

## Role of customer experience and customer engagement in organised retail apparel stores with respect to select cities in Kerala

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**Abstract:** Customer experience (CX) and customer engagement (CE) are pivotal elements in the success of retail stores, influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall business performance. The present study looks into the role of CX and CE in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala. Through a mixed-method approach, comprising descriptive as well as correlational research designs, the study investigates how customer experience influences customer engagement, loyalty, and purchase intentions. The findings reveal significant positive impacts of customer experience on engagement and loyalty, with demographic variables playing a moderating role. The results underscore the importance of enhancing customer experience to foster engagement and loyalty, providing strategic insights for retail managers aiming to improve customer retention and satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Customer engagement, Customer experience, Customer loyalty, Organized retail apparel stores, Purchase intention, Retail marketing, Consumer behaviour.*

### 1. Introduction

Lately, customer engagement (CE) has evolved into a vital approach for generating value within contemporary businesses [7, 9]. This concept, characterized by a customer's commitment of resources towards interactions with a brand [16], has been associated with various beneficial outcomes. In the retail industry, especially in organized apparel stores, the association between customer experience (CX) and engagement is vital. CE has been found to boost sales, increase customer spending, enhance brand reputation, and provide a competitive edge and higher profitability [31]. Furthermore, it acts as a safeguard against losing customers [8], thereby reducing customer turnover rates [19].

For sustainable profitability in the service sector, it is essential for firms to cultivate robust relationships with their customers by actively engaging them. Customer engagement behavior entails voluntary contributions from customers to a brand that extend beyond simple transactions. These behaviors are significantly shaped by customer attributes such as attitudes, satisfaction, trust, and perceived value. To enhance engagement, some companies create platforms that allow customers to share ideas and feedback on new products [14].

In the retail setting, customer engagement behaviors frequently manifest through interactions with fellow customers or company representatives. For instance, a customer might help another shopper, or they may exhibit empathy towards each other. Engagement with the firm can take the form of adherence to rules, providing feedback, or cooperating with staff [36]. Adherence involves following the company's policies and guidelines. Providing feedback allows customers to suggest improvements and assist in the creation of novel goods or services. Cooperation entails customers willingly assisting employees and facilitating service processes. In a connected world, customer engagement behaviors also encompass spreading favourable word of mouth (WOM) and aiding other clients. Positive WOM includes recommending the company to others, which can often have a greater impact than repeat purchases. Hence, customer engagement behavior is considered a multifaceted construct, encompassing compliance, assistance, suggestions, supporting other clients, and favorable word-of-mouth [20, 32].

Customer experience has emerged as a crucial marketing concept focused on delivering unique, enjoyable, and memorable experiences. Although relatively new, this idea has garnered significant attention over the past thirty years. Academics and vendors view it as a strategic approach for generating comprehensive value for clients, differentiating brands, and gaining sustainable competitive advantages. Customer experience is integral to organizational success. There is widespread agreement that delivering favorable interactions with clients is vital for securing a competitive edge, ensuring client contentment, establishing differentiation, enhancing brand image, fostering loyalty, and promoting WOM. The traditional "features-and-benefits marketing approach has evolved into one centered on generating experiences for clients. This shift towards an experience-based economy is highly recommended by both academics and professionals. Substantial research as well as practical implementations have led to the advent of the experiential marketing viewpoint. This strategy posits that consumers live by experiencing products, services, events, or a series of multisensory interactions with organizations at each stage of the purchase process.

Despite numerous attempts to define and conceptualize CX and its associations with various factors, there is still no consensus on its construct and definitions. Theoretical frameworks are still being formulated and validated. Most of the existing research in this domain originates from industry, with limited scholarly contributions. Understanding the dynamics of customer experience and engagement is crucial for retailers aiming to maintain a competitive edge. As consumers increasingly seek holistic and enjoyable shopping experiences, retailers must adapt by creating environments that foster engagement and satisfaction. The investigation seeks to inspect the function of CX and CE in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala. By focusing on organized retail apparel stores in Kerala, the study provides specific insights and practical implications for retail managers, while contributing to the broader discourse on customer-centric marketing strategies.

