

Store Atmosphere as Retail Strategy Element

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate how brick-and-mortar stores build their strategy in terms of atmosphere. The research focused on the toy stores as a scenario to: i) organize the existing knowledge about the subject, (ii) describe the application of different elements of the atmosphere in toy stores, and (iii) show the aspects valued in a hedonic and utilitarian shopping trip regarding the subject. To this goal, the research used qualitative field research with a direct non-participant observation technique. The main finding is that even from the same sector, stores work quite differently in their atmosphere elements and stimulus. Keywords: Retail; Store Atmosphere; Retail Strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

Regardless of its product, retail can no longer compete traditionally, attracting customers only through assortment, low prices, and extended opening hours. Given this context, there is an increase in the importance given by marketing specialists to studies that concern the creation of experience and store environments that increase the competitive differential, thus enhancing the power of influence at the time of purchase (BABIN; ATTAWAY, 2000; BACKSTROM; JOHANSSON, 2006; BALLANTINE; JACK; PARSONS, 2010; DONAVAN et al., 1994; GENTILE et al., 2007; KOTLER, 1974; MASSARA; LIU; MELARA, 2010; MCGOLDRICK; PIEROS, 1998). Fulberg (2003) argues that retail in the new millennium is not about products placed on the shelf to be admired and bought. Today's retail has to understand touching, seeing, hearing, and smell.

Retail is where value objective and subjective exchanges are carried out. On the one hand, the customer receives values such as physical products, services, convenience, experiences, and entertainment. On the other hand, it pays monetary value for the provision of this service. The retail offer satisfies rational and emotional factors and mainly translates into delivering service, product, and experience. The experience gained through the atmosphere becomes a necessary form of differentiation and value creation between the parties.

The interaction between the customer and the store environment generates the shopping experience (MASSARA et al., 2010). This experience is built through a holistic view involving cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical factors as a response. (GRANOT et al., 2010; VERHOEF et al., 2009). According to Puccinelli et al. (2009), the atmosphere can influence consumer decisions in several ways, especially in the evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase stages. That is why marketing experts struggle to create shopping environments that allow for more intense consumer interaction when they make a purchase decision. Schlosser (1998) believes that improving the store atmosphere has become a necessity rather than an option for retailers.

Most store atmosphere studies address the factor influencing emotional states and purchase behavior (BALLANTINE et al., 2010). Many authors also approach the subject from the perspective of environmental psychology. The literature review found that the atmosphere as a strategic dimension has not been addressed intensively. Retailers also need to have a customer-

focused orientation when considering the atmosphere as a strategic factor (TURLEY; CHEBAT, 2002). There was an opportunity to establish a relationship between theory and practice concerning the store atmosphere so academics and practitioners can use it as competitive options that add value to the customer at the time of purchase. The theory and practice will reflect this relationship through the stimuli selected in the literature review and analyzed in three toy retail stores. It is believed that it is necessary to make explicit the variables that form the atmosphere so that the subject enters the plan of strategic discussions in retail when seeking options for competitive advantage.

The problem question to be addressed in the present study is: how did stores in the same sector develop their store atmosphere strategy? As a secondary objective, we seek to theoretically discuss how the store atmosphere influences the value of the customer's shopping experience. To achieve this objective, we sought to

1. Organize the existing knowledge about store atmosphere,
2. Describe how the different elements of the store atmosphere are in toy stores located in the city of São Paulo,
3. Show the valued aspects of the store atmosphere in a hedonic and utilitarian shopping trip.

The following is a theoretical review of store atmosphere, its influence on customer value, and store atmosphere as an element of retail strategy to understand and discuss the contextualization of this topic and present related research. After the theoretical discussion, a field research methodology was conducted and analyzed to conclude.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following bibliographic review sought to explore the concept of the store atmosphere from three perspectives: (i) the different dimensions and elements that describe this concept; (ii) its influence on value to customers; and (iii) its participation as an essential component of the company's strategic configuration.

a) Store atmosphere, dimensions, and elements.

According to the exact sciences, atmosphere means an envelope of mixed gases surrounding a celestial body like a planet, moon, or star. It is the air around a sphere (ONTARIO, 2010). The retail atmosphere is composed of a physical and emotional combination of tangible and

intangible attributes (MCGOLDRICK; PIEROS 1998) and can be considered a psychological attribute of the store image (TURLEY; CHEBAT, 2002). Puccinelli and others (2009) reiterate that they can influence the shopping experience by interacting with consumer perceptions and affecting their behavior.

