APPAREL RETAILERS USE OF STORE ATMOSPHERICS: A STRATEGIC MOVE OR A WASTED APPROACH?

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Abstract

The retail industry has been a central part of everybody's lives- and apparel retailers are no different than other retailers. The basic practices of retailing have changed over the past years due to a number of reasons, least of all due to the changing technological environment, the changing market needs and demands, as well as the increasingly globally competitive market retailers have to deal with. The fact that the time duration between these changes are continuously becoming shorter and shorter has negated the benefits that the standard four p's used to offer retailers. Retailers need to make use of other ways and means to differentiate themselves and to stay ahead of their competitors. This phenomenon has led to this study which focuses on the influence that store atmospherics has on consumers' buying behaviour. Store atmospherics and its influence on consumers' buying behaviour is an area that has received very little attention in the literature to date. The primary research aim of this study was to explore the influence of store atmospherics on consumers' buying behaviour in apparel retail stores in the Tshwane region. The type of research design used in this study was exploratory in nature, making use of a qualitative approach and a communicative technique, including focus group interviews and naïve sketches. The data gathered was analysed by means of Tesch's inductive descriptive coding technique, better known as thematic analysis. It was found that atmospheric elements have the ability to influence consumers either in a subconscious or a conscious way. This has a direct influence on the amount of time the consumers will spend in-store and ultimately the amount of money spend in the store. The study also pointed out that consumers' buying behaviour and the decision to buy or not will be influenced, indicating that the consumers will display either an approach- or avoidance behaviour.

Keywords: Store Atmospherics, Senses, Sight, Sound, Scent, Touch, Consumer Behaviour, Approach Behaviour, Avoidance Behaviour

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1 Introduction and objectives

The physical bricks and mortar retail environment has up until now been the main provider of being both the focus and the setting for consumer engagement (Ogden-Barnes & Barclay, [n.d.]:5). However consumers today are increasingly turning to other new and exciting retail channels such as the internet to browse, compare and ultimately purchase products. This trend is more and more regarded as being a threat to the traditional retail store environment – business is not as we know it anymore! Challenged with this new trend, it is important for brick and mortar retailers to relook the principles and practices of in-store consumer engagement and how to utilize their physical in-store environments in the most effective way in order to ensure sales optimisation, consumer satisfaction and sustainable profitability (Ogden-Barnes & Barclay, [n.d.]:5).

Due to a busier and more complicated and stressful lifestyle of consumers, Gobé (2009:109) suggested that, especially for these reasons, it is more important than ever that retailers realise the importance of having a pleasurable in-store environment in order to satisfy the consumers' needs more effectively, to provide them with an enjoyable experience and to allow them to escape from their busy lifestyles. It is a known fact that retail stores that improve on their in-store environment increase the likelihood to create an effective consuming condition which will stimulate and satisfy consumers' immediate purchasing behaviour (Liaw, 2007:1).

Ogden-Barnes and Barclay ([n.d.]:21) are of the opinion that subtle factors experienced through the senses, of sight, sound, touch, scent and taste, either individually or together, can affect a consumer's emotion in relation to a degree of stimulation and relaxation. For example, different light and temperature combinations can act to influence

consumer perceptions of the retail offer and it is therefore critical for retailers to determine how these key atmospheric elements are optimised in relation to the brand and product offer in order to create a pleasurable shopping environment that will stimulate and encourage sales.

Hunter and Mukerji (2011:119), indicate that elements such as scent, temperature, lighting, colour and even the music playing inside retail stores have been analysed in the past in order to establish its effect on the consumers' emotional state. Based on the emotional concept of stimulus-response, researchers have suggested that these factors can have an influence on arousal and pleasure, which in turn can have a direct effect on consumers' decision-making as either an approach or avoidance behaviour. For example, stimuli such as overcrowding and loud music might reduce consumers' interaction, browsing time and the purchasing of on the spur of the moment products. This implies that if consumers experience an in-store environment/atmosphere that overly increases arousal and decreases the pleasure of the experience, it will have a negative impact on consumers' buying behaviour (Hunter & Mukerji, 2011:119).

