect sizes in the meta-analyses (for a single brand across stores). Hence, they show that the magnitude of the moderating effects is relevant for business managers.

\*\* Tables 5 about here \*\*

### Summary

Based on a global study covering 32 countries, this research sought to untangle the intricate relationships among many retail branding variables, as summarized in Table 6. It examined variables with wide applicability that are managerially actionable and critical in shaping the customer experience. There is strong support for customer beliefs about *Holistic Brand Quality* and *Service Brand Promise* as moderators of the relationship between experience clues and satisfaction with the service encounter. *Holistic Brand Quality* negatively moderated three of the five clues, and *Service Brand Promise* positively moderated two clues. We also found strong



support for the importance of congruence between functional experience clues and store image factors that signal *Utilitarian Value* (two of five tests). The retailer seems to be less effective in signaling *Hedonic Value*. Cognitive and affective fit between customer goals and experience clues also mattered; customers pay more attention to clues that align with their goals (one of three tests). The consistency of our results across markets with different economic conditions, cultures, and customers provides strong support for our hypotheses.

\*\* Table 6 about here \*\*

## DISCUSSION

Brand and store factors help customers interpret their retail experiences. Our study explored a comprehensive set of functional and emotional experience clues relevant to global retail brands. Consistent with research on context-dependent judgments, contextual factors moderated the effect of experience clues on customer satisfaction with retail service encounters. Retailers can leverage brand and store factors to magnify favorable clues and diminish unfavorable clues, enhancing customers' evaluations of service encounters. However, there are differences in how brand and store factors operate on functional versus emotional experience clues.

### Theoretical Implications

Retailer Brand Management of Customer Experiences. Verhoef et al. (2009) emphasized the role of the brand in forming the customer experience; if a customer is primed with the brand, it is likely to influence the entire customer experience. They recommended that research should examine the extent to which brand beliefs moderate the effects of other determinants of customer experience. Our research answers this call by investigating how customer beliefs about holistic brand quality and the service brand promise can strengthen *and* weaken the effects of experience clues on customer satisfaction. Our findings show that retail brand strategy can shape customers' responses to service encounters in the following two ways: through *explicit* communications that create

beliefs about brand quality and the service brand promise and through *implicit* brand promises that inform customers' in-store experiences. For example, when a customer learns that a store promises that it will be easy to find products, this belief will magnify the importance of experience clues, such as friendly employees and short waiting times. Our findings provide detailed knowledge on how retailers can enhance the customer experience by familiarizing consumers with their brand.

Usefulness of a Systems Perspective. Our research addresses a key research priority identified by Tax, McCutcheon, and Wilkinson (2013)—the need for a complex adaptive system perspective. In retailing, several conceptual models have been introduced to capture the diverse factors that may influence the customer experience (see, e.g., Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009). They include macro factors, firm-controlled factors, consumer factors, and situational factors (Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009, Verhoef et al. 2009). However, empirical research has actually never investigated and tested the many factors identified in these complex conceptual models simultaneously. The present research operationalizes retailing as a complex adaptive system including brand, store, and consumer factors while controlling for market factors. It quantified how these factors systematically moderate the influence of experience clues on customer satisfaction with the service encounter. Our findings demonstrate that contextual factors within the retailer's control (and some beyond its control) influence the retailer's ability to deliver on its brand promise during the service encounter. They deepen our understanding of retail conditions and management opportunities and challenges from a systems perspective (e.g., Tax, McCutcheon and Wilkinson 2013). They also provide insights about the multiple, actionable ways retailers can manage and enhance the customer experience as well as adapt to shopper goals and market factors outside their control.

Store Image as a Retail Brand Differentiation Mechanism. A retailer's physical store image contributes to the holistic customer experience, but the introduction of digital channels changes

how consumers evaluate the experience clues in the physical store. It magnifies the importance of experience clues that are similar across channels and diminishes the importance of unique clues in the store. This finding highlights the importance of store image in a given market and demonstrates how experience clues can be designed and managed to influence customers' satisfaction judgments (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009). When retailers consistently deliver in-store experience clues that are congruent with the brand's positioning and customer beliefs, they create a powerful store image. Store image factors then moderate the importance of other clues in the service encounter, suggesting new ways of designing the brand and managing retail service encounters to fit (rather than shape) the socio-economic factors, enabling customers to achieve their shopping goals. Thus, *all* firms can capitalize on brand equity by mirroring customers' brand beliefs and expectations in the store image.

Usefulness of the Meta-Analytic Approach for a Single Brand. The present research makes a methodological contribution by showing how a meta-analytic approach can identify diverse moderating effects for a global brand. Meta-analysis is increasingly common in marketing research, especially for literature reviews, but it is also used in estimating effects across multiple experiments in consumer research (McShane and Böckenholt 2017). Our research can be used to better understand retail brands and service by drawing on multiple, diverse data sources. We analyzed a single retailer's 400 stores operating in 32 countries; this scope ensures that the findings on the moderating effects of diverse retail brand contexts are robust. Meta-analyses that focus on a single retail brand allow researchers to control for a large number of potential confounding factors, isolating and measuring the effects of contextual factors. Our approach could be used to identify (possibly differing) nuances in success factors for other retail brands. Large

datasets are increasingly available to researchers, and our approach provides a straightforward way of assessing moderators without over-parameterizing models and confounding effects.

