The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Customer Perceived Service Quality:
Empirical Insights into the Experience-Seeking and Service-Oriented Economy

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Abstract

In light of the fact that the contemporary business landscape has evolved to be experience-focused and customer-centric, especially, in service contexts, the examination of customers’ evaluations and perceptions appears to be a fundamental subject of marketing interest. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of brand experience and service quality perceived and evaluated from a customer perspective. Based on the theoretical conceptualizations of customer perceived service quality and customers’ prior experiences evoked by brands, the study focuses on the deviance of the brand experience and service quality assessment based on gender, as well as the interrelationship of both concepts in business reality.

In order to collect the necessary empirical data a cross-national online survey has been conducted including a total amount of 433 participants. Thus, the respondents’ brand experience and service quality perceived at IKEA, has been measured by the application of the brand experience scale and the perception section of SERVQUAL. Analytical tools used on the collected data include; descriptive statistics, the Cronbach’s alpha reliability test and Spearman’s correlation coefficient analysis.

The major findings of the study reveal that customers tend to evaluate the dimensions of service quality as being more important than the brand experience dimensions. Within the concept of customer perceived service quality, the most important dimensions were found to be responsiveness, assurance and reliability pointing in the direction that customers assign a higher relevance to functional-related quality aspects. For the conceptualization of brand experience the sampled respondents emphasized the importance of the sensory, affective and intellectual dimensions. This importance rating indicates the necessity to involve sensory and emotional appealing brand related stimuli that engage the customers’ senses, emotions and cognitive capabilities, in order to create memorable and unique brand experiences. Furthermore, the study revealed notable associations between the theories and customers’ overall opinion towards the brand and their visit frequency, pointing out that brand experience and perceived service quality have an impact on other consumer behavior-related concepts. Moreover, significant differences in the customers’ evaluation and perception of brand experience and service quality were found, which highlight the attention to adequate customer segmentation and targeting in experiential and service contexts. Finally, the study revealed significant associations between the concepts of brand experience and service quality, directing new scientific consideration towards the complementary design of prior brand experience related to customer perceived service quality.
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List of Abbreviation

BX   =  Brand Experience
BXD  =  Brand Experience Dimension
BXS  =  Brand Experience Scale
CPSQ =  Customer Perceived Service Quality
SQ   =  Service Quality
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1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene

In economic times distinguished by continuously increasing globalization and intensified competition the “progression of economic value”\(^1\) is inexorably evolving to be the central and most controversial phenomenon in marketing science and practice. Nearly twenty years after the original authors, Pine and Gilmore introduced the idea that the order of precedence in business is changing from commodities to goods, to services and finally to experience\(^2\), the penultimate and latter build the core of marketing activities nowadays.

1.2 Service Superiority

For many decades enterprises have been focusing on the pure form of mass manufacturing and selling of commodities and goods. The center of business activities has been represented by the production of tangible goods, which provide exchange benefits for customers.\(^3\) But due to technological advancements and the evolution of increasing competitive pressure in economic reality businesses adopted a more value-centric orientation focusing on service rather than the actual core product.\(^4\) This alteration in marketing practice towards a service-dominant logic replaced the traditional product-attribute-oriented marketing approach.\(^5\) Business activities such as invoicing, complaints handling, documentation offering, customer trainings, enquiry and service failure handling, as well as promise keeping and personal attention paid to customers etc. are becoming ever more prevalent as additional sources of economic value.\(^6\) These formerly underestimated business processes form the customer’s preferences and image towards a certain firm and contribute to a consumption decision.\(^7\) As a matter of fact all products include tangible and intangible elements\(^8\), which convert them into offerings or solutions. Consequently, the service delivering process of these packages is marked as “(…) a major, if not the major success factor for manufacturing companies”\(^9\), emphasizing that services shift into the center of economic exchange\(^10\) and into the focus of marketing interest.

Hence, measuring and analyzing the customer’s perception of service quality (SQ) has become a managerial urge, which provoked the conceptualization of several

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\(^1\) Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.20.
\(^3\) Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.23, p.26; Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, p.5.
\(^5\) Cf. Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, p.15.
\(^6\) Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.3.
\(^7\) Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.3.
\(^8\) Cf. Levitt, 1980, p.84.
\(^9\) Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, p.7. Accentuation of the original authors.
assessment methods. The most appreciated measurement scale SERVQUAL\textsuperscript{11} has developed to provide significant insights into the SQ perception of customer’s and represents a landmark in SQ literature.

1.3 Experience Evolvement

“Goods and services are no longer enough.”\textsuperscript{12}

For marketing reality, the development towards an experience-centric approach implies that the creation and design of experiences represents the source of sustainable competitive advantage and the true differentiation basis for the company’s offerings.\textsuperscript{13} Evident examples of successful business concepts including experiences are Pinchos the world’s first real app restaurant, IKEA the Swedish furniture retailer and Hollister the American lifestyle brand. These companies combine their core-products with meaningful and valuable customer experiences that are evoked by brand-related stimuli, which provide the customer with positive and extraordinary long-term memories and simultaneously add up to the brand’s competitive advantage. In 2002 Shaw and Ivens realized the potential of strong customer experiences and through quoting Ian McAllister, the former Chairman at the Ford Motor Company Ltd:

“In the 1980s quality was a differentiator. In the 1990s, I think brand was a differentiator. My own view is that for the 2000s, the customer experience will be the differentiator.”\textsuperscript{14}

In regards to McAllister’s assessment it is more the combination of all three determinants customer perceived service quality (CPSQ), branding and customer experience that build the center of marketing attention in today’s business markets.\textsuperscript{15} While perceived quality has been already a viral topic in the 1990s\textsuperscript{16}, the improvement of and the differentiation through superior quality represents an imperative for the increasingly service- and customer-centered world. Besides brands have emerged to dominate the markets and thereby provide new sources of economic value.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, customer experiences are inevitable in the contemporary competitive situation and point in the direction of designing the consumption experiences according to brand-related attributes for the future.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, these important determinants CPSQ and brand experience (BX) build the underlying fundament for economic success at the end of the 21st century.

\textsuperscript{11} Parasuraman et al., 1985.
\textsuperscript{12} Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.11.
\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Gentile et al., 2007, p.395.
\textsuperscript{14} Shaw and Ivens, 2002, p.6.
\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Palmer, 2010, p.203.
\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Parasuraman et al., 1985, p.41.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Klaus and Maklan, 2007, p.120.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.52.
1.4 Research Gap and Problematization

In light of the fact that the majority of industrialized economies are composed of service-based businesses, it is no surprise that providing SQ constitutes the supreme priority in today’s business environment.\(^\text{19}\) Since companies increasingly discover difficulties in creating sustainable competitive advantages, attention and resources are directed to the value-added incorporated in services as a proper source of economic superiority.\(^\text{20}\) Regardless the emerging SQ awareness of management executives, most services such as invoicing or complaints handling, remain non-perceived as services, and consequently are lacking a value- and customer-orientated design and management.\(^\text{21}\) By adapting a “(…) short-term goal orientation”\(^\text{22}\) most companies aim attention at a temporary focus on profits, while personal customer contacts remain superficial and non-satisfactory for customers.\(^\text{23}\) As “perceived quality is a key consideration in nearly every consumer choice context”\(^\text{24}\), customers always take advantage from a service perspective implemented by the company, which is the reality only in a minority of cases.\(^\text{25}\) As a result the detailed and adjusted analysis of customers’ perception of SQ is of high practical significance.

The fact that most companies face difficulties regarding the consistency of services provided, points out that the major challenge in service management is the ability to maintain a constantly high CPSQ.\(^\text{26}\) Only “when the service provider understands how services are perceived and evaluated by the users, it will be possible to identify ways of managing these evaluations and influencing them in a desired direction.”\(^\text{27}\) In spite of the fact that SQ issues are a topical marketing insight, recent empirical investigations focusing on the customers’ perception of SQ determinants are limited. In order to investigate the consumers’ view on SQ this study is going to empirically research on the most important CPSQ dimensions, following the subsequent research question.

**RQ1: What are the most important dimensions of customer perceived service quality?**

Equally to the necessity of excellent SQ, brands have emerged to become the core of all modern marketing thoughts and activities.\(^\text{28}\) With increased service competition, companies need to realize that a strong service brand is a crucial

\(^{19}\) Cf. Schmitt, 2003, p.36.
\(^{20}\) Cf. Zeithaml et al., 1990, pp.1f.
\(^{21}\) Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.3.
\(^{24}\) Aaker, 2010, p.123.
\(^{25}\) Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.4.
\(^{26}\) Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.55.
\(^{27}\) Grönroos, 2007, p.72.
\(^{28}\) Cf. Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson, 2017, p.145.
element for creating sustainable competitive advantage. 29 Moreover, the position of consumers in branding contexts is permanently underestimated, which leads to the phenomenon that customers are often recognized as factors of no significant importance in business reality. 30 Despite the indisputable key role of customers, brands still consistently fail at providing customers with positively connoted experiences. 31 Although many companies engage in building strong brands, only a minority focuses on the opportunities arising from the shift to a customer-centric marketing view and the potentials experiences imply. Particularly, since “traditional advertising media such as TV, radio, magazines and newspapers are losing their grip on consumers” 32, the interactions fostering co-creative customer experiences hold the potential for unlocking new origins of competitive advantage. 33

As the need for differentiation drives contemporary economic reality, experience marketing has developed to be the most interesting business insight of the new era of creating unique customer value through experiences. 34 Furthermore, “most branding issues are really brand experience issues or, more precisely, issues of the customer experience with the brand” 35, the centrality of including branding in the experience creation process is emphasized. As a consequence, the relationship between brands and customers’ decision-making process contains important insights into the contemporary global markets and represents a topic lacking more empirical research. 36

Contrasting the evidence that “experiential marketing is everywhere” 37 and against the fact that the concept of designing customer experiences in a unique and valuable manner has shifted into the strategic focus of marketing 38, the existing literature dealing with customer experiences evoked by brands is rather limited. Referring to the fragmented literature in the field of these experiences, this study is going to investigate the brand experience dimensions (BXD) from a customer perspective. As BX are of great significance for business practice, which accentuate them to be of further interest for practitioners and marketing management executives, this study aims to provide relevant insights into the most important determinants of BX seen from a consumer perspective by analyzing the following research question.

32 Keller, 2009, p.141.
35 Schmitt, 2003, p.35. Accentuation of the original author.
36 Cf. Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson, 2017, p.159.
RQ2: What are the most important dimensions of brand experiences?

With rising customer demands and market requirements the consumer as the focal determinant of all business reality appears indispensably in the center of marketing interest.\(^{39}\) Referring to the importance for marketers to be able to target the desired consumer segment adequately, consumer demographics play a further key role in the context of SQ and BX.\(^{40}\) Since “consumer behavior differs with demographic variables”\(^{41}\), the profiling of consumer attitudes and decisions based on demographic characteristics hold essential information of scientific and practical relevance. Particularly, the divergence between male and female consumers’ purchase behavior represents an approved differentiator in customer segmentation.\(^{42}\) Considering that in 2018 the total consumer spending of women worldwide is predicted to account for about 40 trillion U.S. dollars\(^{43}\), the need for implying effective customer targeting focusing especially on gender differences is an unavoidable managerial urge. Consequently, this study calls possible variation in the perception of SQ and BX based on gender differences into question and aims at the analysis of the subsequent research question.

RQ3: Are there any differences in the perception and evaluation of service quality and brand experiences related to gender?

As a matter of fact CPSQ and BX co-created with the customer differentiate the company from competitors.\(^{44}\) Consequently, the “quality depends on the infrastructure for interaction between companies and consumers, oriented around the capacity to create a variety of experiences.”\(^{45}\) For the purpose of improving this SQ and BX design, measuring the customer’s perception is of paramount importance for the practical business implementation. In combination with the conceptualization of the BXS introduced by Brakus et al., (2009) new potential determinants of the customers’ decision making process shift in the focus of marketing interest.\(^{46}\) The fact that SQ and customer experience develop to be the deciding factors for customer satisfaction and loyalty\(^{47}\), highlights the importance and significance of the investigation of possible connections between the BX on the one hand and the CPSQ on the other hand. In literature only limited contribution can be found on the explicit relationship between CPSQ and BX.\(^{48}\) Most researchers such as Chang and Horng (2010) consider it to be an issue for

\(^{39}\) Cf. Evans et al., 2009, p.3.
\(^{40}\) Frow and Payne, 2007, p.93.
\(^{41}\) Evans et al., 2009, p.155.
\(^{43}\) Cf. Catalyst, 2015, Buying Power: Global Women [online].
\(^{44}\) Cf. Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, p.147.
\(^{45}\) Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, p.6.
\(^{46}\) Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.52.
\(^{48}\) Cf. Klaus and Maklan, 2007, p.120.
further studies to “(...) examine the relationship between experience quality, SQ, and outcome variables (such as satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention).”\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in literature by investigating the relationship between BX and CPSQ combining the perception dimension of the SERVQUAL scale with the five dimensions of the brand experience scale (BXS), measuring customer’s prior experiences with the brand. Thus, the present study focuses on the following research question.

**RQ4: Is there a relationship between customer perceived service quality and brand experience?**

### 1.5 Purpose of the Study

Referring to the research questions pointed out above, this study aims for providing essential insights into the BX evaluation and SQ perception processes from a customer perspective, thereby, intensifying the scientific and especially practical contribution to both concepts. Since “achieving a perfect customer experience is a highly desirable goal for organizations wishing to improve customer loyalty and enhance profitability”\textsuperscript{50}, the study attempts to support practitioners by enhancing the empirical basis of customers’ BX assessments in combination with their perception of SQ and the evaluation differences based on gender. Due to the fact that “companies would benefit greatly from learning how other organisations have successfully created outstanding or perfect customer experiences, as viewed by customers”\textsuperscript{51}, this study provides the benchmarking case-company IKEA in order to show evidence for consumers’ SQ and BX judgments in an international and success-related context. Moreover, one further purpose of the study is to discover a relationship between the prior BX and CPSQ, helping organizations to gain a deeper understanding regarding the connection between both concepts in order to successfully implement and adjust them according to customers’ preferences to achieve a competitive advantage and to survive in these vying economic times.

\textsuperscript{49} Chang and Horng, 2010, p.2415.
\textsuperscript{50} Frow and Payne, 2007, p.98.
\textsuperscript{51} Frow and Payne, 2007, p.91.
2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Service Quality

Oriented towards the purpose of the study, the following paragraphs theoretically underpin the conceptualization of services and provide essential insights into the development of service quality as an inevitable source of customer value.

2.1.1 The Relevance of Service

In literature numerous phrases highlighting the importance of service in marketing science such as “With service excellence, everyone wins”\textsuperscript{52}, “Opportunities for profit are higher for services than for products”\textsuperscript{53} and “All goods manufacturers today offer a number of services to their customers”\textsuperscript{54} can be found. In order to fathom the relevance of services for today’s business practice as well as for scientific contribution this chapter focuses on the role that services play beyond these quotations.

2.1.1.1 Defining Service

In marketing tradition the exchange of economic value mostly referred to as manufactured tangible products for money has been acknowledged to be the central business phenomenon since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{55} For more than one decade the center of business activities has been represented by the production of tangible goods, which provided customers with exchange benefits for many years. Neglecting the potential of services, the mainstream marketing literature solely focused on the value embedded in products until the sub-discipline of service marketing in 1980 emerged.\textsuperscript{56} As a result, the concept of value-in-use, according to which value for customers is created when they use physical goods or services, substitutes the former value-in-exchange view.\textsuperscript{57}

Today the term service can bear several meanings and understandings including face-to-face service, service as a product or package, or an even more holistic service offering\textsuperscript{58} and refers to one of the perhaps most controversial concepts in contemporary marketing research. What is usually agreed on in literature is that services are at least to a certain extent produced and consumed at the same time – simultaneously.\textsuperscript{59} Furthermore, researchers accord with the fact that services are

\textsuperscript{52} Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.2.
\textsuperscript{53} Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000, p.11.
\textsuperscript{54} Grönroos, 2007, p.2.
\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.23.
\textsuperscript{56} Cf. Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, p.3.
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Grönroos, 2007 p.27; Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, p.5.
\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, pp.30f.
\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.53.
intangible in nature and experienced in a subjective manner. Moreover, the generally acknowledged IHIP characteristics, including intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability represent common features to differentiate services from physical goods. For the purpose of this study the following definition of services is used:

“A service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees and / or physical resources or goods and / or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems.”

2.1.1.2 Service Sector Replaced

The fact that services developed to “(…) dominate our economies” is unquestioned in today’s business landscape. In the traditional transaction-marketing approach services were classified into the service sector and simultaneously separated from goods. This economic segmentation included the classic service-based or service-dominated industries such as transportation, finances, hospitality, professional service and the public sector. While separating services from goods by applying the traditional segmentation of the economy, services were wrongly characterized to depend on a specific type of organization and the “hidden services” were neglected. These services were mainly considered as bureaucratic, monetary or technological routines which led to the fact that they remained hidden non-services and non-valuable for the company. As a result it is a managerial imperative to exploit the value incorporated in these potential services and to adopt a comprehensive service perspective.

2.1.1.3 Service Economy and Service Competition

“Everyone faces service competition. No one can escape from it.”