This study aimed to obtain a comprehensive and holistic view of store atmospherics, which forms part of the total retail shopping experience and its impact on the consumers' inclination to purchase. A consumer-centred response approach was followed in this study. The findings of the study could benefit apparel retailers as the consumers' views on in-store atmospheric elements and their influence on the consumers' buying behaviour was uncovered. The same findings of the study can be extrapolated to apply to retailers worldwide with only minor adjustments and adaptations in order to meet local conditions and customs.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of store atmospherics on consumers' buying behaviour in apparel retail stores in Tshwane. This study aimed to investigate, within the context of Tshwane:

- the influence of sight on consumers' buying behaviour;
- the influence of sound on consumers' buying behaviour;
- the influence of scent on consumers' buying behaviour; and
- the influence of touch on consumers' buying behaviour.

The following section presents an overview of store atmospherics, what it is and the components of sight, sound, scent and taste, as well as consumers' buying behaviour. The empirical findings and the discussion of the findings appear in the latter part of the paper.

2 Literature review

2.1 Store atmospherics

The ultimate goal of any retail store's design should be to, differentiate it from competitors, to enhance in-store traffic and to enhance consumer spending (Pradhan, 2007:347). A method to enhance this shopping experience and generating an increase in consumer traffic is through the use of store "atmospherics" – a term first introduced by Phillip Kotler (Pradhan, 2007:347). Store atmospherics is a word used by retailers to describe elements such as lighting, colour, music, aromas and so forth , which is used to appeal to the five human senses and in so doing contribute to the overall in-store environment or experience (Bell & Ternus, 2006:21). Bell and Ternus (2006:21) state that atmospheric elements have the ability to influence consumers' feelings about being in and staying in a retail store and that the longer consumers stay in a store, the more likely that they will purchase a product.

The term "atmosphere" or "atmospherics" can be defined as the physical characteristics of a store that is applied to develop an image in order to attract consumers (Berman & Evans, 2010:508). Liu and Jang (2009:495) defined atmospherics as "... the conscious designing of space to produce specific emotional effects in buyers that enhance their purchase probability". Levy, Weitz, and Beitelspacher (2012:490) describe atmospherics as the design of a store environment by making use of the five human senses. These authors are of the opinion that more retail stores have come to realise the value and importance in developing atmospheric elements that complement other aspects of the store, such as the store design and merchandise (Levy *et al.,* 2012:490). Kotler (2001:50) defines store atmospherics "…as the designing of a buying environment in which specific buying emotions are created through the use of the senses (sight, sound, scent and touch) in order to enhance the consumer's likelihood of purchasing."

A retailer's image in the market is greatly influenced by the atmosphere prevailing in the store – the psychological feeling evoked within consumers the moment they enter a store (Berman & Evans, 2010:508). Berman and Evans (2010:508) as well as Bell and Ternus (2006:36) maintain that a store's atmosphere has the ability to influence consumers' shopping experience and satisfaction, the physical time spent browsing and evaluating the merchandise in the store, the eagerness of consumers to communicate with store personnel and to make use of store facilities such as dressing rooms, the willingness to spend more money than originally planned and the possibility of future patronage. These elements do not only contribute to the overall image of the store, but can also be used as an effective marketing tool to differentiate one store from other stores/competitors,

to effectively communicate with their consumers and to attract consumers' attention (Kotler, 2001:50).

It can therefore be inferred that the atmosphere prevailing in a retail store has a direct influence and impact on consumers' willingness to spend more time browsing in a store and ultimately spending more money. Different atmospheric elements can tactically be used to target specific consumers (Gupta & Randhawa, 2008:225). For the purpose of this study the store atmospheric elements focused upon are sight, sound, scent and touch.

2.1.1 Sight

Sight refers to the act of seeing and forming a perception of specific things or objects by using the eyes (AR Dictionary, 2010). It is regarded as the most powerful of all the human senses and it is also the most seductive (Hultén, 2011:259). Gobé (2009:259) reports that individuals from the age of ten years and older use sight as the most predominant sense in order to explore, discover and understand the world. Kotler (2001:51) classifies sight as all the visual elements such as the colours, lighting, shades and shapes that retailers use to create an appealing atmosphere. From this it can be deduced that what people see in terms of a store's interior and exterior or a brand is critical to draw their attention (Hultén, Broweus & Van Dijk, 2009:87).

