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Examining the response of female fashion shoppers towards the mall atmosphere

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the response of female fashion shoppers towards the mall atmosphere. A total of 100 female students conveniently sampled at a higher learning institution in Federal Territory of Labuan, Malaysia, served as the sample. Results from regression analysis revealed that the mall atmospherics positively influence hedonic shopping value and approach behaviour among all female shopper fashion clusters. It seems that fashion forward shoppers are not responding any better than female shoppers on the low end of the fashion spectrum. This study produced evidence suggesting that store environment triggers affective reactions in customers. The paper rounds off with conclusions and an agenda for future research in this area.

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Introduction

The mall environment is central to the perception of merchandise quality, and the place where respondents gain their shopping experience. Environment is one of the factors that are capable of influencing a wide range of behaviour as well as providing a context in which this behaviour occurs. Atmosphere consists of elements such as brightness, size, shape, volume, pitch, scent, freshness, softness, smoothness, and temperature. Nowadays, with more time, money and willingness to travel further to shop, and the increasing quantity and variety of retail development, consumers have a growing choice of shopping destinations (Kirkup & Rafiq, 1999). At the same time, there are various other factors that will influence the consumer's visit to the shopping mall. Traditionally, developers attracted consumers to malls through the promise of a wide assortment of stores and merchandise available in a single location. One of the most important tasks of store retailers will be how to attract and retain consumers.

According to Holman and Wilson (1982), consumers shop stores that provide a proper environment relative to image and services. Often consumers evaluate the environment to determine the firm's capabilities for providing a particular service before a purchase. Therefore, the environment of service organizations should reflect the needs and preferences of the consumers and its employees (Bitner, 1992). The needs and preferences of retail consumers relative to the environment has been discussed in terms of physical dimensions, as well as other store attributes. These attributes are thought to produce the store's image. The physical dimensions are facilities in stores such as elevators, lighting, air conditioning, washrooms, store layout, aisle placement and width, carpeting and architecture (Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard, 1995). However, other store attributes are studied more often than physical attributes and include categories of merchandise, service and clientele

(Lindquist, 1974). Besides the factors of location, price and merchandise offerings, Martineau (1958) states that the store's personality draws shoppers to one store rather than another. Martineau says that not only should retailers be concerned with value and quality of merchandise, but also with a wide range of other factors (e.g., environmental dimensions). All of these factors are expected to play a critical role in the success or failure of stores.

Female shoppers tend to change their buying behaviour and value when the mall environment is different. Girls with a high degree of self-confidence still expressed a lot of concern in dealing with salespeople and engaging in impulsive shopping behavior (Mallalieu & Palan, 2006). The significant mall environment affects the buying behaviour. This research is meant to examine the response of female fashion shoppers towards the mall atmosphere. Increasingly, it is necessary that managers know which retail attributes are important to which shoppers so that the appropriate retail strategy can be developed, particularly among female market. By understanding satisfaction with mall attributes and the shopping value that customers derive from a visit to the mall, developers may learn what features drive customers to return. In addition, it would be valuable to understand differences in mall attribute satisfaction and shopping value. Many store patrons are not aware of the effects of the store environment towards consumer shopping behaviour. This is due to the lack of exposure about store environment that influence consumer shopping behaviour. Furthermore, store patrons also cannot identify the true reasons why they patronise a particular store. Hence, this study aims to examine the response of female fashion shoppers towards the mall atmosphere.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the model employed in this study, focusing on the rationale of the constructs used and deriving testable hypotheses. Section 3

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describes the research methodology. The next section presents the results and discussions sections. The paper rounds off with conclusions and an agenda for future research in this area.

Literature Review

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) noted that the mall environment influences shoppers' mood and behavioural intentions. Milliman and Turley (2000) mention that the study of retail environments have manipulated a large number of atmospheric stimuli, such as colour, music and crowding and noted their influence on evaluations and on a wide range of behavioural responders, such as time spent in the environment, sales and impulse buying. Consumers' perception of a retail environment will give an impact in their mood. Some researchers suggest two cues which are important in atmospheric factor that will effect on shoppers' affective states in the store environment (Michon, Chebat & Turley, 2005). Milliman and Turley (2000) have divided the emotional that can affect by mall environment into five variables, there are external variables, general interior variables, layout and design variables, point-of-purchase and decoration variables, and lastly is the human variables. In the research of Chebat and Michon (2003), they found out that shoppers' perceptions in the retail atmosphere influenced their perception of the product quality. Therefore, consumer's mall perception influences their evaluation of the products is available at the mall.

