

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SHOPPING CLIMATE: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL LOOK AT THE INFLUENCE OF ATMOSPHERE ON CUSTOMER ATTITUDES AND SHOPPING BEHAVIORS

LINDA BERNS WRIGHT, *Mississippi State University*
CHARLES NOBLE, *Boston College*

Retail atmosphere is often explained by looking at emotional, or affective responses, and at attributes, or functional characteristics. A more complete conceptualization of retail atmosphere adds a third dimension: psychological shopping climate qualities. These dimensions arise as the customer evaluates his or her perceptions of the retail experience and constructs the meaning of the environment. An exploratory study of shopper evaluations confirms the existence of a distinctive dimension reflecting psychological shopping climate in addition to the traditional dimensions of affective and functional qualities. These three dimensions of atmosphere are shown to relate to important attitudinal and behavioral outcomes among customers.

INTRODUCTION

The active management of the store environment is an important element in the formula of retail service success. Of particular importance to those wanting to understand and manage shopping behaviors are customer responses to these retail environments. Some shopping related reactions and behaviors are focused on specific shopping experiences. Other shopper responses to the retail environment, or atmosphere, include ongoing evaluations that will influence both current and future shopping behaviors. Customers continue to evaluate their shopping experiences to assess satisfaction and enjoyment and to identify stores to patronize in the future. In addition, shoppers formulate strategies based on retail interactions that will assist them as they navigate the store environment to complete their shopping, both present and future. By allocating active attention to the understanding of atmosphere, retailers can improve sales in the short-term and earn

customer loyalty and repeat business in the longer term.

Research in this area has sought to understand consumer retail behavior and to identify the dimensions that contribute to the retail choice process and that influence shopping evaluations and behaviors. Bearden et al. (1998) modeled customer service satisfaction as directly dependent on the level of contact with the service provider and identified customer service and employee characteristics as moderating variables. Another example utilizes a model that is often used to study store atmosphere which conceptualizes a linear relationship where environmental stimuli arouse emotional states which in turn influence retail responses (Donovan et al. 1994). This approach to understanding store atmosphere focuses on identifying the environmental characteristics that contribute to the emotional states of shoppers and on measuring emotional variables that reflect these states and their influence on shopping behaviors.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the notion of the *psychological shopping climate* (PSC) is an important additional factor influencing the link

between certain atmosphere characteristics and shopping behaviors. Psychological climate represents an assessment of the potentially beneficial or detrimental nature of an environment. This approach flows from the environmental psychology literature which examines the dynamic relationships between people and their physical environments. The perspective focuses on an individual's perception of the environment and recognizes that the perceptual process is an interactive, ongoing process. Thus, the focus is on person $\leftrightarrow$ environment relations and transactions. This evaluation of the environment, in addition to the functional characteristics of and the affective responses to the retail environment, should influence shoppers' behaviors and attitudes.

We suggest that the construct of the psychological shopping climate is an important addition to the understanding of the retail atmosphere as perceived by consumers. Both the functional dimensions of image and the affective dimensions of atmosphere have been recognized as important to understanding the retail environment. In addition, the retail environment is explained by this third dimension, which is focused on the psychological perceptions of climate and the cognitive dimensions of evaluation utilized by customers. All three dimensions are important to explain the person-store interaction and the shopper perception of the retail experience.

This paper makes several contributions to the retail literature. First, a more interactive conceptualization of the store $\leftrightarrow$ customer experience is put forth, suggesting that atmosphere is an outcome of this interaction. Second, literature from studies of atmospherics, image, psychological perceptions, and related areas is brought together to develop a multidimensional view of the nature of store atmosphere. This view includes the introduction of the concept of psychological shopping climate which focuses on the influence of atmosphere on customers. Third, data from an exploratory study of shopping experiences in a range of retail settings are used to perform a factor analysis to identify the psychological shopping climate factor(s) and to test the proposed model. Finally, implications for the management of retail atmosphere are considered, with a focus on enhancing the retail shopping experience.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL VIEW OF ATMOSPHERE

This study examines a multidimensional, interactive conceptualization of store atmosphere. Figure 1 presents a model of the sources and effects of atmosphere that is based on a customer $\leftrightarrow$ store interaction. A premise of this view is that perceptions of atmosphere within a given store will be different for each individual due to variations in perceptions and interpretations of the store environment. This interaction results in a perception of store atmosphere with three components: functional dimensions, affective dimensions, and psychological shopping climate. All three components should influence customer reactions as evidenced by behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. In the sections that follow we consider the elements of this model in more detail.

