

Stimulating emotions as a strategy for an enhanced retail experience

HRIIYIPHRO KAYINA* AND SUSHMA GOEL

Department of Resource Management and Design Applications,
Lady Irwin College, Delhi University, Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

Sensory stimulation of customers is vital to in-store retail set ups for business success. Stimulation of senses is important in creation of retail experience memories and emotions of customers. Retail experience goes beyond the unique design and aesthetic beauty of the retail store. Successful retail stores have the ability to engage customers by making a connection with their emotions and needs that drive purchase. The retail environment is harmoniously designed to communicate brand personality and retail store image. The store's design and layout, colour, lighting, crowding, music, fragrance and temperature are all determinants of customers' retail experience and reinforcing and distinguishing the retailer's brand identity.

Key Words : Retail experience, Retail emotions, Retail atmospherics

INTRODUCTION

Shopping is an emotional experience. We make many impulsive retail purchases and these decisions are guided by our emotions. With economy and marketing shifting from products to services, creating an emotional customer experience is becoming a differentiation strategy for competitive edge over competitors for retail stores. Emotions are an integral part of customers' retailing experience and retailers need to understand customers' emotions and also shape retail environments to cultivate desired emotions and also eliminate undesired ones (Dahlhoff, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Retail design uses spatial cues to entertain as well as entice the customers to purchase the merchandise. Success of retail designs are measured by footfall of the retail stores against the store's overall productivity. Retailers need to understand how consumers' emotions are triggered and how those emotions affect shoppers' behaviour. While the effects of environmental store characteristics like its design, space, layout, lighting, colour, music, etc contribute for an emotional retail experience, other factors that affect retail emotions need to be considered for instrumental business success (Yoo *et al.*, 1998).

Many retail stores offer the same products and so does online retailers. What can we do to make people buy from our stores and motivate customers to come back? The answer is to offer an outstanding shopping experience that sets you apart from competitors, one customer will remember and want to repeat.

People have changed the way they shop. With the online sales revolution, there is an ever increasing dependency on technology and customers expect to be able to shop whenever they want and wherever they are. People use a variety of means to buy products: online purchase, in-store purchase, researching online before buying in-store or *vice versa*. Although there is a rise in online

Cite this Article: Kayina, Hriiyiphro and Goel, Sushma (2015). Stimulating emotions as a strategy for an enhanced retail experience. *Internat. J. Appl. Home Sci.*, 2 (11&12) : 342-345.

retailing, many people still go to stores to buy merchandise. People want to see, touch and feel certain products before buying them. Some people love to buy merchandise in-store simply because they enjoy in-store shopping experience. This paper focuses on in-store retail experience and does not concern with online retailing.

Emotional retail experience :

With many products and services to choose from, consumers expect a more meaningful retail experience. They look for a personal memorable experience appealing to their senses, emotions and values. Customer retail experience involves customers' cognitive, emotional and intuitive level and is viewed as a new source for value creation. Petermans *et al.* (2009) observed that a retail experience which succeeds in delivering value to the customer can become key to long-term retailer success. There is a growing recognition that providing superior customer experience value is instrumental for retail success. Yoo *et al.* (1998) identified seven store characteristics through several studies based on retail emotional experience – *product assortment, value, salesperson's service, after sale service, location, facilities and atmosphere*. Kumar *et al.* (2010) identified *colour, lighting, music, crowding, design and layout, olfactory factors and tactile factors* as cues that influence retail atmospheric stimulus on consumers. Turley and Miliman (2000) identified 58 store environment variables and classified them into five main categories of store atmospherics – *external, general interior, layout and design, point-of-purchase and decoration, and human*. In line with these studies, this paper attempts to discuss four determinants of retail atmospherics: *design and layout, colour and lighting, crowding and senses* and how they influence customer emotions.