Shopping value is a two-dimensional concept, reflecting the hedonic and utilitarian benefits of a shopping trip (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Shoppers who are enjoying exploration of new products, who are shopping to escape, or who are shopping just for the sake of shopping are seeking hedonic value from shopping. Shoppers can also derive benefit from accomplishing specific tasks or goals while shopping and this type of benefit is called utilitarian value. Shoppers who are task oriented seek utilitarian value from shopping. Therefore, shopping value results from benefits that shoppers derive from a shopping experience and it consists of two distinct dimensions, utilitarian value, and hedonic value. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive (Babin et al., 1994). On any particular shopping trip, a consumer may derive some level of each dimension from the trip and the level of each will likely vary from one trip to another. A study of shoppers patronizing anchor stores at a regional shopping mall found empirical evidence that a single-item, overall satisfaction measure correlated positively with shopper perceptions of hedonic and utilitarian value resulting from their shopping experience (Babin et al., 1994). As consumers interact with the mall, an emotional reaction will result from their on-going cognitive evaluation process (Bitner, 1992), and the shopping value that results from their experience at the mall will be a function of that emotional reaction.

Research suggests that the shopping experience provides consumers with a combination of utilitarian and hedonic shopping value (e.g., Babin et al., 1994). Consumers perceive utilitarian value by acquiring the product that necessitated the shopping trip while simultaneously perceiving hedonic value associated with the enjoyment of the shopping experience itself. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) classified this behavior as shopping with a work mentality. Utilitarian value is therefore tied to the information-processing paradigm within consumer behavior research (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2004). In contrast, hedonic value derived from the shopping experience reflects the emotional or psychological worth of the purchase. Sources of hedonic value could include the joy and/or the

excitement of shopping, or the escape from everyday activities that is provided by the experience. Therefore, hedonic value is more personal and subjective than utilitarian value and is often the result of fun and playfulness (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Hedonic value represents the experiential paradigm within consumer behavior research (Blackwell et al., 2004). Several researchers have demonstrated that both utilitarian and hedonic value can be provided by the retailer during the shopping experience (Fischer & Arnold, 1990; Sherry, 1990). For example, a consumer might be successful at finding the product that motivated the shopping trip at the first store visited and might also find that the product is being offered at a special sale price. Utilitarian value would then be derived from the consumer's success at quickly finding the product they needed, and hedonic value would be created by the excitement associated with the special sale price. However, Triandis (1977) notes that a high level of one type of value does not preclude a high level of the other, and vice versa.

Research has demonstrated links between shopping value and important business outcomes including satisfaction, word of mouth communication, repatronage intentions, and loyalty (e.g., Babin et al., 2005; Jones, Reynolds, & Arnold, 2006). Specifically, utilitarian shopping value has been shown to positively influence repatronage intentions and loyalty, while negatively influencing repatronage anticipation (Jones et al., 2006). Hedonic shopping value has demonstrated a positive influence on word of mouth communication, loyalty, and repatronage anticipation, but does not appear to impact repatronage intentions (Jones et al., 2006). As compared to utilitarian shopping value, hedonic value appears to have a stronger impact on word of mouth communication, but the two types of shopping value have an equal effect on loyalty. Lastly, utilitarian value has also demonstrated a stronger influence than hedonic value in terms of repatronage intentions (Jones et al., 2006).

In view of that, the study hypothesizes that:

H1. A favourable perception of shopping mall atmospherics will improve the perception of product quality among female fashion shoppers.

H2. A favourable perception of shopping mall atmospherics will elicit hedonic shopping experiences among female fashion shoppers.

H3. A favourable perception of product quality will impact female fashion shoppers' hedonic experiences.

H4. A favourable perception of product quality will help female fashion shoppers achieve their shopping objectives.