Functional Dimensions

One important area of the retail literature examines consumer reactions to specific store environmental attributes, or store image. Retail attributes have also been referred to as store characteristics and tangible or functional qualities. The store image literature focuses on various attribute categories including price, quality, selection, clerks/sales people, and attractiveness (Zimmer and Golden 1988; Samli et al. 1998). In studies that focus on store features, both attributes as well as overall impressions of the retail outlet are considered. A full range of store attributes and categories of attributes have been identified in the literature (Haynes et al. 1994). These generally include pricing, merchandise quality, salesperson/service, and store service components. Sirohi et al. (1998) found that store loyalty intentions depend on both service quality and merchandise quality. Other approaches to the retail image literature examine the use of categorization of retail stores (Keaveney and Hunt 1992) and the prototypicality of retail settings (Ward, Bitner, and Barnes 1992).

A store's functional attributes contribute to the store image. In one study, functional characteristics or attributes were found to significantly predict store

FIGURE 1
A Multidimensional Conceptualization of Atmosphere

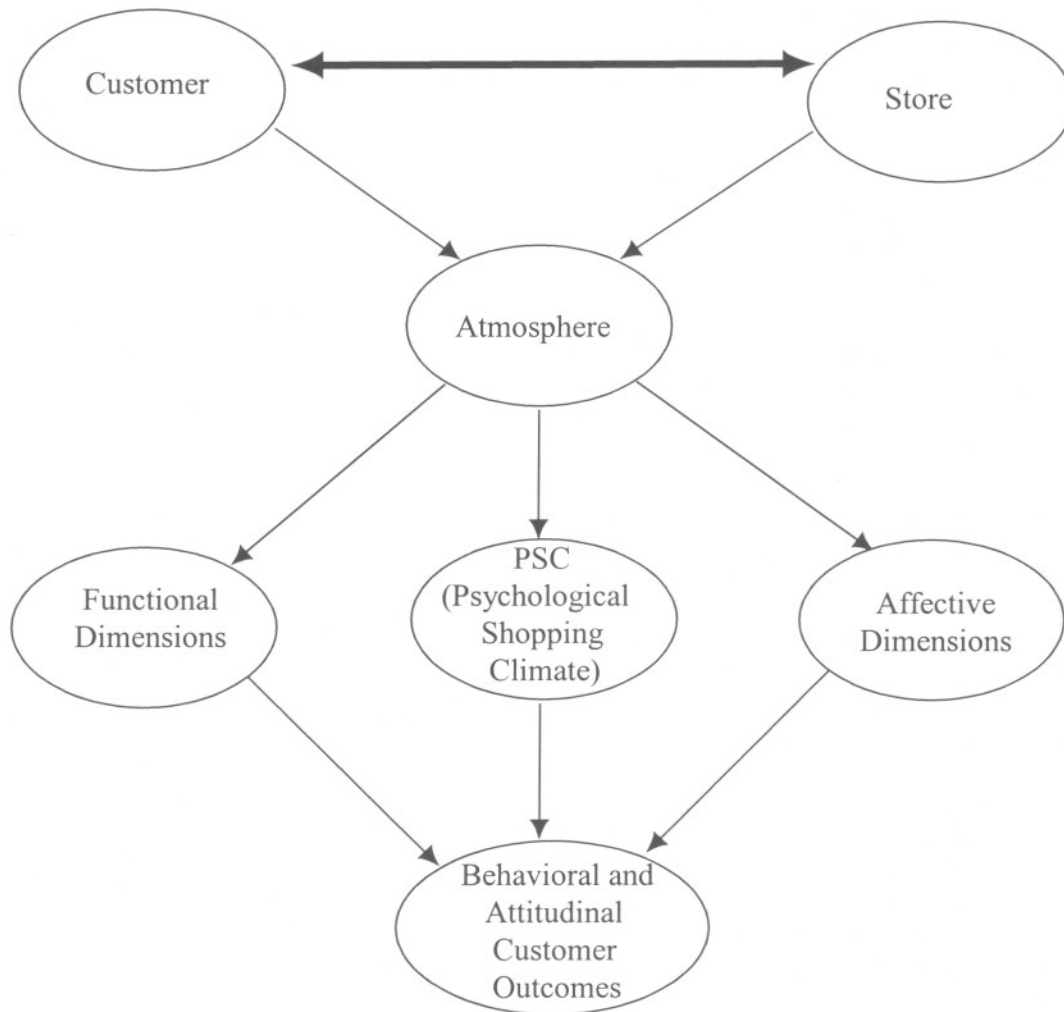


image (Darden and Babin 1994). Image attributes have also been found to be important in international settings (McGoldrick 1998). Thus, the characteristics associated with the retail store are important contributors to the retail environment, suggesting the following proposition:

Proposition 1: The functional dimensions or qualities of store atmosphere will influence customer attitudes and shopping behaviors.

Affective Dimensions

In Kotler's (1973) seminal piece, he recognized that the atmosphere at the place of purchase is an important influence on the purchasing process. The role of successful atmospherics is to produce emotional reactions in the buyer that will increase the probability of purchase. As such, the atmosphere can be structured to appeal to all of the shoppers' senses. This emphasis on emotion, or affective response, has continued to be an important focus in the atmospherics literature.

Babin and Darden (1998) found that the in-store emotional state of consumers influences both spending and satisfaction with a retailer. In a related study, Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) found that the tangible, physical environment of the service experience influences the excitement level which in turn influences repatronage intentions. Yoo, et al. (1998) found that store characteristics influence shoppers' in-store emotions. Pleasure was identified as an important dimension in the service satisfaction process (Hurley 1998). Sherman, et al. (1997) found that the emotional state of consumers was an important factor in buying behavior. Donovan et al. (1994) found that the affective, or emotional factors of pleasure and arousal, influence purchase behavior, and that these emotional factors are aroused by the store environment. For example, pleasure was found to be a strong cause of consumers spending extra time in the store and spending more money than intended.

Ambient factors such as temperature, scent, music and lighting, are important components of retail atmospherics. Music and lighting were found to