Bitner (1992) argues that the dimensions of the atmosphere create a holistic environment moderated by employee and client reactions, which create internal responses such as cognitive, emotional, and psychological factors. These responses guide behavior that may be approach or rejection. Schollosser (1998) adds that the atmosphere serves as an identity that affects: (i) perceptions of the quality of products serving a communicative social function; (ii) the social identity of the store; and (iii) supports the decision about which store to buy.

The atmosphere materializes through the variables of colors, lighting, merchandising, music, and aromas, and retailers can use multiple sensory appeals to create an atmosphere in the store: vision, sound, smell, touch, and, in the case of food, taste, (MCGOLDRICK; MODERATORS, 1998). It is a nonverbal and often unintentional means of communication, which functions as a "silent language" since contact occurs when symbols are exchanged between the message source and the receiver (BELIZE; Crowley, Crowley, HASTY, 1983).

The concept of the influence of the store environment on customer perception and behavior was introduced by Kotler (1973, 1974), then called store atmosphere. In one of the first articles about psychological stimuli created through the store environment, the author suggests that the store atmosphere makes an image in the buyer's mind and that it can vary in several ways, depending on individual characteristics, because it is a particular interpretation. According to the author, in some cases, the atmosphere of the place is a more influencing factor in the purchasing dynamics than the product itself, becoming, in this case, the main product.

Baker and others (1992) consider two main factors for the retail atmosphere being the factors of the environment (lighting and music) and the social factors (number of people, friendly environment, and employees); Yoo and Macinnis (1998) mention that the atmosphere of the store is created by design, lighting and air quality and Mcgoldrick and Pieros (1998) mention that the store atmosphere is created by: (i) environmental conditions, as well as temperature, air quality, noise, music, etc.; (ii) space: store layout, equipment, furniture, etc.; and (iii) signage, symbols and

artifacts and decoration style. Turley and Milliman (2000) established five broad categories of atmospheric variables: external variables, general factors of the interior, layout and design factors, sales areas and exhibitors of products, and human variables. Table 1 offers a comparative view of the various authors surveyed. It is noted that all follow a single line and that there is no conflict between the different definitions; what differs them is the degree of detail and the terminology used for the classifications.

Table 1 - Classification of Communication Tools Stimuli: Composition:

Authors	Stimuli	Composition
Kotler (1973, 1974)	The primary sensory channels in the atmosphere are vision, sound, smell, and touch.	(i) vision: color, lighting, size, shape, (ii) hearing: volume and determination of tone, (iii) smell: freshness and essence, and (iv) touch: softness, softness, temperature.
Bellize; Crowley; Hasty (1983)	Retail traditionally uses colors to project an image or to create the desired atmosphere.	The store can use color to attract and increase the power of comfort so that the customer stays longer in the store.
Buckley (1987)	The combination of stimuli allows you to create a store atmosphere that can be motivating and pleasurable.	The store's atmosphere is created by combining music, colors, an accumulation of people, and other stimuli such as floor, ceiling, lighting, changers, looks, pillars, consumer services, etc.
Bitner (1992)	Servicescape: The impact of physical factors on customer and employee behavior.	(i) environmental conditions: temperature, air quality, noise, music, etc., (ii) space: store layout, equipment, furniture, etc., and (iii) signage, symbols and artifacts, and the decoration style.
Turley Milliman (2000)	The categories that create the store atmosphere are external variables, general interior factors, layout and design factors, sales area and product exhibitors, and human variables.	(i) external variables: architecture, style, and surrounding stores, (ii) general factors of the interior: floor, lighting, color scheme, music, width of corridors, ceiling, (iii) Layout and design factors: design and allocation of space, grouping, flow, etc., (iv) sales area and product displays: signage, wall decoration, price signaling, etc. and (v) human variables: characteristics of employees, uniforms, accumulation of people and areas of privacy.

Ballantine, Jack Parsons (2010)	There is a need to evaluate the atmosphere with a broader and holistic perspective because stimuli are not experienced independently. There's an excellent interrelationship between them.	(i) attractiveness stimuli: lighting, auditory stimuli, space, colors, layout, layout of products and displays and other features of the store design, and (ii) stimuli of ease: comfort, accumulation of people, lighting, and arrangement of products (such as facilitators) and employees.
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Source: The authors.

