THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE ENVIRONMENT AND BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES: A STUDY OF A RETAIL FASHION BRAND'S CLOTHING STORES IN BANGKOK

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Abstract: Retail providers have a special interest in using service environment cues to influence customers' behaviors, including, but not limited to, customers' intentions to revisit the store, spread positive word-of-mouth about the products or services, develop and maintain affirmative attitudes toward the facility, and spend additional time in the store. This research considers the environment cues - the so-called "servicescape," - used by a well-known retail fashion brand in Bangkok, Thailand. J Clothing stores (the name has been changed). A questionnaire including both closed- and open-ended questions was used to survey 390 respondents, all of whom had visited and/or bought products from a J Clothing store in Bangkok. This research applied the Pearson Correlation and Independent T-test and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between service environment (ambience, design/layout, and social factors) and behavioral outcomes (intention to revisit, word-of-mouth, attitude to facility, and the time spent in a Jl clothing store).

Key Words: environment cues, servicescape, ambience, design/layout, social factors, behavioral outcomes, intention to revisit, word-of-mouth, and attitude to facility.

Introduction

The key to sustainable competitive advantage lies in organizing and delivering high quality and favorable service experience to customers by the service providers (Shemwell et al., 1998). Shop owners and store managers recognize the growing impact of service environment on consumer's behavioral outcomes as customers often search for clues about the store before making a purchase.

As Hu and Hwang (2006) asserted, a firm can generate higher revenue margins as long as it is able to maintain lifetime relationships with its customers. Since corporate image is closely associated with customers' assessments of the products and services provided by the enterprise, a negative image can lead to losses.

This research considers the fashion industry, focusing on several factors that create an impact on customers' behavioral outcomes.

The fashion industry is a major contributor to the Thai economy, accounting for approximately 16 percent of total GDP in 2008. It is the largest manufacturing industry in Thailand, with more than 4,500 factories employing more than one million People, roughly 20% of total employment in manufacturing. About 50% of the earnings from Thailand's fashion sector come from tourists, who have been taken by the Thai fashion industry and its numerous small fashion houses. According to the Royal Danish Embassy-Danish Trade Council (2007), the Thai fashion industry affects most age groups.

In February 2004, the government took action to further strengthen this industry by establishing the "Bangkok Fashion City," a project developed to serve and turn Bangkok into a fashion hub in the Southeast Asia region and into a world fashion center by the year 2012.

As Bitner (1992) mentioned, customer behavior is influenced by the organization's physical surroundings, namely the service environment - or servicescape, which consists of ambiance, design/layout and social factors. It has a strong impact on consumers' emotions and behavioral outcomes, which shape a customer's attitudes (Sui and Baloglu, 2003; Shoemaker and Bowen, 2003).

The impact of service environment and demographic factors on behavioral outcomes in the context of a retail fashion brand, J, in Bangkok, will be at the core of this research. This specific fashion brand was chosen mainly for its widespread popularity and availability.

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The literature deemed relevant to this study and theoretical perspectives on each variable will be first presented. The theoretical framework, results and discussion thereof will then be considered.

1. Literature Review

- Behavioral outcome concepts

Each consumer's individual experiences result in varying outcomes. A person's assessment of a service environment takes place from within that person and is determined by continuous contact with that environment, and results in behavioral outcomes. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) defined behavioral outcomes as a sequence of actions an individual is likely to take. Blackwell et al., (2006) stated that he firms should develop an understanding of customer's behavior as the foundation of their marketing strategies.

Previous researchers showed that customer's behavior is linked to the various cues. Bitner (1992) mentioned in his research that customer behavior is influenced by the firm's physical surroundings, namely the service environment or servicescape. Kurtz and Clow (1998) stated that an environment can create emotions ranging from pleasant to unpleasant and from stimulating to boring. Thus, the firms are willing to develop a pleasant shopping environment in order to influence customer behavior.

For this study, the behavioral outcomes that will be discussed are intention to revisit, wordof-mouth, attitude toward the facility and the time spent in the store.

- Intention to revisit

When customers like a particular store, it is very natural for them to go to the store frequently. There can be various reasons for the frequency; it may be the quality of the products, price, service or even the store atmosphere. According to Baker et al. (2002), purposes for revisits are generally formed in retail by an eagerness to be in the store, repurchase, buy more in the future, and suggest the store to others. Moreover, Wakefield and Barnes (1996) mentioned that revisit intentions are essential for the retail business since understanding the association linking shopper attitudes and revisit intentions can help maintain existing customers. In other words, clients may initially patronize a store because of their attraction to the main service interaction; nevertheless, they may not come

back if they are not pleased with the surroundings or general ambience.

- Word of Mouth

Swanson and Davis (2003) mentioned that word-of-mouth communications are considered to be a significant type of communications for service providers. According to Brown et al., (2005) and Babin et al., (2005), word-of-mouth refers to a current flow of information about products, services, or companies from one customer to another.

