

EXPLORING CUSTOMER EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO POP-UP STORE ATMOSPHERES

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Abstract :

Scholarly research, focusing on traditional and virtual stores, have confirmed the positive effects of their atmospheres on consumer emotions and behavioral reactions; this study aimed to understand whether this relationship is established in the context of pop-up stores. Moreover, since pop-up stores are short-lived, the study intended understanding whether the “time” variable moderates the effect of their atmospheres on customer emotions. A total of 182 responses, of customers having recently visited a pop-up store in France, were collected and analyzed. This exploratory research’s results confirm a positive effect of pop-up store atmospheres on consumer reactions and that this relationship is positively moderated by the time variable. In comparison to traditional store atmospheres, the current research findings on pop-up store atmosphere present many specifics related to those retail formats.

Keywords: Ephemeral stores ; Pop-up stores ; Customer Reactions ; Ephemeral store atmospheres.

L’EXPLORATION DES RÉACTIONS ÉMOTIONNELLES DES CONSOMMATEURS FACE AUX ATMOSPHÈRES DES POP-UP STORES

Résumé :

Plusieurs recherches académiques, qui se sont intéressées à étudier les magasins traditionnels et virtuels, ont confirmé les effets positifs de leurs ambiances sur les émotions et les réactions comportementales des consommateurs. Cette étude visait à comprendre si cette relation s'établit dans le cadre des pop-up stores. De plus, les pop-up stores étant éphémères, l'étude avait pour objectif de comprendre si la variable de la « durée de vie » modère l'effet de leurs ambiances sur les émotions des clients. Un total de 182 réponses, de clients ayant récemment visité un pop-up store en France, ont été collectées et analysées. Les résultats de cette recherche exploratoire confirment un effet positif des atmosphères des pop-up stores sur les réactions des consommateurs et que cette relation est positivement modérée par la variable temps. Par rapport aux atmosphères de magasin traditionnelles, les résultats des recherches actuelles sur l'atmosphère des magasins éphémères présentent de nombreuses spécificités liées à ces formats de vente au détail.

Mots-clés : Magasins éphémères ; Pop-up stores; Réactions émotionnelles ; Atmosphères des magasins éphémères

Reduced version

Following the economic recession of 2008, and as brands lacked funding and means of spending in terms of promotions and communication, they turned to adopting pop-up stores or integrating them in their communications strategies. A significant presence of digital technologies in physical stores was also highlighted during the past decade and it had an influence on the store's atmospheric conception as well as on customer reactions and behavior. Pop-up stores could be defined as "short-lived format that is dedicated to delivering specific brand objectives; whether related to sales, to communications or experiences". Designed theatrically, they are considered an art form and appeal to hedonic consumers thanks to their novelties and their distinctive characters in terms of the atmosphere of the point of sale, the selection merchandise and communications.

Originating in environmental psychology, an emotional approach has been used to study point of sale environments. This approach argues that an individual's perceptions and behaviors within a given environment are the result of emotional states created by that environment. Several studies have looked at the influence of a store's atmosphere and others have manipulated a large number of atmospheric stimuli and investigated their influence on consumer ratings and reactions. Many studies in the literature specialized in ergonomics link the well-being of the individual to descriptors such as comfort and vitality, and physical discomfort to descriptors such as pain, fatigue or tension. The time variable appears as an important factor in influencing customers in the context of op-up stores; the question remains in understanding whether it affect customer reactions towards this visit to a pop-up store and its importance in the context of ephemeral store studies.

This research aims at answering whether a pop-up store's atmosphere can influence customer emotional states on one hand, and to understanding if the pop-up store's limited duration moderates its atmosphere's influence on consumer emotional states.

Our conceptual mode looks at the store's atmosphere and customer reactions towards its atmospheric stimuli and external factors, such as time. A point of sale's atmospheric dimensions represents all the intangible elements that surround the intrinsic characteristics of the store. Ephemeral store atmospheres are renewed with each project and are presented theatrically, with an elaborate staging, and showing the creativity of design, architecture or presentation of merchandise. Pop-up store atmospheres are even imagined as art forms designed to involve customers in a series of theatrical, memorable and hedonic experiences.