Some authors study isolated aspects of the store's atmosphere, such as colors and music. Store can use color both to create an image and attract the customer to the store to increase the power of comfort so that the customer stays longer in the store (BELLIZZI et al., 1983). Areni and Kim (1993) conducted a survey on the musical stimulus and found that by placing classical music in wine stores, the sale increases mainly higher value products. Other authors highlight the opportunity to study the atmosphere more holistic and integrated way (BALLANTINE et al., 2010). Some networks work more intensively with stimuli in the store environment building what they call concept stores or flagship stores. Some retailers work the atmosphere differently in their stores, such as Victoria's Secret (uses aromas that characterize your store), Abercrombie (music and lighting), Apple (interactivity), LEGO and M&M (product customization), Toys "R" Us (entertainment and fun in the shopping environment) and American Girl (services and products that make the doll come to life). In an ethnographic study conducted by Borghini et al. (2009) at American Girl Place, it was observed that an environment that transcends the shopping experience could attract an audience that travels through the area without a first intention to purchase. Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006) also prove that a stimulating environment increases the customer's choice to visit the store and make purchases. Kotler (1973, 1974) describes that the first step towards creating an atmosphere is to understand its audience, because the more varied its audience, the more complex the decision becomes. Therefore, managers should identify the main variables of the atmosphere that are available to produce the awareness and the desired reaction and this should be planned according to what has value for the consumer.

b. influence of the atmosphere on value to the customer

From the client's perspective, understanding what value means in an organization's offering enables the enrichment, creation, and improvement of marketing strategies according to the values identified. The competitive advantage lies in discovering new ways to meet the desires of customers by delivering the highest expected value (WOODRUFF, 1997).

The value perceived by the client originates from the confrontation between the benefit and the sacrifice involved in a particular transaction (ZEITHAML, 1988). Kerin et al. (2007) define that, from the consumer's point of view, price is often used to indicate value when compared to the perceived benefits of a product or service. Specifically, value is the ratio between perceived benefits in relation to price or ($\text{value} = \text{perceived benefits} / \text{price}$). This relationship shows that for a given price, as perceived benefits increase, the value increases. However, Schechter (1984 apud ZEITHAML, 1988, p.13) uses a more holistic approach to describing what value comprises qualitative and quantitative, subjective and objective factors, which make up the complete shopping experience.

Holbrook (1996) describes that value for the consumer involves the interrelationship of four dimensions of value, which are: (i) interactivity- the relationship between the consumer and the product; (ii) relativism- comparison between objects, between people, and in a specific context; (iii) preference - which translates into meanings such as affection, attitude, evaluation, predisposition, opinion, response tendency and valence; and (iv) experience- the value is not in the product purchased, nor in the chosen mark or the object possessed, but in the experience that derives there. The importance of the value generated through the shopping experience makes the store atmosphere an attractive competitive option for retail.

The customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, company, or part of your organization, and the value that the consumer and the company earn is created by that set of interactions (ADDIS; HOLBROOK, 2001). The purchase value is generated from the complete purchase experience and not simply by the fetched product (ADDIS; HOLBROOK, 2001; ZEITHAML, 1988). That is, the product may have a higher value according to the purchasing experience obtained in the activities performed to acquire the same, and the act of purchase can generate experiential value in the form of immediate personal gratification since the value is related to tangible and hedonic consequences (BABIN; ATTAWAY, 2000).

Recognizing that consumers spend multiple resources, including time and energy, the personal value of the purchase directs a question about whether the act of purchase is a job or a diversion (BABIN; DARDEN, DARDEN, 2010. GRIFFIN, 1994). An overview of the value at the time of purchase recognizes both a utilitarian result resulting from some conscious exercise of a predicted consequence and a result more related to hedonic responses that capture a fundamental duality of rewards for human behavior. That is, there is a distinction between performing an act of obtaining something, as opposed to doing so since there is a pleasure in this activity (TRIANDIS, 1977 apud BABIN et al., 1994). This aspect is called hedonic value (or experiential value) and utility value (or functional value). Understanding the utilitarian and hedonic approaches can help better understand the experience (HIRSCHMAN; HOLBROOK, 1982).

Hedonic consumption is classified as "facets of consumer behavior that relate to multisensory aspects, fantasies, and emotional aspects when someone has an experience with a product" (HIRSCHMAN; HALBROOK, 1982, p.92). The multisensory aspect refers to the reception of experience in multiple directions, including tastes, sounds, aroma, tactile impressions, and visual images. The authors add that using the hedonic approach; products are not only seen as objective entities but as personal symbols. Customers seeking leisure during purchase expect high levels of hedonic value (BABIN et al., 1994). Perceived fun is a relevant factor in the hedonic benefit offered through the purchasing activity (BLOCH et al., 1986).