## 2. Literature Survey

### 2.1. Retail Customer Shopping Experience

Retail store characteristics encompass a range of evaluative criteria such as sales workforce efficiency, customer service quality, store aesthetics, pricing and return policies, accessibility, product assortment, and brand offerings, as well as the availability of innovative fashions and merchandise value [26]. These factors collectively influence the overall perception of the retail environment and subsequently affect customer behavior. Previous researchers have established the significance of these characteristics, emphasizing the significance of both functional and psychological attributes in crafting a positive shopping experience.

Consumers' perceptions of retail store traits are shaped by both functional capabilities and psychological characteristics. Functional aspects include product variety, pricing strategies, credit policies, store layout, and other features that can be objectively compared with those of competitors. Essential elements that make up retailing include value of merchandise, product selection, and styles. Merchandise value, defined as the level of customer satisfaction with the store's product offerings, plays a vital role in the shopping experience [33]. A positive shopping experience enhances perceptions of merchandise pricing and overall store value. Merchandise price represents the cost exchanged for products [21]. Psychological attributes are the beliefs formed based on the store's functional aspects.

Customer experience has been a subject of theoretical exploration since Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) conceptualization of consumption as providing both hedonic and utilitarian value. It is built on interrelations among consumers and retailers, which generate value and enhance satisfaction and purchase intentions [18, 27].

CX is viewed as a holistic, multidimensional construct involving cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the retailer [25]. Consumers expect a comprehensive experience at every point in their journey [10, 11, 25, 31]. The consumer's proximity to an amalgam of products, surroundings, and activities influences their sense of involvement in the experience [4]. Therefore, retailers must innovate and enhance the physical channel to stay competitive [34].

The physical store environment offers experiential touchpoints and cues that define the store atmosphere [30]. Recent research has integrated digital technology into store atmospherics, showing

that consumer-facing technologies can boost store attractiveness and aesthetic appeal, favourably influencing buying behavior [29, 30, 23, 34]. Innovative technologies have the potential to transform the customer experience [6, 24]. Understanding shifts in experience perceptions due to these influences can be assessed over time. Several studies address the need for further research into how Information and Service Technologies (ISTs) enhance the customer shopping experience in physical retail settings [13, 25], with a specific focus on the fashion retail tor [28].

## 2.2. Customer Experience and Customer Engagement Behaviour

Customer experience is derived from a sequence of correspondence between a client and a service provider. Academics concur that the client experience is all-encompassing, comprising various internal and subjective responses to an organization [35]. It includes cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and sensory elements across different touchpoints [25]. According to Voorhees et al. [37], customer experience occurs through multiple interactions related to a core service offering, encompassing several "moments of truth" that impact client outcomes. From an organizational viewpoint [22], it involves designing and delivering a customer-centric experience [5]. As stated by Grewal et al. [13], controlling customer experience is a strategic business tactic that helps the service provider as well as its clients. The broad managerial consequences of customer experience management (CEM), such as alterations in cultural attitudes, strategic direction, and the growth of business competencies, were emphasized by Homburg et al. [17]. Businesses that use CEM offer social, digital, and physical components at various "instances of truth."

Beckers et al. [3] introduced the term "firm-initiated customer engagement" to describe tactics employed by companies to encourage customer engagement, such as creating brand videos or "liking" brands on social media. Harmeling et al. [15] distinguished between customer engagement as an outcome and CEM, defined as the firm's efforts to inspire and gauge customers' voluntary contributions beyond core transactions. Previous research has often focused on issues like psychological ownership and self-transformation, neglecting the significance of social interaction, reciprocity, and opportunity costs in strategic engagement initiatives.