Researchers argue that the constitutionality of emotions is very relevant and evident in human consumption. A model for measuring consumer emotions, the PAD (*pleasure, arousal, dominance*) has been used in several studies which were interested in the study of consumers' emotional reactions following their exposure to atmospheric stimuli from a physical or digital point of sale. External stimuli presented by a store's atmosphere can contribute to improving the customer emotional experiences at the point of sale. More specifically, environmental stimuli affect emotional states of pleasure and arousal, which, in turn, affect approaching or avoidance behaviors as well as other behaviors such as preference, exploration, spending and affiliation.

Described as always being on the move, postmodern consumers are prompted by the desire to experience "portions of experiences", temporary and exciting. They seek immediate and urgent gratification. For these postmodern consumers, the importance of all action and choice emphasizes a euphoric present tense and a strong denial of any worry about the future. At the heart of the principle of an ephemeral store lies the variable of temporality; the lifespan of a pop-up store is not sustainable and any subsequent experience that an individual has with that store will be fleeting.

Our exploratory research aimed at testing the effect of pop-up store atmospheres on customer emotions and whether this relationship is moderated by the time variable in the context of pop-up stores. Data collection was restricted to the French market and customers who visited pop-up stores in France between the year 2019 and 2020. A total of 182 responses were collected and analyzed using SPSS.

The research's results showed that, in the case of pop-up stores, the atmosphere has an effect over customer emotions. However, and as opposed to traditional stores, different

atmospheric dimensions affect customer emotions. The arrangement of the atmosphere influences the positive and negative reactions of consumers. The social dimension does not affect the customer's feeling of satisfaction or nervousness. The dimension of the intensity of a pop-up store's atmosphere is not the cause of the feeling of oppression of consumers as could be the layout and the social dimensions. Moreover, the social dimension has an influence on the consumer experience especially at the level of evasion, fullness, relaxation and oppression. It can therefore be a source of distraction in the consumer's journey during his visit to the ephemeral store and may prevent the consumer from constructing his journey or his journey. A distracted consumer is less fulfilled and maybe less engaged with the elements of the atmosphere presented by the brand.

Our research's findings add to previous findings related to pop-up stores. The literature review presents pop-up stores as places of experience consumption and places of interaction with the brand. It also presents pop-up stores as new experiential marketing formats that facilitate a brand's marketing communication. Pop-up stores influence word-of-mouth sharing, offer enhanced innovative and interactive experiences and influence long-term relationships with consumers.

The social effect is the dimension that weighs the most in the atmosphere of the ephemeral point of sale to the point that it stimulates the consumer, excites him and improves his appreciation of the time spent and the experience established during this period. It also seems that the consumer forgets the stress of the outdoors and feels more comfortable being surrounded by a crowd in an environment. It is not the physical atmosphere of the pop-up store that increases the time spent. It seems that the physical elements of the atmosphere do not provide enough stimulation for consumers. The physical context seems to be diluted more quickly. In the context of our research, the time spent is prolonged when the consumer feels himself being distracted and having a good time.

Our results enrich the review of the literature on the atmospheres of traditional points of sale as they present specificities specific to pop-up stores. As a new sales format has been recognized, this research highlights the commonalities of a traditional store and a pop-up store and those unique to the design of a pop-up store atmosphere.

Despite this research's focus on studying the time variable's moderation effect, it is worth looking at other variables that could have significant influences on the effect of a pop-up store's atmosphere on customer emotional reactions. An in-depth qualitative research could be a significant source of information that would contribute to enriching the proposed research model.

Managers are invited to understand what type of experience they wish to induce; a utilitarian experience or a hedonic experience. The design of the atmosphere respects the vocation that the brand wishes to adopt to finally allow the consumer to obtain a type of experience (utilitarian or hedonic) in the hope that it is positive.

This study is carried out on the French ground could reflect French market specificities, which leads us to propose to collect data from North American, African or Asian markets to identify the similarities or the differences of the dimensions of the pop-up stores. Given the exploratory nature of the qualitative data collection part of our research, the conclusions we bring out deserve to be put into perspective.

Exploratory studies highlight the specificities and traits of characterizing ephemeral stores in France. As new dimensions appear to be specific to the atmospheres of pop-up stores, it is the creation of a proper scale to measure the atmosphere of a pop-up store that deserves to be developed.

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