### Managerial Implications

To profitably manage a global brand, retailers must manage the contextual factors that are within their control while adapting to those outside their control. Brand, store factors, and market factors influence the importance of experience clues in customers' holistic evaluations of their service encounters and explain considerable variance in the effect sizes of experiential clues. These findings are especially crucial for global brands, which typically receive scarce research attention (Steenkamp, Batra, Alden 2003). For this global retailer's managers, these findings confirm the importance of key success factors such as brand quality (which makes customers more forgiving) and enhancing beliefs about its service brand promise (which makes customers pay attention to the specific experience clues aligned with the brand).

Managing Branded Service Encounters by Monitoring Stores. This research can help to guide the design and management of branded service encounters to suit the characteristics of a given market. Service encounter management must focus on the salient aspects of retail experiences that managers can influence. Customers learn the retailer's brand promises about how their stores offer hedonic (pleasant and attractive) and utilitarian (easy-to-find) value, and they expect their service encounters to be congruent with these promises. The participating retailer primarily promises utilitarian value and provides multiple functional experience clues that are congruent with this promise. Nevertheless, customers also consider emotional clues when evaluating their (holistic) service encounters, and these are especially important for customers who are browsing rather than buying. For this reason, the retailer must ensure that its emotional clues are also congruent with its brand promise. This study shows how branded service encounters can heighten customer attention in important ways, highlighting the value of touchpoint monitoring for

retailers (Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl 2017). By collecting store performance metrics and utilizing feedback mechanisms, retailers can manage activities at their stores to align with shoppers' goals and attentional mechanisms, thereby improving customer experience during service encounters.

Retail Branding Strategies for New versus Established Markets. The weight customers assign to experience clues will depend on how the retailer has developed its brand over time. When a retailer enters a new market, customer beliefs and expectations about holistic brand quality and service brand promise are not yet established. Thus, it is crucial to perform well on all experience clues. In this situation, expectancy-disconfirmation is likely to be important in customer satisfaction judgments. As customers learn about the retail brand, favorable beliefs about holistic brand quality and the service brand promise can shift their attention to specific experience clues on subsequent store visits. Perceptions of brand quality can act as a buffer in that customers become less attentive to incongruent clues. For example, the cooperating retail brand's quality shields it (somewhat) from failure in providing ideas and inspiration, helpful frontline employees, and short in-store waits. Concrete beliefs about the service brand promise heightens customer attention to the same experience clues as they use its promise to predict future satisfaction with the service encounter.

How Retailers Can Support Shopper Goals. Beyond shaping service encounters through brand and store elements, retailers must align their strategies to support different shopper goals. To encourage browsing in stores and buying online, customers' in-store experiences should be enriched by emotional clues (e.g., providing ideas and inspiration). In contrast, if retailers seek to encourage online browsing and in-store purchase or pick up, the retailer should emphasize functional clues (e.g., short in-store waiting time). Retailers cannot control the goals that customers choose to pursue, so they must provide alternative paths that enable each segment of customers to pursue their goals successfully. One option is to design the store layout and

atmospherics so that specific areas of the store support each goal. For example, consumer electronic stores often have attractive in-store demonstration areas where browsing customers can interact with products and employees, while other areas are designed for customers searching for alternatives or purchasing.

Adapting the Store to the Online Channel. When the retailer makes online purchasing available, consumers respond to experience clues in the store differently. This finding suggests that the cooperating retailer needs to strengthen the design of shared experience clues, such as ideas and inspiration and waiting time. This implication is counter intuitive because the retailer might expect customers to seek inspiration online so that it should focus on providing more help and guidance through frontline employees in the store. As this example illustrates, this pattern of findings places further emphasis on the importance of moving from multi-channel retailing to omni-channel retailing (Verhoef, Kannan and Inman 2015). If the consumer places extra emphasis on the shared experience clues, then the same experience clues are important, but they need not be designed in the exact same way across channels. For example, over the course of the present COVID-19 pandemic, several retailers have increased their focus on the online channel. Our findings suggest that when consumers start returning to the store, their response to key experience clues will be different. When the distinction between physical and online starts to vanish, retailers must perform well in all channels for key experience clues. We speculate that consumers might be more forgiving if the retailer fails on the unique experience clues.