Kerfoot, Davies & Ward (2003:145) found that 90% of in-store environment cues are taken in through sight, due to the fact that many in-store cues in the retail setting are visually communicated. The CEO, founder and owner of the Swedish fashion retailer "Gina Tricot" states that "…what the eyes see is extremely important. I say that the eyes buy 70 or 80 percent of what people buy. This is enormously important to bear in mind" (Hultén *et al.,* 2009:9).

2.1.2 Sound

Sound can be described as a specific feeling that is produced by the stimulation of the hearing organs through vibrations sent out through the air or any other medium, such as the sound of music (Dictionary.com, 2012). Kotler (2001:51) classifies sound in a retail sense as the volume or pitch of music that retailers use in order to create an appealing atmosphere. Hultén et al. (2009:67) state that "… sound affects our mood and psychological state, alerts us to danger, and promotes peace of mind for the soul". Sound has always been very important in society for both individuals as well as organisations. This is because people attach certain meanings to different types of sounds and music genres. This can be regarded as an important source of motivation and information in relation to making an association with specific organisations, stores, brands or products (Gobé, 2009:73).

2.1.3 Scent

Scent refers to any particular smell, such as pleasant fragrances, or bad odours (Macmillan Dictionary, 2012). Hultén *et al* (2009:41) assert that "…our search for pleasure and daily well-being most often comes to us via our nose". Gobé (2009:99) mentions that scent is the strongest of all five senses, because it has the best ability to evoke consumer emotions. The sense of smell is closely related to the part of the brain that deals with emotions, called the right cerebral hemisphere. Here, scents stimulate feelings and influence emotions. Scent has the ability to reach people on a conscious as well as on an unconscious level and it takes only one smell to stimulate a person's senses and create a perception (Hultén *et al,* 2009:56). Furthermore, scents have the ability to help individuals to remember, to describe certain things and to tell or explain what the fragrance smells like (Hultén, 2011:266).

2.1.4 Touch

Touch as a sense can be described as a tactile or tangible sense through which consumers have the ability to make physical contact with the surrounding world as well as to investigate three-dimensional objects (Kang, Boger, Back & Madera, 2011:3). It makes it possible for consumers to remember and relive how certain things feel only by looking at them as well as thinking about them. Hultén et al (2009:11) emphasise that it is important for the physical form of products to be available to make it possible for consumers to interact with the product by touching, squeezing and turning it upside down, as this will also contribute to the overall in-store atmosphere. Products, brands and store attributes can be described through tactile sensory expressions, such as materials and surfaces, as well as through temperature and weight (Kang *et al.,* 2011:3).

It is clear from the above mentioned discussion that store atmospheric elements do have an influence on consumers' emotions in some or other way and that environmental stimuli such as the senses (sight, sound, scent and touch) do have an influence on consumers' emotions which can ultimately result in a specific behavioural response (Jang & Namkung, 2009:451; Kang et al, 2011:2). The influences that environmental stimuli (atmospheric elements) have on consumers' emotions are discussed in the next section.

2.2 Consumer emotions and buying behaviour

According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), in-store environmental stimuli such as sight, have a direct influence on consumers' emotions which further results in a behavioural response (Jang & Namkung, 2009:451; Kang et al, 2011:2). From the literature, it is clear that the human senses do have an influence on consumers'

emotions. The moment that consumers see a specific picture or object, past memories are immediately recalled and re-experienced and therefore specific emotions, such as happiness or sadness, is brought to the consumers' mind – either consciously or unconsciously (Hultén et al, 2009:10, 57, 115).

Liao and Liaw ([n.d.]:2) define emotions as the "... oral expression of feelings and as a personal, subjective psychological state". Having said this, a store's environment can elicit three types of emotions which retailers need to be aware of. The first emotion is pleasure, which can be described as an effectual reaction, which will indicate whether consumers find the environment enjoyable or not (Jang & Namkung, 2009:451). The second emotion is arousal, which indicates how much the environment stimulates the consumers. The third emotion is dominance which is concerned with whether consumers feel in control or not in the environment.