affect arousal and pleasure as well as willingness to buy in a study by Baker, Levy, and Grewal (1992). In another study, a difference was found between scented and unscented stores for both evaluation of the store and behaviors in the store (Spangenberg, Crowley, and Henderson 1996). Preference for background music was found to influence both shopping time and purchase amount (Herrington and Capella 1996). Thus, atmospherics and the induced affective responses are important considerations when trying to understand specific consumer behaviors in a retail context. This suggests the following research proposition:

Proposition 2: The affective dimensions or qualities of store atmosphere will influence customer attitudes and shopping behaviors.

The Psychological Shopping Climate

In addition to image (functional) attributes and affective responses, the psychological climate of the store should influence customer behaviors and attitudes. The store environment influences the psychological shopping climate of the retail store which is reflected in the consumers' response to the store. Store environment has an influence on store image and on shopper inferences about merchandise in the store (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994).

From an environmental psychology perspective, shoppers form both objective and subjective perceptions and inferences about the retail environment based on environmental cues (Sunstrom et al. 1996). The design of the retail environment can be perceived as something that enhances the shopping experience because it is personally supportive or beneficial. On the other hand, the store can be seen as a deterrent to shopping because it is a distraction or something that is detrimental to one's well being. Thus, the environment takes on an acquired meaning for the shopper under an environmental psychology perspective. The environment can facilitate or inhibit the shopping experience.

Environmental cues are an important focus in the environmental psychology literature. In addition to

ambient factors and store attributes, there is a dimension of store atmosphere that occurs as a result of the person <—> store interaction and is based on shopper perceptions of the retail environment. Thus, evaluation of the shopping experience itself, in addition to tangible or intangible attributes, is an important contribution to retail assessment. Perceived store shopping experience was found to have a direct causal influence on perceived value and merchandise quality in a study by Kerin, Jain, and Howard (1992).

Increasingly, the literature reflects the importance of recognizing the consumers' perspectives toward shopping experiences. Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) recognized that the people who experience the service setting are the ones who give meaning to the physical environment. Samli et al. (1998) stressed the distinction between a managerial focus and a consumer focus toward the retail store setting. Managers are interested in identifying the important dimensions of image, measuring image, and comparing their image to the competition. Equally important is the perspective of image that reflects store appearance to the target market. Understanding the differences between these two perspectives is necessary to identify a complete picture of store image.