H5. Female fashion shoppers having a positive shopping experience are more likely to adopt approach behaviour.

H6. Female fashion shoppers who fulfil their shopping task are more likely to engage into approach behaviour.

Methodology

A total of 100 female students conveniently sampled at a higher learning institution in Federal Territory of Labuan, Malaysia, served as the sample. Only female shoppers who have made purchases from Labuan Supermarket Milimewah, Financial Park, Utama Jaya supermarkets were eligible for inclusion in line with the study objective of evaluating the response of female fashion shoppers towards the mall atmosphere. Respondents were conveniently selected in 5 days of data collection. As the total number of the population sample (mall shoppers) was generally unknown, a convenient sampling method was deemed appropriate. Male shoppers are excluded

from the research to eliminate the model noise. There is empirical evidence that shows the buying behavior between these two genders is different towards fashion. Gutman & Mills (1982) stated that fashion orientation scale administered in another shopping mall study failed to achieve structural and factor loading invariance between male and female shoppers (Michon, Smith, Yu, & Chebat, 2007). Data were analysed using Regression Analysis via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17) computer program, when the focus is on the relationship between a dependent variable with one or more independent variables.

Questionnaire Development

The self-administered questionnaire is divided into two parts which consists of part A and part B. Part A consists of the demographic profile of the consumers whereas part B consists of the relevant questions which indicate the influence of the environment on their buying behaviour. Therefore, the following variables were investigated in this study. Eight, seven-point semantic differential items were used to measure the consumer's perceptions of the supermarket environment, with 1- tense, uncomfortable, depressing, drab, boring, unlively, dull, and uninteresting, and 7- relaxed, comfortable, cheerful, colourful, stimulating, lively, bright and interesting. These items were adopted from previous study by Fisher (1974). Three seven-point items were used to measure product perception from Bellizzi, Crowley, & Hasty (1983). It is about the style of the products which is offered in the supermarket (1- outdated, 7- up to date), also the product assortments selection in the supermarket (1- inadequate, 7- adequate), and the quality of the products available in the supermarket (1- low, 7-high). This will ensure that the supermarket is offering the needs and wants which will enable female shoppers to get it conveniently and also to fulfil the expectations towards the products offered. The hedonic and the utilitarian shopping value scale are used and it is developed by Babin et al. (1994). Five items were used to measure Hedonic Shopping Value and three items measure Utilitarian Shopping Value. Approach-avoidance measures with five statements is developed by Donovan and Rossiter (1982). Likert type scale (1- strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree) is used where shoppers are asked to indicate their agreement with the statements.

Data Analysis and Findings

As shown Table 1, the majority of respondent are aged between 20-25 years representing 65%, 8% are 25-30 years, 7% are over 35 years. The majority of the respondents were single. More than half of the respondents, 56%, were Chinese, followed by Malays 23%. They mostly hold STPM certificate (55%). More than two thirds of the respondents shopped at Milimewah and Financial Park supermarkets (70%).

Reliability Analysis

The research instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha estimate. The degree of consistency of a measure is referred to as its reliability or internal consistency. A value of 0.70 or greater is deemed to be indicative of good scale reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). The Cronbach's alpha for the five factors range from 0.807 to 0.973, suggesting that the constructs measures are deemed reliable. (Table 2).

Correlation Analysis

The inter-relationships between the thirteen variable measurements were examined using correlation analysis and it is summarised in the Table 3. All of the Pearson's correlations

between variables were less than 1. There is five variables which are correlated to each other in the result. Moreover, the Mall Perception and Product Perception, Hedonic Shopping, Utilitarian Shopping value and Approach Behaviour correlation are at the significant level of 0.01. The Product Perception variables and Hedonic Shopping, Utilitarian Shopping Value and Approach behaviour correlation is at the significant level of 0.01. The Hedonic Shopping with Utilitarian Shopping Value and Approach behaviour correlation is at the significant level of 0.01. Whereas, the utilitarian shopping value with Approach Behaviour is at significant level of 0.01.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 examines the impact of mall perception on product perception. Results infers that mall perception has a significant impact on product perception ($\beta = 0.566$, t -value = 6.793, $p < 0.01$), supporting the hypothesis. A favourable perception of shopping mall atmosphere does improve the perception of product quality among female fashion shoppers. R^2 for the model is 0.32 (Table 4). 32% variations of product perception can be explained by mall perception.