It is likely that certain positive emotional reactions caused by the sense, sight, will result in increased consumer spending, but it will highly depend on the type of in-store atmosphere that is created (Kotler, 2001:54). Therefore, it can be inferred that emotional reactions (pleasure, arousal and dominance) will most likely have an influence on consumers' behavioural responses. Furthermore, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) defined the emotional state and behavioural responses of consumers' to an environment as approach (positive) and avoidance (negative). Approach behaviours include all positive behavioural intentions that are influenced by an environment such as good lighting, pleasant music and attractive smells, whereas avoidance behaviours are the opposite which include all the negative behavioural intentions (Kang *et al.,* 2011:3).

It can be deduced from the above literature outline that in-store atmospheric elements do have an influence on the emotions of consumers and will impact and influence their buying behaviour. The next section deals with the research methodology and the findings of the research.

3 Research methodology

Qualitative research was used for this study; due to the fact that a detailed explanation of *store atmospherics* and its influence on consumers' buying behaviour was needed and qualitative research has the ability to discover true significance and new insights about the available data (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin. 2010).

The extent to which *store atmospherics* influences consumers' buying behaviour was studied by means of exploratory research. Exploratory research is used to explore and to clarify ambiguous situations and ideas of a research problem (Zikmund and Babin, 2007:42).

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, non-probability, purposive sampling was used. Subjects in a non-probability sample are usually selected on the basis of convenience, as they are easy and/or inexpensive to reach or by the purposive personal judgment of the researcher (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2009:312). In purposive sampling, the researcher samples with a purpose in mind (Zikmund *et al,* 2010).

The inclusion criteria for the purposive sampling for this research study were as follows:
- Any male or female older than 18 years.
- Any person who bought at apparel retail stores.
- Any person who resided in the Tshwane region of Gauteng.
- Any person that could understand, speak and write English.

Data was collected by means of a communicative technique of interviews, and the selected methods were focus group interviews and naïve sketches. Focus group interviews can be defined as unstructured, free flowing interviews with small groups of people, generally eight to twelve participants, while naive sketches are open-ended questionnaires that ask participants questions regarding the specific topic (Hair et al, 2009:161). These methods were used to collect data from 16 participants (eight participants in each focus group and naive sketch). Due to this approach, two forms of data was received and compared with one another in order to gain maximum data from each participant.

The focus group interviews were based on the use of visual material in order to create an atmosphere. The photographs were taken of the atmospheric themes implemented by two stores in the Tshwane region and they were included in both the naïve sketches and the focus groups. The participants were asked five questions (the same questions in both the naive sketch and focus group interview) which were derived from the research objectives. The questions are as follows:

1. What do you understand about a clothing retail store's atmosphere?

2. When you walk into a clothing store, what is the influence of the colours and lighting (what you can see) used in-store on your buying behaviour?

3. When you walk into a clothing store, what is the influence of sound (what you can hear – music) used in-store on your buying behaviour?

4. When you walk into a clothing store, what is the influence of the temperature (what you can feel – air-conditioning) in-store on your buying behaviour?

5. When you walk into a clothing store, what is the influence of scents (what you can smell – fragrances) used in-store on your buying behaviour?

Thematic analysis was used, since the required data for this research study was contextual in nature. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research process that involves intensive searching through data to identify any possible patterns, known as themes and categories that might occur more than once (Tesch, 1990:113). A theme can be described as "umbrella" constructs

that are generally identified by the researcher before, during and after the data collection. A theme can therefore be seen as a cluster of linked categories that express the same meanings (Ryan & Bernard in Welman et al, 2005:211). A category is a group of things that have some qualities in common, for example frustration, joy and happiness can all be categorised or classified as emotions. It is a process that organises and describes data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.1 Results

The outcomes of the questions asked in both the focus group interviews and the naive sketches are examined in terms of three main themes and their underlying categories as outlined by Tesch's model (thematic analysis).

Theme 1: Participants display a good understanding and awareness of store atmospherics, the "general ambiance" it creates and the variety of "controllable elements" used to do so, as well as the potential it has to influence their moods and in turn their buying behaviour.

Participants identified a store's atmosphere as consisting of a variety of controllable elements, such as lighting, music, layout, decor, temperature, smell and staff attitude, all of which create the general ambience. It was highlighted that the general ambience of a store is important, as it creates a general feeling of either being welcome or not, the moment a person enters a store.