Studies consistently show that positive customer experiences lead to behaviors such as recommendations, organizational support, and positive word-of-mouth [2]. These engagement behaviors vary. Social exchange theory implies that when clients are satisfied with the service they receive, they see the company as fulfilling its side of the service agreement, motivating them to engage in extra-role behaviors.

Customers engage in various types of behaviors. Social media platforms enable customers to discuss and exchange insights regarding a retailer's service, and products [12]. These interactions influence other customers' behaviors and attitudes and assist merchants in enhancing their performance. Beneficial encounters can make consumers believe that the standard of the services they are provided is superior and encourage them to provide merchants and other clients with additional recommendations and data. Physical and sensory experiences in the service environment can foster positive behaviors toward service organizations. In online retail, satisfied customers are prone to offer advice and assistance to others, and provide empathetic support [1]. Customers with positive social interactions with retail employees or other clients are more willing to help, forming committed reciprocal relationships with retailers. CE behaviors are seen as a higher-order construct, where engaged customers exhibit a wide range of extra-role behaviors [20, 32].

The literature review highlights the complex nature of customer experience and engagement in retail settings. Research consistently shows that positive customer experiences lead to higher engagement, fostering loyalty and favourable WOM. However, there is a necessary for more empirical studies to explore these relationships in specific retail contexts. This study addresses this gap by focusing on organized retail apparel stores in Kerala, providing new insights into the determinants of CE and strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### 3. Objectives of the study

- To analyze the impact of customer experience on customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.
- To examine the relationship between customer engagement and customer loyalty in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.
- To evaluate the influence of customer experience on purchase intention in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.
- To assess the role of demographic variables in moderating the relationship between customer experience and customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.

### 4. Hypotheses of the Study

$H_1$ - Customer experience significantly impacts customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.

$H_2$ - There is a positive relationship between customer engagement and customer loyalty in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.

$H_3$ - Customer experience positively influences purchase intention in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.

$H_4$ - Demographic variables significantly moderate the relationship between customer experience and customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala.

### 5. Research Questions

- How does customer experience affect customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala?
- What is the nature of the relationship between customer engagement and customer loyalty in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala?
- How does customer experience influence purchase intention in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala?
- To what extent do demographic variables moderate the relationship between customer experience and customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala?

### 6. Research Methodology

#### 6.1. Research Design

The research employs a mixed-method approach, integrating descriptive as well as correlational research designs to thoroughly analyze the role of CX and CE in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala. The descriptive research design describes the current state of customer experience and engagement, collecting data on the target population's characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes. The correlational research design identifies and analyze the relationships between customer experience, customer engagement, customer loyalty, and purchase intention, aiming to understand how Variable alterations are related to alterations in another variable. The study focuses on customers shopping at organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala, with data collection occurring over a three-month period to capture a diverse range of customer experiences and engagement levels. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire administered both online and in-person at selected retail stores, including items measuring customer experience, engagement, loyalty, purchase intention, and demographic variables.

#### 6.2. Sampling Size and Strategy

To determine the sample size for this study, we assume a large population of 100,000 customers shopping at organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala. Using a 95% confidence level corresponding to a Z-value of 1.96, a 5% margin of error ( $E=0.05$ ), and an estimated population proportion (P) of 0.5, the sample size formula for proportions,

$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot P \cdot (1-P)}{E^2}$  is applied. Calculating this, we find  $n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$ , resulting in  $n = 384.16$ . Given the large population size, the finite population correction factor is not necessary, so the final sample size is rounded up to 400 respondents.

To assess the validity and reliability of the survey, a pilot study with 50 participants was carried out, with feedback used to refine it. The final sample size of 400 respondents was targeted to ensure adequate representation and statistical power. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure diversity and representativeness across different demographic segments, dividing the population into strata based on demographic variables and randomly selecting respondents from each stratum.

