

Love Language Scale in Retail Service Environment: An Exploratory Study

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Background and purposes. In this study, Chapman's five love languages are adapted to create a scale in the retail service context. According to Chapman (1992), most humans use one (or two) of the five love languages, namely words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch, to communicate and receive love, which ultimately helps to maintain relationships. The theory of relational maintenance (Dindia & Canary, 1993), which states that certain maintenance behaviors (e.g. love languages) are used to sustain desired relational features, also supports Chapman's claims. Although the five love languages have been universally applied (over 6 million copies sold in English and translated into 38 languages) as a guide to communicate love and maintain relationships in settings such as marriage, school, and the workplace environment, it has not been applied to a retailer-customer relationship context. Thus, with the new mantra for "brand love," the authors argue that it is likewise important for retailers to adapt these love languages in their businesses to measure retailer-customer relationships with the goal of sustaining customer relationships. In order to measure how the five love languages may impact customer's relationship with the brand, it is first important to develop and establish the reliability and the validity of the love language scale in the context of retail service. To fill this need, the study was designed to develop a reliable and valid self-report measurement of the love-language scale in the retail service environment to measure the retailer-customer relationship.

Methodology and sample. To develop the scale, the researchers followed the procedures recommended by (Churchill Jr, 1979). An initial 27-item online survey was developed by the researchers after literature review (Chapman, 1995; Egbert & Polk, 2006; Forsythe et al., 2006). The questions were developed based on Chapman's the 5 love languages in a retail store context such as Target, Gap, or Home depot. The initial scale includes (1) word of affirmation (e.g. compliments me on my appearance); (2) quality time (e.g. spends time with me); (3) receiving gift (e.g. offers me a gift with purchase); (4) act of service (e.g. helps me to make a decision) and (5) interact (e.g. eye contacts or lightly pats on shoulder or arm) and measured in 7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. A total of 214 undergraduate students (93.2% female) aged 18 to 28 years from an American university participated in the study with about 90% of respondents reported their favorite retail stores in the clothing/shoes/accessories category and about 77% of them reported that they have been shopping with their favorite retailers for more than 3 years.

Analysis and results. Step 1: After examining the multivariate normality and homoscedasticity for data normality, an initial reliability test using Cronbach alpha revealed that the 27-item pool has good internal reliability ($\alpha = .93$). After checking the squared multiple correlations ($<.40$), one item was dropped. One item which has a low item-to-total correlation ($<.30$) was

removed. Removing the two items results a coefficient alpha of .93, leaving 25 items in the scale. **Step 2:** A factor analysis was then conducted using principal component analysis in order to identify underlying factors of retailer-customer love relationship. Following Field's recommendation (2005), items with a factor loading of .60 or higher were considered in interpreting the factors. The principle axis factoring analysis with a Promax rotation with Kaiser Normalization revealed six factors with an eigenvalue of one or greater. The cumulative percentage of the six factors is 71.80%. The Kaiser–Mayer–Olkin (K-M-O) measure and the Barlett's test of sphericity suggesting all variables are unrelated and thus the factor analysis is feasible (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999). Five items that had no significant loadings on any of the factors above (factor loading less than .60 or with a cross-loading) were eliminated (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999). The six factor revealed were named: (1) act of service--4 items; (2) receiving gift—5 items; (3) word of affirmation—3 items; (4) quality time—3 items; (5) preferred interact –3 items; and (6) not-preferred interaction (2 items with low items means). The first four factors identified are consistent with the Chapman's five love languages. However, the study results suggested that for the fifth dimension of touch, participants may have different ideas in the context of retail store environment. Specifically, for the preferred in-store interaction, the items that fall into this factor were: ~~–doesn't make me feel rushed~~” or ~~–assists me to locate a product that I cannot find~~”; while the items fall into the factor of not-preferred interaction are ~~–stands closely by me when I need help (mean=3.14, SD=1.71)~~” or ~~–lightly pats on my shoulder or arm (mean=2.88, SD=1.71)~~.”

Conclusion and future research. The findings reveal that while the four scales for Chapman's love languages were reliable and valid in the context of retailer-customer relationships, touch is a factor that may only work in the context of intimate relationships, where a personal relationship has been previously established. This study is valuable in that further studies can now proceed to measure and examine how these love languages in a retail setting may influence other important factors of relational maintenance. Moreover, in order to further strengthen the validity of the scale, future studies should include a sample with equal gender distribution, across different ages and regions in the U.S.

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