In 1999 Pine and Gilmore stated that the boundaries between goods and services lack a clear separation and that the “Service Economy” is on the rise. Similarly, Gustafsson and Johnson (2003) claim that “whether you compete in a traditional service industry or produce physical goods, adding value through services has

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60 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.54, p.74; Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, pp.4f; Kurtz and Clow, 1998, p.24;
Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.15.
61 Cf. Zeithaml, 1990, pp.15f; Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, pp.4f.
62 Grönroos, 2007, p.52. Accentuation of the original author.
63 Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, p.2.
64 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.1.
65 Grönroos, 2007, p.2. Accentuation of the original author.
66 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.3.
67 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.2, p.11.
68 Grönroos, 2007, p.1.
become a way of life.”\textsuperscript{70} The western hemisphere has emerged to be distinguished by its post industrial service economy and service competition represents daily reality for most firms.\textsuperscript{71} This service competition development does not only impact the management requirements but also the categorization of businesses as competition increasingly takes place on the service level, less differentiation between manufacturing and service businesses can be made.\textsuperscript{72} When service competition is a success related factor and all products are “servicefied”\textsuperscript{73} as they are turned into services, “(...) every business is a service business.”\textsuperscript{74} In line with this Vargo and Lush (2004a) as well considered in their concept of a service dominant logic that all economies are classified to be services economies and withal augmented the emerging service-centered view of marketing with the new evolving customer-oriented and relational perspective.\textsuperscript{75}

2.1.2 The Role of Customers

“We services are inherently relational.”\textsuperscript{76}

The cognition that the role of customers has shifted to a more central, if not even the major, pivotal element in business economics, is a universally accepted phenomenon. There has been significant research conducted on several aspects of customer-centered marketing issues, pointing out that they have become a crucial factor in most company’s business strategies, distributing more and more power towards the consumer. Especially, in concepts such as mass customization and modular production customers build the core of the production process.\textsuperscript{77} This development possesses not only the validity for physical goods, as they become increasingly customer oriented; but also, services are developed towards a customer centric logic. Accepting that customers primarily do not buy goods or services separated from each other, in fact they buy offerings or packages including a combination of goods, services, information, delivery, personal attention and other elements\textsuperscript{78}, which comprise value for them, total service offerings provide the solutions to customers’ problems.\textsuperscript{79} According to Berry & Parasuraman (1991) the product customers purchase is referred to as a performance and it is this performance that customers evaluate to proof the SQ.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{70} Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, p.1.
\textsuperscript{71} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.10.
\textsuperscript{72} Cf. Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.2.
\textsuperscript{73} Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000, p.16. Accentuation of the original authors.
\textsuperscript{74} Grönroos, 2007, p.33. Accentuation of the original author.
\textsuperscript{75} Cf. Vargo and Lush, 2004a, p.10.
\textsuperscript{76} Grönroos, 2007, p.8.
\textsuperscript{77} Cf. Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000, p.15.
\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.4, p.30.
\textsuperscript{79} Cf. Levitt, 1980, p.84.
\textsuperscript{80} Cf. Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, p.5.
In the context of the intangibility of services, customer contacts and interactions are essential and therefore characterize services to be relationship-oriented \(^{81}\) and depended on the customer. The important determinant in a service-oriented perspective is that only if customers perceive the customer-brand contacts as valuable and extraordinary they will be willing to build a relationship. \(^{82}\) If the contrary occurs and customers do not perceive sufficient value from the relationship they are likely to terminate the relations. The customer orientation in services does not only represent a strategic element essential for the company’s success but also encourages customers to purchase from the same firm and distracts them to choose alternative service providers, which increases competitiveness in return. In order to create true customers, who are willing to repeat purchasing after a service experience, excellence in service is inevitable. \(^{83}\) In contrast to the classic value exchange perspective, where firms only distribute the ready-made value embedded in the core product to the customer, the service perspective includes the customer directly into the value creation process. \(^{84}\) This mutual process of co-creation adds a new perspective on customers operating as “service engineers” \(^{85}\), which contribute to the formation of new service innovations and ideas. These buyer-service provider interactions are referred to as “service encounters” \(^{86}\) and build the basis for value-generating service processes. Every customer contact holds the opportunity to make customers participate in a better service than prior experience prepares them to expect. \(^{87}\) In a broad sense services represent the values, with which businesses are competing, in the relationship with customers. \(^{88}\)

2.1.3 Customer Perceived Service Quality

Combining the increased importance of services in today’s competitive landscape \(^{89}\) with the emerging powerful position of customers in the value creation process \(^{90}\), the key success factor is SQ. In line with this, Berry and Parasuraman (1991) claim that the most famous marketing model – the four Ps – is missing a Q-perspective for quality, because none of the other four aspects would function without the consideration of quality. \(^{91}\) Customers interact with firms because they perceive more value in their offerings or packages than in the

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82 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.8.
84 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.28; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, p.5.
85 Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, p.6.
86 Grönroos, 2007, p.73; Gummesson 2008, p.82.
88 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.11.
89 Cf. Gustafsson and Johnson, 2003, p.25.
90 Cf. De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998, pp.8f.
offerings of competitors. Consequently, quality improvements on services must be done from the customer perspective, because only when customers perceive the service efforts made by the business, quality turns into a strategic benefit.

As a result of the service characteristics intangibility and inseparability SQ is harder to evaluate for customers than the quality of goods and therefore customers must experience the service to be able to judge the SQ accordingly. Consequently, the experiential nature of services makes it even harder for companies to promote their service. Customers construe the SQ and include the service delivery procedure into their perceived SQ and do not only focus on the pure service result. Referring to Grönroos and the model of total perceived SQ introduced in 1984 there are two dimensions distinguishing the quality of services perceived by customers. On the one hand the technical dimension of quality related to the actual outcome of a service, that is what customers receive while collaborating with the service provider. On the other hand the functional dimension of SQ referring to the process of service production and consumption. Accordingly, customers are to a great extent influenced by their perception of how the technical quality is conveyed. Therefore, Grönroos (2007) provides seven criteria of good perceived SQ combining the technical quality dimension professionalism and skills, the filter dimension reputation and credibility with five functional SQ dimensions namely “attitudes and behaviour, accessibility and flexibility, reliability and trustworthiness and service recovery” and the physical service surroundings. What links both dimensions is the fact that it is the quality perceived by the customer that counts in service management. As a consequence, the central aspect of enhancing SQ is matching or excelling customers’ service expectations both technical and functional. Although both dimensions have an impact on the customer’s perceived SQ, in order to differentiate and to benefit from a sustainable competitive advantage it is beneficial for companies to develop and enhance especially the functional dimension of services, due to the fact that it is less often the core product that causes dissatisfaction or negative experiences, than the service activities surrounding it.

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92 Cf. Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.11.
94 Cf. Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.16.
100 Grönroos, 2007, p.89.
101 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.73; Zeithaml et al., 1990, p. 9, p.16.
103 Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.31.
Grönroos (1984) and his disconfirmation construct of CPSQ reveals that the deciding degree of CPSQ depends not solely on the level of the technical and functional quality dimensions implemented, but rather on the gap between the quality expectations customers hold compared to their service production process and consumption experiences.\textsuperscript{104} The center of all service marketing activities is matching the service production and service consumption process, in order that customers perceive good SQ and continue purchasing from the same business.\textsuperscript{105} Referring to Zeithaml et al. (1990) and their definition of CPSQ, which “(...) can be defined as the extent of discrepancy between customers’ expectations or desires and their perceptions”\textsuperscript{106} the necessity to close the gap between customers’ expectations and the service reality in economic practice is revealed.

2.1.4 SERVQUAL

Through an extensive literature review several SQ measurements such as customer panels or transaction-based customer surveys\textsuperscript{107} were found, though today attribute-based measurement instruments build the predominantly used basis both for academic science and business practice. In 1985 Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry introduced a milestone in SQ research - the measurement scale SERVQUAL\textsuperscript{108} illustrated in figure 1. The model recognizes the fact that customer judgments about high or low quality rely on their actual service experience compared to their service expectations by condensing the scale into 44 items (22 expectation items and 22 perception items).\textsuperscript{109} The multi-item method

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure_1.png}
\caption{Conceptual Framework SERVQUAL, Source: Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.46.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{104} Cf. Grönroos, 1984, p.40.
\textsuperscript{105} Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000, p.15.
\textsuperscript{106} Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.19. Accentuation of the original authors.
\textsuperscript{107} Zeithaml et al., 1990, pp.57f.
\textsuperscript{108} Parasuraman et al., 1985, pp.41-50.
\end{flushright}
measuring customers’ expectations and perceptions along five categories, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy has found wide contribution both in academic and practical research.

The first item category tangibles refers to the “(…) appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials”\textsuperscript{110}. Especially in service contexts it is of high relevance to provide customers with tangible contact points.\textsuperscript{111} For the purpose of “tangibilizing”\textsuperscript{112} the service offering, implementing as much physical reference elements as possible that evoke associations with the firm is inevitable. These tangible elements such as stationery, staff uniforms and dress codes, office decoration and brochures are supposed to convey consistency with the firm’s service and should avoid promising more than the actual service process is able to deliver.\textsuperscript{113} Additionally, Bitner (1992) introduced the concept of “servicescapes”\textsuperscript{114}, which refers to the physical surroundings that can enhance the customers’ perception of the brand. “Those factors include an endless list of possibilities, such as lighting, color, signage, textures, quality of materials, style of furnishings, layout, wall decor, temperature, and so on”\textsuperscript{115} all aimed at creating a visual contribution to the firm’s offering and to differentiate the company’s service environment from competitors.\textsuperscript{116} As Yavas et al. (2004) reveal the improvement of tangible elements surrounding the service lead to higher levels of consumer commitment.\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore, the design of personnel dressing plays an essential role in the SQ evaluation process of consumers.\textsuperscript{118} Empirical evidence that “(…) there is an indication that the buying environment may play a much more important role for women consumers whereas men may be able to fulfill their main concerns relatively easily in either environment”\textsuperscript{119}, was also found in literature.

The second dimension reliability focuses on the “(…) ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.”\textsuperscript{120} The empirical investigations made by Berry and Parasuraman (1991) reveal that it is the primary determinant customers take into consideration when evaluating SQ.\textsuperscript{121} Additionally, providing customers with excellent service experiences the first time reduces expenses due to the fact that it is less costly to maintain satisfied existing customers than to

\textsuperscript{110} Parasuraman et al., 1988, p.23.
\textsuperscript{111} Cf. De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998, p.222.
\textsuperscript{112} De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998, p.223.
\textsuperscript{113} Cf. De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998, p.223.
\textsuperscript{114} Bitner, 1992, p.58.
\textsuperscript{115} Bitner, 1992, p.62.
\textsuperscript{116} Cf. Bitner, 1992, p.66.
\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Yavas et al., 2004, p.153.
\textsuperscript{118} Cf. Shao et al., 2005, p.9.
\textsuperscript{119} Dittmar et al., 2004, p.424.
\textsuperscript{120} Parasuraman et al., 1988, p.23.
\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, p.16.
acquire a new customer base. Moreover, “the duration of the wait influences not only customers’ postservice satisfaction but also their prior decision regarding which service provider to visit.”

Similar influences of consumers’ perceptions of reliability on their complaint and switching behavior were found by Yavas et al. (2004). As a result, the reliability of service affects both the cost saving strategies of the company and the customers’ service supplier choice and evaluation. Possible reasons for this high appraisal of the reliability aspect related to SQ could be found in consumers’ strive for minimizing risks and the avoiding of unnecessary uncertainties, which lead to ambiguity in the shopping process. Further contributing to the importance of the reliability dimension, “(...) it can be argued that women place more emphasis on the dependability of service and accuracy of information.”

The next section responsiveness relates to the company’s “(...) willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.” The elements related to personal touch and consumer-service-provider contacts embedded in the dimension of responsiveness refer to helpfulness, and promptness of the service delivery process. These service attributes are highly appreciated by customers and pertaining to the empirical investigations conducted by Babbar and Koufteros (2008) determine the customers’ perception of SQ and level of service satisfaction. Additionally, similar empirical results have been found by Yavas et al. (2004), highlighting the impact of the service provider’s responsiveness on customers’ decision making and satisfaction. Further observations revealed that especially female customers tend to assign a greater importance on interpersonal communications in service contexts.

The fourth division assurance focuses on “(...) knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.” According to Jones and Shandiz (2015) the assurance dimension varies in the customer’s importance depending on the degree to what the service is associated with high-risk or high-price decisions. Additionally, the empirical study undertaken by Delcourt et al. (2017) highlights the importance of employees’ emotional and technical
competence for enhancing the service experience.\textsuperscript{135} By demonstrating high levels of knowledge and technical skills necessary to answer consumers’ questions frontline personnel positively influences the customers’ assurance-related perception of SQ.\textsuperscript{136} Referring to Noble et al. (2006) notably men put more emphasize on the gathering of information compared to their female counterpart.\textsuperscript{137}

Finally, the item dimension of \textit{empathy} includes the aspect of “(…) caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers.”\textsuperscript{138} Much scientific attention has been distributed to the importance of interpersonal communications in service settings. The majority of these studies points in the direction that the relational aspects in the service production and consumption process enhances the customer-service provider connection, the consumers’ commitment and the building of consumer trust.\textsuperscript{139} Especially, in earlier phases of a service relationship the interpersonal related aspects of service providers’ personnel such as empathy and politeness show a great impact on customer trust.\textsuperscript{140} Moreover, particularly female consumers emphasize the interpersonal attributes of service providers as a result of their increased relationship-orientation.\textsuperscript{141} Employee-contacts appear throughout literature to have a higher effect on women\textsuperscript{142} supporting the tendency that they put more emphasize on personal attention, communications and the aspects of caring. Following the rank-order probed by the empirical study undertaken by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), customers do include \textit{reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles}, in this anticlimactic order into their SQ judgments.\textsuperscript{143}

Conceptualized in order to measure CPSQ the SERVQUAL methodology offers relevant and significant insights, but also has been accused by numerous criticisms. Most criticism is directed towards the gap methodology underlying SERVQUAL. Whereas the perceptions of customers are possible to measure and define, the customers’ expectations include interpretations and definitions of wide scope.\textsuperscript{144} Following the definition of Kurtz and Clow (1998) expectations represent pretrial beliefs about the service performance customers hold in their mind.\textsuperscript{145} These beliefs depend on several other factors influencing the customers’

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{135} Cf. Delcourt et al., 2017, p.97.
\textsuperscript{136} Cf. Wu et al., 2015, p.231.
\textsuperscript{137} Cf. Noble et al., 2006, p.184.
\textsuperscript{138} Parasuraman et al., 1988, p.23.
\textsuperscript{139} Cf. Matute et al., 2018, p.353.
\textsuperscript{140} Cf. Coulter and Coulter, 2002, p.44.
\textsuperscript{141} Cf. Karatepe, 2011, pp.293f.
\textsuperscript{143} Cf. Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, p.16.
\end{flushright}
SQ expectations. Word-of-mouth communications, individual consumer characteristics and needs, external communications provided by the firm and past BX are typical variables having an impact on the creation of customers’ service expectations.\textsuperscript{146}

2.2 The Ubiquity of Branding

In today’s markets brands are indispensable\textsuperscript{147}. Therefore, the subsequent chapter deals with the theoretical contributions regarding the importance of brands in the context of an experience-driven and customer-centric economy.

2.2.1 The Relevance of Brands

The development of the predominance of brands in the business landscape is ascribed back to the beginnings of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when companies realized the potentials comprised in branding.\textsuperscript{148} Creating brands as the central marketing phenomenon provides firms with the possibility to differentiate and stand out from competition\textsuperscript{149} and simultaneously facilitates the decision-making process for customers.\textsuperscript{150} Hence, succeeding in building a strong brand adds intangible value to the offering\textsuperscript{151}, “even things we do not traditionally think of as brands are now being treated and marketed as such.”\textsuperscript{152}

While traditional branding was limited to packaged goods mostly, in the last decades the importance of branding for services emerged to be an essential element of marketing reality.\textsuperscript{153} Certainly, classic brand elements such as names, logos and phrases still contribute to the perception of the brand as a whole, but it is the service production process that should be in the center of service brands, since it is the very first image a customer receives when evaluating a brand.\textsuperscript{154} Due to the intangibility of services it is not possible to market product brands solely, for services the company brand as a whole is of paramount importance.\textsuperscript{155} Therefore, the sum of customer’s contacts with the brand distinguishes the relationship towards the brand and marks the customer to be the deciding constructor of the brand.\textsuperscript{156} Likewise, De Chernatony and McDonald (1998) divide the branding process in the branding as an input generated by the marketers

\textsuperscript{146} Cf. Grönroos, 1984, p.37; Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.19.
\textsuperscript{147} Cf. Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson, 2017, p.145.
\textsuperscript{148} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.329.
\textsuperscript{150} Cf. Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson, 2017, p.16.
\textsuperscript{151} Cf. Keller, 2009, p.140.
\textsuperscript{152} Schmitt, 1999, p.54.
\textsuperscript{154} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.330.
\textsuperscript{156} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.331, p.333.
and the actual branding as an output as brand image perceived by the customer, highlighting the significant role customers play in the creation of brands.\textsuperscript{157}

Resulting from the increased attention paid to the theory of branding in order to achieve a competitive advantage and to tie consumers to the firm’s offerings, an extensive variety of definitions of a brand in marketing literature exist. One of the most acknowledged definition given by Grönroos (2007) provides a holistic view on brands including services and the extension of solution packages and a relational approach having the customer-brand relationship in focus:

“A brand is created in continuously developing brand relationships where the customer forms a differentiating image of a physical good, a service or a solution including goods, services, information and other elements, based on all kinds of brand contacts that the customer is exposed to.”\textsuperscript{158}

Similarly, Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson (2017) highlight the customers’ role in the branding process by defining that “the quality of a product, the experience and the satisfaction the consumer derived from the previous consumption of it, is objectified in the brand.”\textsuperscript{159} In spite of the fact that both approaches include a customer-centric view and the latter explicitly refers to customer’s experiences, the definition provided by Grönroos (2007) appears to be more comprehensive and service-oriented, matching the purpose of the study more accurately.

