The Influence of In-Store Ambience on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour:
A Namibian Retail Apparel Store Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses in-store ambience or atmospherics of a selected apparel retail store to determine its possible influence on consumer behaviour at the selected store. Forty-five walk-in customers were conveniently selected to participate in the quantitative, cross-sectional study. The study concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between in-store ambience and consumer purchasing behaviour at the selected retail store. The study provides recommendations for both theory and practice.

KEYWORDS

1. INTRODUCTION

Pfister (2019) posits that the comprehensive occupation of an atmospheric space in the context of consumer behaviour, is totally or partially without boundaries in what is experienced by and presented to the consumer. Hence, according (Pfister, 2019), atmospherics in that sense, relate to in-store ambiance and are not subjected to an individual position in the store but rather related to a wide-ranging field including, but not limited to, things such as sensory cues and spatial aesthetics.

Notwithstanding this definition, quoting Philip Kotler (1973), Pfister (2019) expresses that in-store ambiance has a lot to do with showcasing the store surroundings, thus suggesting that organisations use spatial feel, deliberately and ably as they would use value proposition, advertising, personal selling, and different devices to promote their products. The word atmospherics as coined by Kotler (1973) describes the careful development of an environment that has specific effects on customers, to produce pleasant buying situations and customer enthusiasm towards purchases. Purchase decisions based on atmospheric factors can further be explained by the concept of pleasure, *arousal,* and *dominance (PAD)*. Therefore, the sensory description of the atmospheric as being a complex arrangement of environmental factors that are likely to influence consumer behaviour is widely accepted (Kotler 1973, Hultén, 2012; Krishna, 2012). Hence this paper seeks to establish the possible influence that in-store ambiance or atmospherics has on the consumer purchasing behaviours in a selected apparel retail store in Windhoek.

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1.1 Statement of the Problem

In-store ambiance is said to be critical for consumer purchase decision-making in apparel retail stores (Pfister, 2019). However, it seems that the emphasis placed on in-store ambiance by many apparel retail stores may not match its importance across the spectrum. Although it is a well-known fact that consumers go through a purchase decision-making process in which products and services are evaluated before purchase (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010, Semente and Whyte, 2018), it seems there is no clear means to determine point at which consumers look for sensory cues and atmospheric factors to make a purchase decision, nor is there a way to ascertain whether such factors play a role in consumer purchase decision-making. Hence, this study is keen to establish the possible influence of in-store ambiance on consumer purchase behaviour in a selected apparel store in Windhoek.

1.2 Objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

- To assess in-store atmospherics (i.e., sensory cues and spatial aesthetics) at the selected apparel store in Windhoek.
- To assess the influence of in-store atmospherics (i.e., sensory cues and spatial aesthetics) on consumer purchasing decision-making at the selected apparel store in Windhoek.
- To assess the influence of pleasure, arousal, and dominance on consumer purchase decision-making at the selected apparel retail store.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 In-Store Ambience and Atmospherics

When it comes to in-store ambience and atmospherics, various investigations have concentrated on in-store barometrical components such as, lighting, structure format, item show and neatness (Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007, Liaw, 2007). The impact of store attributes on clients' disposition, fulfilment and buying conduct have been considered by (Spies *et al*., 1997). The impact of store configuration, store music and store representatives on shopping state of mind and support fulfilment have been looked at by (Liaw, 2007; Liao and Liaw, n.d. The impact of music on shopping times has been the focus of (Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000) while the impact of atmospherics, passionate reactions, for example, administration and item quality and social goals have been researched by (Liu and Jang, 2009; Jang and Namkung, 2009) together with ecological tangible parts, for example, vision, scent, sound and contact by (Kang *et al*., 2011). Hence, the expression "store atmospherics" has been explored through different methods. However, it seems that a limited number of studies have focused on the retail apparel industry and more specifically few have addressed environmental components such as format, shading, lighting, aroma, sound, apparatus, shelf divider surface, temperature, aisle dimensions, changing rooms, work force, stock, costs, sales, cash register placements, neatness, and the general condition of store signage (Berman and Evans, 1998). Most of these investigations have been conducted in other parts of the world, particularly in Taiwan, USA, India, Sri Lanka, and Australia.

A three-classification typology made up of: surrounding factors, plan factors, and social elements as conceived by Baker (1986) have been used by many authors, although Aaker, Kumar, Day and Leone (2011), Zikmund and Babin (2007) have warned that the research process does not usually follow a familiar arrangement of step. They stress that a well-planned research process needs to be followed to guarantee that an examination is fully completed. Similarly, Bitner (1992), proposes three classifications, albeit a bit from those of Baker (1986): surrounding signals influencing the five senses, spatial format, and signage.

Fascinatingly, Verhoef et al., (2009) think about the social condition which is different from the retail atmosphere. This and other authors consider that among the key causal determinants of

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