As people move through any environment, they acquire knowledge about that environment and form a cognitive representation of that environment. The field of environmental psychology views the person and the environment as inseparable. For example, focusing on a person's understanding of a specific context is referred to as "sense making" (Sunstrom et al. 1996). Environmental psychology has been used in the retail literature as it relates to understanding both the affective and image streams. The focus of this study is to examine psychological shopping climate as it impacts directly on customers and their attitudes.

The environmental psychology literature recognizes the concept of psychological climate. In a related context, the psychological climate approach has been used to describe organizational experiences within the retail literature. Burke, Borucki, and Hurley (1992) examined appraisals of the work-climate environment in terms of meaning and significance to

individual employees. Evaluation of the environment results in the formation of cognitive schema that reflect meaning and significance to an individual and provide a structure for the individual to use when evaluating related experiences. In addition, psychological climate has been used to explain the organizational structure of franchising channel relationships (Strutton, Pelton, and Lumpkin 1995). The idea that psychological climate and the resulting cognitive structures influence situational assessments is equally true for shoppers. Retail customers' psychological shopping climates need to be identified and understood.

Burke et al. (1992) identified psychological climate dimensions that were important to the retail work environment that focused on the retailer's concern for customers. These same dimensions can be used to examine the retail environment from the customers' view points. The adapted dimensions are: service climate; interpersonal climate; merchandise climate; and store design climate. The psychological climate, as reflected in these cognitive evaluations, is just as important from the customers' views as it is from the employees' views. This suggests the following research proposition:

Proposition 3: The psychological shopping climate of store atmosphere will influence customer attitudes and shopping behaviors.

THE EXPLORATORY STUDY

An exploratory study was conducted as an initial test of our framework. The study was conducted over two semesters in a large, public university in the southeastern United States. Subjects were undergraduate business students enrolled in one of several courses in the core curriculum. Students received extra class credit for their participation.

The survey consisted of 74 Likert-type and semantic differential scale items and a few demographic items. Students were asked to complete the survey with regard to one of four specific local retailers. Given the relatively small size of the local community, there was a common base of shopping experiences for virtually all students in the

university. The four retailers consisted of a national mass merchandiser, a national department store, a regional grocery store chain, and a local discount store. This group of four retailers was selected to represent a range of strategies, formats, and atmospheres. Students were allowed to complete surveys regarding more than one store for additional credit (up to a maximum of four per subject). A total of 487 usable surveys were collected through this method. The final sample was 59.2 percent male with a mean age of 22.8 years ($sd = 4.49$). When asked how many times they had visited the store in question during the previous six months, the mean response was 11.63 visits ($sd = 13.70$).

Measures

The survey instrument included measures of functional dimensions, affective dimensions, and the dimensions reflecting psychological shopping climate, along with several outcome variables related to customer shopping evaluation and future intentions. Measures for functional and affective dimensions of atmosphere were taken from Dardin and Babin (1994), who partially based their work on Russell and Pratt (1980). Their measures include four elements of affective dimensions for a retail atmosphere (pleasant, unpleasant, activity, sleepy) and four elements of functional dimensions (discount prices, store personnel, quality, and crowding). Each dimension is represented by from two to four adjectives to which respondents are asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement on a Likert-type scale. The measure of psychological shopping climate was developed from the previously discussed dimensions as suggested by the work of Burke et al. (1992). Based on their framework, an item pool was developed to measure the construct and its subdimensions from a customer rather than an employee perspective. Items were generated independently by two researchers and either modified, included, or discarded based on mutual discussion. These items of psychological shopping climate dimensions focus more on the aspects of evaluation associated with a shopping experience than do the functional and affective dimensions. They are: service climate; interpersonal climate; merchandise climate; and store design climate. Examples of the actual items used in the psychological shopping climate scale are shown in the Appendix.