In a business environment where brands are ubiquitous and the markets are saturated with ordinary brands, consumers strive for steady innovation, novelty and extraordinary value added beyond the original product.\textsuperscript{160} As a result, brands are no longer attributes accompanying the firm’s products and offerings but rather build the source for differentiating and enhancing the customer’s experiences.\textsuperscript{161}

\textbf{2.2.2 Experience Economy}

“Experiences represent an existing but previously unarticulated genre of economic output.”\textsuperscript{162}

In an abating goods-focused world experiences represent a new and necessary source of value\textsuperscript{163} and influence the successfulness of companies.\textsuperscript{164} Referring to the progression “while commodities are fungible, goods tangible, and services intangible, experiences are memorable”\textsuperscript{165}, Pine and Gilmore (1999) accentuate the evolution of economic value. Accordingly, experiences serve as an

\textsuperscript{157} Cf. De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998, pp.18f.
\textsuperscript{158} Grönroos, 2007, p.334.
\textsuperscript{159} Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson, 2017, p.16.
\textsuperscript{160} Cf. Hirschmann, 1984, p.117.
\textsuperscript{161} Cf. Schmitt, 1999, p.54.
\textsuperscript{162} Pine and Gilmore, 1999. p.ix.
\textsuperscript{163} Cf. Pine and Gilmore, 2011, p.17.
\textsuperscript{164} Cf. Gentile et al., 2007, p. 395.
\textsuperscript{165} Pine and Gilmore, 1999, pp.11f.
enhancement of services, which consequently replaces the notion “Service Economy” by the concept of the “Experience Economy”. In contrast to classic product offerings experiences are naturally personal and can barely be staged without engaging the consumer. The idea of “experientializing” goods enhances the company’s ability to customize their offering in order to create consumer unique value, which in return represents the interface between experiences and the individual customer.

2.2.3 Customer Experience

The central concept arising from the experience-driven economy is the advancement of the classical transaction-based approach of customer relationship to the more extended conception of customer experience. Although, “we experience things all the time, no matter what we do”, marketing research has uncovered that customer experience as an economic entity occurs, “(…) when consumers search for products, when they shop for them and receive service, and when they consume them.” The first who introduced the idea of the existence of an experiential dimension in consumer behavior theory were Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). Following their view of the experiential consumption process consumers steadily pursue the three F’s “fantasies, feelings, and fun”. In line with that, Schmitt’s (1999) conceptualization of customer experience views the creation of experiences through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational values as a central element, building the cornerstone for the development of experiential marketing.

In 2005 Shaw and Ivens predicted that “the customer experience will be the next business tsunami”, emphasizing the new experience era. While due to the ubiquity of communication channels the number of contacts between customers and the firm increases, the academic and practice related literature focusing on customer’s experiences is growing rapidly. Thereby, the emerging importance of considering experiences arising from these touch points in the daily business reality is emphasized. Referring to the probably most accepted definition of experience marketing in literature given by Gentile et al. (2007), the concept of experience marketing is completely personal as it relies on the customers’ individual perceptions. Furthermore, it indicates a customer’s participation

166 Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.15.
168 Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.16.
170 Cf. Gentile et al., 2007, p.396.
171 Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 2000, p.35.
172 Brakus et al., 2009, p.52.
173 Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p.132.
175 Shaw and Ivens, 2005, p.1. Accentuation of the original authors.
resulting from the customers’ response to a variety of interactions with the company, its offerings or other parts of the organization, which encourages the customer to react. \textsuperscript{177} Similarly, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) also stated that experiences are not simply perceived by consumers in a multisensory way, but that consumers do react to these stimuli, and therefore placing interaction in the center of the subject of experience marketing. \textsuperscript{178} In accordance Prahalad et al. (2004) point out that value perceived by customers is embedded in personalized experiences resulting from active involvement rather than it is added to products, or created by services. \textsuperscript{179} In this perspective, the functional, social and emotional consumption values \textsuperscript{180} included in the experience and perceived by customers shift to the fore. As a result, “the ultimate goal of experiential marketing is to create holistic experiences that integrate individual experiences into a holistic Gestalt.” \textsuperscript{181}

In line with this aim, empirical investigations on customer preferences revealed that the resulting purchase intentions are mainly influenced by customers’ perceived experiences. \textsuperscript{182} Due to the clutter of information and product offerings in today’s crowded marketplaces enhancing the customer experience increases the potential for a purchase decision. \textsuperscript{183} Provided that customers aspire towards positive consumption experiences, the relationship between the customer and the company is enhanced, when positively connoted experiences take place. Similarly, the customer’s loyalty and emotional commitment to the firm is fostered by the effective implementation of favorable customer experiences. \textsuperscript{184} “Moreover, the firm’s success is influenced directly when providing proper customer experiences, for the reason that these experiences function as differentiators and competitive advantages as well as revenue generators and cost reducers.” \textsuperscript{185} Nonetheless, the view of customer experiences described above neglects the core function “(...) of a brand as a rich source of sensory, affective, and cognitive associations that result in memorable and rewarding brand experiences: Brand = EX.” \textsuperscript{186}

\textsuperscript{177} Cf. Gentile et al., 2007, p.397.
\textsuperscript{178} Cf. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p.132.
\textsuperscript{179} Cf. Prahalad et al., 2004, p.5.
\textsuperscript{181} Schmitt, 1999, p.53.
\textsuperscript{182} Cf. Gentile et al., 2007, p.396.
\textsuperscript{183} Cf. Wolf, 1999, p.63.
\textsuperscript{184} Cf. Gentile et al., 2007, p.404.
\textsuperscript{185} Shaw and Ivens, 2005, p.9.
\textsuperscript{186} Schmitt, 1999, p.57.
2.2.4 Brand Experience

In spite of the fact that researchers have recognized the relevance of how customers experience brands for the implementation of marketing strategies, former investigations mostly focused on the product attributes and classification of experiences, but rarely on experiences evoked by brands. Additionally, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) highlight that in a customer-oriented view “the experience is the brand”. Along the lines with Brakus et al., (2009) and their conceptualization of “(...) brand experience as subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”, BX are induced by incentives provided by the brand which stimulate customers inner personal and behavioral reactions. Against the customer experience perspective provided by Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982), Gentile et al. (2007) and others the definition given by Brakus et al. (2009) directly links the experience to brands.

For the reason that BXs appear in an array of contexts, whenever there are direct or indirect touch-points between the brand and the customer, the BX perceived by the customer is a critical success-factor determining the effective implementation of marketing strategies in the daily business routine. In addition BXs are characterized by different intensity and strength levels, provoked by the brand. While “the interesting is more memorable than the boring in brands as in people”, Aaker (2010) highlights that the brand’s remarkableness can vary depending on the extraordinary offered by the brand. Due to the fact that BX can appear expected or unexpected they do not require the customer to be surprised or motivated in order to participate in BXs. Even when the customer does not hold a personal tie or curiosity in the brand, stimuli related to the brand can affect the customer and create a BX.

2.2.5 The Brand Experience Scale

While Schmitt (1999) originally proposed five dimensions for customer experiences: sense, feel, think, act and relate, for the purpose of planning, assessing and measuring the BX Brakus et al. (2009), proposed the BXS

189 Brakus et al., 2009, p.53.
190 Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.65.
191 Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.53.
194 Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.53.
consisting of 12 items along the four dimensions sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual.\(^{196}\)

The sensory dimension focuses on the customers’ perceptions of sensory stimuli provided by the brand appealing to the customers’ senses and the degree to which the impressions of customers’ are influenced by these.\(^{197}\) Referring to “the more effectively an experience engages the senses, the more memorable it will be”\(^ {198}\), the most important experience determinants observed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) were the memorability and uniqueness of the occurrence induced by a proper implementation of sensory stimuli. For the purpose of enhancing the experiential aspect of a brand’s offering it is essential to add elements that enable customers’ sensory interaction with the brand.\(^ {199}\) Additionally, Schmitt (1999) reveals that experiential marketing and especially sensory elements intensify the BX.\(^ {200}\) In accordance, Krishna (2012), defines sensory marketing as “marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior,”\(^ {201}\) emphasizing the important role that sensory stimuli play for the customer’s brand preferences. Empirical research focusing on the Asian airline industry conducted by Lin (2015) revealed that for three out of six analyzed airlines the sensory BXD had the major impact on brand equity.\(^ {202}\) Similarly, the more recent study conducted by Moreira et al., (2017) points out that BXs are increased by the means of multisensory stimulation, which in return leads to increased purchase intention.\(^ {203}\) Regarding gender, female customers appeared to be more attracted by sensory stimuli than their male counterparts and especially the multisensory percipience of BX affects women more directly\(^ {204}\) as they are characterized to have higher attentive and absorptive capacities in their information processing.\(^ {205}\)

In contrast the affective dimension of BX represents the level of emotional connection between the brand and the customer by concentrating on the induced feelings and sentiments involved.\(^ {206}\) In the event that customers’ perceive positive feelings while interacting with a certain brand, an emotional benefit is offered by the brand.\(^ {207}\) According to the empirical investigations conducted by Ding and Tseng (2015) the implementation of emotions as experiential elements of the

\(^{196}\) Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.65.
\(^{197}\) Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.57
\(^{198}\) Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.59.
\(^{200}\) Cf. Schmitt, 1999, p.61
\(^{201}\) Krishna, 2012, p.333.
\(^{202}\) Cf. Lin, 2015, p.2258.
\(^{203}\) Cf. Moreira et al., 2017, p.80.
\(^{204}\) Cf. Dittmar et al., 2004, p.440.
\(^{205}\) Cf. Costa et al., 2001, p.328; Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
\(^{206}\) Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.57.
brand contributes to enhancing the customer’s brand loyalty. Similar results were found by Lin (2015), supporting the importance of a customer’s commitment to a brand. Since “(...) males, who are normally reluctant to disclose their intimate feelings such as those that imply any weakness or dependence on others or vulnerability”, the focus on affective elements in the BX appears to be women-oriented.

The behavioral dimension contrarily focuses on the ability of the brand to engage customers in physical activities and to bodily experience the brand. As Pine and Gilmore (1999) claim, “in the Experience Economy, people seek to perform a wide variety of activities”, the behavioral aspects included in the customer-brand relationship are central to the enhancement of experiences. Recent empirical contributions to the bodily experiences and action orientation of brands suggest that consumers are likely to rate the importance of these aspects very high, affecting brand relationship quality and brand loyalty. Regarding gender differences related to this dimension of BX, there is hardly scientific contribution found.

Moreover, the intellectual dimension deals with the extent consumers’ thinking, curiosity and problem solving is encouraged by the brand. In light of the fact that the cognitive dimension represents a rather complex and difficult dimension, empirical investigations are limited and the previous research that does exist, state that the intellectual dimension influences brand satisfaction and brand equity only to a small degree. Similarly, the empirical observations by Shim et al. (2015) came to the conclusion that there is no significant association between the cognitive elements of BX and consumers’ brand loyalty. Again further academic evidence for this dimension is rare, especially including variance based on gender.

The relational or social dimension has been added to these four dimensions, in order to contribute to the aspects that this study focuses on the relationship between BX and SQ which are by definition relational concepts highlighting the significance of customers’ social interaction. Furthermore, empirical research revealed that the social elements of BX affect customer satisfaction and loyalty as

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208 Cf. Ding and Tseng, 2015, p.1010.
210 Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
211 Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.60.
212 Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.15.
214 Cf. Cleff et al., 2018, p.20.
215 Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.60.
217 Cf. Shim et al., 2015, p.68.
well as the customers’ commitment to the brand.\textsuperscript{219} Referring to gender differences empirical investigations revealed that women are more relationship-orientated and tend to put more emphasize on the social interaction with brands.\textsuperscript{220} Moreover, especially female customers seem to be more engaged with social interaction than males, due to their higher need for affiliation and interpersonal contacts.\textsuperscript{221}

Besides the conceptualization of the BXD Brakus et al., (2009) identified positive behavioral impacts of BX directly on consumer satisfaction and loyalty and indirectly on brand personality.\textsuperscript{222} In line with this Dolbec and Chebat (2013) in their study detected that positive experiences result in the customer being affected through emotions, cognition and bodily experiences.\textsuperscript{223} Another empirical investigation directly made use of the BXS by focusing on the segmentation of experiential consumers directing their intention towards the predictability of consumer behavior.\textsuperscript{224} Regardless of the increased interest in the contexts surrounding the BXS, most empirical contributions focused on consumer behavior relevant theories like loyalty, satisfaction and the consumer types. What is absent in literature is the investigation in relations between CPSQ and their prior BX.

### 2.3 The Relationship Between Customer Perceived Service Quality and Brand Experience

As these earlier theoretical contributions emphasize the conceptualizations of SQ and BX are of high scientific and practical relevance, building two critical determinants for the customers’ evaluation process and in the long-term perspective for the success of firms in today’s brand-dominated and experience-seeking business markets.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Customer Perceived Service Quality}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{219} Cf. Nysveen and Pedersen, 2014, p.816.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Cf. Noble et al., 2006, p.186.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Cf. Noble et al., 2006, p.186.
\item \textsuperscript{222} Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.65.
\item \textsuperscript{223} Cf. Dolbec and Chebat, 2013, p.461.
\item \textsuperscript{224} Cf. Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010, p.539.
\end{itemize}
In light of the fact that customers’ past experiences with a certain brand have the ability to influence customers’ expectations of a service or offering provided by the brand\textsuperscript{225}, it is necessary to draw the attention on the possible interrelationship between CPSQ and their prior BX. This context is illustrated in figure 2. Additionally, Edvardsson (2005) as cited in Enquist et al., (2007) emphasizes that “contemporary service quality is focused on favourable customer experiences”\textsuperscript{226}, thereby highlighting the topicality of the interconnectedness of these two meaningful concepts. Pursuing “a focus on customer experience instead of service alone will encourage brand managers to understand the value that customers derive from their offers in a more profound and substantial manner and in this sense, reinforce the traditional role of brands as fundamental to value creation in competitive markets.”\textsuperscript{227}

\textsuperscript{225} Cf. Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.19.

\textsuperscript{226} Edvardsson, 2005, cited by Enquist et al., 2007, p.391.

\textsuperscript{227} Klaus and Maklan, 2007, p.120.
3 Methodology

3.1 Quantitative Study Design

In the interest of investigating the answers connected to the study’s research questions a quantitative study design was chosen. As this study attempts to provide significant insights in BX and CPSQ the necessary empirical data collection took place by carrying out a cross-national online survey. In order to reach more respondents and to receive reliable and comprehensive statistical results the method of conducting an anonymous questionnaire has been preferred compared to administering personal interviews. Additionally, due to the nature of the two chosen focal theoretical concepts SERVQUAL and the BXS, conducting a quantitative study method appeared to be the superior option for measuring consumer evaluations and perceptions.

3.2 The Case of IKEA

In light of the fact that the study focuses on customers’ personal shopping experiences, and nonetheless following the aim of generalizing the results the Swedish retailer IKEA was chosen as the survey’s case-company. For simplification reasons and to avoid misunderstandings in the conducting of the questionnaire this study implemented the case of IKEA. By making use of the special case of IKEA it is ensured that all participants had the same business concept in mind while filling out the questionnaire, which is necessary to reduce falsification of data. The reasons behind the study’s choice of IKEA are inter alia the company’s worldwide recognition due to the 355 stores in 29 countries\(^\text{228}\), the outstanding and unique business concept and the successful implementation of BXs. Moreover, among researchers IKEA is a common and benchmarking example for an impressive “values-based service brand”\(^\text{229}\), which indicates that its business concept matches the requirements of providing relevant information on the possible relationship between SQ and BX provided by a strong brand. A further motivation for the selection of IKEA as the survey case-company is related to the geographical circumstances, due to the fact that the study was executed in large part focusing on respondents in Sweden, IKEA’s country of origin.

3.3 Questionnaire and Sample

For this quantitative study a questionnaire consisting of 39 different questions or items was conducted in English and consigned to a convenient sample via the online survey instrument “Umfrage Online”\(^\text{230}\). The target population for this

\(^{228}\) Cf. INGKA Holding B.V., 2017, pp.2-3.

\(^{229}\) Edvardsson et al., 2006, p.235.

\(^{230}\) Marbot, 2018, Umfrage Online, [online].
quantitative study consisted of consumers that have experienced both BX on the one and SQ on the other hand. For the purpose of this study the sampling frame is limited to consumers that are familiar with IKEA and that have at least once visited an IKEA store. In order to meet this target population appropriately the study employed a combination of a convenient sample\textsuperscript{231}, respondents that are familiar and easy assessable, and a snowball sample\textsuperscript{232}, due to the fact that the respondents were asked to send the survey to friends and family. Regarding the sample size it is necessary to represent the desired population in an adequate manner; consequently, to increase the reliability of the study at least 300 respondents were required.\textsuperscript{233} In view of the necessity of reaching a large sample for this study the questionnaires were sent out online via E-mail, WhatsApp and social-media channels such as Facebook. Other sources of respondents were specific networks such as the Mid Sweden University’s online portal and the equivalent student portal from FH Aachen. Making use of a computer-assisted data collection implies the advantage of gathering the results instantaneously and detecting inconsistencies dependably.\textsuperscript{234} For the purpose of the study’s focus on a cross-national sample the use of a web-based survey method represented an effective, cost-efficient and timely-adequate procedure for reaching a sufficient amount of sample units from different countries.