The utilitarian value is the aspect of consumption that has been studied by the primary current of consumer behavior and is called the rational model. Addis and Holbrook (2001, p. 61) describe that in this view "the consumer is primarily oriented towards the commitment to purchase, by rationality, aiming at achieving one or more goals or objectives". The consumer is described as a problem solver, who chooses in a totally rational way. The authors complement that after the act of purchase, satisfaction is obtained through better performance of the product consumed in the face of current expectations.

Lipovetsky (2007, p. 68), on functional and hedonic value, describes:

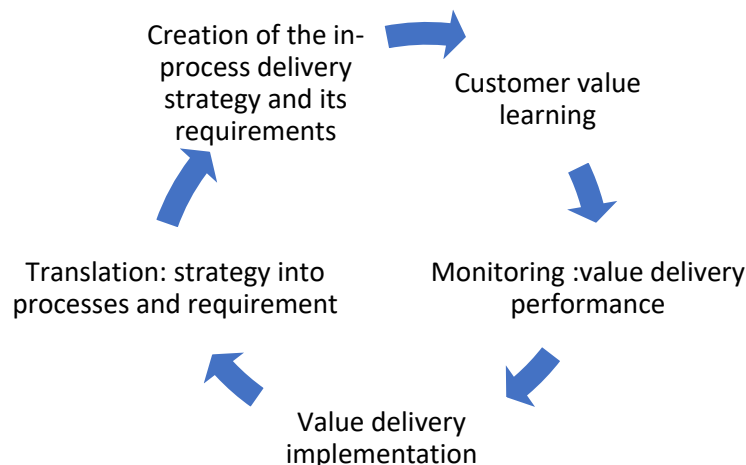
The buyer certainly attaches importance to the functional value of the products. Still, at the same time, he is increasingly searching for renewed pleasures, sensory or aesthetic experiences, communicational

or playful. So excitement and sensations are sold, and it is lived experience that is bought, resembling every consumer, more or less, a collector of experiences.

The atmosphere strategy should vary according to the customer's orientation; that is, if there is a hedonic orientation, there is a positive effect on the customer when working in the store environment with stimulations, thus increasing their intention to visit the environments of the store and make purchases (KALTCHEVA; WEITZ, 2006). On the other hand, when consumers have the motivation to purchase task-oriented, a stimulating environment diminishes its charm and diminishes their purchase intention (KALTCHEVA; WEITZ, 2006) because these customers reflect the act of purchase as a job (HIRSCHMAN; HALBROOK, 1982) and distraction can be harmful.

Chaudhuri and Ligas (2009) conducted a hypothesis test study where they found that when customers perceive a higher value in goods sold in a given store, their loyalty to buyback and attitude thus increase with the propensity to pay higher prices. Finally, Woodruff (1997) proposes a model to assist in implementing superior value for customers. The conceptual model presented in figure 1 describes that learning what is relevant to the client is the starting point for strategies to deliver value to them.

Figure 1 - Flow of use of knowledge about the value to the customer



Source: adapted from Woodruff (1997).

c. The atmosphere as an element of retail strategy

It is necessary to develop customer-centered strategies, that is, to have the ability to respond and adapt to the needs of your audience. Consumer relations become increasingly competitive and overcome those whose methods come closer and touch more closely the pulse of consumer desire (SANTAELLA apud PEREZ, 2004).

Consumers are increasingly looking for alternatives that provide them with convenience and pleasurable experiences, loyalty, maximizing the benefit/cost ratio in their purchasing decisions, and value customized solutions (PA RENTE, 2010). Because of this, it is necessary to establish relationships between the client's voice and internal strategies, making him the center of any company's business (RUST et al., 2001). Woodruff (1997) points out that quality is no longer a source of competitive differentiation, so the consumer must direct an organization's internal processes to deliver value aligned with what the customer sees as having value.

Rust and others (2001) agree that not all customers want the same thing, even if they use the same word. So there is a need to go deeper into generic terms (e.g., quality/convenience) to understand what customers value and give them what they want while reducing what they don't wish to. When retail recognizes the importance of a deep understanding of customers and acts with this knowledge, consumer satisfaction will increase, as well as retail performance and success (PUCCINELLI et al., 2009).

Turley and Chebat (2002) point out that creating a store atmosphere can become an essential strategic variable challenging to copy and a necessary means of gaining a competitive advantage. According to the authors, the result that retail can obtain through the store atmosphere is the effect on sales, the attraction-rejection behavior, the store image, retail entertainment, employee satisfaction, and competitive advantage. That's why it's necessary to use the store atmosphere customer-centric approach by understanding what the customer values in a specific environment of the store in question so that the atmosphere also becomes an essential tool for generating value for the customer.