Adapting to Markets. Retailers must align their brand strategy with market characteristics. Our meta-analyses show that, in markets with high growth rates, emotional clues, such as frustration and ideas and inspiration, are more important to customers, while easy-to-use stores and waiting time are less important (perhaps due to product scarcity). This finding highlights how customers in growing markets seek hedonic value from retail service encounters. It is consistent

with evidence that growth strategies require firms to connect emotionally with customers (Reinartz et al. 2011). In markets with a high level of individualism (such as in the USA and Australia), frustration and waiting time are less important to customers (perhaps due to the prevalence of self-service), but if uncertainty avoidance is high (as in Eastern European countries), less frustration and offering ideas and inspiration are more important.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our research has some limitations that open up avenues for further research. First, although our meta-analyses integrated data from more than a million customers across 32 countries, these related to a single cooperating retailer. Our robustness study indicates that effect sizes will vary under different conditions. Hence, replications and extensions that vary in method factors—by studying different brands, categories, and stores—will make it possible to quantify the effect sizes under different conditions and identify additional relevant factors (McShane et al. 2019).

Second, although we relied on well-established satisfaction scales and measured dimensions of the customer experience identified in prior research, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) observe that scales measuring the entire customer experience are not well developed. Future research should develop comprehensive scales for measuring the customer experience. For example, expectancy-disconfirmation (i.e., better/same/worse than expected) is a key antecedent of customer satisfaction with the retail service experience. This study's results suggest that it should be measured at the attribute level rather than for the entire service encounter.

Third, our meta-analyses integrated multiple data sources to measure market, brand, store, and consumer factors and thereby identify ways in which retailers can design and manage service encounters. Since brand and store factors are somewhat firm- and industry-specific, more work is needed to expand and refine these factors. Interestingly, our post hoc analyses indicated that a concrete construal level (service brand promise, store image of easy-to-find) diminished the

importance of expectancy-disconfirmation, whereas holistic beliefs about the brand or store heighten its importance. Expectancy-disconfirmation is central to understanding customer satisfaction with the retail service encounter, so this finding warrants additional investigation.

Fourth, we worked with a large retailer that operates 400 stores around the world. The retailer's standardized store concept helped us control for sources of variation that would be present in a study involving multiple retailers. The present study focuses on variation across countries and stores rather than variations in retail brand strategy (e.g., everyday low price versus premium brand strategy). Future research could examine different retail brand strategies. Fifth, this study focused on whether moderating effects are consistently significant across different countries. We could not investigate variations due to *changes* in retail brand strategy. A longitudinal study of market factors (such as internet penetration and urbanization) would be useful to reveal how these and other global factors influence customer preference structures.



**Table 1**  
**Satisfaction Model Variables, Measures and Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	4.134	0.848
<b>Experience Clues</b>			
Brand Satisfaction	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1=☺; 5=☺☺☺☺☺)	4.062	0.812
Frustrating†	Average of five dichotomous variables indicating emotions checked on list: complicated, stressful, frustrating, tiring, annoying	0.072	0.150
Ease of Use	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.598	1.033
Ideas and Inspiration	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.995	0.880
Frontline Employees	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.441	0.971
Waiting Time	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.018	1.020
Disconfirmation	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = much worse; 5 = much better)	3.121	0.706
<b>Covariates</b>			
Inviting and Attractive	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.667	1.013
Price Fairness	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.493	0.981
Products in Stock	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	3.642	1.134
Products-I-like	Rating scale 1 to 5 (1 = ☺; 5 = ☺☺☺☺☺)	4.074	0.833
Functional†	Average of three dichotomous variables indicating characteristics checked on list: informative, useful, functional	0.332	0.274
Boring†	Average of two dichotomous variables indicating emotions checked on list: boring, dull	0.011	0.077
Exciting†	Average of four dichotomous variables indicating emotions checked on list: exciting, fun, inspiring, entertaining	0.270	0.269
<b>Control variables</b>			
Used Customer Service	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.154	0.361
Use Catalog	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.826	0.379
Bought previously	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.942	0.233
Shop only this store	1 = Yes, 0 = No	4.244	0.839
Loyalty Program	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.713	0.453
House – Apartment	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.298	0.457
House – Studio	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.022	0.146
Living – Single	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.112	0.315
Living – With Children	1 = Yes, 0 = No	0.441	0.497

†The survey included an emotions inventory, using 14 items drawn from Izard (1991), Richins (1997) and Oliver (2014). Emotion indices were based on a principal components analysis that identified four orthogonal factors. Rather than using factor scores, indices were formulated to ensure that measures could be easily interpreted.