### 6.3. Data Collection

Primary data was gathered employing a standardized questionnaire that was distributed to customers in organized retail apparel stores, covering sections on customer experience, engagement, loyalty, purchase intention, and demographic information. Secondary data was gathered from academic journals, industry reports, and previous studies relevant to customer experience and engagement in retail.

### 6.4. Variables of the Study

#### 6.4.1. Independent Variables

- i) Customer experience- Measures include store atmosphere, product quality, service quality, and overall satisfaction.
- ii) Demographic variables- Age, gender, income level, etc.

#### 6.4.2. Dependent Variables

- i) Customer engagement- Measures include frequency of visits, interaction with staff, participation in loyalty programs, and engagement with store promotions.
- ii) Customer loyalty- Measures include repeat purchase behaviour, willingness to recommend, and overall loyalty to the store.
- iii) Purchase intention- Measures include intention to purchase, likelihood of future purchases, and planned spending.

### 6.5. Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to offer a thorough comprehension of the sample characteristics and key variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sample characteristics and key variables. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses and explore the relationship among variables. Specifically, regression analysis was carried out to examine the effect of customer experience on customer engagement, correlation analysis was used to assess the association between CE and customer loyalty, ANOVA was employed to evaluate the influence of customer experience on purchase intention, and moderation analysis was performed to assess the role of demographic variables in moderating the relationship among CX and CE.

### 6.6. Limitations of the Study

The research is constrained by its geographic focus on select cities in Kerala, that might affect the universality of the outcomes to other regions. Furthermore, the application of self-reported information introduces the potential for response biases. In addition, the research's cross-sectional design gathers data at a single point in time, thereby limiting the ability to infer causality.

### 6.7. Ethical considerations

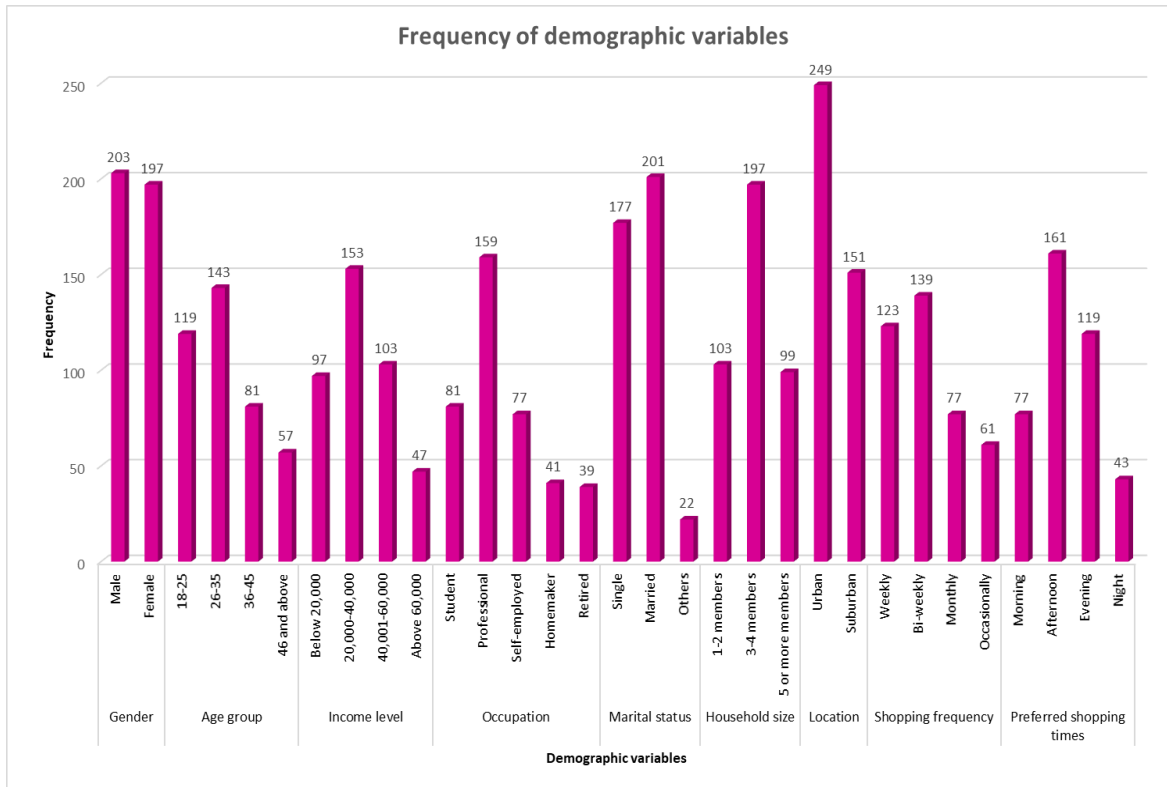
Consent was acquired from participants after they were made aware of the study's goal. In addition to being informed that participation is entirely optional and that they are free to end it at any moment, respondents' data was guaranteed to be private and confidential.