The participants also indicated that store atmospherics potentially influenced their mood, and in turn their buying behaviour. In the focus group discussion, it was found that if a store managed to use the controllable elements of lighting and colours correctly, the likelihood of the participants buying increased. However, if these controllable characteristics were used incorrectly, the likelihood that participants would rather leave a store was enhanced.

Two categories emerged from the first theme and are explained below.

Category 1: A store's atmosphere consists of a variety of controllable elements, such as lighting, music, layout, decor, temperature, smell and staff attitude, all of which create the general ambience

From both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches it was clear that the participants understood the term "store atmospherics" (as defined in the literature) as the controllable elements that a store can use to create a general ambience or feeling. General ambience is defined by Dunne and Lusch (2008:457) as the "…overall feeling or mood projected by a store through its aesthetic appeal to human senses". The participants indicated that a pleasant in-store environment was created through attention to detail. They further indicated that store atmospherics could be anything that affected the senses of consumers,

such as sight, sound, smell and touch, and that it was important for the in-store temperature to be comfortable. Their opinion was that it should rather be too cold than too hot.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to confirm the findings regarding the first category of controllable elements:

• "… it's mostly all controllable elements that lead to our likes, it's like the type of music that is playing in the background, the colours, the lighting, the scent that you get when you walk into the store, is something that retail can control …"

• "The 'general ambiance' of the store created by lighting, music, layout, availability of personnel and pay points"

• "… includes mostly all the controllable characteristics that a store utilizes in order to entice the customer and influence their moods"

Category 2: Store atmospherics potentially influenced their mood, and in turn their buying behaviour

The participants from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches indicated that they were far less likely to stay in a store if the music was too loud, as this had a negative influence on their mood and in turn on their buying behaviour. Three quotes were taken from the focus group interviews to substantiate the above findings.

• "… far less likely to stay in a store if it is playing loud music"

• "… if the music is too loud, it will reduce my buying behaviour, if the music is pleasant and not in your face, it will probably enhance or add to me wanting to stay longer and linger longer in the store …"

• "… if the music is too loud or not nice then I rather just leaves …"

Theme 2: Store atmospherics speaks a "silent language" to participants, reinforcing niche/target market appeal and/or merchandise integrity/quality or lack thereof, either enticing them into or repelling them from a store.

Participants from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches were of the opinion that store atmospherics spoke a silent language, meaning that the participants did not always recognise the atmospheric elements used in-store, but if they were unpleasant (e.g. lighting too dark) they immediately became aware of it or noticed it. It can therefore be implied that store atmospherics has a subliminal (subconscious) influence on consumers.

The participants further pointed out in both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches that store atmospherics could be context driven and therefore appeal to a specific target market or consumer group. The participants said that they would not enter some stores, because they did not feel comfortable in there and these stores did not fit in with their style and personality.

The participants also indicated that store atmospherics formed part of a store's total product and could therefore reveal something about the quality or integrity of the product and/or service offered. It is clear that the participants felt that a store that was too dark could portray an image of dirtiness and that the store was hiding something. They further emphasised the importance of the types of atmospheric elements used fitting in with the type of merchandise that the store offered. Three quotes were taken from the focus groups to illustrate the participants' views on all three categories.

Three categories emerged from the second theme and are explained below.

Category 1: Store atmospherics spoke a silent language

The participants did not always notice a specific sound or music playing in-store, but when they recognised that one of these elements was "out of place" or not right, for instance too loud, too fast, too hot, too cold, too smelly or too dark, they became annoyed and left the store immediately or as soon as possible, thus affecting their buying behaviour negatively. Five quotes were taken from the focus group interviews which justify the above findings.

• "... I tend to not notice music, if it does not irritate me, or sounds, I notice it if it irritates me but if it doesn't irritate me, then no ..."

• "... I don't like if it is not nice smelling, I will not spend time there ..."

• "Atmosphere too crowded implies cheap while too sparse implies out of my league!"

• "Certain items are spotlighted or highlighted, works because then you feel special, more exclusive … there is something about it that says 'Turrah! Here is the item!'"

