

# THE PRINCIPLES OF SPATIAL DESIGN THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCIES

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to explore the principles of design in the physical surroundings that impact customer experiences. Understanding the role of design in customer satisfaction has never been so important. The decor elements and the environmental design of the place where the product is purchased does impact brand's customer perceptions and influence overall customer experience. The research is a conceptual one and is focused on theoretical and practical work in the field of design, marketing and environmental psychology. The paper coverage the elements and principles of design, which enhance customer experience and contribute to brand satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Environmental psychology, customer experience, product design*

## **Introduction**

In the last decade, customers focus less on quality when they want to differentiate between brands, because they expect quality to be a must in most of the products they buy (Pin & Galmore, 1999). What they value more in these days is the aesthetic appeal of the goods and the positive experience they encounter by using the product or the environment where the product is being purchased (Postrel, 2003). Customers may find individual solutions and aesthetic diversity of the same product in different stores and cities. Milliard (2006) point out that those products that deliver excitement to customers will be more successful than those that do not. Additionally, positive aesthetic experiences influence brand satisfaction and perceived product quality (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Often the design of the product is being used as a communication tool, pointing out information about brand origin and purpose of usage (Mono, 1997). So emotional design and its affect on consumer behavior is not a new topic but has been always of great interest to marketers (Norman, 2007). However, within the marketing literature, design research lacks behind compare to other marketing disciplines (Bloch, 2011).

## **1. The Elements and Principles of Design**

We are interested to research and study the principles of design because they impact three aspects of consumers; the body, soul and mind (Fiore, 2010). Design and in particular the aesthetic experience of design, has a primarily role in consumer perceptions.

Pleasure comes first from stimulating the sensory receptors of the body where the eyes, skin, nose, mouth and ears are the first to approach information around us (Fiore, 2010). Then is the brain that organizes the stimuli and information received from the sensory elements, which in the best case will create a likable experience. Anyhow, Coren, Porac and Ward (1979), mentioned that overstimulation of the senses may result in unpleasant emotions. Just as a glass of whisky may feed the desire of the body, a piece of music may feed the soul (Fiore, 2010). In this context the soul refers to something that is not physically approached. Beside the body and the soul, Fiore (2010) mentioned that pleasure can be stimulated by activating the cognitive part of the mind. The pleasure that comes from the mind is mainly connected to the symbolic part of the experience.

## 1.1 Music

There are empirical studies investigating isolated atmospheric elements with influence consumer behavior. One of these attributes is the music played in the service environment that affects consumers approaching or avoiding behavior. Smith and Curnow (1996) were among the first to analyze and manipulate the background music in a shopping setting. Bruner (1990) point out that the tempo, the choice of the music, the volume and the pitch are important settings to be considered. Milliman (1982) found that costumers exposed to slow music spent 38 % more time within the store. Milliman (1982) did the same study in a restaurant setting and he came to a same conclusion that consumer spend more time in slow music than in a fast rhythm music. Actually time is very important indicator positively correlated to the amount of money consumers spend within the retail store. Although depended on the age of consumers, the volume of the music appears to be associated with time consumers spend inside shopping centers. Smith and Curnow (1966) reported that consumers stayed longer in retail spaces while listening to softer music than exposed to louder music. The above factors combined with other scents have their influence on how consumers perceive the shopping experience, as pleasurable or not enjoyable. The familiarity of the music for example boosts consumer enjoyment, while unfamiliar music might weaken it (Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000). In a field experiment done by Mattila and Wirtz (2001), the low tempo music combined with low lavender scent led to higher satisfaction and higher purchasing impulse than using the scent with high rhythm music. What is interesting to notice with the music ambient dimension is that consumers unconsciously try to adjust their behavior based on the tempo and volume of the music, as mentioned above. From the management prospective this means that bars and restaurant managers can speed up table turnover by increasing the music or they can keep customers longer during their off-pick hours by playing soft and low volume music.

## 1.2 Scent

Scent is perceived from many authors as the most important ambient dimension. Referring to Bone and Ellen (1999) the properly use of scent can have a direct impact on consumer behavior, teasing their mood and increasing their level of impulse purchase. Most of retail spaces invest a lot on scent marketing, creating favorable and desirable buying atmosphere.

The potpourri scent used in Victoria's Secret store, the Fierce fragrance used in Abercrombie & Fitch retail or the Magnolia aroma used in Children's museum of Indianapolis are great

examples on the use that scent has in the today service environment. Hotels do understand as well the role that scent play in the customer overall experience. Westin Hotels use white tea fragrances in their lobes and Sheraton Hotels use a combination of figs and jasmine aromas in their rooms so to relax customers and enhance their travelling experiences (Lovelock et al., 2009).