## 7. Results and Analysis

### 7.1. Descriptive Analysis

**Table 1.**  
Demographic traits of participants.

Variable		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	203	50.75
	Female	197	49.25
Age group	18-25	119	29.75
	26-35	143	35.75
	36-45	81	20.25
	46 and above	57	14.25
Income level	Below 20,000	97	24.25
	20,000-40,000	153	38.25
	40,001-60,000	103	25.75
	Above 60,000	47	11.75
Occupation	Student	81	20.25
	Professional	159	39.75
	Self-employed	77	19.25
	Homemaker	41	10.25
	Retired	39	9.75
Marital status	Single	177	44.25
	Married	201	50.25
	Others	22	5.50
Household size	1-2 members	103	25.75
	3-4 members	197	49.25
	5 or more members	99	24.75
Location	Urban	249	62.25
	Suburban	151	37.75
Shopping frequency	Weekly	123	30.75
	Bi-weekly	139	34.75
	Monthly	77	19.25
	Occasionally	61	15.25
Preferred shopping times	Morning	77	19.25
	Afternoon	161	40.25
	Evening	119	29.75
	Night	43	10.75



**Figure 1.**  
Frequency of demographic variables.

The sample demographics indicate a well-distributed representation across various categories, including gender, age groups, income levels, occupation, marital status, household size, location, shopping frequency, and preferred shopping times. This diverse dataset ensures that the analysis will provide comprehensive insights into the customer experience and engagement in organized retail apparel stores across different segments of the population. The inclusion of various demographic attributes allows for a nuanced understanding of how different factors may influence the relationships being studied.

## 7.2. Inferential Analysis

### 7.2.1. Regression Analysis

**Table 2.**

Regression analysis of customer experience on customer engagement.

Predictor variable	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Std. error	t-value	p-value
Customer experience	0.45	0.05	9.00	<0.001

The regression analysis demonstrates that customer experience significantly impacts customer engagement in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala. With a coefficient ( $B$ ) of 0.45 and a p-value <0.001, the results strongly support Hypothesis 1. This suggests that enhancing customer experience can directly improve customer engagement levels. However, while the significant positive impact is evident, it is also important to consider other variables that might influence this relationship, as well as potential variations across different demographic groups.





**Figure 2.**  
Scatter plot of the regression analysis.

The scatter plot includes a regression line showing the linear relationship between customer experience (independent variable) and customer engagement (dependent variable), with each point representing an observed pair of values. The slope of the regression line ( $B = 0.45$ ) indicates that for every unit raise in CX, CE increases by 0.45 units. The positive coefficient ( $B = 0.45$ ) and the low p-value ( $< 0.001$ ) suggest a statistically significant relationship. Key observations include a clear positive relationship between customer experience and customer engagement, a strong statistical significance indicating that CX is a significant predictor of CE, and the potential for enhancing CX to increase CE, which can be a key strategy for retail stores.