Retail design and layout :

The goal of retail design is to get customers to the threshold of the store and to influence purchase. It is a creative and commercial discipline incorporating elements of interior decoration, industrial design, graphic design, ergonomics and advertising. It concerns with the aesthetics of the retail environment and an understanding of the store dimensions functionally and commercially. One of the most striking features of a great retail store is its attractive appearance. Since design of retail store environments aim to provide inspiration for customers, designers and retailers need to have an understanding of customers' value to functionally and emotionally appeal them to make purchases (Petermans *et al.*, 2009).

Shop windows are the eyes of a retail store, telling a story that communicates through into the physical space. A striking piece of visual merchandising can capture shoppers' attention and encourage them to cross the threshold of the store. Retail value can be communicated to customers for a better retail experience by increasing search efficiency, comfort, product quality, price, displays, etc. Customers have a tendency to hurry and retailers should strive to slow down this journey and increase customers' time in the store. Placing large, eye-catching display at the entrance and key products at the front of the store will help customers decide whether they like what they see. Stopping customers at the entrance can encourage them to travel further into the store. A distinguishing trait of successful retail stores is their visual simplicity and transparency. The store should be easy to navigate, enabling the customers to immediately know if the store has what he wants and where it is located. The store layout should allow for an enjoyable shopping experience by means of wide enough aisles to accommodate traffic flow, clean fitting rooms, places to sit and relax for tired shoppers and avoiding physical obstructions (Roberts, 2015; Burke, 2005).

Signs and maps should use familiar language and visuals to aid wayfinding and navigation. They should be positioned and angled to be seen easily by customers. Section specific colour schemes, layouts, lighting, materials and ceiling heights can facilitate product department and category identification and distinction (Burke, 2005)

Retail colour and lighting :

Colour and lighting are important elements of retail environment. They change customer moods, create excitement and influence consumption behaviour. Customers associate meanings with colours; blue for boys and masculinity, pink for girls and femininity, red for love, green for freshness, etc. Clever colour choices have the potential to create an immersive environment reinforcing the retail image. Understanding colour prejudices and their meanings beyond their textual context on a local scale helps add value to the retail image (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Roberts, 2015). Retailers can use colour and lighting to influence customer arousal level. It has been found that warm colours increase customer arousal level (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006). Lighting is not only essential for highlighting products but also to guide and influence customer moods. Lighting conditions influence consumers' time perception, visibility and store image. Illuminated shelving, light boxes, integrated lighting and focused lighting can be used to evoke emotions and deliver pleasant retail experience. Variations in brightness and colour of lighting are observed in different retail set ups. Different colour and lighting schemes can aid department and product category identification and distinction (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Burke, 2005).

Retail crowding :

Retail crowding is concerned with human and spatial crowding with regard to the number of people in a store at a particular point of time. Customers may experience feelings of discomfort and suffocation due to excessive crowding and the amount of inventory displayed in the store depending on their personal tolerance level. Retailers offer an extensive product assortment to satisfy the needs and wants of a heterogeneous customer base. In such cases, products should be arranged and displayed in ways that simplify purchase decisions. Excessive crowding can lead to excessive stimulation of the customers' emotions resulting in negative or no associations formed with the retail store. This may lead to lack of interest, decrease in exploratory tendencies, lack of interaction with sales personnel, delay in shopping time, unnecessary distractions and ultimately decrease in customer value. Marking out customer pathway can help lead customers in the directions retailers want them to move. Retailers know the paths they want customers to take around their store and have a clear idea of which products lead where. Stores need to make this journey obvious to shoppers to help counter with excessive crowding and increase customer dwell time in store and sales. It has been found that customers naturally veer towards the right when they enter a retail space and therefore it is advised to capitalise on this by placing visually interesting signs and key products on the right (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Roberts, 2015; Burke, 2005).

Clutter distracts customers from their shopping goals and reduces efficiency of in-store communication. It interferes with customer's ability to visually and physically navigate through the store to find desired merchandise. Retail clutter can be through signs or the merchandise itself. Signs that provide inconsistent or irrelevant information should be avoided. Merchandise clutter can be avoided through wide enough aisles to accommodate merchandise and customer traffic, using simple and functional fixtures, keeping shelves straight, grouping products based on similarity and limiting out-of-season and unpopular merchandise (Burke, 2005).