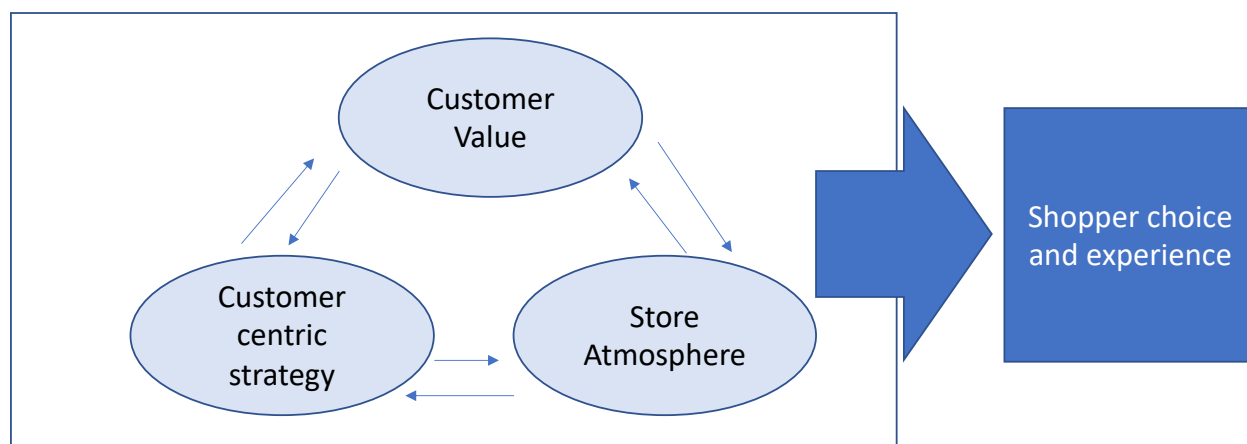
The atmosphere of the store is a factor that directly influences the image of the store. Baker and others (1994) based on works by various authors, consolidated the characteristics of the store

atmosphere that characterize discount or luxury retail. Stores are classified as sophisticated in use in their environment classical music, soft lighting, opaque or incandescent, carpet on the floor, textured wall, free forms in their layout, and wide corridors. On the other hand, discount stores use modern music, bright, shocking, or flourishing lighting, cold or cement floors, painted walls, grid layouts, and narrow corridors. They add that discount stores use bright colors, while sophisticated stores make use of gold, silver, black, monochrome, or trendy colors. The signs are also different, discreet in luxury retail and apparent in discount stores. It is important to note that, contrary to what common sense tends to believe, working with a store atmosphere that passes a discount store image is not always bad, depending on the retailer's strategy. It happens because the customer can interpret that a store with sophisticated stimuli practices higher prices (SCHLOSSER, 1998). Turley and Milliman (2000) add that there is a strong link between the store atmosphere and sales volume. Even a tiny change in one of the various elements of the retail atmosphere can generate different results in sales and buying behavior (TURLEY; CHEBAT, 2002).

The value is something perceived by the customer, which cannot be objectively determined by the supplier (WOODRUFF, 1997). A conceptual model was created based on the literature review (RUST; ZEITHAMIL; LEMON, 2001; TURLEY; CHEBAT, 2002; WOODRUFF, 1997) in Illustration 2, proposing a link between the customer-centered strategy, with the value for the customer, with the store atmosphere. It is noted that, in addition to the fact that the store atmosphere needs to be thought of based on customer-centered strategies and customer values, there is also the reverse path because it also influences the customer value (COTTET; LICHTLE; PLICHON, 2006).

The theoretical model of figure 2 also proposes that the store's atmosphere can influence buying behavior in at least three modes: attention, message and effect (MCGOLDRICK; PIEROS,1998). Attention and message influence the overall consumer's decision about store choice, while the effect deals with how the atmosphere influences in-store shopping behavior.

Figure 2 - The customer is the center of the decisions in the store's atmosphere.



Source: The authors

Methodology, results, and analysis of field research

Donovan and Rossiter (1982) and McDonald (1998) claim that emotional manifestations are momentary and not always remembered when questioned in the future. When asked to recall previous actions, it is more likely that the explanation of their behavior is formed by rational arguments rather than calling emotional impulses in their subconscious. Faced with a scenario where the effects of the store atmosphere are emotionally manifested and are difficult to verbal expression, we chose to conduct a study of the qualitative methodology of non-participant direct observation where the evaluation criteria were extracted from the existing bibliographic review on the subject. Qualitative research has concern with describing phenomena in an uncontrolled way and can use natural observation, besides having a subjective perspective close to the data, being profound and oriented to discovery with a holistic view (MARTINS; THEOPHOLO, 2009).