**Table 3.**  
Correlation analysis between customer engagement and customer loyalty.

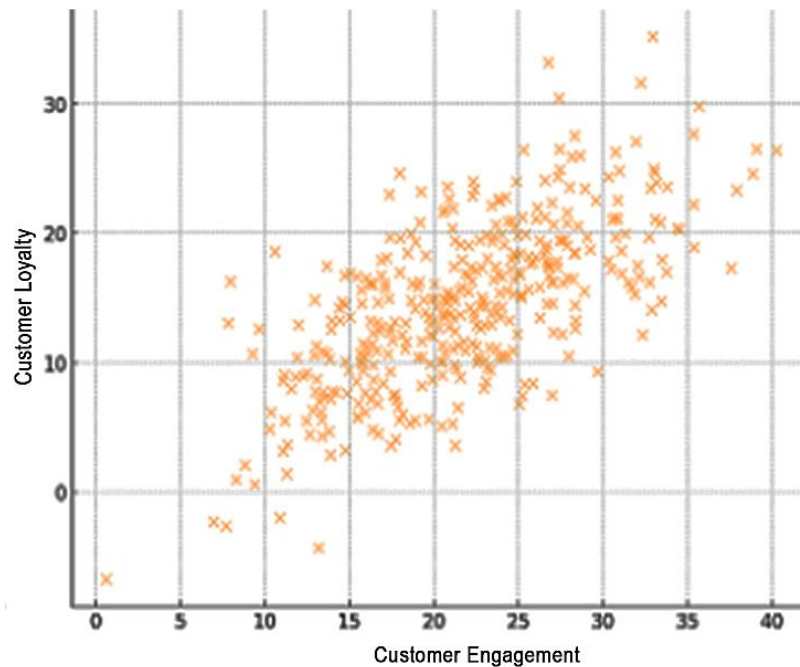
Variables	Correlation coefficient (r)	p-value
Customer engagement	0.65	$<0.001$

#### 7.2.2. Correlation Analysis

A robust beneficial correlation among customer involvement and customer loyalty is revealed by the correlation analysis, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.65 and a p-value  $<0.001$ . This supports Hypothesis 2, indicating that higher levels of customer engagement are associated with increased customer loyalty. This finding underscores the importance of fostering engagement to build a loyal customer base. Nevertheless, while the correlation is strong, causation cannot be directly inferred, and other mediating factors should be considered in future studies.



### Correlation Analysis : Customer Engagement vs. Customer Loyalty



**Figure 3.**  
Scatter plot of the correlation analysis.

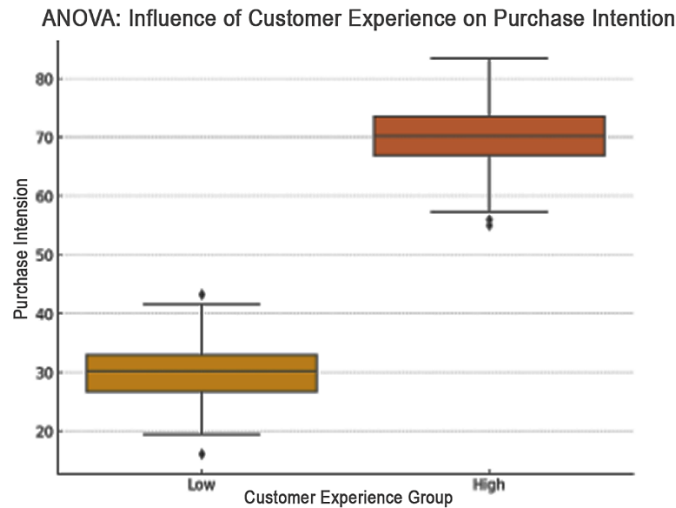
The scatter plot displays the association between CE and customer loyalty, with a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.65, indicating a strong positive linear relationship. The very low  $p$ -value ( $< 0.001$ ) confirms that this correlation is statistically significant. Key observations from the data reveal a strong positive correlation, implying that greater levels of customer engagement are linked with greater levels of customer loyalty. This underscores the vitality of fostering CE to increase customer loyalty, highlighting its significance for retail strategies. However, while the correlation is strong, it does not imply causation, and further studies could investigate potential causal mechanisms.