The dependent measures were selected based on a desire to measure the effects of atmospheric dimensions on several attitudinal and behavioral variables associated with retail patronage. *Shopping enjoyment* (O'Guinn and Faber 1989) is a 3-item Likert-type scale measuring the enjoyment a consumer receives from a shopping experience. *Shopping satisfaction* was measured through the Crosby and Stephens (1987) general measure of satisfaction, consisting of a 5-item semantic differential scale. These two measures were chosen as assessments of subjects' satisfaction with past shopping experiences with the retailers under study. The final two dependent variables were administered to assess preference and anticipated future shopping behaviors. *Shopping intentions* (Baker, Levy, and Grewal 1992) measures the self-reported likelihood that a consumer will shop at a specified store. This is a 3-item Likert-type scale. *Membership in consideration set* was a 4-item, Likert-type scale developed by the authors to assess the extent to which the retailer in question would be considered when the customer was making a shopping trip. It included items such as "Visiting this store is always a possibility when I go shopping." Consumers' use of consideration sets results from inherent human cognitive processing limitations. The composition of elements included or not included in these sets influences personal and professional decision-making (e.g., Reger and Huff 1993).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As a first step in the analysis, coefficient alpha reliability estimates were calculated for all measures. In the initial assessment, the measures for the "activity" component of affective qualities and the "store design" component of psychological shopping climate were below the recommended .70 coefficient alpha standard for acceptability (Nunnally 1978). A review of the item-total correlations revealed a problematic item in each case. After the removal of these two items, the measures all showed good reliability. The correlations between measures, final coefficient alpha values, and other descriptive data on the measures are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations, and Coefficient Alpha Reliabilities

	# items	mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Discount Prices ¹	4	12.5	5.7	.90															
2. Store Personnel ¹	4	12.5	5.1	.23	.89														
3. Quality ¹	3	12.3	4.7	-.06	.54	.82													
4. Crowding ¹	2	7.6	3.3	-.14	.09	.05	.80												
5. Service Climate ²	5	17.3	5.6	.13	.63	.53	.10	.72											
6. Interpersonal Climate ²	5	17.8	6.0	.10	.68	.56	.18	.75	.83										
7. Merchandise Climate ²	5	16.4	5.9	.14	.61	.55	.06	.71	.63	.76									
8. Store Design Climate ²	11	36.8	11	.11	.69	.69	.06	.75	.72	.80	.88								
9. Pleasant ³	4	13.3	5.8	-.01	.73	.66	.11	.64	.65	.65	.75	.93							
10. Unpleasant ³	4	10.3	5.9	.02	.58	.48	.12	.59	.57	.63	.64	.67	.93						
11. Activity ³	3	11.7	3.9	.06	.35	.37	-.26	.33	.28	.32	.35	.34	.18	.71					
12. Sleepy ³	4	12.4	5.6	.08	.51	.38	-.02	.49	.48	.48	.48	.50	.60	.42	.85				
13. Enjoyment ⁴	3	13.0	4.6	.16	.54	.53	-.06	.54	.46	.52	.56	.58	.44	.44	.41	.87			
14. Satisfaction ⁴	5	16.0	7.5	.22	.73	.57	.01	.71	.63	.70	.73	.76	.70	.37	.58	.72	.96		
15. Shopping Intentions ⁴	3	9.8	4.9	.22	.58	.47	-.08	.58	.50	.65	.61	.56	.59	.37	.47	.62	.74	.75	
16. Consideration Set ⁴	4	14.4	7.0	.21	.46	.46	-.18	.51	.37	.58	.55	.45	.47	.39	.41	.72	.71	.75	.86

Note: Reliability estimates appear in **bold italics** on the diagonal.

¹Functional Dimensions

²Psychological Shopping Climate Dimensions

³Affective Dimensions

⁴Behavioral and Attitudinal Customer Outcomes

TABLE 2
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses for Overall Dimensions and Individual Components (Standardized Path Coefficients)

Predictor Variable	Dependent (Criterion) Variable			
	Shopping Enjoyment	Shopping Satisfaction	Future Shopping Intentions	Membership in Consideration Set
FUNCTIONAL DIMENSIONS				
Discount Prices	.181***	.206***	.115*	.032 ^{ns}
Store Personnel	.114**	.131***	.106**	.114**
Quality	.068 ^{ns}	.156***	.155**	.057 ^{ns}
Crowding	.210***	.045 ^{ns}	.070 ^{ns}	.103*
PSYCHOLOGICAL SHOPPING CLIMATE				
Service Climate	-.058 ^{ns}	-.042 ^{ns}	-.108**	-.166***
Interpersonal Climate	.190**	.277***	.309***	.333***
Merchandise Climate	.217***	.194***	.123*	.172**
Store Design Climate	-.105 ^{ns}	-.072 ^{ns}	-.075 ^{ns}	-.200***
AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS				
Pleasant	.079 ^{ns}	.115**	.279***	.281***
Unpleasant	-.059 ^{ns}	.004 ^{ns}	-.012 ^{ns}	.095 ^{ns}
Activity	.344***	.456***	.342***	.277***
Sleepy	.239***	.277***	-.001 ^{ns}	-.044 ^{ns}
	.019 ^{ns}	.207***	.266***	.181***
	.172***	.039 ^{ns}	.103**	.139***
	.017 ^{ns}	.068*	.000 ^{ns}	.006 ^{ns}