On the other hand, Zigmund (2006) describes that non-participant direct observation can produce a detailed record of events where the observer plays a passive role. It adds that it is a recommended method for detailed logging of an environment because when a buyer is directly questioned, they may not be able to report the search object accurately. The observer can record physical trace data to discover things that a respondent might not accurately recall. According to

the author, an observation form helps to maintain consistent observations and ensures that all relevant information is recorded, so the researchers chose to construct a detailed research protocol and that, for the sake of space, it was not inserted in this work.

However, it is worth mentioning that the main variables addressed in the literature were addressed; however, as the objective was to obtain a holistic view of the store's atmosphere, items were taken or added to the script to ensure the relevance and inclusion of highlight points of the stores surveyed.

The authors performed the non-participant observation to evaluate the stimuli of the store atmosphere in three toy stores on weekdays, distant from festive dates, and at nearby times, during the second half of 2010. The analysis was a portrait of the moment, without intending to criticize the participating stores of the sample, but rather to propose a deeper reflection on the subject.

The research scenario was the retail of toys in the city of São Paulo, in three stores, which we will name Shop A, Shop B, and Shop C. The researchers chose the stores because they worked in a very different way from their store environment. All are located in shopping malls and focus on an audience with greater purchasing power. The researchers chose toy retail because it is a rich and stimulating scenario for study since many visual and interactive stimuli are generally used to promote its products. It is a type of retail that covers themed and theatrical items and can quickly leave the store atmosphere attractive and engaging. It is believed that in this sector, more than buying the toy (product), one buys the emotion that this product provides to the final consumer. The buyer, even though he is not most often the final consumer, when searching for toys if stimulated by the environment, can be emotionally involved by memories of his childhood or that of his children.

Based on the five broad categories of atmospheric variables presented by Turley and Milliman (2000), researchers carried out the observation research in the three stores. The result of the field study can be observed in Tables 2 to 7, which were organized by the following topics: (i) factors of the interior of the store; (ii) layout and design factors; (iii) sales area and product exhibitors; (iv) human aspects; (v) general store factors; and (vi) external variables. Within each topic, researchers did a description of the variable observed in the study.

Table 2 - Factors inside the store

Observação	SHOP A	SHOP B	SHOP C
Color scheme	Intense colors, with the predominance of red and yellow. Free-form and non-harmonious exposed colors	Orange and blue colors (logo colors) predominated. Lilac was also used to differentiate the environment from younger children	They used colors present in their visual identity added to the gray color, which reflected a classic look.
Música	It didn't use music in your environment	It didn't use music in your environment	It didn't use music in your environment
Ambient noises	It was possible to hear a low noise from a television that aired a children's program from a paid channel	Conversations between customers and employees were heard	The ambient sound was low and the result of television teles that made up the environment and disseminated the store's products
Olfactory stimuli	They weren't working with smell stimuli	The aroma of tutti fruit in the environment, which, according to the staff, was placed in the air conditioning. The scent, not intense, referred to the smell of new toys and candy for children.	The store did not work with smell stimuli
Temperature	Shopping Pattern	Shopping Pattern	Shopping Pattern
Iluminação	Bright and shocking lighting, made by inexpensive reflectors. Lighting focused on showcasing products and gondolas.	The lighting was soft, with no spots highlighting products.	The internal lighting was soft, with sophisticated spots highlighting the products exposed in the gondolas.
Roof	A high ceiling painted with different pastel colors creates the	Low right foot with big Superman flying doll. The store also used the ceiling to	The store entrance was an extensive line of toys on the ceiling that appeared

	impression of an Iris bow. Presence of flags on the roof, with the logo of the network itself	expose some oversized products, giving the impression that they were flying.	propped up on a rounded beam. The roof was composed of two levels, thus creating a dynamic space.
Wall	Painting, with simple and unsophisticated features, of children playing outdoors	A big Spider-Man doll climbing through the walls	Gray stickers on the watermark wall in the shape of toy parts and white robots. On the wall behind the box, there were large cubes that reflected modernity in the space.
Floor	White and cold	White and cold	The rubberized floor in gray and black (accompanied by ceiling color)
Width of corridors	Shop with adequate circulation space	Some corridors were tight.	Shop with adequate circulation space

Source: The authors.