#### 7.2.3. ANOVA

**Table 4.**  
ANOVA for the influence of customer experience on purchase intention.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-value	p-value
Between groups	15.20	1	15.20	22.30	$< 0.001$
Within groups	271.80	398	0.68		
Total	287.00	399			

The ANOVA results indicate that the impact of the CX on the intention to purchase is noteworthy, with an F-value of 22.30 and a  $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ , supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding implies that enhancing customer experience can positively affect customers' likelihood to make purchases. However, it is important to recognize that while the results are statistically significant, practical implementation of strategies to improve customer experience should be evaluated for cost-effectiveness and overall impact on sales and profitability.



**Figure 4.**  
Box plot of the ANOVA.

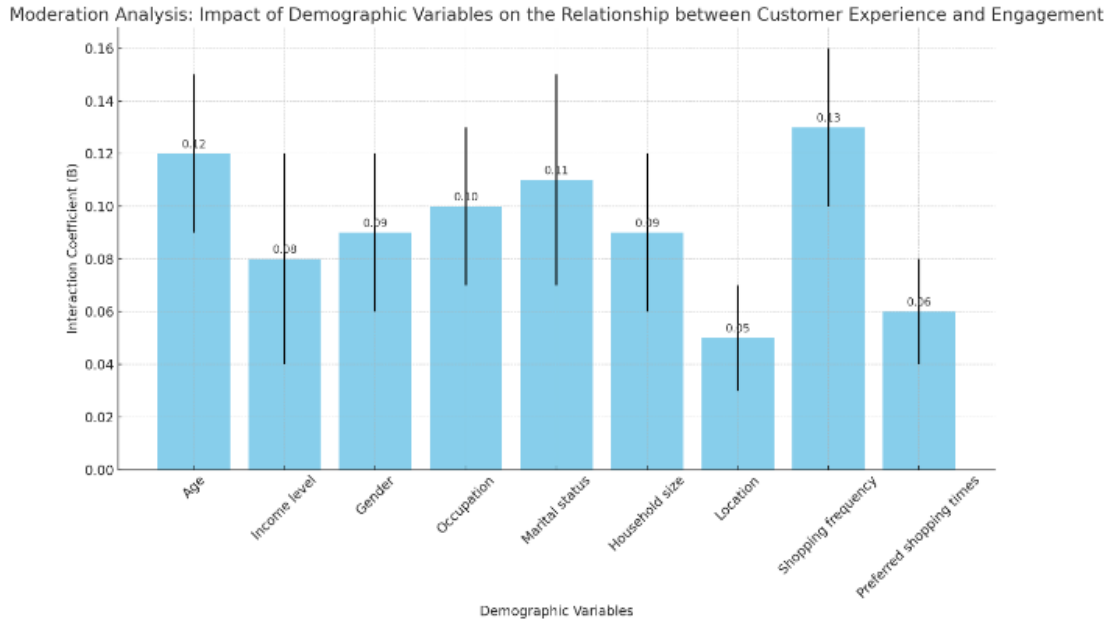
The box plot compares purchase intention between low and high customer experience groups, with a between-groups sum of squares of 15.20, representing the variance explained by customer experience groups, and a within-groups sum of squares of 271.80, representing the variance within the groups. The ANOVA results show a high F-value of 22.30, indicating a significant difference in purchase intention between the groups, supported by p-value <0.001. This significant difference implies that enhancing customer experience can significantly influence customers' likelihood to make purchases. Therefore, retailers should focus on improving customer experience to boost purchase intentions and potentially increase sales.