Hirsch and Gay (1991) analyzed the impact that scent has on purchase behavior. They figured out that consumers were more likely to purchase Nike shoes in a Nike retail store where was used a special fragrance than in a Nike unodorized store. The interesting fact is that people were willing to pay \$10.33 more for the sneakers exposed in the floral-scented room. In another experiment, Hirsch (1995) investigated the effect that ambient aromas had on gambling customers. Different aromas were used in two slot machines in a Las Vegas casino. Another unodorized machine was taken into the study. The research figured out that the amount of money gambled in one of the slot machines, which was odorized, was higher than in the slot machine that was not odorized.

Scent can also be used to enhance brand memory and other experience associations (Morrin & Ratneshwar 2003, Holloway, 1999; Dichter, 1998). Research findings emphasize that humans can recall familiar scents from childhoods to late adulthood (Goldman & Seamon 1992). Lorig and Schwartz (1998) suggest that ambient scents tend to increase customers' arousal level, which in response may affect positively the brand memory process. Marketers should proper incorporate scent marketing to their strategies, so to better persuade consumers and to increase their brand awareness.

### 1.3 Color

Brand owners use color as one of the most powerful tools, to stimulate customers', feelings and desire. Since 80 % of human experiences are filtered through eyes (Pantone Color Institute, 2015), colors may create emotional connections with customers, increase brand awareness, generate impulse buying behavior, increase sales and reinforce customers' loyalty (Sliburyte & Skeryte, 2014). Abril, Olazabal and Cava, (2009) point out that color is strongly related to brand image and brand recognition. A specific color is becoming so strongly associated with the brand, that the brand and the color are perceived undividable on consumers mind (Hoek & Gendall, 2010).

The research on the effects that color has on consumer behavior is abundant (Abramov & Gordon, 1994; Jacobs, Kewon & Worthley, 1991; Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Mittlestadt, 1990; Levy, 1984; Bottomley, Doyle, 2006). In the last years firms have registered colors as trademarks, due to the importance that this element has in brand awareness. Additionally, companies are using colors in a very intuitive and innovation way.

The classic example is that of Pepsi and Cola. To distinguish itself from its main competitor, Pepsi focused its marketing campaign on the blue color. Malboro, Cadbury, BP Oil, France Telecom, Victoria Secret and other global brands have used color as the key element in their branding strategies. Organizations as well, have been relied on the use of color as a communication tool. The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation has created a pink color on all their integrated marketing campaigns so to increase consciousness on its cause (Labrecque & Milne, 2011). What has to be emphasized is that people generally perceive positively warm color environments.

Warm colors influence positively on fast decision-making service settings and cold colors are used in environments where consumers need time to make high-involvement purchase decision (Lovelock et al., 2009).

Colors can define the space and create customers specific mood. Brand managers try to create the perfect mood by designing each department or merchandize line with appropriate colors. Hotels, restaurants, fashion retails, coffee shops, exhibitions spaces, fairs and other service providers are highly investing on interiors and color design so to differentiate their service and to create a specific customer experience.

#### **1.4 Light**

Lighting is a very important element of design. It affects the interior and the exterior of commercial buildings, it is used in retail to enhance the experience of dressing rooms, it points out advertisement displays and is a critical component in creating mood in events and at trade booths. Brands can be differentiated from their competitors with a proper use of lighting (Fiore, 2010). With a lighting program a room can look more spacious (Durak, Olgunturk, Yener, Guven and Gurcinar, 2007) and the light may emphasize specific design features. There are different studies acknowledging lighting as a critical environmental and architectural element (Schielke, 2010; Summers & Hebert, 2001). In an interesting experimental research done by Park and Farr (2007), it was revealed that CCT (correlated color temperature), presented by a warmer lighting was perceived as more approachable than the cooler lighting. In another study done by Areni and Kim (1994), it was concluded that there is not a significant affect of lighting on sales and time spent into the store. However, Fiore (2010) mentioned that lighting effects provide uniqueness aesthetic design, enhance customer experience through making the surface of fabrics and furniture more vivid. Recently retailers are starting to invest on real lightening design systems and not just on illuminating spaces (Graf, 2015). Beside the aesthetic impact, professional lightening plays a key role in functional design as well. Customer orientation is one of the reasons space designers use programing lightning. Taylor and Sucov (1974) analyzed the direction people were taking when they were walking in an empty space. What they figured out in this lighting experiment was that people were attracted to brightness and they tended to choose the path that had a higher level of illumination. Brightness can also be used to focus attention through brightness contrast between objects and can influence how people seat in restaurants or other service providers where customers for example tend not to seat in brightness but want to see brightness (Ginthner, 2004). Designers may effectively manipulate the lightening schemes so to create the desired impression in customer experiences. Ginthner (2004) analyzed the lighting manipulation conditions and revealed some interesting impressions that light can have on people. He mentioned that if designers are looking forward in creating a pleasant atmosphere they should use wall lighting and a non-uniform distribution of brightness in the space. Moreover, a more formal distribution will create a public mood and a peripheral lightening will give the impression of a clear visual space design. Depending on the space type or the service it is been provided, a perfect match for a relaxed atmosphere would be a lighting system which will focus on a non-uniform distribution, wall lighting, and on lower light levels (Ginthner, 2004).