Table 3 - Layout and design factors

Observação	SHOP A	SHOP B	SHOP C
Store layout	Furniture is displayed in a grid, with a basic layout similar to those used by supermarket chains.	The furniture forms a staircase, with a lower modular at the center and high on the wall. This furniture dynamic allows better visualization of the store as a whole. The modules were exposed linearly, forming three large corridors.	The rounded and low furniture of which they were placed in accessible forms. Even though it was a small shop, there was a sense of breadth with spacious hallways. This effect was highlighted by the fact that there are not so many products exposed to
Equipment	The store consisted of tall and wide metal gondolas	The central modules were all short, which facilitated navigation between different environments. The furniture was metal and wood. The	The furniture was made of wood and was sophisticated. There were also two low plastic tables

		wood was used to display products for children under the age of two	with a design that matched the store
Separation of environments	The products were grouped by gender and theme. Age separation was made only for the first age (from zero to two years), but there was no specific signaling that differentiated this space.	The store had easy navigation, having as large tabs: girls, boys, babies, and games, easily identified due to to the visual communication developed	The products were grouped by collection, and each collection had a large age-group signage indicated in the product boxes

Source: The authors. Observation

Table 4 - Sales area and product exhibitors

Observação	SHOP A	SHOP B	SHOP C
Exposição	Many products were present, which passed the feeling of extreme abundance. store made up the display of the products on the wall shelves to the ceiling. Larger and more expensive products were exposed at the top of the gondolas, with difficult visualization	The exhibition was organized by themes, and visual communication valued and signaled them. In the box, there was a display of several small and lower-value products, which seemed to be strategically positioned to encourage impulse buying	The store was well organized, and several products seemed suitable for an organized exhibition. The store had unpublished products in Brazil and also sold t-shirts, games, videos, keychains, and other accessories centered on the theme of the toys offered. In the cashier, there was the sale of small products to encourage impulse buying.
Displays	Displays and standard materials that appeared to have been produced on a large scale by the suppliers of the various products sold	The displays and visual communication seemed to have been made exclusively to suit the store's look. They were constructed of durable cut materials, forming attractive panels	to incentive sales where there were acrylic cubes around the store with the products mounted out of the box. There was a sensor in the cubes with light and sounds attached to the movements of the parts. It was as if the boxes there had life.

Sinalização	No signage differentiating the different product sectors		The signage consisted of banners and cardboard totems made exclusively to publicize the lines.
Comunicação visual Eletrônica	Two televisions passing drawings of a paid channel	Television links commercials of a major manufacturers of the sector.	Six television screens made up the environment and disseminated the store's products
Preço	Price flagged on the product itself, easily identified. Many highlight the promotional aspect by disclosing the old price and the promotional. Use of specific promotional material. Promotional intensity: great	The price is reported on the product itself but not always present. Promotional communication is made through a differentiated label that stands out in the product. Promotional intensity: average	The price is disclosed in the product itself without highlighting the promotional aspect. Promotional intensity: small
Employee support	Young men and women. Passive attitude and concerned with administrative routines	Young men and women. Passive attitude	Young men and women. Proactive and knowledgeable
The kindness of the staff	Cordials when requested	Cordials when requested	Cordials when requested
Employees' clothing	Simple uniforms, but made in harmony with the colors and communication of the store	The uniform does not present sophistication but was made in connection with the colors and communication of the store	Discreet yet sophisticated uniform
Flow	Low flow	moderate	Moderate-low
Buying effort	Moderate-high	Moderate	Moderate-Low
Assortment	Products from various manufacturers and the	No private label products were found, but there	Works only with the lines of a brand. The store had unpublished products in

	presence of some private brand products	was the presence of exclusive import product	Brazil and also sold t-shirts, games, videos, key players and other accessories on the theme
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Source: The authors.

Table 5 - Human aspects of the store

Observação	SHOP A	SHOP B	SHOP C
Entertainment	Without the presence of space intended for children's entertainment	Some products were open to being handled. Game tables for children to interact with products	Presence of two modern tables with pieces for children to interact with the product.
Differentiated factors that could increase the desire for consumption	No differentiated factor was identified	Display of products in the box. Products are open for handling. Visual communication of collections. Communication in games, brought life to the boxes	Display of products in the box. Products are open for handling. Activity table for interaction with the product. Acrylic box with products that come to life. The sculptures on the door attract the attention of everyone passing by in front of the store.
General aspects of the store	Pattern. Does not use differentiated resources in the construction of the store atmosphere	Differentiated. The store used planned features to improve the atmosphere of the store	Innovative. The store used exclusive visual resources in the construction of the store's atmosphere

Source: The authors.