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Next, the propositions were examined through a series of multiple regression analyses. The analyses were conducted at two levels. First, the effects of the components of functional, affective, and psychological shopping climate dimensions on the dependent measures were considered. These components were then combined into aggregate predictor variables and their effects on behavioral and attitudinal customer outcomes were examined. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 2.

The results show strong support for our overall framework. With only one exception, the combined functional, affective, and psychological shopping climate measures were significant predictors of shopping enjoyment, shopping satisfaction, future shopping intentions, and membership in consumers' consideration sets. This highlights the complexity of the influences acting on consumers making their shopping decisions.

The disaggregated analysis which looked at the components of these overall dimensions resulted in less clarity. Dominant components appear in each of the broader groupings. Among the functional dimensions, the presence of discounted prices was the only component that was significantly related to all of the dependent measures. It appears that price dominates customer assessments of the basic functionality of a store. Other factors such as the presence of competent personnel, quality merchandise, and potential crowding were selectively influential. Despite current trends towards improving store ambience (e.g., Sears) and depth of assortments (e.g., J.C. Penney), this finding suggests that the dominance of customer price sensitivity cannot be ignored.

Among the affective dimensions, the positive coefficients for both "pleasant" and "unpleasant" attitudes are the result of the reverse coding of the negatively worded items, necessary for the creation of the aggregated measures. Hence, the direction of the coefficients is as expected. The broad affective notion of (un)pleasantness was generally significantly predictive of the dependent measures. While this finding is interesting it is also of limited managerial value. Unlike most of the other variables in the model, the levers that retailers can use to

produce feelings of pleasantness are not readily apparent. Activity was also found to generally result in positive customer outcomes. This is interesting, suggesting that across a range of retail formats, a more energized environment was ultimately beneficial to the retailer.

Psychological shopping climate was the focus of the study. The overall construct, measured in the aggregate, was highly predictive of all dependent measures. Disaggregating the measure produced some noteworthy findings. The dominant dimensions of PSC were service and merchandise climate. The significant results associated with the service climate component are probably least surprising. For several years, the retail press has noted that competition based on unique merchandise offerings, superior operations, or other tangible points of differentiation is becoming increasingly frustrating -- that is, there is little about the tangible operations of most retailers that cannot be duplicated by an aggressive competitor. The service elements of retailing have become increasingly potent in standing out in the customer's mind. For example, Jordan's Furniture has used services such as traveling interior decorators, on-line customization options, and a unique "low pressure" sales approach to achieve sales productivity that is nearly six times the industry average. The significance of the merchandise climate is also worth noting. This finding suggests that consumers like to interact with the merchandise and develop broad opinions about the merchandise offering regardless of how routinized a particular purchase might be.

The two dimensions of PSC that were not well supported are equally interesting. Interpersonal climate was not related as expected to the dependent measures. In fact, the regression coefficients for this variable were negatively related to the dependent measures, only the relation to membership in the consumer's consideration set was statistically significant. This result may seem somewhat contradictory to the importance of service elements noted above. Historically, the foundation of good customer service has been interpersonal interactions between consumers and sales personnel. We would speculate that this finding indicates that

consumers are more interested in customer service *processes* than in customer service *people*. That is, given the nationwide shortage of competent personnel to staff retailers' operations, it appears that consumers may have de-emphasized the importance of the more personal elements of a shopping experience. Instead, the processes of retailing have become increasingly essential for the provision of good service. Liberal return policies, extended hours, automated ordering options, and extraordinary convenience options have increasingly supplanted a personal relationship with a store keeper or even a friendly smile in the consumer's mind.