The questionnaire was supposed to be completed by the respondents directly and self-administrative without any type of aid interviewer, which minimized interviewer errors\textsuperscript{235}, social desirability bias\textsuperscript{236} and the manipulation of respondents.\textsuperscript{237} One further advantage of self-administered procedures is emphasized by the increased time for reflection and thinking.\textsuperscript{238} When relying on the respondents and their commitment to the survey it is important to keep it interesting, clear and short in order to motivate. As a consequence, the survey included an explanatory covering letter proving the study’s value and scientific relevance.

3.4 Choice of Questions and Measurements

For the purpose of collecting data according to the four research questions the questionnaire has been divided into three parts. The first part of the survey began with four questions focusing on the respondents’ interaction frequency with and

\textsuperscript{231} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.679.
\textsuperscript{232} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.685.
\textsuperscript{234} Cf. Fowler, 2014, p.70.
\textsuperscript{235} Definition Interviewer Error: “a source of error in personal interviews due to the impression the respondent has of the interviewer and the way the interviewer asks questions, follows up partial answers and records the responses.” Aaker et al., 2011, p.681.
\textsuperscript{236} Cf. Fowler, 2014, p.95.
\textsuperscript{237} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.230.
\textsuperscript{238} Cf. Fowler, 2014, p.66.
attitude towards IKEA. Not only essential information was gathered by these questions but also the participants were introduced into the topic in a simple and appealing way. In order to keep the questionnaire short, clear and to exclude participants that do not know IKEA the questions besides the frequency of IKEA visits and the overall attitude was carried out by simple ‘Yes or No’ questions. For participants that do not know IKEA the survey ended here, because including their responses would have caused distortion of results. In order to answer question Q3: ‘How regularly do you visit IKEA?’ the respondents were given frequency categories ranging from ‘Less than Once a Year’ up to ‘More than Once a Month’. This facilitated the coding and avoided subjective interpretations of wordings such as ‘Sometimes’ or ‘Seldom’. The last question directly related to the participants’ relationship to IKEA focused on the general opinion towards the brand. Therefore, the respondents were provided five categories starting with ‘Very Positive’ and ending with ‘Very Negative’. This method of measuring the respondents’ opinion by implementing a balanced scale instead of open field questions simplified the comparability and coding of results.

The following questions included in the survey were derived or directly taken from the two focal theory concepts the BXS introduced by Brakus et al., (2009)\textsuperscript{239} and Parasuraman et al., (1985)\textsuperscript{240} SERVQUAL applications. To guide the participants along the thematic subdivision of the BXS and to balance the quantity of questions within the categories two\textsuperscript{241} statements (items) per dimension were presented and the degree of approval from the customers was asked. In order to provide a logical sequence of questions the order of questions relates to the dimensional perspectives of the relevant concepts.

For the first BXD sensory the survey participants were asked to evaluate the sensory interest and visual or other sensory appeal evoked by IKEA. The second dimension affective focused on one statement referring to the consumers’ feelings and sentiments stimulated by IKEA and the evaluation of the statement ‘IKEA is an Emotional Brand’. Similarly, the fourth BXD behavioral provided the respondents with one item investigating in their bodily experiences at IKEA, while the second item ‘IKEA is Action-Oriented’ referred more generally to the perception of the BX concept. For the intellectual BXD the respondents were asked to evaluate the cognitive stimulations ‘thinking’ and ‘curiosity’ evoked by the brand. Finally, the last BXD social contained three statements which included aspects of social interaction while experiencing IKEA.

\textsuperscript{239} Cf. Brakus et al., 2009, p.60.
\textsuperscript{240} Cf. Parasuraman et al., 1985, p.31.
\textsuperscript{241} Only in the social dimension three items were used.
Generally, the BX S has gained scientific reputation and “psychometrically, the scale is internally consistent and consistent across samples and studies.”\textsuperscript{242} For the purpose of evaluating the dimensional item parts the chosen measurement scale was a five-point Likert scale consisting of the following response categories ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Rather Agree’, ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’, ‘Rather Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’. Likert scales or summated scales are common approach in scientific research and “require a respondent to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with a variety of statements related to the attitude or object.”\textsuperscript{243}

After the five BXD the participants were asked to rank their overall attitude towards their BX at IKEA by utilizing the Likert scale stated above. The next question referred to an importance rating focusing on research question RQ2. Here the participants were supposed to execute an importance ranking including a five-point Likert scale including ‘Very Important’, ‘Rather Important’, ‘Neither Important nor Unimportant’, ‘Rather Unimportant’ and ‘Very Unimportant’ for every BXD. For the reason of ensuring that all participants understand the meaning and relevant aspects of the five BXDs this importance ranking was implemented subsequently to the dimensional item evaluation part.

The second part of the survey focused on the concept of SQ perceived by the respondents. Equally to the items of the BXS as well the five dimensions of SERVQUAL were represented by three (or two) statements each, which were supposed to be answered by the five-point Likert scale. The first SQ dimension tangibles included three statements referring to IKEA’s implementation of physical surroundings such as interior arrangement, staff uniforms and the modernity of equipment. This dimension was followed by three statements investigating the respondents’ evaluation of reliability aspects regarding service promise keeping, service failure handling and time adequately of services. Furthermore, in the responsiveness dimension the respondents were asked to evaluate two items focusing on IKEA’s promptness of services and the willingness to help customers. The next SQ category assurance included two statements referring to the knowledge of the personnel at IKEA and their competence. Finally, the last dimension of SQ empathy contained the three statements focusing on the respondents’ perception of personal treatment at IKEA.

After evaluating the five SQ dimensions the participants were asked for their overall attitude about the SQ of IKEA by making use of the Likert scale mentioned above. Similar to the BX importance ranking, the respondents were

\textsuperscript{242} Brakus et al., 2009, p.65.
\textsuperscript{243} Aaker et al., 2011, p.259.
subsequently supposed to rate the importance of the depicted dimensions of CPSQ, which is directly related to RQ1.

The final part of the survey dealt with seven general questions collecting demographic information about the respondents within the sample. In accordance with scientists that suggest attaching personal questions regarding the respondents at the end of the questionnaire, the author decided that ending the survey with simple and clear questions will motivate the respondents to continue and complete the survey. In order to receive sufficient information about the respondents the chosen questions considered the participants' gender, age, nationality, highest education level, family status, household size and monthly net income. Especially, the demographic variable gender depicted an interesting source of knowledge for the purpose of RQ3.

In spite of the fact that the questionnaire included a combination of two item scales, the length of the questionnaire was kept to a minimum. By choosing only a few different types of questions and avoiding that the length of the questionnaire discouraged the participants, the study attempted to increase the response rate.244 Furthermore, the wording choice for this questionnaire was supposed to convey consistency and standardization to make it easier for respondents to understand and complete the survey.245

3.5 Pilot Study

“First drafts of questionnaires tend to be too long, often lack important variables, and are subject of all the hazards of ambiguous, ill-defined, loaded, or double-barreled questions.”246 In order to identify and eliminate these problems and to examine the chosen survey questions, their relevance and the understandability perceived by respondents, a pilot study has been carried out in advance. By pretesting the questionnaire, possible meaning ambiguity, difficulties and length issues can be detected and eliminated.247 For conducting a personal interview pretesting a convenience sample was used, which included a small sample of 4 people that were close to hand and prompt available. As a result of this study’s pretesting the chosen survey questions were adjusted and reduced drastically. Especially, meaning ambiguity caused by the use of English as the execution language has been an important adjustment category that resulted in wording changes and the simplification of technical terms. The pretesting revealed that some items in the originally proposed survey have not been understood in the way they were intended or respondents perceived the questions to be doubling the

246 Aaker et al., 2011, p.292.
aspects of another question. As a result, the items shown in table 1 have been eliminated by the pretesting.

Table 1: Survey Items Excluded after Pretesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rejected survey items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• IKEA appeals to my senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I have strong emotions for IKEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I engage in physical actions and behaviors when I use IKEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter IKEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• IKEA is ready to respond to customers’ enquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employees at IKEA appear to know what they are doing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, to the advantages arising from the reduced meaning ambiguity by deleting these items, the questionnaire has been shortened which minimized the risk of “(...) respondent fatigue, interview break-off, and initial refusal (...)”\(^{248}\). One further result of the study’s pretesting has been that the flow of the questionnaire appears to be in a logical sequence by guiding the respondents along the two concepts and dimensions. Despite the distinct complexity of concepts implemented in the questionnaire the respondents’ attention and interest levels regarding the topic have appeared to be very high in the pretest.

### 3.6 Operationalization

In the operationalization process the relevant elements of the theoretical framework were transferred into the survey questions according to the four research questions. Furthermore, the adjustments that have resulted from the pilot study’s pretesting and the chosen measurement scales were dealt with in the operationalization tables 4 and 5 in the appendix I.

### 3.7 Data Collection and Statistical Methods

After distributing and conducting the survey, the received data was collected and entered into the statistical analysis software SPSS. For the purpose of simplifying the data analysis, the different values of variables were denominated by numeric codes, even when the variable were actually nominal, therefore, dummy variables according to the coding methods described in the operationalization were used. Subsequent to the typing in of data, the received data was examined and analyzed. Since from a total amount of 433 participants included in the study, nearly 80 dropped out already at Item 5, the study does not include these units in order to keep the item non-response beneath 5\%.\(^{249}\) Furthermore, a dummy variable for the

\(^{248}\) Aaker et al., 2011, p.293.

\(^{249}\) Cf. Fowler, 2014, p.137.
nationality demographic was coded and used in order to focus on the two main represented countries Germany and Sweden. Moreover, the open field answers resulting from Q36 were manually recoded into the appropriate educational categories or excluded when the degree of speculation on educations and orders was too high.

Addressing the first two research questions and in order to give a clearly arranged and visually appealing overview of the study’s result, descriptive models such as tables and diagrams showing the relevant percentages were utilized. In addition to the data frequencies, the descriptive statistical method mode was analyzed to emphasize important finding figures. After assessing the respondents’ general demographics and importance ratings for BX and CPSQ possible correlations between them were examined by applying the Spearman coefficient analysis. Since most of the items were measured as ordinal variables this type of correlations appeared to be more appropriate. The resulting correlations and their significance level were additionally double checked by applying the “non-parametric equivalent of t-tests”\textsuperscript{250} Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal Wallis Test\textsuperscript{251} for ordinal data. Moreover, the Cronbach’s α Reliability Test for the accuracy of the applied scales and dimensions\textsuperscript{252}, was conducted. In order to address RQ4 focusing on the relationship between the respondents’ BX and CPSQ was examined by applying Spearman’s bivariate correlation data analysis including significance testing between the items. Here again the results were analyzed by making use of the non-parametric tests mentioned above in order to support the correlations’ significances.

### 3.8 Sources of Error, Validity and Reliability of the Study

After describing the study design and execution of data collection this section concentrates on possible methodological problems and negative effects influencing the study’s validity and reliability.

#### 3.8.1 Sampling Errors

The first potential source of problematic issues of this study could be the risk regarding sampling errors. This type of error originates from the discrepancy between the sample and the original population, which is desired to be analyzed.\textsuperscript{253} Due to the fact that this study is carried out by means of convenience and snowball sampling, which represent non-probability sampling methods, the potential of sampling errors is high.\textsuperscript{254} Consequently, the study attempted to

\textsuperscript{250} Duignan, J., 2016. Mann–Whitney U test [online].
\textsuperscript{252} Cf. Ireland, R., 2010. Cronbach's alpha [online].
\textsuperscript{253} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.335; Fowler, 2014, p.10.
\textsuperscript{254} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.350.
increase the sample size and thereby simultaneously reducing the risk of sampling errors.\textsuperscript{255}

\subsection*{3.8.2 Non-Sampling Errors}

Similar to sampling errors, further potential sources of methodological problems are connected with non-sampling errors such as “(…) measurement error, data-recording error, data analysis error, and non-response error.”\textsuperscript{256} One of the major problems when conducting an empirical survey research is the non-response problem, which occurs when sample members refuse to respond, do not have the ability to respond or are inaccessible.\textsuperscript{257} In spite of the study’s huge participation rates in the first days it was necessary to send out several reminders. While non-responses do not represent a problem for the study, internal dropouts represent a major weakness. The chance that participants of this study would not complete the questionnaire was relatively high due to the amount and extent of questions, therefore the questionnaire was adjusted and shortened and an involving design was implemented. Furthermore, the study made use of ticking boxes instead of writing answers, in order to keep the participants’ motivation and attention high. Disclaiming the use of open writing answers for this study also contributes to the removal of the fact that self-administrative questionnaires require the respondents to have good reading and writing skills.\textsuperscript{258} Another potential cause for the study’s dropout rate could be the language barrier due to the fact that the study has been carried out in English but distributed mainly in Germany and Sweden. “Owing to cross-national variances, the meaning of survey responses may get lost during translation and interpretation into other languages”\textsuperscript{259}, therefore the study relied on English as the execution language instead of implementing different language versions.

Moreover, the study faces the risk of acquiescence response bias\textsuperscript{260}, which refers to the problem that respondents tend to agree to statements rather than disagree. Additionally, “it is not unusual for 20 percent of respondents to choose a middle alternative when it is offered, although they would not have volunteered this answer had it not been mentioned.”\textsuperscript{261} Consequently, offering a neutral response category such as ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’ tends to be preferred by respondents who genuinely struggle to choose among specific attitude statements.\textsuperscript{262} However, in some cases a neutral response reveals important

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{255} Cf. Fowler, 2014, p.39. \\
\textsuperscript{256} Aaker et al., 2011, p.335. \\
\textsuperscript{257} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.352. \\
\textsuperscript{258} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.233. \\
\textsuperscript{259} Aaker et al., 2011, p.240. \\
\textsuperscript{260} Cf. Fowler, 2014, p.91; Kam and Meyer, 2015, p.513. \\
\textsuperscript{261} Aaker et al., 2011, p.280. \\
\textsuperscript{262} Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.283.
\end{flushleft}
insights as well and represents a legitimate response. Although the implementation of middle alternatives is a matter of scientific controversy the study offered a neutral alternative incorporated in the intensity indicating five-point Likert scale.

Regarding the study’s validity and reliability the outlined methodological errors depict potential sources of negative influences on both concepts, but the study’s efforts to minimize these concerns should be considered. The validity of a study displays the degree to which the measures used in the study measure what they are supposed to. Whereas reliability complements by providing the degree to which temporal stability is assessed by the study. Considering the fact that the two main concepts BX and SERVQUAL are universally recognized measurement scales that have been utilized many times in the context of other studies the validity and reliability is pointed out. In addition, Brakus et al. (2009) emphasize for the concept of BX that “the scale also successfully passed various reliability and validity tests, including test-retest reliability and criterion validity.” Equally, Parasuraman et al. (1988) highlight the validity and reliability of SERVQUAL by reporting the executed measurement conceptualizing and testing procedures. As a consequence, this study possesses a significant accuracy in measurements which influenced the validity and reliability of outcomes positively.

3.9 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues within survey research are of significant importance, due to the arising concerns regarding privacy and data security. In line with human rights legislation and private data regulations, standards for applying confidentially and privacy for survey research were applied. As a consequence no questions offending or harming the participants’ privacy were asked. For instance, the highly sensible income-related question Q39 has been excluded from the mandatory field questions to respect the respondents’ privacy. Furthermore, the anonymity of participants and the confiding treatments of sensitive data have been declared in the covering letter and were complied with. As there were no names included in the questionnaire it is not possible to back trace the data generated to one specific respondent. Therefore, this study distances itself from unethical proceedings and the misleading of participants.

263 Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.283.
264 Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.269.
265 Cf. Aaker et al., 2011, p.270.
266 Brakus et al., 2009, p.65.
267 Cf. Parasuraman et al., 1988, pp.28f.
4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Sample Descriptives

In this study a total amount of 433 respondents participated in the online survey and an absolute number of 330 respondents completed the questionnaire. Consequently, the present study has a completion rate of approximately 76%.

The study’s sample consists of 143 male participants accounting for 43.3% of the 330 respondents that completed the survey, whereas 187 females accounting for 56.7% took part in the questionnaire. The respondents are grouped into five age categories ranging from ‘under 18’, which amounts to 1.2% of the study’s respondents, ‘18-24’ accounting for 40.3%, ‘25-34’ representing 22.7%, ‘35-44’ accounting for 11.8% up to the last age category ‘older than 44’, which amount to 23.9%. The study has been carried out as a cross-national research, including a total amount of 17 different nationalities. The relative distribution of nationalities is simplified illustrated in figure 3. Provided that Germans represent 71.8% and Swedish inhabitants account for 14.8%, these two nationalities sum up to more than 85% of the sample.

In this study 39.6% of respondents graduated from High School, 23.2% possess some college credit, but no degree and 17.6% hold a Bachelor’s Degree. Summing higher educational levels such as ‘Master’s Degree’ and ‘Doctorate Degree’ approximately 10% of the study’s respondents account for these educational levels. Similarly, nearly 10% of respondents attended school until the ninth grade (8.4%) or did not complete schooling (0.9%). Regarding the allocation of the respondent’s monthly net income approximately 60% of the participants are nearly equally distributed among one of the three first income categories ‘0-450€’ (20%), ‘451-1000€’ (21.6%) and ‘1001-2000€’ (21.03%). While higher income categories such as ‘2001-3000€’ and ‘3001-4000€’ account for roughly 15% and

![Nationality Distribution](image)

*Figure 3: Relative Nationality Distribution, n=330*

271 All relevant frequencies related to the demographic analysis are shown in the appendix III.
13% of respondents, the last two highest income categories ‘4001-5000€’ and ‘more than 5000€’ amount to slightly more than 4% each.