## 1.5 Texture

It has been noticed that the opportunity to touch products does influence customer behavior. The evaluation of the product and also its buying intention has been linked to the touching sensory aspect of marketing (Peck & Childers, 2003a). Texture deals with uniformity or variation of the surface of an object and the perception of the texture is based on the activation of the body's skin (Fiore, 2010). Tactile perception of texture occurs when a person touches the surface of an object and referring to Heller (1991), there are three types of tactile sensations: pain, touch and temperature. It has been noticed that in the sensory marketing discipline, the visual perception has gained more attention than any of the other senses and also has been recognized as the most important criteria to evaluate products (Ernst & Banks 2002). But there are products that their evaluation is mainly done by touch. We have the case of bath towels, where 81 % of the buyers mentioned that the most important indicator they look for when they want to purchase a bath towel is the way it feels on the skin (Fiore, 2010).

What is interesting to figure out is that the feeling of touch is stronger in some customers than others. These customers prefer to evaluate products through touch and are more unsatisfied when shopping, if they do not have the opportunity to touch products (Peck & Childers, 2003b). The need for touch (NFT) is segmented into two dimensions; instrumental NFT and autotelic NFT (Peck and Childers 2003b). Customers that are part of the first instrumental group, touch the product as a need to gather information and understand the usage of the product, focusing more on the functional design of the texture. Other people that belong to the second group, that of autotelic NFT, touch product because they enjoy it and for them having this feeling it's fun and experiential. The latest is part of the symbolic or aesthetic aspect of design. Peck and Wiggings, (2006) figured out that the incorporation of touch into marketing messages can have a positive effect on persuasion for people who are high in autotelic NFT.

In the last decades marketers from different industries have been building expertise on impressing consumers through sensory marketing and they have centered their research on "embodied cognition", the idea that without our conscious awareness, our body influence the mind and bodily sensations help determine the decisions we make (Jones, 2015). Two American professors, Williams and Bargh (2009) developed an experiment showing that experiencing physical warmth promotes interpersonal warmth. What they figured out was that people who had a warm drink were more likely to think for a stranger that was friendly than people who had a cold drink. The idea that individuals extract information from their body status is widely recognized in art, psychology and philosophy.

One of the ways to obtain information from the body is through touching the surface of the product and as a matter of fact, the primary interest in the haptic behavior is to study hands as a principal source of input to touch (Abhishek, Sinha & Vohra, 2013). McCabe and Nowlis (2003) pointed out that consumers prefer to choose those products from the store that were allowed to be touched. There are neuroimaging studies that support the thesis that by touching the tactile surface, consumers feel emotionally connected to the product brand. These kind of relationship, influences judgment and product evaluation. For example customers that were consuming potato chips in which they found it hard to open, the potato chips were perceived as higher quality than potato chips that were put in bags, which were easy to open (McDaniel & Baker, 1977). Additionally, the texture of the product does not influence only the quality

perception, but also loyalty. If one customer is happy and paying attention to a particular product based on its textile, then there is less possibility that this customer will switch product and approach a new brand (Lederman & Klatzky, 1987). As already mentioned in the “need for touch dimensions”, beside the functional effect that touching has on consumer behavior, it also influences the aesthetic and symbolic part of consumer perception.

## 1.6 Space and Movement

Space is essential in building brand awareness, influencing customer emotions, enhancing the brand’s story and differentiating a brand through appealing sensory forms (Fiore, 2010). In retail design the space aspect plays a critical role in increasing or decreasing product attention.

Companies pay a higher bill if their products want to receive more attention or if they want to have a primer spot within the store (Silayoi & Speece, 2004). Space is an important aspect of interior design, and all the design elements of vision and touch in interior are finished with space design as a carrier (Zhou, 2014). The width, the length and the height that influence the aesthetic aspect of design determine the image of the interior space. According to Zhou (2014), the material of ceiling used in the interior design affect customer perception about the environment, where lofty ceiling with curving or pointed arch has great momentum while lower ceiling often gives a den-like feeling of cordiality and warmth, and irregular ceiling with unusual shape may show the features of variation of psychological space. Referring to Yu and Oulton (2002), brand managers should pay attention to customer movement within the store, so they can properly identify the hot and the cold spot areas of merchandize. The authors mentioned that hot spots are areas where customers visit more and cold spots are spaces where is experienced less customer foot traffic.