**Table 2a**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Meta-Analysis Variables†**

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Outcome Variables: Customer Responses to Experience Clues (n = 842)</b>		
Frustration	-0.123	0.105
Ideas and Inspiration	0.008	0.017
Expectancy-Disconfirmation	0.007	0.015
Easy to use	0.002	0.013
Frontline Employees	0.004	0.014
Waiting Time	-0.004	0.011
<b>Predictor Variables</b>		
<b>Brand Factors<sup>1</sup> (n = 331)</b>		
Average value for the store calculated from Global Brand Survey data		
Holistic Brand Quality (% respondents rating 4 or 5☺)	38.969	9.726
Service Brand Promise (% respondents rating 4 or 5☺)	58.147	10.197
Index of three survey measures: inspiring company, full of surprises, warm and human; reliability (alpha) = 0.90;		
Brand Share of Wallet (% share of category purchases, customer-declared)	28.935	9.703
<b>Store Factors<sup>2</sup> (n = 331)</b>		
Pleasant/Relaxing Store Image (% respondents rating 4 or 5☺)	58.268	11.126
Average value for the store calculated from Global Brand Survey data		
Products-I-like Store Image (Mean of 5-Point ☺Scale)	4.095	0.162
Average value for store calculated from store level survey data		
Easy-to-find Store Image (Mean of 5-Point ☺Scale)	3.555	0.171
Average value for the store calculated from Global Brand Survey data		
Family Friendly Store Image (Mean of 5-Point ☺Scale)	3.994	0.174
Average value for store calculated from store level survey data		
Products in Stock Store Image (Mean of 5-Point ☺Scale)	3.711	0.175
Average value for store calculated from store level survey data		
Store size (10,000 square meters, source: Internal Records) <sup>3</sup>	2.891	0.657
Online Purchase Option <sup>4</sup> (Indicator value of 1 if customers can purchase online from this retailer in the given country, zero otherwise)	0.375	
<b>Consumer Factors: Shopper Goals<sup>5</sup></b>		
Measure from store level survey data: What was your main reason for visiting XXX today? [Select only one.]” Categories available were classified as: Buying, Browsing, and Searching.		
<b>Control Variables (Socio-economic) Factors (n = 32)<sup>6</sup></b>		
Hofstede (2003) Individualism Index	56.938	22.653
Hofstede (2003) Uncertainty Avoidance Index	62.875	25.798
Growth Rate of Industry in Country (2011-2012, Euromonitor)	-1.722	5.330
Disposable Income in Country 2012 (,000 Euros, Euromonitor)	36.947	2.207
Urban (% of population, Euromonitor)	77.772	12.511

<sup>1</sup> Erdem, Swait and Valenzuela (2006), Erdem, Zhao and Valenzuela (2004); <sup>2</sup> Grewal, Levy and Kumar (2009), <sup>3</sup> Van Birgelen, De Jong and De Ruyter (2006); <sup>5</sup> Grewal, Levy and Kumar (2009), Puccinelli et al. (2009); <sup>6</sup> References for control variables are reported in the Web Appendix.

**Table 2b**  
**Pearson Correlations for Stage Two, Meta-analysis Model Variables**

	Frustrating	Ideas and Inspiration	Easy to use	Expectancy Disconfirmation	Frontline Employees	Waiting Time	Service Brand Promise	Brand Quality	Share of Wallet	Pleasant and relaxing
Ideas and Inspiration	0.08									
Easy to use	-0.02	-0.09								
Expectancy Disconfirmation	0.04	-0.05	-0.06							
Frontline Employees	-0.02	0.12	-0.13	0.04						
Waiting Time	0.09	-0.11	-0.09	-0.04	-0.16					
Service Brand Promise	-0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.08				
Brand Quality	-0.14	-0.14	-0.01	0.11	0.01	0.02	0.69			
Share of Wallet	0.09	0.09	0.06	-0.11	-0.01	0.06	0.30	0.09		
Pleasant and relaxing	-0.02	0.01	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	0.09	0.83	0.70	0.25	
Ease of finding	0.05	-0.19	-0.06	-0.03	-0.08	0.03	0.25	0.34	-0.03	0.23
Family Friendly	0.08	-0.13	-0.12	0.04	-0.08	0.04	0.14	0.19	-0.31	0.21
Products I Like	0.06	-0.16	-0.12	0.06	-0.10	-0.01	0.10	0.23	-0.28	0.10
Products in Stock	0.05	-0.11	-0.11	-0.03	-0.12	0.04	0.03	0.07	-0.25	0.09
Store Size	0.05	0.05	-0.02	-0.01	-0.04	-0.06	-0.14	-0.19	0.02	-0.23
Online Purchase	0.13	0.13	-0.01	-0.05	-0.11	-0.02	-0.41	-0.45	0.06	-0.32
Individualism	-0.01	-0.05	-0.03	0.01	-0.11	-0.11	-0.43	-0.24	-0.26	-0.45
Uncertainty avoidance	0.03	0.16	-0.07	0.00	-0.03	0.00	0.32	0.20	0.07	0.46
Industry Growth Rate	-0.03	0.03	-0.06	0.09	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.17	-0.29	0.09
Disposable Income	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.00	-0.04	0.01	-0.56	-0.48	-0.10	-0.54
Urban	-0.05	-0.09	0.06	-0.05	-0.02	0.03	-0.48	-0.16	-0.02	-0.35