The study’s demographical allocation reveals that most respondents are German or Swedish inhabitants between 18 and 34 years old. These results reflect that the study has been carried out mainly in Germany and Sweden and that the major survey-distribution channels were focusing on younger generations and especially students.

4.2 The Case-Company IKEA

After describing and analyzing the descriptive statistics for the study’s demographics this section deals with the four introductory questions focusing on IKEA and the respondents’ attitude towards the brand.272 As these questions were put in the beginning of the questionnaire the total amount of participants accounts for 356. Referring to the first question of the questionnaire 353 respondents specify that they do know IKEA while only 3 respondents negated. In relative figures 99.2% of respondents know the brand IKEA. For this context a correlation between the respondents monthly net income and the recognition of IKEA was observed $r = -0.15, p<0.01$. For this correlation a statistically significant difference between the recognition of IKEA and the respondents monthly net income was found by conducting the Kruskal Wallis Test ($H(2)= 10.33, p= 0.000$)273.

Similarly, 98.6% of respondents confirmed that they have already been to an IKEA store. Referring to these 351 respondents 14.8% state that they visit IKEA ‘Less than Once a Year’, while 24.5% visit IKEA ‘Once a Year’ and 48.4% chose ‘Ever Half a Year’ to describe their visit frequency for IKEA, whereas higher frequency categories such as ‘Once a Month’ and ‘more than once a month’ were selected by 9.7% and 2.6% of the participants. The relative distribution of visit frequencies is illustrated in figure 4. A significant correlation was detected between the two nationalities Germany and Sweden and the respondent’s visit frequencies $r = -0.12, p<0.05$. For this correlation statistically significant support has been observed by implementing the Mann-Whitney U Test ($U= 4632.00, N1= 48, N2= 234, p= 0.041$)274.

The last question of this section focuses on the sample’s attitude towards IKEA, revealing that approximately 60% evaluate their overall attitude towards the brand as ‘Positive’ and 22.5% as ‘Very Positive’. Contrariwise no respondent referred to a ‘Very Negative’ opinion and only 2.3% evaluated it as ‘Negative’. The remaining 14.2% of participants chose ‘Neutral’ in order to describe their attitude.

272 All relevant frequencies related to the IKEA section are shown in the appendix III.
273 All relevant p-values from the Kruskal Wallis Test are illustrated in table 18 in the appendix III.
274 All relevant p-values from the Mann-Whitney U Test are illustrated in table 19 in the appendix III.
towards IKEA. Regarding the last question a positive correlation between gender and the respondents’ attitude towards IKEA was found \( r = 0.21, p<0.01 \). By implementing a Mann-Whitney U Test evidence to support a difference between the male and female respondents and their attitudes towards IKEA was found \( U= 10207.00, N1= 140, N2= 185, p= 0.000 \). Moreover, a second association was detected between the nationality variable and the attitude towards the brand \( r= -0.19, p<0.01 \), supported by the results of the Mann-Whitney U Test \( U= 4169.00, N1= 48, N2= 234, p= 0.001 \).

![Figure 4: Relative Distribution of Respondents' Visit Frequency for IKEA, n=351](image)

Referring to the results of the IKEA related general questions that were included in the survey nearly all participants know IKEA and have already visited an IKEA location before. Due to the correlation between monthly net income and IKEA recognition one can assume that respondents with a higher income slightly tend to refuse knowing IKEA, which could be a consequence of IKEA’s low budget target group focusing on offering affordable furniture\(^{275}\). The extensive recognition of IKEA as a brand is not surprising due to the company’s global operations and marketing efforts. Nevertheless, these remarkable results show that IKEA succeeds in building a strong and recognizable brand that attracts people regardless from the demographic differences observed in this study. The fact that the majority of respondents’ visit frequencies are rather limited to one or two times a year might seem to indicate that respondents do not evaluate the shopping experience at IKEA as positive at first, but in fact IKEA sells mainly furniture and decoration elements, which do not represent daily convenience goods. On the contrary it is quite astonishing that nearly 10% of the respondents state that they visit IKEA once a month or more often, which indicates that there must be other reasons than the actual core products of IKEA. The significant correlation between the respondents’ nationality and the visit frequency indicates that Swedes rather than Germans slightly tend to visit IKEA more often. This could perhaps be

a consequence of Sweden being IKEA’s country of origin and the Scandinavian fondness for architecture and interior design. Furthermore, the results reveal that IKEA is succeeding in creating favorable brand attitudes with their customers, as more than 80% of the sample refer to their overall attitude towards the brand as positive or even very positive. Especially, the fact that not even one of the study’s participants holds a very unfavorable attitude towards the brand shows IKEA’s achievements regarding customer satisfaction and in combination with the visit frequencies loyalty.

Furthermore, the significant correlation between gender and the attitude towards IKEA discloses that especially women tend to hold more favorable attitudes towards the brand compared to men. One possible reason could be that women in general favor decoration and aesthetic arrangements to a greater extent than men do. Additionally, the second revealed correlation between nationality and the attitude towards IKEA shows that Swedes are likely to have a slightly more favorable attitude towards the brand, which again could be a result of IKEA’s cultural background. Considering these results IKEA has been an adequate case-company choice for this study due to its vast recognition and favorable customer attitudes.

4.3 The Importance of Service Quality

In order to meet the study’s first research question RQ1: What are the most important dimensions of service quality? The following section is focusing on the respondents’ evaluations of the five SQ dimensions tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The results of the frequency analysis for the importance of the SQ dimensions are illustrated in table 2.

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The SQ scale consisted of these five dimensions including a total of 13 items ($\alpha = 0.91$)\(^\text{278}\), indicating a very high reliability of the scale.

Table 2: Absolute and Relative Frequency Distribution for the Service Quality Dimensions, $n=329$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Rating</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Rather Important</th>
<th>Neither Important nor Unimportant</th>
<th>Rather Unimportant</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Tangibles

The first dimension of SQ tangibles includes three items (I18, I19, I20) measuring the respondents perceived composition of physical surroundings at IKEA. The reliability of the subscale tangibles was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0.65$). All three items share Mo= 4, since the most frequent answer to each item is ‘Rather Agree’.\(^\text{279}\) In accordance to these relatively positive results, the participants’ evaluation of the dimension tangibles reveals that determined by a total number of 329 participants 48.3% rank it as ‘Rather Important’ and 30.4% as ‘Very Important’. Contrariwise only one respondent evaluated the dimension as ‘Very Unimportant’, 3% as ‘Rather Unimportant’ and 17.9% described it as ‘Neither Important nor Unimportant’. A significant correlation between gender and the respondents’ importance ranking of the tangibles dimension was found r= 0.19, $p<0.01$, revealing that women tend to slightly allocate a higher importance to physical surroundings than men. There is further evidence to support a difference between the importance ratings for the tangibles dimension based on gender ($U= 10292.50$, $N1= 140$, $N2= 185$, $p= 0.001$)\(^\text{280}\).

These results for the dimension tangibles indicate that customers do assign a relatively low importance to the physical surroundings such as attractiveness of facilities, personnel dressing and the ‘up-to-dateness’ of a brand’s store compared to the other dimensions of SQ. Similar to the empirical investigations executed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), which identified the dimension tangibles to be the least important for customers evaluating their perceived service\(^\text{281}\), the tangibles dimension only accounts for the penultimate importance rank in this study. However, 78.7% refer to it as important legitimating that the dimension is a relevant part of the consumers’ SQ considerations. Referring to the general

\(^\text{278}\) All results of Cronbach’s Alpha scale reliability testing for SQ are shown in table 6 in the appendix III.

\(^\text{279}\) The frequencies and modes for the tangibles dimension are illustrated in table 8 in the appendix III.

\(^\text{280}\) Result Mann-Whitney U Test.

importance marketing literature adjudges to tangibles, the physical aspects of SQ seem to be an inevitable part in contemporary clutter of information, helping the customer to differentiate the offering from competitors and to facilitate the decision-making process. Another possible reason for the customers’ still high evaluation of tangibles touch points with the brand might be rooted in the nature of services and their characteristic of being intangible, which makes it even more essential for service providers to design the services’ physical surroundings. Furthermore, the results regarding the different importance evaluation of women reflect the tendency that women in general might pay more attention to the store arrangements and employee outfits. Similarly, Suki (2014) found out that “women tend to rely more heavily on the quality of the service environment and tangible cues in the environment to make service evaluations than males.” Regardless of the comparison with the other SQ dimensions, the physical surroundings complement the service production process and therefore are of high importance for customers in general and hold especially in female-dominated service areas essential sources of potential value-added.

4.3.2 Reliability

The results for the second dimension reliability reveal a similar picture than for the tangibles dimension, due to the fact that all three items (I21, I22, I23) measuring the customers’ evaluation of the service accuracy and dependability again share the mode \( \text{Mo}= 4 \). The reliability of the subscale reliability was found to be highly reliable \((\alpha= 0.82)\). Since the respondents evaluate the single items rather important, as well the importance ranking for the dimension reliability is relatively high. No respondent evaluated the reliability aspect as ‘Very Unimportant’ and 1.8% stated it as ‘Rather Unimportant’. The majority of respondents rank the reliability dimension as ‘Rather Important’ 39.5% or ‘Very Important’ 43.2%. Equal to the tangibles dimension there is a significant correlation between gender and the importance ranking for reliability \( r= 0.23, p<0.01 \). Again, the correlation shows the tendency that women are more likely to evaluate the reliability dimension as more important than men and evidence to support this correlation was found \((U= 9734.00, N1= 140, N2= 185, p= 0.000)\).

Referring to the results of the reliability dimension it becomes obvious that customers evaluate the reliability of services including the precision, dependableness and timely reliability as important. Compared to the other

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286 The frequencies and modes for the reliability dimension are illustrated in table 9 in the appendix III.
287 Result Mann-Whitney U Test.
dimensions the *reliability* accounts for the third important variable. Consequently, this study contradicts the former findings of Berry and Parasuraman’s study (1991), in which reliability accounted for the most important determinant in the customers’ perception.\(^{288}\) Against the assumption that consumers include especially the timeliness of services into their judgment of post-service satisfaction and service provider choice\(^{289}\), the sampled consumers rather allocated a medium importance towards this aspect of SQ. One possible reason for this decrease in the importance of *reliability* could be that the steady availableness of service or complaint hotlines causes the consumers themselves to be less dependent from certain services and their accuracy. The fact that especially the female respondents tend to evaluate the reliability of service providers more crucial than men might refer to the increased risk-aversion women are distinguished by\(^{290}\). Besides this result accords to the findings of Karatepe (2011), revealing that the satisfaction of female customers is to a greater extent affected by reliability than it is for male customers.\(^{291}\) As a result the *reliability* dimension of SQ represents a moderately important consideration in the SQ evaluation, which is slightly more probable preferred by female customers.

4.3.3 Responsiveness

For the third SQ dimension only two items (I24, I25) were implemented to measure the customers’ evaluation of IKEA’s responsiveness including the offering of prompt service and the willingness to help customers. The reliability of the subscale *responsiveness* was found to be reliable (\(\alpha = 0.75\)). For these items the mode again is Mo= 4, indicating that the respondents ’Rather Agree’.\(^{292}\) In accordance with these relatively high evaluations of the single items as well the importance ranking for the *responsiveness* dimension appears to be higher. While 45.6% of the respondents evaluate it as ‘Rather Important’ even 42.2% rank it as ‘Very Important’, only a minority of 1.2% refers to it as ‘Rather Unimportant’ but no respondent as ‘Very Unimportant’. Again, there is a significant correlation between gender and the importance ranking of *responsiveness* \(r = 0.26, p<0.01\), revealing that women slightly connect a higher importance to responsiveness than men do. This correlation is supported by the applied Mann-Whitney U Test (\(U = 9374.00, N1 = 140, N2 = 185, p = 0.000\))\(^{293}\).

This extremely high frequency of 87.8% respondents that evaluate the dimension as important marks it as the most important dimension of the SQ concept. It is not

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\(^{291}\) Cf. Karatepe, 2011, p.293.

\(^{292}\) The frequencies and modes for the responsiveness dimension are illustrated in table 10 in the appendix III.

\(^{293}\) Result Mann-Whitney U Test.
surprising that the sample estimates the importance of courtesy and promptness of services to be the major consideration in SQ, since several former researchers came to comparable results.\textsuperscript{294} In accordance with the present results the empirical investigation executed by Suki (2014) focusing on the role of gender in the evaluation of SQ in the hospitality sector revealed that the dimension \textit{responsiveness} has a significant impact on female customers’ satisfaction, pointing in the direction of an increased importance of responsiveness aspects based on gender differences.\textsuperscript{295} One possible reason can be related to the assumption that male customers appear to be more individualistic when it comes to shopping than women.\textsuperscript{296} Furthermore, Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993) found out that women are more likely to allocate more value to the friendliness of service personnel, whereas male customers focus more directly on technical qualities of the service perceived.\textsuperscript{297} Due to the fact that the \textit{responsiveness} dimension was found to be the most important determinant for consumers evaluation of SQ, this calls attention to the need for further research dealing with this explicit dimension and its practical realization in business routine.

\subsection*{4.3.4 Assurance}

For the \textit{assurance} dimension measuring the customers’ evaluations of employee competence at IKEA two items (I26, I27) have been included in the survey. The reliability of the subscale \textit{assurance} was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.90$). Both items show exactly the same statistical number for the mode $\text{Mo}= 4$, indicating that the most frequently chosen response is ‘Rather Agree’.\textsuperscript{298} For the importance ranking of this dimension again the respondents refuse to evaluate it as ‘Very Unimportant’ and only a minority of 1.5% ranks it as ‘Rather Unimportant’. On the contrary, nearly 50% state it to be a ‘Rather Important’ and 33.4% as a ‘Very Important’ dimension of SQ. Here again a significant correlation between gender and the respondents’ evaluation can be found $r = 0.21$, $p<0.01$, which is additionally supported by the result of the Mann-Whitney U Test ($U= 10020.50$, $N1= 140$, $N2= 185$, $p= 0.000$). This association illustrates the tendency that women allocate a higher importance to the competence of personnel in general compared to men. A further significant correlation between the respondents’ educational degree and their importance rating has been found $r= 0.22$, $p<0.01$ indicating the slight tendency that respondents with a higher educational level evaluate the importance of assurance elements in the SQ context higher than respondents with a lower educational background. There is a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{294} Cf. Babbar and Koufteros, 2008, p.825; Cf. Yavas et al., 2004, p.154.
\item \textsuperscript{295} Cf. Suki, 2014, p.57.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Cf. Noble et al., 2006, p.185.
\item \textsuperscript{297} Cf. Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1993, p.291.
\item \textsuperscript{298} The frequencies and modes for the assurance dimension are illustrated in table 11 in the appendix III.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
statistically significant difference between the assurance importance rating and the highest educational degree of respondents (H(2)= 20.60, p= 0.002)\(^{299}\).

As a consequence of these results, it is emphasized that the assurance related aspects of SQ are the second most important variable for the study’s respondents. While former studies adjudged a minor importance to the personnel’s competence\(^{300}\), these results show the contrary. Furthermore, the results contradict Jones and Shandiz (2015) suggestion that there is the need for dividing the service context into high or low-risk and high and low-price decisions\(^{301}\). Since IKEA focuses on offering low-budget furniture there are rather low-risk and low-cost decisions involved, but still respondents take the importance of employees’ assurance into consideration. Along with the present results empirical observations of Wu et al. (2015) reveal that customers’ evaluation of SQ is significantly impacted by the competence and courtesy of frontline personnel.\(^{302}\)

Since literature suggests male consumers to be more interested and prone to the gathering of information\(^{303}\), the results of this present study refuse to show this tendency. In contrast the sampled female customers appeared to be more likely to request verbally information and to evaluate the courtesy of employees as more important. Referring to the second observed correlation between the respondents’ level of education and their importance rating of assurance, it seems to be intuitive that with rising educational graduation consumers expect a higher level of competence from the company’s personnel. Considering that “knowledge reduces information asymmetries between relationship partners”\(^{304}\), the empirical research by Suh et al. (2015) uncovers similarly that more educated consumers tend to feel more pleasant when asking questions\(^{305}\).