Hypothesis 2 postulates the associations between the mall perception and hedonic shopping value. Results in Table 5 show that hedonic shopping value has a significant and observable impact on the mall perception ($\beta = 0.618$, t -value = 7.789, $p < 0.01$). Hence, hypothesis 2 is supported and 38 percent of variance in hedonic shopping value is explained by the significant factor (mall perception). A favourable perception of shopping mall atmospherics does elicit hedonic shopping experiences among female shoppers. Shoppers who perceive that their trip to the mall provided hedonic shopping value are more likely to visit the mall again in the future. Moreover, this finding was consistent with previous research that found consumers' positive feelings (e.g. fun, psychological lift) were associated with hedonic shopping experiences and the novelty aspects of hedonic shopping (Hausman, 2000).

Hypothesis 3 explicates the impacts of product perception on hedonic shopping value. Hedonic shopping value is significantly influenced by product perception ($\beta = 0.737$, t -value = 10.791, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the hypothesis is supported and 54.3 percent of variance in product perception is explained by the hedonic shopping value (Table 6). A favourable perception of product quality does impact female fashion shoppers' hedonic experiences. This finding implied that clothing as an experiential sensory product plays an important role in fulfilling hedonic needs (e.g. novelty, diversion, stimulation) for shopping (Hausman, 2000).

Hypothesis 4 expounds the associations between product perception and utilitarian value. As inferred in Table 7, one's utilitarian value is significantly influenced by product perception ($\beta = 0.511$, t -value = 5.880, $p < 0.01$). As a result, hypothesis 4 is thus supported and 26 percent of the variance in utilitarian value is explained by product perception. A favourable perception of product quality, such as saving time, saving costs, and full assortments of necessities, does help female fashion shoppers achieve their shopping objectives.

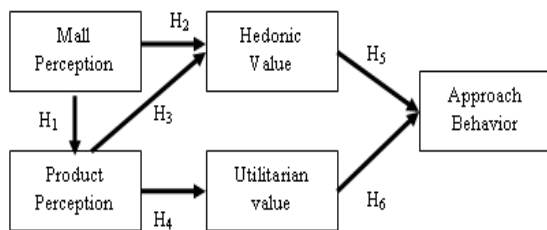
Hypothesis 5 elucidates the associations between the hedonic shopping value and approach behaviour. Results in Table 8 be evidence for approach behaviour is significantly affected by the hedonic shopping value ($\beta = 0.730$, t -value = 10.585, $p < 0.01$). Hence, hypothesis 5 is supported and 53 percent of variance in approach behaviour is explained by the significant factor (hedonic shopping value). Female fashion

shoppers having a positive shopping experience are more likely to adopt approach behaviour. Shoppers who believe their mall visit provided them with a fun, pleasurable, and enjoyable shopping experience feel rewarded. They feel that the experience was valuable, and therefore, they are likely to return in the future. This finding supported the involvement of hedonic or experiential shopping motivations in satisfying emotional or expressive needs, such as fun, relaxation, and gratification (Bloch, Ridgway, & Nelson, 1991; Roy, 1994).

Hypothesis 6 examines the impact of utilitarian value on approach behaviour. Results infer that utilitarian value has a significant impact on approach behaviour ($\beta = 0.505$, t -value = 5.797, $p < 0.01$), supporting the hypothesis. Female fashion shoppers who fulfil their shopping task are more likely to engage into approach behaviour. Shoppers who perceive that their trip provided utilitarian shopping value do not necessarily intend to visit the mall again in the future. It may be that utilitarian value is linked to the specific stores where the shopper was able to complete their shopping task and not to the mall in general. R^2 for the model is 0.25 (Table 9). 25% variations of product perception can be explained by mall perception.

Hypothesis 7 expounds the associations between mall perception and approach behaviour. As inferred in Table 10, approach behaviour has a significant and observable impact on mall perception ($\beta = 0.555$, t -value = 6.613, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is thus supported and 26 percent of the variance in approach behaviour is explained by mall perception. Female shoppers with a high propensity for fashion buying are more likely than others to respond favourably to the mall environment.