	Ease of finding	Family Friendly	Products I Like	Products in Stock	Store Size	Online Purchase	Individualism	Uncertainty avoidance	Industry Growth Rate	Disposable Income
Family Friendly	0.67									
Products I Like	0.73	0.83								
Products in Stock	0.61	0.78	0.75							
Store Size	-0.14	-0.10	-0.04	-0.04						
Online Purchase	0.10	0.16	0.07	0.21	0.09					
Individualism	0.27	0.22	0.19	0.23	0.11	0.54				
Uncertainty avoidance	-0.24	-0.14	-0.10	-0.16	0.03	-0.34	-0.49			
Industry Growth Rate	-0.11	0.14	0.20	0.15	-0.03	-0.01	-0.01	0.03		
Disposable Income	-0.11	-0.09	-0.13	-0.02	0.00	0.53	0.50	-0.46	0.08	
Urban	-0.07	-0.30	-0.24	-0.17	-0.02	0.10	0.33	-0.39	0.14	0.49

**Table 3**  
**Meta-analysis results for contextual factors influencing importance of experience clues**

<b>Dependent →</b> <b>Moderator (Hypothesis,</b> <b>Predicted Sign)↓</b>	<b>Emotional Experience Clues</b>					
	<b>Frustration</b>		<b>Ideas and Inspiration</b>		<b>Expectancy-Disconfirmation</b>	
	<b>Coefficient†</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Coefficient†</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Coefficient†</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
Constant	-0.5095***	0.0828	.0323***	0.0113	0.0624***	0.0152
<b>Brand Factors</b>						
Holistic Brand Quality (H <sub>1a</sub> -)	-0.0028***	0.0004	-0.0003***	0.0001	0.0002***	0.0001
Service Brand Promise (H <sub>1b</sub> +)	0.0019***	0.0005	0.0003***	0.0001	-0.0003***	0.0001
Brand Share of Wallet	0.0005	0.0003	0.0001	0.0001	-0.0001	0.0001
<b>Store Factors</b>						
Pleasant and Relaxing (H <sub>2a</sub> +)	-0.0002	0.0005	-0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
Products-I-like (H <sub>2a</sub> +)	-0.0038	0.0399	-0.0031	0.0056	0.0123**	0.0049
Easy-to-find (H <sub>2b</sub> -)	0.0336	0.0263	-0.0068	0.0037	-0.0104***	0.0040
Products in Stock	-0.0667***	0.0232	-0.0021	0.0034	-0.0136***	0.0033
Family Friendly	0.1323***	0.0328	0.0016	0.0049	NA	NA
Online Purchase Option (H <sub>3+</sub> )	-0.0002	0.0085	0.0065***	0.0010	-0.0018	0.0013
<b>Consumer Factors: Shopper Goals</b>						
Browsing (Hedonic) Goal (H <sub>4b+</sub> )	0.0365***	0.0066	0.0042***	0.0014	-0.0015	0.0013
Searching Goal	0.0027	0.0066	0.0027***	0.0014	-0.0002	0.0012
<b>Control Variables: Market Factors</b>						
Asia Pacific	-0.0509***	0.0155	NA	NA	0.0007	0.0027
Europe – East	-0.1016***	0.0191	NA	NA	0.0087***	0.0029
Europe – West	-0.0296***	0.0106	NA	NA	0.0029	0.0016
North America	-0.0329***	0.0128	NA	NA	0.0049**	0.0021
Individualism	-0.0004	0.0002	NA	NA	NA	NA
Uncertainty Avoidance	0.0006***	0.0002	0.0001***	0.0000	-0.0001***	0.0000
Industry Growth	0.0025***	0.0007	0.0003***	0.0001	-0.0002	0.0001
Disposable Income	NA	NA	0.0000	0.0000	0.0001**	0.0000
Urban	NA	NA	NA	NA	-0.0002***	0.0001
Store Size	0.0019	0.0036	0.0001	0.0006	-0.0001	0.0006
<b>Meta-Analysis Fit Statistics</b>						
Q-Statistic	16824		1602		1528	
Degrees of Freedom	841		841		841	
Analog R-Squared	0.17		0.42		0.34	

† Z values, confidence limits and p-values can be calculated from the information provided. Two sided p-values are indicated by asterisks. \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ . Shaded areas indicate the test results for the hypotheses presented in the paper.

**Table 4**  
**Meta-regression analysis results for contextual factors influencing importance of functional experience clues**