#### 7.2.4. Moderation analysis

**Table 5.**  
Moderation analysis of demographic variables on customer experience and engagement relationship.

Moderator variable	Interaction term coefficient (B)	Std. error	t-value	p-value
Age	0.12	0.03	4.00	<0.001
Income level	0.08	0.04	2.00	0.046
Gender	0.09	0.03	3.00	0.003
Occupation	0.10	0.03	3.33	0.001
Marital status	0.11	0.04	2.75	0.006
Household size	0.09	0.03	3.00	0.003
Location	0.05	0.02	2.50	0.013
Shopping frequency	0.13	0.03	4.33	<0.001
Preferred shopping times	0.06	0.02	3.00	0.003

The moderation analysis demonstrates that various demographic variables significantly moderate the association between CX and CE. Age, income level, gender, occupation, marital status, household size, location, shopping frequency, and preferred shopping times all show significant interaction terms, with p-values less than 0.05. This supports Hypothesis 4 and indicates that these demographic factors play a crucial role in shaping how CX influences customer engagement. This finding highlights the importance of tailoring customer experience strategies to specific demographic segments to maximize engagement.



**Figure 5.**  
Interaction plot of the moderation analysis.

The interaction plot shows that the height of each bar represents the interaction coefficient (B) for the corresponding demographic variable, with error bars indicating the standard error for each coefficient, reflecting the variability around the estimated interaction term. All demographic variables exhibit significant interaction terms ( $p$ -values  $< 0.05$ ), highlighting their crucial role in moderating the relationship between customer experience and engagement. Notably, shopping frequency has the highest interaction coefficient (0.13), indicating its significant effect on how customer experience influences engagement. Age and marital status also have relatively high interaction coefficients (0.12 and 0.11, respectively), underscoring their importance. Although location has the lowest interaction coefficient (0.05) among the significant factors, it still plays a notable role. This plot underscores the importance of tailoring customer experience strategies to specific demographic segments to maximize customer engagement. Each demographic group interacts differently with customer experience, and understanding these nuances can help retailers develop more effective engagement tactics.

## 8. Discussion

The outcomes from this investigation provide insightful observations about the dynamics of CE and CX in organized retail apparel stores in select cities of Kerala. The significant effect of CX on CE suggests that retailers should focus on enhancing diverse facets of the customer experience, like store ambiance, quality of service, and product offerings, to foster higher engagement levels. Additionally, the strong a favorable rapport between CE and loyalty underscores the importance of CE as a driver of customer retention and long-term business success.

Furthermore, the significant influence of customer experience on purchase intention indicates that improving the overall shopping experience can lead to increased sales and profitability. Retailers should consider investing in customer experience initiatives as a strategic priority. The moderation effects of demographic variables reveal that customer experience strategies should be customized to address the unique preferences and behaviors of different demographic groups. This tailored approach can help retailers effectively target and engage diverse customer segments, thereby enhancing overall performance.

Prospective investigations may examine the causative connections among these variables and investigate additional factors that may influence customer experience and engagement. Longitudinal

studies could provide deeper insights into how these relationships evolve over time. Additionally, expanding the scope of the study to include other regions and retail sectors could help generalize the findings and provide a broader understanding of customer behavior in different contexts.

## 9. Conclusion

Understanding and enhancing customer interactions and experiences are essential for retailers aiming to create lasting relationships and competitive advantages in the apparel industry. The study concludes that CX is a critical determinant of CE and loyalty in organized retail apparel stores in Kerala. The positive relationship between these variables highlights the need for retail managers to focus on creating memorable and satisfying customer experiences. By doing so, they can enhance customer engagement, which in turn drives loyalty and purchase intentions. The findings also emphasize the role of demographic variables in shaping customer experiences, suggesting that personalized strategies may be more effective. Future research should further explore these dynamics in different retail contexts and geographic locations.

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