Figure 1 illustrates a visual representation of the full model and the causal relationships tested. It depicts that all proposed hypotheses are supported and significant at the 0.01 level.



Note: → Denotes relationship is significant at the 0.01 level

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework with Significant Relationships

Conclusion and Recommendations

In a nutshell, the mall environment does affect the buying behaviour of the female respondents. The mall atmospherics positively influence hedonic shopping value and approach behaviour among all female shopper fashion clusters. Satisfaction with mall attributes also increased hedonic and utilitarian shopping value derived from visiting the mall (Stoel, Wickliffe, & Lee (2004). This study produced evidence suggesting that store environment triggers affective reactions in female customers. Mall owners should do more on enhance hedonic shopping value, such as nice product display, store atmosphere, more assortments of novel products, and good decorations. It is especially important to focus on mall attributes that influence hedonic value because female shoppers who derive hedonic value from their mall visit are likely to intend to return to the mall, so that visits will be perceived as providing shopping value.

Despite the useful findings of this study, this empirical study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Several factors were examined in this study such as mall perception, product perception, hedonic value, utilitarian value and approach behaviour to analyse how is the response of female fashion shoppers towards the mall atmosphere. Future studies should attempt to draw profiles based on characteristics other than attribute importance, such as shopping motivations. Thereafter, would help advance efforts to develop comprehensive theories of retail-shopping behavior. Future research should also measure the effect of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with mall attributes, since they have been shown to be unique constructs. Next, the data were collected from a convenience sample of 100 female students in a higher learning institution in Federal Territory of Labuan, Malaysia. It is recognized that this convenience sample, given its demographic limitation, would place restrictions on the generalization of the results of this study to other geographic areas or to the general population. Future research should expand or increase the involvement of respondents. The more geographic area of research included, the result will more representative.

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Table 1: Socio-demographic Profiles of Respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Age	Under 20	15	15
	20 - 25	65	65
	25 - 30	8	8
	30 - 35	7	7
	35 and above	5	5
Marital Status	Single	94	94
	Married	6	6
Race	Malay	23	23
	Chinese	56	56
	Indian	6	6
	Others	15	15
Education	STPM	55	55
	Diploma	33	33
	Degree	12	12
Supermarkets Visited	Milimewah	6	6
	Financial Park	64	64
	Utama Jaya	11	11
	Labuan Supermarket	19	19

Table 2: Reliability Test

Variable	No of item	Cronbach's Alpha
Mall Perception	8	0.973
Product Perception	3	0.834
Hedonic Shopping	5	0.906
Utilitarian Shopping Value	3	0.871
Approach Behavior	5	0.807

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Mall Perception	1				
(2) Product Perception	0.566(**)	1			
(3) Hedonic Shopping	0.618(**)	0.737(**)	1		
(4) Utilitarian Shopping Value	0.446(**)	0.511(**)	0.543(**)	1	
(5) Approach Behavior	0.555(**)	0.700(**)	0.730(**)	0.505(**)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Influence of the Mall Perception and Product Perception

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Mall Perception	0.679	0.100	0.566*	6.793

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.320$ **Table 5: Influence of the Mall Perception and Hedonic Shopping Value**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Mall Perception	0.705	0.090	0.618*	7.789

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.382$ **Table 6: Influence of the Product Perception and Hedonic Shopping Value**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Product Perception	0.700	0.065	0.737*	10.791

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.543$ **Table 7: Influence of the Product Perception and Utilitarian Value**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Product Perception	0.443	0.075	0.511*	5.880

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.261$ **Table 8: Influence of the Hedonic Shopping Value and Approach Behaviour**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Approach Behaviour	0.801	0.076	0.730*	10.585

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.533$ **Table 9: Influence of the Utilitarian Value and Approach Behaviour**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Utilitarian Value	0.607	0.105	0.505*	5.797

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.255$ **Table 10: Influence of the Mall Perception and Approach Behaviour**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Mall Perception	0.694	0.105	0.555*	6.613

* $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.309$