<b>Dependent →</b> <b>Moderator ↓</b>	<b>Functional Experience Clues</b>					
	<b>Ease of Use</b>		<b>Frontline Employees</b>		<b>Waiting Time</b>	
	Coefficient†	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error†
Constant	0.0312***	0.0116	0.0893***	0.0141	-0.0486***	0.0114
<b>Brand Factors</b>						
Holistic Brand Quality (H <sub>1a</sub> -)	0.0001	0.0001	-0.0001**	0.0001	-0.0001	0.0000
Service Brand Promise (H <sub>1b</sub> +) <span style="background-color: #cccccc;"></span>	-0.0000	0.0001	-0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0000
Brand Share of Wallet	0.0000	0.0000	0.0001	0.0001	0.0000	0.0000
<b>Store Factors</b>						
Pleasant and Relaxing (H <sub>2a</sub> -)	-0.0002***	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0000	0.0001
Products-I-like (H <sub>2a</sub> -)	-0.0061	0.0047	-0.0209***	0.0056	NA	NA
Easy-to-find (H <sub>2b</sub> +) <span style="background-color: #cccccc;"></span>	0.0064	0.0034	0.0094**	0.0038	0.0085***	0.0028
Family Friendly	-0.0047	0.0040	0.0021	0.0046	0.0016	0.0040
Online Purchase Option (H <sub>3</sub> +) <span style="background-color: #cccccc;"></span>	-0.0009	0.0010	-0.0024	0.0012	0.0024***	0.0009
<b>Consumer Factors: Shopper Goals</b>						
Browsing (vs Buying) Goal (H <sub>4a</sub> -)	0.0003	0.0012	-0.0029**	0.0013	-0.0010	0.0010
Searching (vs Buying) Goal	0.0011	0.0012	-0.0017	0.0012	-0.0020**	0.0010
<b>Control Variables: Market Factors</b>						
Asia Pacific	NA	NA	0.0011	0.0022	0.0053**	0.0020
Europe – East	NA	NA	-0.0039	0.0026	0.0017	0.0019
Europe – West	NA	NA	-0.0050***	0.0015	0.0014	0.0010
North America	NA	NA	-0.0002	0.0018	0.0001	0.0015
Individualism	0.0000	0.0000	-0.0001	0.0000	-0.0001***	0.0000
Industry Growth	-0.0000	0.0001	0.0003**	0.0001	0.0000	0.0001
Urban	-0.0000	0.0001	-0.0003***	0.0001	0.0001***	0.0001
Store Size (x10,000m <sup>2</sup> )	-0.0002	0.0005	-0.0009	0.0005	0.0002	0.0004
<b>Meta-Analysis Fit Statistics</b>						
Q-Statistic	1361		1536		1194	
Degrees of Freedom	841		841		841	
Analog R-Squared	0.12		0.25		0.24	

† Z values, confidence limits and exact p values can be calculated from the information provided. Two sided p-values are indicated by asterisks. \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$  Shaded areas indicate the test results for the hypotheses presented in the paper.

Table 5  
Results of the Replication Study

*5a. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

	Mean	Std. Dev.	1.	2.	3.	4.
<b>1. Satisfaction with the retail service encounter</b>	4.01	0.926		0.296**	0.543**	0.548**
<b>2. Expectancy-Disconfirmation</b>	3.47	1.246			0.276**	0.248**
<b>3. Ideas and Inspiration (Emotional Clue)</b>	3.59	1.091				0.454**
<b>4. Easy to Use (Functional Clue)</b>	3.75	1.044				

*5b. Regression Model (OLS)*

<b>Dependent Variable: Satisfaction with the retail service encounter</b>			
	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Hypothesis
Constant	0.105	0.036	
<b>Main Effects</b>			
Expectancy-Disconfirmation	0.099**	0.033	
Ideas and Inspiration (Emotional Clue)	0.281**	0.062	
Easy to Use (Functional Clue)	0.298**	0.063	
<b>Moderators</b>			
<i>Brand Quality</i> × Ideas and Inspiration (-)	-0.118 <sup>ns</sup>	0.077	H <sub>1a</sub>
<i>Brand Quality</i> × Easy to Use (-)	-0.167**	0.084	H <sub>1a</sub>
<i>Brand Promise</i> × Ideas and Inspiration (+)	0.025 <sup>ns</sup>	0.085	H <sub>1b</sub>
<i>Brand Promise</i> × Easy to Use (+)	0.196**	0.083	H <sub>1b</sub>
<i>Hedonic Value (Products I Like)</i> × Easy to Use (-)	-0.072**	0.031	H <sub>2a</sub>
<b>Adjusted R-Squared</b>	0.43		

Two sided p-values are indicated by asterisks. \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ . ns indicates  $p > .05$ . Standardized coefficients are effect sizes.