4.3.5 Empathy

The final dimension of SQ relates to the personnel’s caring and individual attention directed to customers, measured by three items (I28, I29, I30). The reliability of the subscale empathy was found to be highly reliable (\(\alpha= 0.85\)). While the first two items share a mode of Mo= 4, referring to the most frequently given answer ‘Rather Agree’, the last item has the mode Mo= 3 ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’.\(^{306}\) In comparison to the other dimensions the empathy dimension of SQ is ranked more neutral. While one respondent refers to it as ‘Very Unimportant’, 3.6% as ‘Rather Unimportant’, 1/5 of the respondents evaluate it as

\(^{299}\) Result Kruskal Wallis Test.
\(^{301}\) Cf. Jones and Shandiz, 2015, p.53.
\(^{302}\) Cf. Wu et al., 2015, p.232.
\(^{303}\) Cf. Noble et al., 2006, p.184.
\(^{304}\) Suh et al., 2015, p.272.
\(^{305}\) Cf. Suh et al., 2015, p.273.
\(^{306}\) The frequencies and modes for the empathy dimension are illustrated in table 12 in the appendix III.
‘Neither Important nor Unimportant’. As a consequence, a smaller number of participants rank it as ‘Rather Important (50.2%)’ and ‘Very Important’ (25.5%). Equally to the other dimension, again there is a correlation between the gender variable and the respondents’ importance evaluation of the empathy dimension $r= 0.22$, $p<0.01$. This association indicates the slight tendency that women are likely to evaluate empathy more important than men and there is evidence to support this correlation ($U= 9944.00$, $N1= 140$, $N2= 185$, $p= 0.000$).307

Referring to the results of the last SQ dimension empathy, it is emphasized that it is the least important variable. Especially, the relative amount of respondents that evaluate the empathy dimension as ‘Very Important’ differs significantly from the other dimensions, indicating that it more irrelevant compared to the other dimensions. These results oppose the general assumption that the relationship with contact personnel is a very important determinant of SQ.308 Furthermore, former empirical investigations identified the high importance of relational service aspects such as included in the empathy dimension309, are contradicted by this study’s results. One possible reason for this could be that the relational aspects of SQ are more important in an earlier service relationship stage310, which is only for a minority of respondents the case for IKEA. The finding that women tend to hold a more favorable attitude towards relational elements in the service context is also supported by former research311 and appears to be a result of women’s relationship and communication orientation. However, the importance ranking for empathy in this present study is still very high, but it shows significant differences compared to the other dimensions.

As these results emphasize, consumers allocate a continuously high importance to the different dimensions of SQ. Considering the findings of the importance rating the anticlimactic rank order of dimensions is: responsiveness, assurance, reliability, tangibles and empathy. Consequently, consumers estimate the offering of prompt and competent service over the physical design and emotional abilities of personnel to be more important in the SQ evaluation process.

4.4 The Importance of Brand Experience

In light of the study’s second research question RQ2: What are the most important brand experience dimensions?, the focus of this chapter shifts from the SQ conceptualization and the connected empirical results to the significant findings the study holds regarding the BXDs sensory, affective, behavioral, intellectual and social as illustrated in table 3. The scale consisted of these five dimensions
including a total of 11 items (α= 0.84)\textsuperscript{312}, indicating a high reliability of the scale. As these questions were put right following the general IKEA questions, a total amount of 351 respondents participated.

### Table 3: Absolute and Relative Frequency Distribution for the Brand Experience Dimensions, n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Rating</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Rather Important</th>
<th>Neither Important nor Unimportant</th>
<th>Rather Unimportant</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>Σ %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory</td>
<td>68 19.4</td>
<td>158 45</td>
<td>99 28.2</td>
<td>21 6</td>
<td>5 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>38 10.8</td>
<td>142 40.5</td>
<td>119 33.9</td>
<td>40 11.4</td>
<td>12 3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>32 9.1</td>
<td>109 31.1</td>
<td>152 43.3</td>
<td>47 13.4</td>
<td>11 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>31 8.8</td>
<td>126 35.9</td>
<td>138 39.3</td>
<td>44 12.5</td>
<td>12 3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>23 6.6</td>
<td>86 24.5</td>
<td>145 41.3</td>
<td>68 19.4</td>
<td>29 8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.4.1 Sensory

The first BXD sensory is measured through two items (I5, I6) scaling the respondents’ agreeableness regarding the sensory attractiveness of IKEA stores. The reliability of the subscale sensory was found to be reliable (α= 0.74). The mode for both items is equal Mo= 4, revealing that the most frequently given answer is ‘Rather Agree’.\textsuperscript{313} In spite five respondents accounting for 1.4% evaluated the sensory dimension of BX as ‘Very Unimportant’. Moreover, 6% of respondents ranked it as ‘Rather Unimportant’ and nearly one-third regarded the sensory dimension as ‘Neither Important nor Unimportant’. While approximately 36% of respondents hold a neutral or unfavorable attitude towards sensory aspects, 45% chose ‘Rather Important’ and a narrow percentage of 20% assigned it to the highest importance category ‘Very Important’. A significant correlation between gender and the sensory importance ranking was found r= 0.27, p<0.01, indicating that female customers tend to allocate a higher importance to a brand’s ability to attract visual or other senses than men. There is evidence to support this correlation (U= 9118.0, N1= 140, N2= 185, p= 0.000)\textsuperscript{314}.

As these results for the sensory dimension of BX illustrate, roughly 65% of respondents evaluated the sensory elements as important, which marks this dimension to be the most important determinant of customers BX. Customers appear to especially be influenced by elements that engage their visual or other senses when experiencing a brand. These results go along with Schmitt (1991), who emphasized that sensory stimuli do intensify and deepen the BX from a customer perspective\textsuperscript{315}. Recent investigations executed by Shim et al. (2015)

\textsuperscript{312} All results of Cronbach’s Alpha scale reliability testing for BX are shown in table 7 in the appendix III.
\textsuperscript{313} The frequencies and modes for the sensory dimension are illustrated in table 13 in the appendix III.
\textsuperscript{314} Result Mann-Whitney U Test.
\textsuperscript{315} Cf. Schmitt, 1999, p.61.
revealed comparable results for the impact of the sensory BXD on brand loyalty\textsuperscript{316}. Similarly, the empirical results identified by Moreira (2017) ascribed a significant impact of sensory marketing to consumers’ purchase intentions\textsuperscript{317}. All this former empirical research point in the same direction as the results of this present study, emphasizing the eminent importance of sensory aspects included in the BX. In line with the customers’ overall high importance ranking for the sensory aspects, the gender related correlation calls attention to the fact that female customers seem to be more attracted and influenced by sensory elements than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{318} One possible reason can be found in the nature of females as they are described to be more attentive and absorptive in aesthetic contexts.\textsuperscript{319} Another is more deeply rooted in the female information processing style, highlighting that women “(...) tend to be comprehensive processors of information”.\textsuperscript{320} Furthermore, as IKEA is a furniture retailer focusing on stylish interior décor and design women might feel more attracted by these sensory appealing BX.\textsuperscript{321}

4.4.2 Affective

The second BXD affective deals with the feelings and emotions that are evoked by the brand and includes two items (I7, I8). The reliability of the subscale affective was found to be highly reliable (α= 0.83). Equal to the results for the sensory dimension the mode is Mo= 4, highlighting that the most frequent evaluation for the single items is ‘Rather Agree’.\textsuperscript{322} Beyond these results 3.4% of respondents evaluated the dimension as ‘Very Unimportant’ and 11.4% referred to it as ‘Rather Unimportant’. More than one-third (33.9%) of the sample allocated a neutral importance to the affective dimension. The other rough half of respondents ranked the affective dimension as either ‘Rather Important’ (40.5%) or ‘Very Important’ (10.8%). One significant correlation between gender and the respondents’ evaluation of the affective importance for BX r=0.23, p<0.01. There is evidence to support a difference between the importance ratings for the affective dimension of different genders (U= 9636.0, N1= 140, N2= 185, p= 0.000)\textsuperscript{323}.

Even if the results for the affective BXD appear to be more negative compared to the sensory dimension, it should not be underestimated that over 50% of respondents evaluate it to be important. As a consequence, the affective dimension accounts for the second most important dimension of the concept and seems to

\textsuperscript{316} Cf. Shim et al., 2015, p.56.
\textsuperscript{317} Cf. Moreira, 2017, p.80.
\textsuperscript{318} Cf. Dittmar et al., 2004, p.440.
\textsuperscript{319} Cf. Costa et al., 2001, p.328.
\textsuperscript{320} Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
\textsuperscript{321} Cf. Costa et al., 2001, p.328.
\textsuperscript{322} Cf. Costa et al., 2001, p.328.
\textsuperscript{323} The frequencies and modes for the affective dimension are illustrated in table 14 in the appendix III.
\textsuperscript{323} Result Mann-Whitney U Test.
incorporate a source of value-added for the consumers. In line with this the importance of emotional consumption values as conceptualized by Kurtz and Clow (1998) is emphasized. Comparing the study’s results with former research conducted by Ding and Tseng (2015) and Lin (2015), who detected the positive impact of affective related elements in the BX on brand loyalty and brand commitment, there is evidence that customers evaluate the emotional associations with a brand as highly important. Another study conducted by Cleff et al. (2018) identified the affective dimension to be the most important in online contexts, pointing in a similar direction as the results from this present study. The existing correlation detected between gender and the importance evaluation of respondents regarding affective elements emphasizes that women tend to be more attracted by relational and emotional attributes than men. This might be due to the female stereotypical characteristic of being more attached to feelings and “(...) communicating their internal emotional states”. As these results hypothesize the affective dimension of BX represents a very important consideration in the BX’s evaluation process and particularly depicts a source of consumers’ diverging importance allocation based on gender differences.

4.4.3 Behavioral

The behavioral aspects of BX were measured through two single items (I9, I10), investigating the respondents’ evaluation of bodily experiences while at IKEA and the degree to what IKEA is acknowledged to be action oriented. The reliability of the subscale behavioral was found to be reliable ($\alpha= 0.66$). For the first item the most frequent answer chosen by the participants was ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’ Mo= 3, while ‘Rather Agree’ Mo= 4 was picked by most respondents regarding the second item. As well the importance ranking for the behavioral dimension bear resemblance due to the high amount of 43.3% of respondents referring to a neutral importance category. A relative number of approximately 40% specified the behavioral BXD to be either ‘Rather Important’ (31.1%) or ‘Very Important’ (9.1%), whereas 13.4% regarded it as ‘Rather Unimportant’. A total of 11 respondents (3.1%) decided to choose the lowest importance ranking for this dimension.

Since the results for the behavioral BXD are rather low, indicating a lesser importance for activity-oriented elements in the arrangement of BX, the original

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325 Cf. Ding and Tseng, 2015, p.1010.
327 Cf. Cleff et al., 2018, p.20.
328 Cf. Dittmar et al., 2004, p.424.
330 Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
331 The frequencies and modes for the behavioral dimension are illustrated in table 15 in the appendix III.
assumption that in the experience economy consumers seek for active participation made by Pine and Gilmore (1991)\textsuperscript{332} is rejected. Less than half of the respondents assigned importance to the active involvement degrading the \textit{behavioral} dimension to the penultimate most important dimension. This result is at variance with the former assumptions that \textit{behavioral} BX account for the strongest brand relationship quality as assumed by Xie et al. (2017)\textsuperscript{333} and the second largest impact on brand loyalty identified in Cleff et al.’s (2018) empirical research\textsuperscript{334}. What is rather unsurprising is the nonexistence of any correlation between gender and behavioral elements, as there has not been found any scientific evidence that the gender of customers has a significant impact on the attitude towards the behavioral aspects of BX. Consequently, even if the importance assigned to this dimension appears to be of comparatively minor relevance this study demands future research to concentrate on possible reasons and differences regarding the \textit{behavioral} dimension of BX based on gender.

### 4.4.4 Intellectual

The BXS included two item statements (I11, I12) that measure the respondents’ approval of cognitive aspects in their BX at IKEA. The reliability of the subscale \textit{intellectual} was found to be reliable (\(\alpha=0.71\)). For both items the calculated mode is \(Mo=4\), revealing that most participants have chosen ‘Rather Agree’ in order to describe their intellectual involvement with the brand.\textsuperscript{335} Equal to the \textit{behavioral} BXD 3.4\% of the sample refused to state that the intellectual aspects of the BX are important. Furthermore, 12.5\% described the dimension as ‘Rather Unimportant’ and nearly 40\% chose the middle option ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’. More than 35\% of the surveyed customers allocated ‘Rather Important’ to the dimension and further 8.8\% selected the highest importance category ‘Very Important’ in order to evaluate the \textit{intellectual} dimension. A significant correlation between the respondents’ highest educational degree and the \textit{intellectual} importance rating was found \(r=0.13, p<0.05\), showing the tendency that with rising educational level, respondents assign slightly greater importance to the \textit{intellectual} BXD.

For the \textit{intellectual} BXD slightly higher importance evaluations have been observed than for the earlier dimension. In light of the fact that narrow 45\% of respondents allocated importance to the intellectual aspects, emphasizes that most consumers do not value the brand’s ability to engage their curiosity and thinking. Similar the results identified by Shim et al. (2015) state that there is no significant

\textsuperscript{332} Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.15.
\textsuperscript{333} Cf. Xie et al., 2017, p.276.
\textsuperscript{334} Cf. Cleff et al., 2018, p.20.
\textsuperscript{335} The frequencies and modes for the intellectual dimension are illustrated in table 16 in the appendix III.
association between this dimension and customers’ brand loyalty.\textsuperscript{336} Hardly any empirical evidence can be found that the intellectual engagement of customers is linked to their overall evaluation of BX and therefore the importance of this dimension appears to be of decreased relevance, even if in this study the intellectual related importance ranking accounts for the third most important determinant of BX. Interestingly, only a weak significant correlation between the respondents’ highest educational degree and no significant correlation referring to gender was observed without showing significant evidence by applying a Kruskal Wallis Test. As a consequence, it can be assumed that consumers do not differ fundamentally in their evaluation of intellectual BX elements. Since the extensive theoretical contribution to the cognitive engagement of customers in the BX process is lacking future research is needed.

4.4.5 Social

The last BXD conceptualization refers to the relational aspects including social interaction with other people, building friendships and chatting. Different from the other BXD the importance was measured through three items (I13, I14, I15). The reliability of the subscale social was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.75$). The first item (I13) has the mode $\text{Mo}= 4$, indicating that most of the respondents referred to ‘Rather Agree’ when evaluating the social interaction with other people at IKEA. In contrast the I14 and I15 both share the mode $\text{Mo}= 2$, revealing a less positive response and the highest answer frequency for the ‘Rather Disagree’ category.\textsuperscript{337} Similar results can be observed in the importance ranking for the social dimension. While a relative small amount of respondents compared to the other dimensions distributed the response categories ‘Rather Important’ (24.5%) or ‘Very Important’ (6.6%) to the social aspects incorporated in BX, roughly one-third assigned it as either ‘Very Unimportant’ (8.3%) or ‘Rather Unimportant’ (19.4%). The most frequently selected importance ranking for the social dimension is the neutral middle option ‘Neither Important nor Unimportant’, chosen by more than 40% of the sample.

Referring to the results of the social BXD, the survey’s participants evaluated the social interaction by far as the least important determinant compared to the other dimensions. Only roughly one-third of the respondents regarded it as important, which emphasizes that customers to a great extent do not wish for social interaction while using the brand. These results are converse to Nysveen and Pedersen’s (2014) findings revealing that consumers that are brand loyal share a social engagement with the brand\textsuperscript{338}. The results found by Matute et al. (2018) go

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{336} Cf. Shim et al., 2015, p.68.
\item \textsuperscript{337} The frequencies and modes for the social dimension are illustrated in table 17 in the appendix III.
\item \textsuperscript{338} Cf. Nysveen and Pedersen, 2014, p.828.
\end{itemize}
even beyond highlighting the positive impacts employees’ emotional abilities on
the customers’ BX have.\textsuperscript{339} Furthermore, empirical investigations focusing on
gender differences found significant correlations between female customers and
their appraisal of social interaction.\textsuperscript{340} These gender differences are surprisingly
not supported by the findings of the present study. Regardless of the literature’s
tendency to highlight the relational aspects of BX, the empirical results for the
social BXD appear to only incorporate a relatively low importance for consumers.

Since, the importance of BX has gained much attention in the recent years the
dimensions included in the conceptualization of BXS appear to be of significant
relevance for customers in general. As the results for RQ2 assume, consumers
evaluate the sensory and affective dimensions most important and assign relatively
lower emphasis on the other BXDs intellectual, behavioral and social. Consequently, for the design and implementation of successful BX perceived by
consumers the focus on sensory related elements that trigger the senses and the
involvement of emotions induced by the brand represents an essential contributor.

In consideration of the importance of SQ and BX concepts further meaningful
outcomes of the study were found. As illustrated in figures 18 and 19\textsuperscript{341} roughly
78\% of the study’s respondents evaluate their overall attitude towards the SQ and
their BX with IKEA to be positive. This result emphasizes once more that IKEA
has been an adequate case-company due to the fact that the brand succeeds in both
regards. Furthermore significant correlations between the evaluation of SQ
(r= -0.20, p<0.01) and BX (r= -0.27, p<0.01) and the participants’ nationality
were found, indicating that Swedish customers slightly more often evaluate their
SQ and especially their BX at IKEA to be positively connoted compared to
German consumers. Again the cultural background of IKEA and the fact that
Swedes visit IKEA more often is stressed. Additionally, the study reveals a further
correlation between the respondents’ agreeableness in regard to a positive BX at
IKEA and gender r= 0.24, p<0.01. This finding emphasizes that female customers
tend to evaluate their BX more often positively compared to their male
counterparts. Stressing this result the assumption that women are capable to
perceive more information and stimuli\textsuperscript{342} is further supported. In addition, the
respondents overall opinion towards IKEA and the evaluation of positive BX
shows a strong significant correlation r= 0.66, p<0.01. Similarly, a notable
correlation was observed for the respondents’ overall opinion and the evaluation
of a positive SQ r= 0.52, p<0.01. Surprisingly, the customers’ positive evaluations
of BX show an impact on their overall brand attitude that excels the positive

\textsuperscript{339} Cf. Matute et al., 2018, p.354.
\textsuperscript{340} Cf. Noble et al., 2006, p.186.
\textsuperscript{341} Cf. Appendix III.
\textsuperscript{342} Cf. Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
evaluations of SQ comparatively (cf. Fig. 6). Considering the results from RQ1 and RQ2 the tendency that consumers rate the importance of the SQ concept to be more important than the BX dimensions, this result stands out significantly. On the one hand, the overall brand attitude is a complex construct resulting from numerous touch-points\textsuperscript{343} that do not necessarily always include SQ related aspects. On the other hand, IKEA cannot be seen as a traditional service company that only provides services, on the contrary customers get a visible outcome of their BX – the furniture, which might explain the overall attitude to a greater extent than the pure service offered.