Retail senses – music, fragrance and temperature :

Retail environments are sensory, creating emotional and cognitive reactions in shoppers through sight, smell, sound and touch. Experiential shopping includes seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting products on display. Studies have shown that music activates moods and emotions, making people pay more attention to their own preferences and attitudes and less to product attributes such as price. It also suggested that physical warmth increase sales and willingness-to-pay by activating the concept of emotional warmth, which in turn generates positive feelings and induce consumers to place a higher value on products. Music can increase consumer value and shopping volume by

providing relaxation and calmness to customers (Dahlhoff, 2013). Fragrance and temperature help create a holistic atmosphere in retail store, making it soothing, cosy and comfortable for customers. Smell affects areas of the brain that deal with emotions, feelings and motivation which leads to behavioural response. Congruency of customers' age, gender, and ethnicity with olfactory factors are used to influence consumer buying behaviour. Tactile factors influence emotional experience that potentially increase or decrease customer value due to personal comfort and aesthetic value (Kumar *et al.*, 2010).

Conclusion :

Environmental elements such as lighting, music, window dressing and layouts, architectural design, freshness and fragrance, appropriate temperature, soothing and trendy colour, attractive logo, and gentle crowding are ideal conditions that can affect the current and future behaviour of consumers in a retail setting (Smith and Burns, 1996). Retail environment communicates brand personality and image of the store. Store image speaks about the identity of the store's clientele and acts as signals of quality and value to other customers. Research has confirmed Walt Disney's saying "People spend money when and where they feel good". When customers enjoy the retail experience, they spend more time browsing the store and are more likely to make purchases. A retail experience that stimulate consumer's sense evokes powerful emotions in customers by connecting with their past experience and memories. Providing exceptional retail experiences to customers require paying close attention to the needs and demands of customers, considerable time, effort, talent and financial investment. Such significant investments create a more engaging, satisfying, emotional, memorable, enjoyable and convenient retail experience for customers, resulting in a more profitable competitive edge over competitors for retailers (Burke, 2005; Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Dahlhoff, 2013).

REFERENCES

- Burke, R.R. (2005). Retail shoppability: A measure of the world's best stores. *Future Retail Now: 40 Of The World's Best Stores*. Retail Industry Leaders Association, 2005.
- Dahlhoff, D. (2013). *Emotional connections in retailing: Designing consumer and employee emotional experience*. Conference by Jay H. Baker Retailing Center, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania.
- Kaltcheva, V.D. and Weitz, B.A. (2006). When should a retailer create an exciting store environment? *Journal of Marketing, American Marketing Association*, 70, January 2006
- Kumar, I., Garg, R. and Rahman, Z. (2010). Influence of retail atmospherics on customer value in an emerging market condition. *Great Lakes Herald*, 4(1), March 2010.
- Petermans, A., Cleempoel, K.V., Nuyts, E. and Vanrie, J. (2009). *Measuring emotions in customer experiences in retail store environments: Testing the applicability of three emotion measurement instruments*. PHL University College and Hasselt University, Department of Arts and Architecture.
- Roberts, M. (2015). 7 Retail interior design principles. Green Room blog, September 5, 2014.
- Smith, P. and Burns David, J. (1996). Atmospherics and retail environment: The case of the "power aisle". *Internat. J. Retail & Distribution Mgmt.*, 24(1) : 7-14.
- Turley, L. and Milliman, R. (2002). Atmospheric effects on shopping behaviour: A review of the experimental evidence. *J. Business Res.*, 49(2) : 193-211.
- Yoo, C., Park, J. and Maclnnis, D. J. (1998). Effects of store characteristics and in-store emotional experiences on store attitude. *J. Business Res.*, 42 : 253-263.