Word of mouth has always played an important role in the development of customers' opinions, but over the past few years it has become an even more influential force due to a technology-driven increase in the number, types and widespread availability of casual communication networks such as email, the Internet, cell phones, (Harris Interactive, 2006) blogs, Facebook, Twitter, BlackBerries and IPhones which make it very easy to convey opinions about anything instantly to a wide range of other people. If there is anything negative about an experience, or vice-versa, it can easily be expressed instantaneously to many others. Thus. handling situations well at a store by staff is even more imperative than in the past.

- Attitude to Facility

In the context of this research, attitude to facility refers to a constant favorable or unfavorable direction towards a place or environment (Hawkins et al., 2001). Attitudes consist of three mechanisms: cognitive, affective and behavioral. It is important for retailers to understand how employees and the environment play vital roles to create a specific consumer attitude towards a facility and product.

Attitude is useful to determine the reason as to why customers purchase or do not purchase a specific product in a chosen store. "Attitudes are consistent inclinations whether favorable or unfavorable that a consumer holds towards products, services, people, place or events." (Hanna and Wozniak, 2001)

- Time Spent in the store

The duration of time customers stay in the environment is also a significant factor for the provider because in most leisure servicescape settings, the longer one stays in the place, the more money one is likely to spend (O'Neil, 1992). Thus, service providers often strive to provide an environment and services that create a sensation in customers to spend more time at the store to shop. It seems reasonable to expect that buying decisions reflect shoppers' moods.

- Service Environment

The influence of the physical surroundings referred to as 'atmospherics' (also or 'servicescape') on sentiments and actions has often been noted by designers and environmental psychologists (Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003: Porteous, 1997). Service environment includes the design of the physical surroundings and the quality of employees that characterize the context which houses the service encounter. It elicits internal reactions from customers leading to the display of approach or avoidance behaviors (Bitner, 1992). Baker (1987) defined three essential features that influence the substantial sections of service quality dimensions as design, social, and ambient factors.

- Ambiance - Music

It is generally agreed that distinctive music in retail environments creates surroundings which exact expressive results in the purchaser in order to develop the consumer's buying purposes and contribute to profit-making (Kotler, 1973). Previous research has revealed that distinctive music can boost sales (Mattila Wirtz, 2001), influence purchase and intentions (North and Hargreaves, 1998), create considerably heightened responses such as pleasure and relaxation (Oakes, 2003), increase shopping time and waiting time (North and Hargreaves, 1998; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1993, 2000), reduce perceived shopping and waiting time (Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000), control customer awareness of a store (Hui et al., 1997; Mattila andWirtz, 2001), and improve customer-staff interaction (Chebat et al., 2000; Hui et al., 1997).

- Aroma

The power of pleasing aromas, as an influential tool in driving sales up, has attracted much consideration among retail businesses (Lin, 2004). Retailers know that fragrance can have a significant impact on a customer's wish to make a purchase. A pleasant or unpleasant scent can create positive or negative perception of a store or service (Bone and Ellen, 1998).

- Cleanliness

As noted by Garry et al., (1993) and Miller (1993), there are two aspects to cleanliness

from a management standpoint: preventive training and continuous cleanup. Preferably, a service provider should check and organize the servicescape and maintain hygiene all the time.

- Design and Layout Factors

Design and layout factors are extremely significant for any retail outlet. As mentioned by Bitner (1992), design and layout constitute the visual outlook of a place including its architecture and interior space. Mathews, Bonn, and Snepenger (2009) stated in their research that design factors consist of layout, color and clutter. A comparison between the related literature and Jaspal stores is vital. For instance, when a person walks into a Jaspal outlet, the environment impacts the shopper through the type of colors used and the space inside the shop. Jaspal outlets are specifically designed so the customer can easily walk around and see the apparel easily.

- Social Factors

Customer-orientation is essential to a service organization's ability to be market related (Brown et al., 2002). Staff behavior, as a product of market orientation, is related to organizational culture (Harris, 1998), which elevates shared values and a strong sense of unity (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). The social factors consist of the service of the employees of the facility relevant to their courtesy, knowledge levels, and the quality of service provided to customers (Mathews, Bonn and Snepenger, 2009).

In addition, Pan et al., (2008) focused on the atmospheric cues on purchasing behaviors in their study, which is about the wine business in Taiwan. The results confirmed that there is a positive relationship between store moods atmosphere, consumers' and purchasing behaviors. In other words, a pleasing atmosphere catches the attention of and strengthens a customer's affective commitment. This, in turn, supports the intentions customer's purchasing and encourages spending more time in the stores.