**Table 6**  
**Summary of Findings†**

	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Finding</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
H <sub>1a</sub> : Holistic Brand Quality	When the retailer has created favorable beliefs about <i>Holistic Brand Quality</i> in a market, customers weigh functional and emotional experience clues less heavily compared with markets with less favorable beliefs (negative moderating effect).	Negative moderating effect for two emotional clues: frustration and ideas and inspiration. Negative moderating effect for one functional clue: frontline employees.	Supported (3 of 5 tests).††
H <sub>1b</sub> : Service Brand Promise	When the retailer has created high levels of belief in the <i>Service Brand Promise</i> in a market, customers weigh functional and emotional experience clues more heavily compared with markets with low levels of belief (positive moderating effect).	Positive moderating effect on two emotional clues (ideas and inspiration and frustration). No positive moderating effects on functional clues.	Partially supported (2 of 5 tests).††
H <sub>2a</sub> : Hedonic Value Congruency	When the brand store image promises <i>Hedonic Value</i> (e.g., pleasant and relaxing environment, products-I-like), customers will weigh emotional clues (e.g., frustration, ideas and inspiration) more heavily and functional clues (e.g., ease-of-use, frontline employees, waiting time) less heavily.	No positive moderating effects. Negative moderating effects of pleasant and relaxing on ease-of-use and “products-I-like” on frontline employees.	Partially supported negative moderating effect only (2 of 5 tests).††
H <sub>2b</sub> : Utilitarian Value Congruency	When the brand store image promises <i>Utilitarian Value</i> (e.g., easy-to-find), customers will weigh functional clues (ease-of-use, frontline employees, and waiting time) more heavily, and emotional clues (e.g., frustration, ideas and inspiration) less heavily.	Positive moderating effect of easy-to-find on all two functional clues (employees, waiting time). No negative moderating effect of easy-to-find.	Partially supported positive moderating effect only (2 of 5 tests).
H <sub>3</sub> : Online Purchase Available	Customers in markets where the retailer makes <i>Online Purchase Available</i> will weigh shared experience clues (e.g., ideas and inspiration, waiting time) more heavily and unique experience clues (e.g., frontline employees) less heavily than customers in markets that do not offer online purchase.	Increases the weight assigned to ideas and inspiration and waiting time	Partially supported (2 of 3 tests).
H <sub>4a</sub> : Utilitarian Goal	Customers who are <i>Buying</i> (a utilitarian goal) weigh functional clues (e.g., ease-of-use, frontline employees, waiting time) more heavily than customers pursuing a hedonic goal.	Negative moderating effect of browsing (versus buying) on frontline employee availability; the other two coefficients are also negative but not significant.	Partially supported (1 of 3)
H <sub>4b</sub> : Hedonic Goal	Customers who are <i>Browsing</i> (a hedonic goal) weigh emotional clues (e.g., frustration, ideas and inspiration) more heavily than customers pursuing a utilitarian goal.	Moderating effect of browsing (versus buying) for both emotional clues: ideas and inspiration and frustration.	Supported (2 of 2 tests).



†For the supported and partially supported hypotheses, 14 of 23 or 61% of tests are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . ††Replicated in robustness study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