Furthermore, a significant correlation between the respondents’ visit frequency and a positive SQ evaluation was observed $r= 0.32$, $p<0.01$. Additionally, the respondents visit frequency is correlated with the customers’ positive evaluation of BX $r= 0.244$, $p<0.01$. In contrast to the former result, consumers tend to consider the SQ to be more important when it comes to visit frequencies. This result is in line with the empirical investigation by Coulter and Coulter (2002), which revealed that “as customers become more and more tied to a particular service provider over time, service representatives need to be perceived as extremely competent in their ability to deliver the basic service package.”\textsuperscript{344}

Consequently, customer loyalty illustrated through visit frequency is directly impacted by both concepts SQ and BX, whereas the former seems to be more determining as the relationship-length increases.

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\textsuperscript{343} Cf. Grönroos, 2007, p.334.
\textsuperscript{344} Coulter and Coulter, 2002, p.44.
4.5 Differences in the Perception and Evaluation of Service Quality and Brand Experience Based on Gender

The following remarks reflect on the study’s results (cf. Fig. 7) referring to the third research question RQ3: Are there any differences in the perception and evaluation of service quality and brand experiences related to gender?. Theoretical contributions from consumer behavior literature suggest that male and female customers differ in their processing of information\(^{345}\) and their focus on varying service related aspects.

Since female customers appeared to be more relationship-oriented, socially interactive and attracted by aesthetic and sensory means\(^{346}\), they considered the dimensions of SQ as more important than their male counterparts and allocated higher importance ratings to the sensory and affective BXDs. The results illustrated in figure 7 indicate the general tendency that male customers are increasingly focusing on technical aspects of SQ, while female customers appear to be to a greater extent be motivated by interpersonal and emotional elements. Excluded from this assumption is that there was no significant association between gender and the importance rating of the social BXD, contrasting the observed focus on social interaction found in the other dimensions. Furthermore, women showed a more positive attitude towards their BX, considering the tendency that women evaluate the whole shopping process including aspects such as the enjoyableness of shopping, men are focused on the pure shopping outcome of attaining the desired offering.\(^{347}\) The inference that “women stress social–experiential and identity-related concerns, and, in particular, emotional

\(^{345}\) Cf. Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
\(^{347}\) Cf. Dittmar et al., 2004, p.424.
involvement”\textsuperscript{348} is further supported by this study’s findings revealing the stressed importance of the SQs dimensions \textit{responsiveness} and \textit{reliability}, as well as the BXs sensory and affective elements. All in all, the findings of this empirical investigation reveal that there are significant differences in consumer’s perception and evaluation of SQ and BX based on gender differences.

### 4.6 Associations Between Customer Perceived Service Quality and Brand Experience

Regarding the fourth research question RQ4: Is there a relationship between service quality and brand experience?, the next chapter deals with the analysis of the statistical results investigating the relationship between the mentioned concepts.

Since both conceptual approaches measuring SQ and BX are based on item scales there were several significant and meaningful correlations found between them. The most relevant correlations\textsuperscript{349} are illustrated in figure 8. The highest correlation that was found between the dimensions of SQ and BX refers to the items I18 and I5 belonging to the dimensions of \textit{tangibles} and \textit{sensory} $r=0.43$, $p<0.01$. This association emphasizes that 18.5\%\textsuperscript{350} of the variance in the evaluation of the first \textit{tangibles} item I18 is explained by the respondents’ evaluation of the \textit{sensory} item I5. Similarly, the items I18 and I6 show a significant correlation minimally lower $r=0.42$, $p<0.01$. Here 18\%\textsuperscript{351} of the variance in the evaluation of I18 is explained by the \textit{sensory} item I5. For the other items included in the dimensions \textit{tangibles} and \textit{sensory} only weaker correlations were detected. Since both dimensions focus on the physical appearance of the service surroundings and the use of brand related sensory stimuli, the result that these items show the strongest relationship within the concepts is no surprise.

Obviously, consumers’ evaluation of the brand’s implementation of stimuli engaging the senses is directly related to their perception of the in-store physical composition. In comparison, the perceived personnel dressing and the modernity of equipment show weaker associations with the \textit{sensory} dimension. This result suggests that customers’ take the sensory appealing service environment into higher consideration when perceiving SQ.

Moreover, a significant correlation was found between the items I18 and I11 referring to the dimensions of \textit{tangibles} and \textit{intellectual} $r=0.37$, $p<0.01$. This result emphasizes that 14\%\textsuperscript{352} of the evaluation variance of the \textit{tangibles} item I18 is explained by the \textit{intellectual} related item I11. Additionally to the sensory

\textsuperscript{348} Dittmar et al., 2004, p.440.

\textsuperscript{349} Only correlations at $p<0.01$ are shown in table 20 in the appendix III.

\textsuperscript{350} Computation of the explained variance: $0.43^2 \times 100 = 18.5\%$.

\textsuperscript{351} Computation of the explained variance: $0.42^2 \times 100 = 18\%$.

\textsuperscript{352} Computation of the explained variance: $0.37^2 \times 100 = 14\%$. 
attractiveness of the brand’s service environment, customers’ perception of the physical surroundings is influenced by their evaluation of the intellectual aspects of the BX. As a consequence, curiosity and thinking induced by the brand relates to the consumers’ SQ impression of the physical in-store design.

Further significant correlations between SQ and BX were found between the assurance and sensory dimensions. The items I26 and I5 are correlated at $r=0.33$, $p<0.01$. Accordingly, the percentage of variance accounted for is estimated to $11\%$\(^{353}\). Here again the other items referring to these dimensions account for slightly weaker associations for example the items I27 and I5 show a correlation of $r=0.30$, $p<0.01$, indicating an explained variance for I27 by I5 to be $9\%$\(^{354}\). Further associations between these two dimensions are illustrated in table 20. As these results emphasize the relationship between the assurance related elements of SQ and the sensory stimuli implemented by the brand is significant, indicating that consumers include the sensual BX into their perception of the brand’s personnel knowledge and competence.

The last significant correlations that result in relatively high correlation coefficients is the association between the reliability and sensory dimensions, referring to the correlations between the items I21 and I5 $r=0.31$, $p<0.01$, I22 and I5 $r=0.30$, $p<0.01$ and I22 and I6 showing an equal correlation of $r=0.30$, $p<0.01$. Considering these results, the reliability items’ percentages of variance explained by the sensory items accounts for 9-10\%\(^{355}\). Similar to the former results, there is an association between the dimensions reliability and sensory, pointing towards the tendency that the brand’s sensory attractiveness impacts the CPSQ’ reliability. Consequently, providing services at the promised time and handling customer problems adequately is significantly associated with the brand related sensory stimuli.

For the other dimensions significant correlations were found as well, but due to their weaker values they appear to be of minor interest for this discussion. Nevertheless, the accurate results for these correlations are included in table 20. Surprisingly, only very weak significant correlations between the dimensions assurance and intellectual were observed, indicating that the relevance of the relationship between these thematically related dimensions hardly exists. This non-existence of strong correlations highlights that the perceived assurance in service contexts is not affected by the customers’ intellectual brand involvement. Enhancing customers’ curiosity and thinking related to the brand shows no statistical association with the perception of the employees’ courtesy and

\(^{353}\) Computation of the explained variance: $0.33^2 \times 100 = 11\%$.
\(^{354}\) Computation of the explained variance: $0.30^2 \times 100 = 9\%$.
\(^{355}\) Computation of the explained variance: $0.31^2 \times 100 = 10\%$, $0.3^2 \times 100 = 9\%$. 

helpfulness. Similar results can be observed for the dimensions *empathy* and *social* showing only a very weak association, if any at all since for the items I28 and I13 no significant results were found. Although both dimensions highlight the emotional and social functionalities of SQ and BX there is no strong significant association between them. Consequently, the perception of the employees’ empathic ability seems to be not interrelated with the evaluation of the degree of social interaction included in the BX.

In conclusion to the results of RQ4 it is appropriate to assume that there is a relationship between the concepts of BX and SQ. Nearly every dimension of SQ shows associations with the dimensions of BX, highlighting the interrelationship of the customers’ evaluation of the BX and the CPSQ. Even if most of the correlations only account for weaker associations, the percentages of the explained variance of CPSQ partially amounts to more than 10%, showing relationships that should not be underestimated. The fact that especially the *sensory* dimension of BX shows the highest correlations within the concepts of BX and SQ, emphasizes that the sensory design of the BX appears to be the most crucial determinant related to the CPSQ. In addition, this result refers to the great importance that was already allocated to the *sensory* dimension in RQ2 and highlights the consistency of results within this study. Even though the concepts of BX and CPSQ appeared to be related in nearly every dimension future research is needed to prove and uncover possible similarities and differences based on diverging case-companies and considered industries or economies.

![Figure 8: The Item-Associations Between Brand Experience and Service Quality Dimensions](image-url)
5 Conclusion

Since, “providing powerful and compelling customer experiences will set you apart from your competitors in a way that focusing on simple satisfaction never will.”356, this present study was designed to provide deeper insights into the concepts of SQ and BX, their importance to consumers and the possible relationship among the dimensions of BX and CPSQ. By conducting an online survey dealing with the case-company IKEA, consumers’ evaluations and perceptions of BX and SQ were measured. The significant findings of the study indicate that customers tend to assign higher importance to dimensions of SQ comparatively to BX and that especially the dimensions responsiveness, assurance and reliability appear to be of major relevance. The service personnel’s willingness to help customers and to offer prompt service accounts for the most important consideration customers emphasize in service contexts. Followed by the dependability and accuracy of the service production and consumption process, customers perceive these rather functional-related factors as very important. Furthermore, the service personnel’s competence and ability to answer questions account for essential determinants in the evaluation of SQ. Surprisingly, the dimensions of tangibles and empathy accounted only for a minor importance, highlighting that the design of the physical service surroundings and the individual attention seem to be of lower relevance.

Compared to the sampled customers’ evaluation of SQ, the conceptualization of BX appears to be of slightly minor importance. However, customers rated the dimensions of sensory, affective and intellectual brand related stimuli as the most important factors for the BX. Especially the sensory appealing design of BX was evaluated to be of major importance. In addition, the emotional and cognitive involvement with the brand contributes significantly to the consumers’ evaluation of BX. The factors related to the behavioral and social aspects of BX appeared to be less important, indicating that bodily experiences and the social interaction in the BX context are rather depreciated by consumers. Even though consumers tend to slightly devalue the BXDs compared to the dimensions of SQ, the positive evaluation of BX showed a strong association with the overall opinion towards the brand. A similar but slightly weaker relationship was found between the positive perception of SQ and the consumers’ attitude towards the brand. These results contrast the tendency that SQ appears to be more important than the customers’ BX to a certain extent. Despite this, another significant correlation was found between the positive CPSQ and the visit frequency of respondents, which excels the relationship between the positive BX and the latter. Again, these results accord

to the former findings of the study highlighting the importance of SQ aspects perceived when referring to customers’ loyalty.

Since the consumer literature contributes significant differences in the shopping motives of customers based on gender\textsuperscript{357}, this study investigated these differences in the contexts of SQ and BX. As a result, the present study highlights that female customers in general assign higher importance to the dimensions of SQ and focus more intensively on the emotional and relationship-oriented factors included in the SQ perception. Similarly, female customers were found to rate a higher value to the \textit{sensory} and \textit{affective} dimension of BX, emphasizing that their information processing style is more comprehensive\textsuperscript{358} by perceiving sensory stimuli to be more important and that they are more engaged by emotions and sentiments than their male counterparts\textsuperscript{359} when experiencing a brand.

In light of the fact that scientific literature has identified prior BX to show an impact directly on customers’ service expectations\textsuperscript{360}, this study was aimed at the investigations of possible relationships between BX and the CPSQ. The empirical findings support that there is a relationship between both concepts, since nearly all dimensions showed significant correlations among each other. The highest associations were found between the thematically related dimensions \textit{tangibles} and \textit{sensory}, emphasizing that the physical design of the service environment is directly associated with the sensory appealing composition of BX. Further significant relationships were found between the dimensions of \textit{tangibles} and \textit{intellectual}, \textit{assurance} and \textit{sensory} and \textit{reliability} and \textit{sensory}. Similar to the first correlation the service environment is related to consumers’ curiosity and thinking induced by the brand. Furthermore, the competence, courtesy and dependability of the service provider show significant associations with the implementation of sensory engaging brand-related stimuli. Even though nearly all dimensions of SQ showed significant correlations with BDs, the highest were among the dimensions mentioned above.

5.1 Managerial Implications

The results of the present study do not only account for high scientific contribution but bear crucial practical implications as well. The importance of BX and SQ is paramount and requires considering the following advices derived from the empirical findings observed in this study. Providing highly sensory attractive and emotionally loaded BX plays a key role in enhancing the customers’ overall opinion of the brand and simultaneously the CPSQ. Consequently, it is inevitable

\textsuperscript{357} Cf. Evans et al., 2009, p.155.
\textsuperscript{358} Cf. Evans et al., 2009, p.178.
\textsuperscript{360} Cf. Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, p.68.
to focus on the implementation of sensory stimuli such as lightning, smells, sounds and the attractive design to enrich the customer experience. Furthermore, intensifying the BX by making use of highly emotional and cognitive engaging elements contributes to a favorable brand evaluation and can to some extent increase the brand loyalty of customers. Moreover, the study’s results support the outstanding importance assigned to excellent SQ. Particularly, the responsiveness and courtesy of service personnel, the reliability of service provided and the competence assigned to service employees represent critical determinants in CPSQ. As a consequence, it is of paramount importance to improve the frontline staff’s interaction skills by establishing adequate methods of personnel recruiting, education, training and motivation in order to offer a consistently high CPSQ.

Further significant implications can be drawn from the observed gender differences, calling for appropriate customer segmentation. While in male-dominated business contexts the functional and outcome-related aspects of service prevail, the focus should be on improving the relational and social factors of SQ when targeting female customers. Additionally, the sensory attractiveness of the physical surroundings and the embedded emotional involvement with the brand appear to show higher importance for the BX evaluation in female-oriented business concepts. As a consequence, the successful implementation of excellent SQ and memorable and strong BX requires the adequate adaptation of customer preferences based on gender.

Since the findings of the study revealed the relationship between BX and CPSQ, it is a managerial urge to include both concepts in the business reality. Enhancing the customers’ attitude towards the BX shows positive associations on the perception of SQ, which highlights the need for matching the elements of both concepts. In order to differentiate from competition and to offer unique solutions to customers the adjustments of SQ and BX bear important sources of competitive advantage and customer appreciation when designed in a complementary way.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

The present study included the case-company IKEA for measuring customers’ evaluations and perceptions of BX and CPSQ, therefore further research should be directed at other companies to ensure that the results are consistent throughout different industry segments and service concepts. Moreover, the study was conducted mainly in Germany and Sweden, comparing other nationalities’ evaluations and perceptions regarding BX and SQ illustrates further alternative research opportunities. Moreover, the study was limited to the method of collecting the post-BX and post-SQ evaluations and perceptions by conducting a quantitative online data collection, instead future investigations should consider
the measuring of these attitudes on location and directly after the BX and SQ took place by implementing a qualitative study design. Additionally, this research dealt with the in-store SQ neglecting possible differences that could be observed through other service settings such as phone-hotlines and online service and complaint handling. Finally, further insights should be provided for the different dimensions of SQ and BX. While much of scientific contribution has focused on the underlying concepts of SERVQUAL and the dimensions included only minor attention was pointed at the analogous BXDs. Therefore, the need for further research into these dimensions is essentially important for understanding the process of consumers’ decision making based on BX and CPSQ.
### Appendix I - Operationalization

**Table 4: Operationalization Items 1-20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Basis</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Question /Item</th>
<th>Measurement Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The case-company IKEA</td>
<td><strong>Q1:</strong> Do you know IKEA?</td>
<td>Q1: Dichotomous ‘Yes’ or ‘No’</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Q2:</strong> Have you ever been to an IKEA store? <strong>If no:</strong> Why not?</td>
<td>Q2: Dichotomous ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ <strong>If no:</strong> Open field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Q3:</strong> How regular do you visit IKEA?</td>
<td>Q3: Categorical, More than Once a Month, Once a Month, Every Half a Year, Once a Year, Less than Once a Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Q4:</strong> What is your overall opinion about IKEA?</td>
<td>Q4: Five Point Likert Scale, Very Positive, Positive, Neutral, Negative, Very Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BX Dimensions:**

- **Sensory** RQ2, 3, 4
  - **Item 5:** I find IKEA interesting in a sensory way
  - **Item 6:** IKEA makes a strong impression on my visual senses or other senses
  - Five-point Likert Scale, Strongly Agree, Rather Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Rather Disagree, Strongly Disagree

- **Affective** RQ2, 3, 4
  - **Item 7:** IKEA induces feelings and emotions
  - **Item 8:** IKEA is an emotional brand
  - See above

- **Behavioral** RQ2, 3, 4
  - **Item 9:** IKEA results in bodily experience
  - **Item 10:** IKEA is action oriented
  - See above

- **Intellectual** RQ2, 3, 4
  - **Item 11:** IKEA stimulates my curiosity
  - **Item 12:** IKEA makes me think
  - See above

- **Social** RQ2, 3, 4
  - **Item 13:** I am in interaction with other people when I use this brand
  - **Item 14:** IKEA provides me to build friendships
  - **Item 15:** IKEA encourages me to chat
  - See above