Mathews et al., (2009) conducted a study on "Atmospherics and consumers' symbolic interpretation. They distributed a 111-item questionnaire to 500 respondents and then evaluated them by means of MANOVA in SPSS. The test results confirmed that there was a considerable association between ambiance and the behavioral outcomes. Also, layout and design have a noteworthy association with approach to the place as does social impression with revisit intentions. In other words, environmental features do play an important role in terms of influencing behavioral intentions in hedonic environments. Customers often create a evaluation framework for hedonic attractions/services based on symbolic perceptions (meanings), behavioral intentions, and the meanings they associate with the service surroundings.

Patterson (2007) found that demographics play an important part in revisit intention and repeat purchase. Results show that age and occupation are connected with service loyalty (repurchase intention and loyalty behavior) while gender is not. In addition, more established age groups (35-54 and over 55 years) exhibit more dedicated behavior than their younger counterparts (18-24, and 25-34 years).

2. Conceptual Background

Figure 1: Modified Conceptual Framework



Source: created by the author for this study.

The objectives of this research are to analyze the relationship between service environment (ambiance, design and layout, and social factors) and behavioral outcomes (intention to revisit, word of mouth, attitude to facility, and the time spent in Jaspal clothing stores) and study the differences in these behavioral outcomes when classified by demographic factors (gender, age, and income levels). Attempting to understand the relationship between service environments and behavioral outcomes towards Jaspal Clothing store, the researcher seeks to investigate the following hypotheses:

- Service environment Variables

H1a: There is a positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of intention-to-revisit Jaspal stores.

H2a: There is a positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores.

H3a: There is a positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores.

H4a: There is a positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores.

H5a: There is a positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of intention-to-revisit Jaspal stores.

H6a: There is a positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores.

H7a: There is a positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores.

H8a: There is a positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores.

H9a: There is a positive relationship between social factors behavioral outcomes in terms of intention-to-revisit Jaspal stores.

H10a: There is a positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores.

H11a: There is a positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores.

H12a: There is a positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores.

- Demographic Variables:

H13a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores, when segmented by gender.

H14a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores, when segmented by gender.

H15a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores, when segmented by gender.

H16a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores, when segmented by gender.

Age

H17a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores, based on different age levels.

H18a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores, when segmented by different age levels.

H19a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores, when segmented by different age levels.

H20a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores, when segmented by different age levels.

H21a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores, when segmented by income levels.

H22a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores, when segmented by income levels.

H23a: There is a difference in behavioral outcomes interms of attitude towards Jaspal stores, when segmented by income levels.

H24a: There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores, when segmented by income levels. -Research Methodology As Singhsachathet (2009) stated, the target market segments of the Jaspal stores should be males and females aged between 18 and 35. In this study, the target population is thus any customer above 18 who has visited and/or bought something from any Jaspal Clothing store, in Bangkok.

According to Zikmund (2003), the purposive or judgment sampling techniques require the researcher to select the sample based on his or her personal judgment. In this study, the researcher chose to collect data from Jaspal Clothing stores in Bangkok. There are 16 stores in total under the Jaspal brand scattered throughout Bangkok. However, following the political unrest in Bangkok in May 2010, the branch located in Central World department store was destroyed and no longer available to conduct research. The 15 remaining branches, all of them also in key locations, were critical and significant to this study.

The number of respondents was calculated based the sample size divided by the total number of branches (390/15), which resulted in an equally distributed number (26 respondents for each branch).

Convenience Sampling, a procedure collecting questionnaires filled out by people who are most conveniently available (Sekaran, 2002) and willing to participate was used.

Primary data was collected through selfadministered questionnaires in Thai and English and distributed to 390 customers in the 15 Jaspal branches throughout Bangkok. Respondents were first asked to select their preferred language. Both the Thai and English versions of the questionnaires had been checked by two professors to make sure there was no discrepancy. The data was then analyzed using the SPSS program.

Secondary information used in this study was obtained from online databases, Thai and English textbooks, articles, journals, search engines, and other related previous studies.

The researcher used the Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (Bivariate analysis), Independent t-test and one-way ANOVA method to test the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The analysis was separated into two sections: a descriptive analysis and an interferential statistics or hypothesis testing.

Results and Conclusion

The findings show that most of the respondent customers visited Jaspal stores because the locations were convenient. They also usually shop for business purposes. In addition, the results show that the largest group of respondents consisted of females, accounting for 62.6% of the total sample. The largest age level group was that between 21 and 25 years. The majority of the respondents were single, representing 56.7% of the total population. With regard to occupation and income level, the largest groups of respondents identified themselves as employees and within the 20,001 to 30,000 baht monthly income range. Iin terms of their preferences about enjoying shopping for fashion clothings (sometimes), going shopping (sometimes), and liking to be fashionable and trendv (sometimes), most of the respondents were in the middle. Moreover, the respondents indicated that they usually shop for other brands besides the Jaspal brand, the majority of them going for Armani, followed by other brands such as Top Shop, H&M, and CPS.