• "I think a lot of the music has got a lot to do with the subconscious because you are not walking into the store to go and listen to music and if it hits you and now the thing is, all twelve of us can walk into the same store, six will be irritated, two wouldn't even notice it and the other two that likes it, yes"

Category 2: Store atmospherics could be context driven and therefore appeal to a specific target market or consumer group

Both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches revealed that the participants felt that the atmosphere of some stores was context driven and that it appealed to a specific niche or target market. When a participant did not feel comfortable in a store, sometimes due to bad lighting, they either did not enter the store or they left shortly after entering, as they did not feel welcome there.

The following four quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to validate the findings regarding the second category of context driven:

• "I mean you walk into the Disney Store, there is a sound of sleigh bells, there is sounds of you know, Chipmunk songs and there is Disney tunes and these

kinds of things and they influence how happy the kids are because that is their target audience ..."

• "When I go into a Zoot or one of these, I don't feel welcome anymore, the atmospherics is not right, I get the feeling it's the young people, the young people buy there and I feel that I am not welcome, but that is obviously not true, I just don't feel like the atmosphere is right, the music is too loud, lighting is not what I like, clothes are too cluttered, so I just, you know, me, I personally like the ambience of the stores that I frequent."

• "I will be more likely to buy in a store where I feel comfortable and where I feel I fit in"

• "From a lighting perspective, I think lighting to me personally, will, if I don't know the brand, if I am not familiar with that store at all, and it's very dark, I am going to be less inclined to go inside, but there is now an outside poll of a specific store, like the Marlboro Store or the Kingsley Heath stores or, that are creating a specific look ..."

Category 3: Store atmospherics formed part of a store's total product

It was evident from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches that the participants felt that the types of atmospheric elements used formed part of the product and/or service offered by the store. In other words, the participants felt that the type of atmospherics used in a store should fit the type of merchandise offered. The participants further indicated that a dark store projected an image of poor quality and filthiness, whereas a store with proper lighting projected a feeling of cleanliness and good quality. It can therefore be inferred from the focus group interviews and naïve sketches that a more "elegant" store should make use of good lighting in order to emphasise the quality of the merchandise. The participants furthermore pointed out that it was important for the type of music played in a store to fit in with the merchandise and services offered, in order to contribute to the overall atmosphere of the store.

The following four quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to confirm the above findings regarding the third category of store's total product:

• "Too much darkness that says, okay why? ... it's dirty, you know, they are hiding their quality they are not proud to stand up and say something, I am just saying from a psychological perspective that is what darkness would imply."

• "Whereas you know, go to Queenspark and there is some rap or something, it's definitely not going to make you want to buy, so it's definitely, you have to relate it to what you are selling."

• "I think the music that stores have also have to relate to the merchandise they sell."

• "Because of the lighting, if that it is clean, I get the feeling its clean, and that they are not hiding anything, that the quality is there."

Theme 3: Elements of store atmospherics that move towards either extreme (for example, too hot or

too cold) become salient or obtrusive to consumers, leading to discomfort and limiting or disrupting browsing time and thus lessening the chance that the product will be discovered and bought.

The participants stated that certain atmospheric elements that moved towards the extremes, for instance too loud, too dark or too hot, led to discomfort and/or irritation, which affected their spending. It was clear from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches that the participants did not enter a store if they could see from a distance that the store was too dark. If the participants had, however, entered such a store, they would leave immediately if they recognised any unpleasant atmospheric elements.

The participants further indicated that unpleasant atmospheric elements decreased the likelihood that they would find something to buy, as the time spent on browsing was then immediately shortened. The participants stated that a store where the lighting was too dark would directly influence the amount of time spent in-store, which in turn affected their buying ability.

Two categories emerged from the third theme and are explained below.