Companies such as Neiman-Marcus could be severely threatened by this trend since personal attention and relationships have been the cornerstone of their competitive advantage since their inception. These retailers are attempting to retain this advantage while making concessions to current trends through programs such as a web-based personal shopper request system that lets the busy executive enter bits of information such as "My wife's birthday is Thursday; she likes blue." This initiates a process where a personal shopper with an intimate knowledge of the store's merchandise offerings will respond with gift options and, if requested, wrap and ship the goods directly to the recipient.

Store design appeared to have little influence on consumers' decisions and attitudes. Clearly, some retailers have focused on design as a source of competitive advantage. Sharper Image, the Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, Chuck E Cheese, and Tandy Corporation's now-defunct Incredible Universe concept all rely heavily on some form of entertainment or interactivity as part of their shopping experience. Along these lines, the previously noted Jordan's Furniture offers amusement park rides and animatronic "Mardi Gras" shows to visitors, a radical departure from the dominant approaches to design in the conservative furniture industry. Our four-store sample did not include any retailers that would be considered as relying on design as a true differentiating element of their strategies. Therefore, this result suggests that store design is not particularly salient to consumers in mainstream retailers. Studies in other retailing contexts would be needed to test the validity of this result in more design-driven settings.

CONCLUSIONS

The broad premise of this research, that retail atmosphere should be treated as a multidimensional construct consisting of functional, affective, and psychological shopping climate dimensions, was supported in this study. Each of these dimensions contributed to the outcome variables. The affective and psychological shopping climate dimensions of retail atmosphere, in particular, appear to be strongly related to a range of important customer outcomes associated with the satisfying shopping experience. On looking more deeply into the findings, we identified several relationships between components of these dimensions and our outcome measures. These findings have implications for managers competing in a retail setting. They suggest that managers must appreciate the unique interaction that each customer has with their retail environment. Atmospheric in retailing has long been an area of interest for both practitioners and academics. This study highlights the need for both groups to consider the complex web of factors that combine to form "atmosphere" in the consumer's mind. We have highlighted, for example, the need to consider how each consumer interacts with the service processes offered by a retailer. Tracking studies of retail consumer satisfaction need to be sufficiently detailed to focus on these relatively fine areas that, nonetheless, can make the difference between success and failure in a highly competitive retail environment.

Future research should expand our understanding of the psychological shopping climate. The concept is rich with great potential to add further to our understanding of the consumer side of the shopping experience. Interactivity with the shopping environment, the central tenet of this work, is an element that has been lacking in traditional atmospheric research. By adding a consideration of this interaction, a more complete model of the psychology of the shopping experience can be developed. Research based on this work should refine the dimensions suggested here and further illuminate the interconnection and distinction between retail concepts of image, atmosphere, and climate. Further work is also needed in measure development for many of these constructs.

Psychological shopping climate focuses on those perceptions that relate to the shopping environment that are psychologically significant to the shopper rather than on the objective features that are characteristic of the retail setting. Understanding the psychological shopping climate of the Internet would be one area where our research could make an important contribution. How do shoppers assess and evaluate the Internet as a shopping environment? What aspects of the Internet enhance the shopping experience and what aspects act as a deterrent? Marketers need to know the meaning of Internet shopping to the consumer to develop Web sites that enhance the shopping experience.

This study has certain limitations. Our empirical test was preliminary to one employing a broader sampling of more diverse subject groups to validate the results. The measure development, while internally consistent at the sub-concept level, resulted in inconsistent results in the testing of propositions. Further empirical work is needed to determine whether these results generalize to other groups of consumers.

This research has strongly suggested that scholars and practitioners need to broaden their views about the nature of atmosphere in retailing. Our data showed that the psychological shopping climate has significant consequences for retail patronage behaviors and customer attitudes and must be more deeply understood. Further work in the area will provide insights to assist retailers in creating shopping environments that produce higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty and may result in difficult-to-achieve competitive advantages in saturated retail markets.

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APPENDIX

Examples of Psychological Shopping Climate Survey Items

Service Climate

- The service in this store is excellent.
- I get the help I need to buy something in this store.

Interpersonal Climate

- Employees seem to be knowledgeable.
- The employees in this store are excellent.

Merchandise Climate

- Merchandise is presented effectively.
- The merchandise that I want is generally in stock.

Store Design Climate

- This store is arranged poorly. (R)
- It is easy to move through this store.

All on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly agree" and 7 = "strongly disagree."

(R) = reverse-coded item.