- **Overall Experience** RQ2
  - **Item 16:** I have a positive overall attitude towards my BX with IKEA
  - See above

- **Importance Ranking** RQ2
  - **Q17:** How important are the brand experience dimensions for you? (Sensory, Affective, Behavioral, Intellectual, and Social)
  - Q17: Five-point Likert Scale, Very Important, Rather Important, Neither Important nor Unimportant, Rather Unimportant, Very Unimportant

**SQ Dimensions:**

- **Tangibles** RQ1, 3, 4
  - **Item 18:** IKEA stores are attractively arranged
  - **Item 19:** The personnel at IKEA are dressed appropriately
  - **Item 20:** IKEA has up-to date equipment
  - Five-point Likert Scale, Strongly Agree, Rather Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Rather Disagree, Strongly Disagree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Basis</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Question /Item</th>
<th>Measurement Scale</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1, 3, 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Item 21:</strong> IKEA provides services as promised</td>
<td>See above</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Item 22:</strong> IKEA handles customers’ service problems adequately</td>
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<td><strong>Item 23:</strong> IKEA provides service at the promised time</td>
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<td><strong>Responsive-ness</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1, 3, 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Item 24:</strong> IKEA offers prompt service to the customer</td>
<td>See above</td>
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<td><strong>Item 25:</strong> IKEA’s personnel are willing to help customers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assurance</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1, 3, 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Item 26:</strong> IKEA’s employees have the knowledge to answer customers’ questions</td>
<td>See above</td>
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<td><strong>Item 27:</strong> IKEA’s personnel are competent</td>
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<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1, 3, 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Item 28:</strong> Employees at IKEA give customers individual attention</td>
<td>See above</td>
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<td><strong>Item 29:</strong> IKEA’s personnel care about the customers</td>
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<td><strong>Item 30:</strong> Employees at IKEA have the customers’ best interest at heart</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall SQ</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Item 31:</strong> I have a positive overall attitude towards the SQ at IKEA</td>
<td>See above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance Ranking</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Q32:</strong> How important are the SQ dimensions for you?</td>
<td><strong>Q32:</strong> Five-point Likert Scale, Very Important, Rather Important, Neither Important nor Unimportant, Rather Unimportant, Very Unimportant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Q33:</strong> What is your gender?</td>
<td><strong>Q33:</strong> Dichotomous ‘Female or ‘Male</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Q34:</strong> How old are you?</td>
<td><strong>Q34:</strong> Categorical Under 18, 18 – 24, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, Older than 44</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Q35:</strong> What is your nationality?</td>
<td><strong>Q35:</strong> Drop-down option</td>
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<td><strong>Q36:</strong> What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?</td>
<td><strong>Q36:</strong> Categorical, No Schooling Completed, School to 9th Grade, Graduated High School (Abitur), Some College Credit, no Degree, Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, Doctorate Degree, Other, namely: open field</td>
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<td><strong>Q37:</strong> What is your marital status?</td>
<td><strong>Q37:</strong> Categorical, Single (never been married), In a Relationship, Married, Separated, Divorced, Widowed</td>
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<td><strong>Q38:</strong> Including yourself, how many people currently live in your household?</td>
<td><strong>Q38:</strong> Categorical, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, More than 5</td>
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<td><strong>Q39:</strong> What is your monthly net income (€)?</td>
<td><strong>Q39:</strong> Categorical, 0 – 450 (€), 451 – 1000 (€), 1001 – 2000 (€), 2001 – 3000 (€), 3001 – 4000 (€), 4001 – 5000 (€), More than 5000 (€)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II - Questionnaire

The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Customer Perceived Service Quality

Covering Letter

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a survey research investigating the relationship between brand experience and customer perceived service quality in the context of the Swedish retailer IKEA. The study is conducted by Michelle Meis enrolled in the Mid Sweden University and FH Aachen as a contribution to her bachelor thesis. Your participation in the survey will help companies to achieve a better understanding of brand experiences and perceived service quality from a consumer perspective. The questionnaire is carried out in English and the completion will only take a few minutes. Please answer all questions from your own perspective and experience as honestly as possible even if you are not completely sure. Your participation is voluntarily and all entered information will be kept confidential and anonymous.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate and contact:
michelle.meis@student.miun.se

IKEA

Firstly, could you please give me some information about your attitude towards IKEA.

Q1: Do you know IKEA?
   □ Yes   □ No

Q2: Have you ever been to an IKEA store?
   □ Yes   □ No
   (If no, why not: __________________)

Q3: How regular do you visit IKEA?
   □ More than Once a Month
   □ Once a Month
   □ Every Half a Year
   □ Once a Year
   □ Less than Once a Year

Q4: What is your overall opinion about IKEA?
   □ Very Positive
   □ Positive
   □ Neutral
   □ Negative
   □ Very Negative
May you now give me some information about you experiences with IKEA. If you are using your smartphone it is recommended to turn it sideways, so that all answer possibilities are easy to read.

### Sensory Statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 5: I find IKEA interesting in a sensory way</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<th>Item 6: IKEA makes a strong impression on my visual senses or other senses</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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### Affective Statement

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<tr>
<th>Item 7: IKEA induces feelings and emotions</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<th>Item 8: IKEA is an emotional brand</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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### Behavioral Statement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Item 9: IKEA results in bodily experience</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Item 10: IKEA is action oriented</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Intellectual Statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 11: IKEA stimulates my curiosity</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 12: IKEA makes me think</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social Statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 13: I am in interaction with other people when I use this brand</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 14: IKEA provides me to build friendships</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 15: IKEA encourages me to chat</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Q16: I have a positive overall attitude towards my experiences with IKEA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q17: How important are the brand experience dimensions for you?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Rather Important</th>
<th>Neither Important nor Unimportant</th>
<th>Rather Unimportant</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensory (Visual or other senses)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective (Feelings and emotions)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral (Physical actions)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual (Thinking)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social (Social interaction)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service Quality

Finally, please give me some information on your service quality perceptions at IKEA.

**Tangibles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 18: IKEA provides attractive facilities</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 19: The personnel at IKEA is dressed appropriately</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 20: IKEA has up-to-date equipment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reliability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 21: IKEA provides services as promised</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 22: IKEA handles customers’ service problems adequately</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 23: IKEA provides service at the promised time</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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**Responsiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 24: IKEA offers prompt service to the customer</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 25: IKEA’s personnel is willing to help customers</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Assurance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 26: IKEA’s employees have the knowledge to answer customers’ questions</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 27: IKEA’s personnel is competent</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</table>
Empathy
Statement

Item 28: Employees at IKEA give customers individual attention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>□</td>
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</table>

Item 29: IKEA’s personnel care about the customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Item 30: Employees at IKEA have the customers’ best interest at heart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>□</td>
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</table>

Q31: I have a positive overall attitude towards the service quality at IKEA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q32: How important are the SERVQUAL dimensions for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Rather Important</th>
<th>Neither Important nor Unimportant</th>
<th>Rather Unimportant</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(“Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(“Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(“Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(“Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(“Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Questions

Lastly, could you please give me some information about yourself, so that I can put your other answers in a greater context.

Q33: What is your gender?

□ Female □ Male

Q34: How old are you?

□ Under 18
□ 18 - 24
□ 25 – 34
□ 35 – 44
□ Older than 44

**Q35:** What is your nationality?
Drop Down __________________

**Q36:** What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
*If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*
 □ No Schooling Completed
 □ School to 9th Grade
 □ Graduated High School (Abitur)
 □ Some College Credit, no Degree
 □ Bachelor’s Degree
 □ Master’s Degree
 □ Doctorate Degree
 □ Other: __________________

**Q37:** What is your marital status? *
 □ Single (Never Been Married)
 □ In a Relationship
 □ Married
 □ Separated
 □ Divorced
 □ Widowed

**Q38:** Including yourself, how many people currently live in your household?
 □ 1
 □ 2
 □ 3
 □ 4
 □ 5
 □ > 5

**Q39:** What is your monthly net income (€)?
 □ 0 – 450
 □ 451 – 1000
 □ 1001 – 2000
 □ 2001 – 3000
 □ 3001 – 4000
 □ 4001 – 5000
 □ > 5000
Appendix III - Analysis

Frequencies Demographics

**Gender Distribution**

- Male (43.3%)
- Female (56.7%)

*Figure 9: Relative Gender Distribution, n=330*

**Age Distribution**

- Under 18 Years (1.2%)
- 18 - 24 Years (40.3%)
- 25 - 34 Years (22.7%)
- 35 - 44 Years (11.8%)
- Older than 44 Years (23.9%)

*Figure 10: Relative Age Distribution, n=330*

**Distribution Highest Educational Degree**

- No Schooling Completed (0.3%)
- School to 9th Grade (8.4%)
- Graduated High School (39.6%)
- Some College Credit, no Degree (23.2%)
- Bachelor’s Degree (17.6%)
- Master’s Degree (8%)
- Doctorate Degree (2.2%)

*Figure 11: Relative Distribution of Respondents' Highest Educational Degree, n=330*
Figure 12: Relative Distribution of Respondents’ Marital Status, n=330

Figure 13: Relative Distribution of Respondents’ Monthly Net Income, n=315
Frequencies IKEA

Figure 14: Relative Distribution of Respondents Knowing IKEA, n=356

Figure 15: Relative Distribution of Respondents that Have Visited IKEA, n=356
### Reliability Testing

#### Table 6: Reliability Testing Service Quality Scale and Dimensions, n=329

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability Testing</th>
<th>Items Included</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha (α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Service Quality Scale</td>
<td>I18-I30</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles Dimension</td>
<td>I18, I19, I20</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability Dimension</td>
<td>I21, I22, I23</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness Dimension</td>
<td>I24, I25</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance Dimension</td>
<td>I26, I27</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy Dimension</td>
<td>I28, I29, I30</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 7: Reliability Testing Brand Experience Scale and Dimensions, n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability Testing</th>
<th>Items Included</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha (α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Brand Exp. Scale</td>
<td>I5-I15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory Dimension</td>
<td>I5, I6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Dimension</td>
<td>I7, I8</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral Dimension</td>
<td>I9, I10</td>
<td>0.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual Dimension</td>
<td>I11, I12</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Dimension</td>
<td>I13, I14, I15</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequencies Service Quality Items

#### Table 8: Frequencies Tangibles Dimension of Service Quality, n=330

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>∑ %</td>
<td>∑ %</td>
<td>∑ %</td>
<td>∑ %</td>
<td>∑ %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I18 IKEA stores are attractively arranged</td>
<td>91 27.6</td>
<td>177 53.6</td>
<td>43 13</td>
<td>18 5.5</td>
<td>1 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I19 The personnel at IKEA are dressed appropriately</td>
<td>67 20.3</td>
<td>157 47.6</td>
<td>83 25.2</td>
<td>20 6.1</td>
<td>3 0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I20 IKEA has up-to-date equipment</td>
<td>99 30</td>
<td>146 44.2</td>
<td>72 21.8</td>
<td>13 3.9</td>
<td>- -</td>
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</table>
### Table 9: Frequencies Reliability Dimension of Service Quality, n=330

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I21 IKEA provides services as promised</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I22 IKEA handles customers' service problems adequately</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
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<td>I23 IKEA provides services at the promised times</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>113</td>
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### Table 10: Frequencies Responsiveness Dimension of Service Quality, n=329

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<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I24 IKEA offers prompt service to customers</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>103</td>
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<tr>
<td>I25 IKEA’s personnel are willing to help customers</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11: Frequencies Assurance Dimension of Service Quality, n=329

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I26 IKEA’s employees have the knowledge to answer customers’ questions</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
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<td>I27 IKEA’s personnel are competent</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>62</td>
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</table>
Table 12: Frequencies Empathy Dimension of Service Quality, n=329

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I28 Employees at IKEA give customers individual attention</td>
<td>41 12.5</td>
<td>156 47.4</td>
<td>97 29.5</td>
<td>28 8.5</td>
<td>7 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I29 IKEA’s personnel care about the customers</td>
<td>47 14.3</td>
<td>161 48.9</td>
<td>100 30.4</td>
<td>18 5.5</td>
<td>3 0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I30 Employees at IKEA have the customers’ best interest at heart</td>
<td>30 9.1</td>
<td>133 40.4</td>
<td>141 42.9</td>
<td>22 6.7</td>
<td>3 0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequencies Brand Experience Items

Table 13: Frequencies Sensory Dimension of Brand Experience, n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I5 I find IKEA interesting in a sensory way</td>
<td>42 12</td>
<td>178 50.7</td>
<td>112 31.9</td>
<td>17 4.8</td>
<td>2 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I6 IKEA makes a strong impression on my visual or other senses</td>
<td>65 18.5</td>
<td>166 47.3</td>
<td>97 27.6</td>
<td>21 6</td>
<td>2 0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Frequencies Affective Dimension of Brand Experience, n=350 and n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I7 IKEA induces feelings and emotions</td>
<td>37 10.6</td>
<td>168 48</td>
<td>100 28.6</td>
<td>35 10</td>
<td>10 2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I8 IKEA is an emotional brand</td>
<td>38 10.8</td>
<td>135 38.5</td>
<td>107 30.5</td>
<td>58 16.5</td>
<td>13 3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15: Frequencies Behavioral Dimension of Brand Experience, n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I9 IKEA results in bodily experience</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I10 IKEA is action-oriented</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Frequencies Intellectual Dimension of Brand Experience, n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I11 IKEA stimulates my curiosity</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I12 IKEA makes me think</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Frequencies Social Dimension of Brand Experience, n=351

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ %</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I13 I am in interaction with other people when I use IKEA</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I14 IKEA provides me to build friendships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I15 IKEA provides me to chat</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequencies Positive Service Quality

I have a positive overall attitude towards my brand experience with IKEA

- Strongly Disagree (1.4%)
- Rather Disagree (4%)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (16%)
- Rather Agree (55.3%)
- Strongly agree (23.4%)

Figure 16: Relative Distribution of Positive Service Quality, n=329

Frequencies Positive Brand Experience

I have a positive overall attitude towards my brand experience with IKEA

- Strongly Disagree (1.4%)
- Rather Disagree (4%)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (16%)
- Rather Agree (55.3%)
- Strongly agree (23.4%)

Figure 17: Relative Distribution of Positive Brand Experience, n=351
**Kruskal Wallis Test**

*Table 18: p-Values Kruskal Wallis Test for Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monthly Net Income</th>
<th>Highest Educational Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you know IKEA?</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Assurance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mann-Whitney U Test**

*Table 19: p-Values Mann-Whitney U Test for Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Opinion IKEA</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit Frequency IKEA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Tangibles</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Reliability</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Responsiveness</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Assurance</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Empathy</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Sensory</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Affective</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Service Quality</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Brand Experience</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Correlations Between Brand Experience and Service Quality

Table 20: Results of the Correlation Coefficient Analysis at \( p < 0.01 \) Between Brand Experience and Service Quality Dimensions

| Service Quality Dimensions | Brand Experience Dimensions | p>|0.01 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------|
| Empathy                    | I11                         | 0.24 |
| Assurance                  | I12                         | 0.15 |
| Responsiveness             | I13                         | 0.22 |
| Reliability                | I14                         | 0.20 |
| Tangibles                  | I15                         | 0.18 |
| P>|0.01                      |                             |      |

Table 20: Results of the Correlation Coefficient Analysis at \( p < 0.01 \) Between Brand Experience and Service Quality Dimensions

Correlations Between Brand Experience and Service Quality

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List of References


Closing Declaration

I hereby assure to have written the present thesis without the help of others and without using any other aids than the ones I indicated. All passages directly or indirectly taken from published or unpublished sources have been marked as such. The paper has not been presented to any other examination office other than FH Aachen University of Applied Sciences and Mid Sweden University in the same or similar form.

Östersund, 10.06.2018

Signature [Signature]

(First name, surname)
MICHELLE MEIS

Personal Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surname</td>
<td>Meis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Aachener Straße 124 52076 Aachen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>02408/7951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handy</td>
<td>+49 157874 63569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mail</td>
<td><a href="mailto:michelle.meis@gmx.de">michelle.meis@gmx.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>05.05.1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td>Aachen-Burtscheid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education

2017 – 2018
Business Administration B.A.
Exchange Year: Mid Sweden University, Sweden
Thesis: The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Customer Perceived Service Quality: Empirical Insights into the Experience-Seeking and Service-Oriented Economy

2015 – 2018
International Business Studies B.Sc.
FH Aachen University of Applied Sciences, Germany

2007-2015
Inda-Gymnasium Aachen
Diploma from German Secondary School Qualifying for University Admission, Abitur (Grade A)

Professional Experience

Since November 2015
ZAQUENSIS GmbH, Aachen (Germany)
Marketing Department, Social Media Assistant

June 2015 – August 2015
Henry Lambertz GmbH & Co. KG, Aachen (Germany)
Marketing Department, Twelve-Week Internship

September 2013 – May 2015
Otto Geilenkirchen GmbH & Co. KG, Aachen (Germany)
Warehouse and Logistics, Mini-Job

April 2012
ZAQUENSIS GmbH, Aachen (Germany)
Marketing Department, Two-Week Internship

Language Skills

German: Native
English: Fluent (C2)
Spanish: Good (B2)
Swedish: Basic (A1)
Qualification in Latin (Grade A)

Additional Skills

Computing
MS Office and Adobe (Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign)

Driver’s License
Klasse B

Interests

Sports (Running, Fitness, Volleyball), hiking, reading and traveling