Category 1: Atmospheric elements that moved towards the extremes, led to discomfort or irritation

The participants of both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches indicated that atmospheric elements that move towards an extreme in either direction led to irritation or discomfort and made them leave the store immediately or as soon as possible. The participants would not enter a store if they observed from a distance that the music was too loud. Therefore, unpleasant atmospheric elements will most likely have a negative influence on the buying behaviour of consumers.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to confirm the above findings regarding the first category of elements that move to extremes:

- "... and I just couldn't take it, he was, you know, it was too loud."
- "I don't like loud music so I won't go there, I would rather look for a better store."
- "... if the music is too loud, it will reduce my buying behaviour, if the music is pleasant and not in your face, it will probably enhance or add to me wanting to stay longer and linger longer in the store but it's not a definitive, you know I will buy because of the music."
- "I don't think that music will entice me to buy more, it will definitely, if it is not to my liking, it will rush me to get out of there and to limit the time in the shop."
- "[lighting] influences whether you go into a shop or not, I mean a dark sort of dingy looking shop, you are not going to want to enter into so it starts right at the outside of an appeal."
- "Needs to be comfortable, i.e. not too hot or too cold."
- "... for some temperature does have an important influence especially if it is too hot, cold."

- "[lighting] must be as close to the real thing as possible."

Category 2: Unpleasant atmospheric elements decreased the likelihood that customers would find something to buy

The participants in both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches explained that any unpleasant atmospheric element detected in the store, whether it was too loud or too dark, had a direct influence on the amount of time that they spent browsing in the store, which ultimately influenced the likelihood of purchasing something, most probably in a negative way. The participants made it clear that they would not tolerate any unpleasant atmospheric elements in-store and would therefore leave the store immediately. This would decrease the likelihood of buying something.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to validate the above findings regarding the second category of unpleasant atmospherics:

- "... will influence the time spent browsing and will influence whether I will try stuff on or not."
- "... but if the lighting is not, you know, to my appeal, then I am just going to spend less time there."
- "... I think it greatly has an impact on how long you spend in a store."
- "... I am not going to stay there and spend time there."

Theme 4: Personal factors and buyers' intentions do moderate the influence of store atmospherics on buying behaviour.

The participants of both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches liked and disliked some atmospheric elements and said that they would tolerate some of the elements but only to a certain point. It was clear from the discussion with the participants that some of them tolerated unlikeable or loud music, especially when they needed something specific, but others did not, even though they might need something specific. The participants further explained that they could not tolerate any unpleasant smell and would leave the store immediately.

The participants furthermore pointed out that they would endure unpleasant atmospherics if the store had what they were after (category 2) and if it was difficult to find the product elsewhere. If they urgently needed something specific, they would tolerate the unpleasant atmosphere, whether it was too cold, too hot or too smelly. However, if they did not need something specific, they would not tolerate the unpleasant atmosphere in-store and would either not enter the store in the first place or would just leave the store immediately after entering.

Two categories emerged from the fourth theme and are explained below.

Category 1: Variability and similarity in terms of which atmospheric elements are liked/disliked tolerable/intolerable

From both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches it was clear that there were certain atmospheric elements that the participants tolerated, but that there were also elements that they did not

tolerate at all. It was interesting to note that for the majority of the participants, stores using their own radio stations were extremely irritating and they preferred silence to the radio station. The participants also stated that the stores that used incense created an image of "cheapness" in their minds. The participants further explained that they did not want to feel claustrophobic in a store and that it was important for them to easily move through the customers and merchandise.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to confirm the above findings regarding the first category of variability and similarity in terms of atmospherics:

• "Their radio station irritates the life out of me, I just don't spend a lot of time in there."

• "I think for me, if I go into a store and they play crappy music, it doesn't bother me."

• "I think physical attributes play a role here and with the temperature, some people are more sensitive to temperature."

• "If I smell incense, I think to myself "cheap".

• "Any radio-station tuned music is unacceptable."

• "I do not like scents of any sort inside a clothing store."

• [noise] "... it is irritating and it might encourage you to leave or just quickly buy what you need and leave, but I also wouldn't say, if they play a nice song, I am going to buy more, so, if it is good music and its calming and everybody can listen to it, then I feel more people will be inclined to visit the store and look around and buy products ..."