In the retail business how companies visualize their storytelling and reinforce the brand is critical in maintaining a competitive advantage. The Visual Retailing’s Mockshop online software, help retailers to position and place merchandise within the store. The software support visual merchandizing managers to properly match product’s colors and space concepts so brands can have a visual appealing and customers can move based on a logical flow throughout the store (Visual Retailing, 2015). IKEA, the Swedish furniture manufacture, is one of those companies that use interesting showrooms to present the products. The layout of the space is designed to encourage customers to see the store and to try the products exposed in real size rooms. One main reason why IKEA embodies this home space design concept is to merge the idea of functioning as a carefully engineered museum space and meantime being perceived as a real commercial space (Lindqvist, 2009). Based on market research, it has been concluded that 94 % of shoppers have mentioned store layout as one of the most important factors that influence their decision when choosing where to shop (Akhazadeh, 2005). The shape of retail spaces has also been changed in the last years and has been experienced that stores and other space designers use a variety of tactics to increase emotional arousal to the space. Now we see many large shopping malls that have a curved design so to make the long distance of walking less intimidating and also to give a customer a sense of mystery (Fiore, 2010). The Anna Taylor shop at 645 Madison Avenue, in New York City, presents a feminine sophisticated space reflective of the dynamic lifestyle of the Ann Taylor woman and point out the symbolic affect that space design has on consumer perceptions (Fiore, 2010). Piotrowski and Rogers (2013) mentioned that open spaces promote luxury and the symbolism of large space is associated with power. The space comfort is also

connected to the personal space of individuals, where the higher the status, the higher the intrapersonal distance (Latta, 1978).

## 2. Experiences in the Marketing Perspective

Schmitt (1999) mentioned that experiential marketing is everywhere and that marketers are moving away from traditional marketing of commoditized goods and services, towards attractive customer experiences. Within the marketing literature, economy of experience, service experience, product experience and shopping experiences are some of the areas that have studied the experience process in detail (Pin & Galmore, 1999; Hui & Bartenson, 1991, Hoolbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Hoch, 2002). The previous authors who studied the brand experience theory, have been mainly focused to analyze it from the perspective of brand management (Valencia, 2005), to construct a measurement scale of brand experience (Brakues et al., 2009) to analyze its effects on brand credibility, brand attitude and customer-based brand equity (Shamim & Butt, 2013) or to identify the brand experience consequences as that of satisfaction and loyalty (Morrison & Crane, 2007; Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). Schmitt (1999) developed a five dimensional framework of customer experience based on a previous work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Holt (1995). The five types of experiential marketing experiences are: sense, feel, think, act and relate type. The concept of production experiences with a focus on sensory and emotive aspects of product was firstly analyzed by Holbrook et al., (1982) and was a groundbreaking theory on emotional consumption. Referring to them, the experiential view of consumption should be seen as involving a steady flow of fantasies, feelings and fun. Additionally Holbrook et al., (1982) pointed out that experiential prospective focus on cognitive processes that are more subconscious and private in nature.

In consumer marketing, the experience theory has been focused on consumers' activities as that of searching for products, shopping and consuming (Arnould, Price & Zinkhan 2002). The product experience phase occurs when consumers search for products, interact with them and evaluate the products' quality (Hoch, 2002). The interesting part for marketers at this stage of product search is to understand how product experience does influence preferences, product judgment and purchase intention (Huffman & Houston 1993). The shopping experience deals on the affects that servicescape and sales communication has on buyers. This kind of experience occurs when consumers interact with the space design store and with its staff (Ofir & Simonson 2007). The consumption experience on the other hand is focused on the consumption phase of the product. Referring to Hoolbrook et al., (1982), the consumption experience is focused on hedonic needs, such as fantasies, feelings and fun. However, Brakus et al., argues that experiences in marketing perspectives do not occur only when consumers search, buy and consume products but also when they are exposed indirectly to product through companies' integrated marketing communication as that of advertising and other promotional activities.

## Conclusions

As a summary we can conclude that product design elements are important providers that affect consumer emotional mood, their psychological arousal, brand awareness that in turn influence the time customers stay within the store, the money they spend buying and the

overall customer experience. Understanding the design benefits will have a direct contribution to business performance. Effective design spaces can help the company to better differentiate its products and services, support the product to have a higher quality and last but not least a proper design space increases the possibility to improve company's image.

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