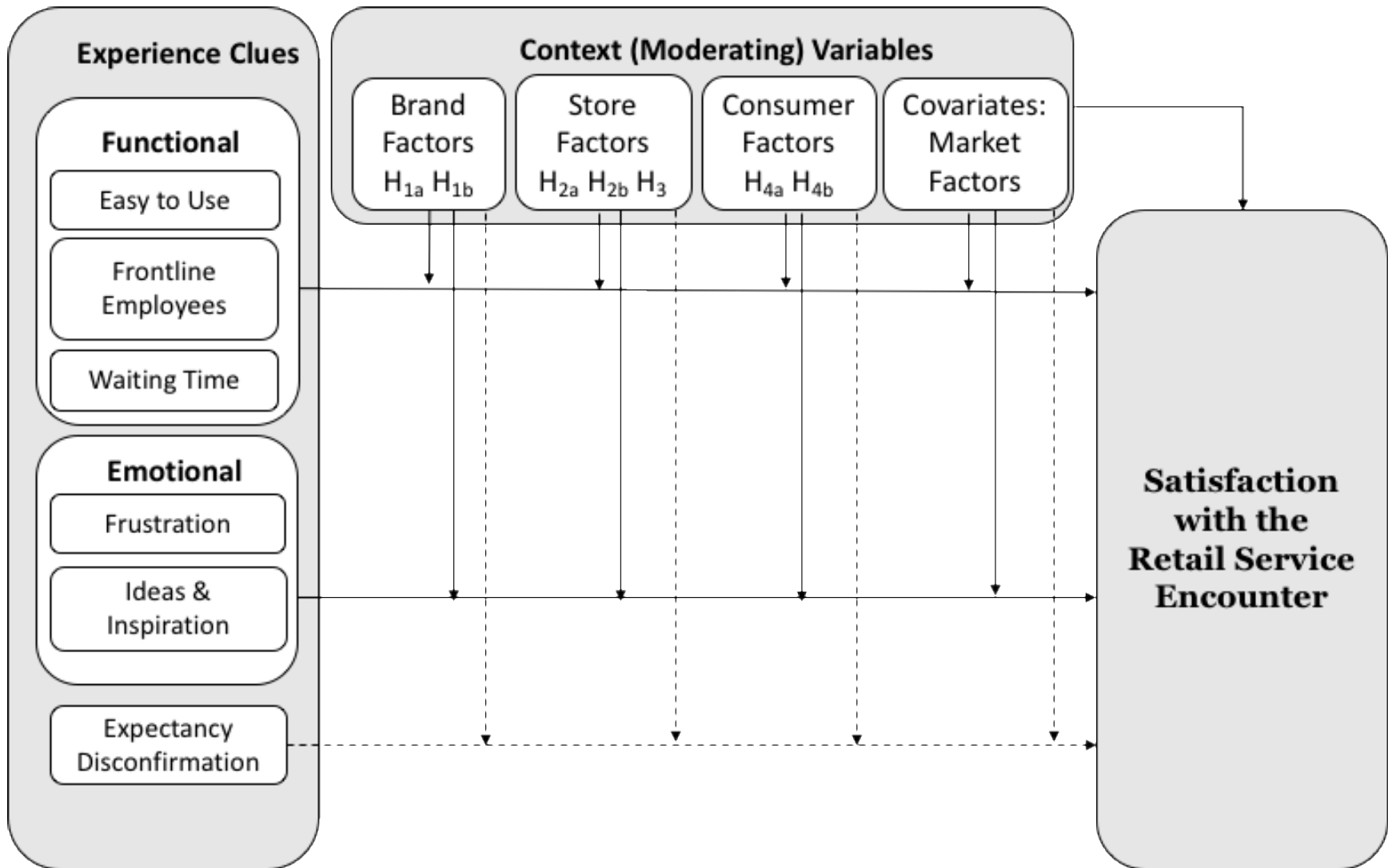
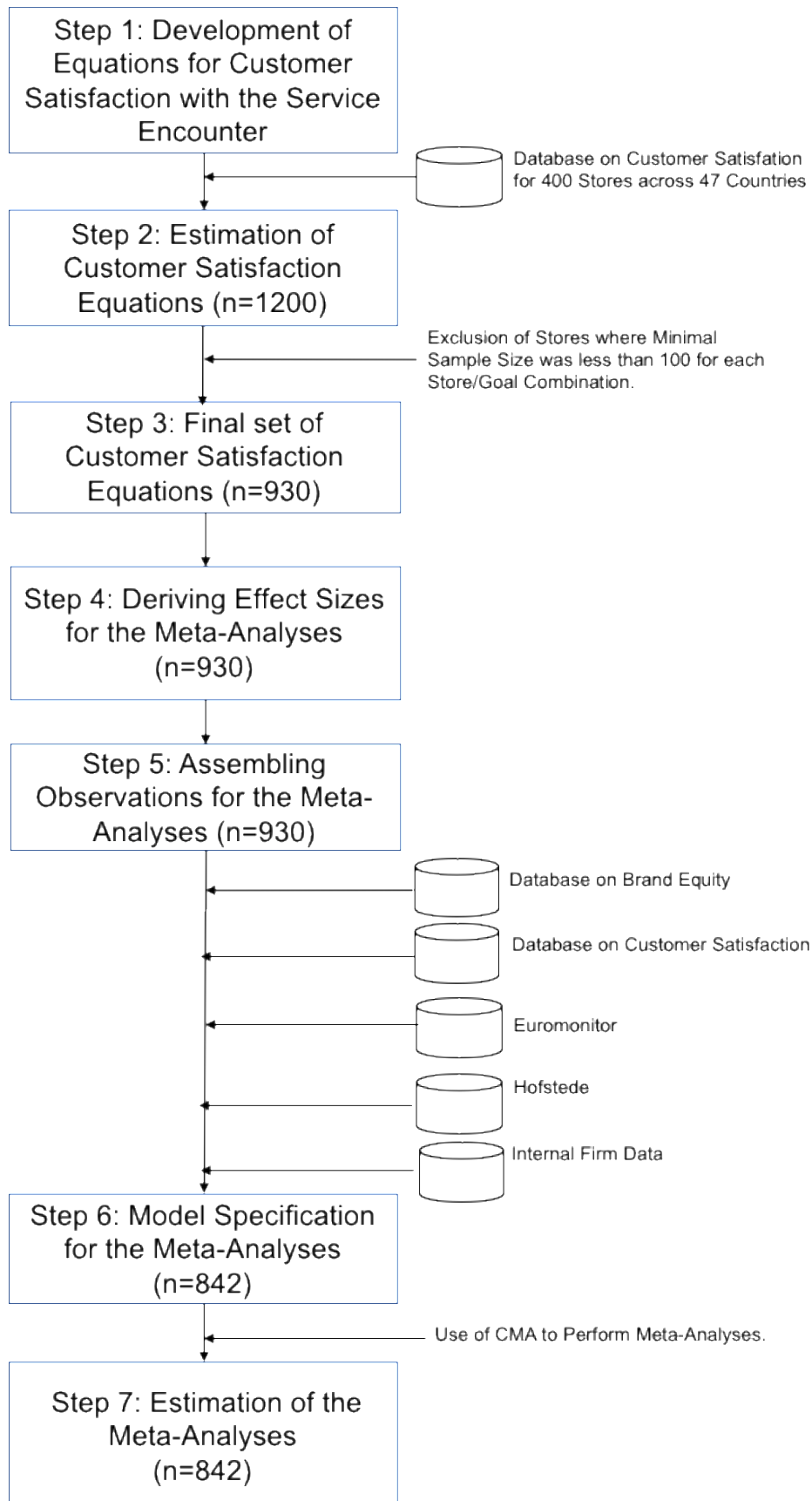


Figure 2: Steps in HLM Meta-Analysis Methodology



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