Category 2: Tolerance of consumers to endure "unpleasant" atmospherics [if they know the store has what it is they are after i.e. if they have clear intention for entering into the store]

The participants in the research study would endure unpleasant atmospherics if they knew the store had what they were after, meaning that the participants had a clear purpose for entering the store. The participants further indicated that sometimes apparel stores were aware of a bad or unpleasant atmospheric element, such as a broken air-conditioner, and still did not solve the problem, because the stores knew that they had products that the consumers wanted and needed, and despite the broken air-conditioner, the consumers would return.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from both the focus group interviews and naïve sketches to confirm the above findings regarding the second category of tolerance of consumers:

• "If there is a product like that and I can't find it anywhere else, then I would go in despite the bad atmosphere."

• "If you need something specific and you know it is at a store you will go there, never mind what the atmospherics is."

• "... I think when you have to buy something specific and you know where to find it, you just go there and buy it but if a store is nice, it will maybe tempt you to go back if you have time to browse around and that may lead to purchases."

• "I don't think that music will entice me to buy more, it will definitely, if it is not to my liking, it will rush me to get out of there and to limit the time in the shop, so I don't think there is music enough for my wallet..."

• "... If I need something in a specific store, and it's cold or too warm, I would not leave immediately. The temperature may convince me not to stay and browse, but it usually won't keep me from buying what I need from a store."

4 Conclusion

Sight was found to have a major impact on the consumer's decision to enter and stay in-store. The participants indicated that the lighting in a store was an important factor to them when considering entering a store or not and making a decision to purchase a product. It is clear from this that participants preferred a store to be immersed in light and not dark. If the participants observed from a distance that the lighting was too dark or not bright enough, it sometimes prevented them from entering the store, as they became irritated and felt that the quality of the products would not be good. The participants stated that a store that was too dark could easily be regarded as dirty and/or that the store was hiding something. It is therefore clear that lighting was very important to the participants and will have an influence on the time they spend in store which will ultimately influence their likelihood to make a purchase or not to purchase.

Sound was found to have a profound effect on the amount of time that the participants spent in-store. They were far less likely to stay in a store if the music was too loud, and this directly influenced their buying behaviour. Furthermore, participants indicated that they would not enter a store if they could observe (hear) from a distance that the music was too loud, as it made them feel unwelcome. Feeling comfortable at all times while shopping in a specific store was critical to the participants and as soon as they noticed that the music was too loud according to their preference, they were inclined to leave the store immediately, or as soon as possible. It was further found that participants did not always notice sounds (music, noise) in-store. This therefore implies that sound (music) can have a subtle influence on consumers, as they do not always notice it. However, the moment that consumers do recognise any form of sound (music, noise or radio) in-store that they do not like, they will become uneasy (irritated) and possibly leave the store. This has a negative influence on their buying behaviour.

Touch was also regarded as a very important element, as the temperature in-store influences their mood and in turn their buying behaviour. The participants mentioned that they needed to feel comfortable in-store and that as soon as they felt the temperature was not right, i.e. too hot or too cold, they were not comfortable, started feeling sweaty or freezing and irritated, they would leave the store immediately. The participants preferred the

temperature to be rather too cold than too hot, but ideally the temperature should be right (room temperature of 21 degrees), thus not too cold and not too hot.

Scent was also regarded as an important element, but that it had a subtle effect, meaning that the participants did not always notice a specific smell; however, they did notice a bad or alien smell and were most likely to leave the store when noticing such a smell. The same applies to a pleasant smell. The participants did not necessarily recognise a pleasant smell, but a pleasant smell/scent might subconsciously have motivated them to walk around longer (browsing), which could lead to unplanned purchasing. It was also found that the participants related certain smells/scents to specific predetermined images. For instance, stores that make use of incense created an image of "cheap" in the participants' minds and they further indicated that they could "smell" quality. This influenced the time spent in-store and ultimately influenced the likelihood of purchasing.

In summary, it was established that store atmospherics (sight, sound, scent and smell) do have a positive and a negative influence on consumers' buying behaviour in apparel retail stores. The reason for this is that atmospheric elements have the ability to influence consumers either subconsciously or consciously. Furthermore, it is evident that the amount of time spent in-store is directly influenced by these elements which ultimately influences the consumers' intension to purchase in-store. It is recommended that apparel retailers, by the pure nature of their product offering, can utilize store atmospherics effectively in order to capitalize on the prolonged time that consumers spend in a store when the mix is right and they can also use it as an effective differentiating tool.

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