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made based on this study's research findings, answers from the open ended questions collected from the questionnaire, as well as from the researcher's observations and interviews with the respondents while collecting data. In order to improve brand loyalty, the researcher believes that Jaspal management team should improve and increase some aspects of service environment in order to develop a more positive word-ofmouth, boost the intention to revisit, create a favorable attitude towards the facility, and enhance the time consumers spend in a Jaspal store.

First of all, the customers' responses to the open ended questions and interviews suggest that Jaspal managers should re-evaluate and update the music played. Some customers who shop at the store frequently felt that the music played tends to create a sense of boredom. With the lowest mean pertaining to the statement "background music relaxes me while shopping at the store," the music played clearly fails to create a relaxing atmosphere. This statement is in-keeping with another one, "the environment (music and ambience) make me spend more time at the store," suggesting

that the time spent in the store is linked in part to the musical environment. The management team should consider more closely what tempo, pitch, volume and consonant harmony would create the most pleasant feeling and help release customers' stress. According to respondents' replies, they should also change the songs more frequently.

The management team might also consider increasing or adding more signage in the store to help organize the clothes better. Some customers also suggested that the changing rooms should be more spacious and include a small stool to sit on.

It was also found that many service staff members were not trained to make shopping an enjoyable activity for the customers. In fact, some customers mentioned that a number of the staff members tended to pull long faces. thus creating discomfort. Moreover, new service staff members were not well-trained to understand customer needs. These findings suggest that Jaspal management should modify staff training so as to raise their level of awareness of and ability to create a positive shopping experience at Jaspal. The staff interaction with customers should include smiling faces, warm welcomes and personal attention, three features mentioned as lacking in many instances.

A majority of the customers recognized during the interviews that Jaspal aims to target middle- and high-income earners. However, many of them found that prices were sometimes too high and therefore waited until the collections would go on sale. This is especially true of those who would not have the discount card, which to have one must purchase at least 5,000 baht in a day. The customers surveyed suggested that Jaspal should have more promotion schemes such as more discount cards available for both members and non-members by reducing the minimum spending target.

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Appendix One

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Table 2:	Summary	of Hv	potheses	Testing
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Null Hypothesis Description	Sig. level	Results
$H_{1:}$ There is no positive relationship between service environment and behavioral outcomes.	0.000	Rejected H _o
$H_{2:}$ There is no positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H _{3:} There is no positive Relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H ₄ .There is no positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H ₅ .There is no positive relationship between ambiance and behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
$H_{6:}$ There is no positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H _{7:} There is no positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
$H_{8:}$ There is no positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
$H_{9:}$ There is no positive relationship between design/layout factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H _{10:} There is no positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H _{11:} There is no positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms.	0.000	Rejected H _o
$H_{12:}$ There is no positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H _{13:} There is no positive relationship between social factors and behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores.	0.000	Rejected H _o
H_{14} . There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores when segmented by gender.	0.001	Rejected H _o
$H_{15:}$ There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores when segmented by gender.	0.545	Failed to reject H _o
H _{16:} There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores when segmented by gender.	0.027	Rejected H _o
H _{17:} There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores when	0.688	Failed to Reject H_o

segmented by gender.		
H ₁₈ . There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores when segmented by different age levels.	0.025	Rejected H _o
H ₁₉ . There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of-mouth about Jaspal stores when segmented by different age levels.	0.004	Rejected H _o
H ₂₀ :There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores when segmented by different age levels.	0.096	Failed to reject H _o
H_{21} :There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores when segmented by different age levels.	0.004	Rejected H _o
$H_{22:}$ There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of intention to revisit Jaspal stores when segmented by income levels.	0.027	Rejected H _o
H_{23} . There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of word-of- mouth about Jaspal stores when segmented by income levels.	0.119	Failed to reject H _o
H_{24} There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of attitude towards Jaspal stores when segmented by income levels.	0.058	Failed to reject H _o
H_{25} There is no difference in behavioral outcomes in terms of time spent in Jaspal stores when segmented by income levels.	0.022	Rejected H _o

Appendix Two

	Jaspal Branches	Sample Size of respondents
1	Siam Center	26
2		26
	Emporium Shopping	
3	Central – Ladprao	26
4	Central – Pinklao	26
5	Central City – Bangna	26
6	Central Rama III	26
7	Times Square	26
8	Amarin Plaza	26
9	Silom Complex	26
10	The Mall-	26
	Ngamwongwan	
11	The Mall-	26
	Ramkhamhaeng	
12	The Mall- Bangkapi	26
13	The Mall- Bangkae	26
14	Seacon Square	26
15	Future Park Rangsit	26
	Total	390

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Size