Table 6 - General store factors

Observação	SHOP A	SHOP B	SHOP C
Entertainment	Without the presence of space intended for children's entertainment	Some products were open to being handled. Game tables for children to interact with products	Provide two modern tables with pieces for children to interact with the product.

Differentiated factors that could increase the desire for consumption	No differentiated factor was identified	Display of products in the box. Products are open for handling. Visual communication of collections. Communication in games brought life to the boxes.	Display of products in the box. Products are open for handling. Activity table for interaction with the product. Acrylic box with products that come to life. The sculptures on the door attract the attention of everyone passing by in front of the store.
General aspects of the store	Pattern. Does not use differentiated resources in the construction of the store atmosphere	Differentiated. The store used planned features to improve the atmosphere of the store.	Innovative. The store used exclusive visual resources in the construction of the store's atmosphere

Source: The authors.

Table 7 - Store external variables

Observação	SHOP A	SHOP B	SHOP C
Architecture, style, and visual communication	The panel with solid lighting at the top of the door discloses the store's name through the logo—standard-size glass doors. The logo of the store had discreet lighting.	Visual communication of the external store is made in frame format, composed of large side cubes with children's drawings. The logo was softly on the top of the entrance.	In front of the store was a large doll sitting on a garden chair. At the entrance, there was a clown also built with toy parts. The logo of the store at the top of the entry repeats itself in the right and left corners, with soft lighting, thus highlighting the <i>internal design</i> of the store.
Showcase	A comprehensive glass showcase with a net separates the showcase and the store environment. Themes grouped the toys— inexpensive and impromptu-looking promotional materials. However, the display	Shop open without doors, making the store as a whole becomes a considerable showcase. From the entrance, it was possible to see practically the entire store due to furniture of different sizes. Toy	Showcase integrated with the store. I was using cubes to expose collections. <i>Thin</i> banners compose visual communication and highlight differentiated products. The showcase reflected the modernity

	communication did not seem to have specific planning.	island at the door, with toys to be handled	present in other environments of the store
Neighboring shops	Sophisticated. The large concentration of children's clothing stores with store spaces developed in a creative and engaging way	Several specialties without great differential in the development of an internal atmosphere	Several sophisticated store specialties showed great concern with the details.

Source: The authors.

Despite meeting the exact customer's profile, the three stores visited work in very different ways in their strategy of training the store environment. Shop A, even located in a luxury mall, featured aspects described by Baker *et al.* (1994), which characterizes it as a discount store due to the predominance of solid colors, emphasizing red, bright lighting, and grid *exposure*. There was also little evidence of concern in the development of store atmosphere strategies in the store, adopting an apparent focus on the product and not on the customer. In shops, B and C, characteristics of sophisticated stores were observed due mainly to the presence of free forms, wide corridors, incandescent lighting, and in the case of the C store, the predominance of a black and gray color. The music stimulus was not observed in any of the stores, which may reveal an opportunity to increase sales, as observed in the study by Areni and Kim (1993). The olfactory stimulus was observed only in shop B. In the shop A, an audience more focused on their purchase objective was observed, because the purchases were faster and little time was spent on comparisons.

On the other hand, in the shop B and especially in C, a more significant number of people were observed presenting characteristics of an uncompromising purchasing mission without a specific objective. The appearance of shop C suggested that it had been set up to delight the adult as well, probably to awaken childhood memories. With this, the environment valued the product line, which has a high price compared to other toys. For those who want to make the moment of purchase a form of leisure, shop C proved to be attractive, but the assortment was minimal compared to the other stores studied. The strategy observed in shops B and C encouraged hedonic purchase trips and could increase the customer's intention to visit the different environments of the store and thereby generate a higher sales volume (KALTCHEVA; WEITZ, 2006).

The main differentiating factors can be observed in table 8, which presents evident characteristics among the three environmental strategies. Shop A has a greater focus on promotional aspects, with low intensity of stimuli to hedonic values, as well as entertainment and stimulating atmosphere, besides having a passing and distant attitude in its service. On the other end, shop C presents a more significant number of training stimuli of the hedonic values involved in the experience, as well as entertainment on the store site, creative atmosphere, and proactive attitude of employees, as well as shop B, but in lower intensity.

Table 8 - Store external variables

Point of observation	Shop A	Shop B	Shop C
Promotion	greater focus	Intermediate focus	low focus
Shopping effort	moderate high	moderate	moderate low
Entertainment	Low intensity	Intermediate intensity	Great intensity
Staff and service	passive and distant attitude	passive attitude	proactive attitude
Store atmosphere	standart	differentiated	innovative
Assortment	broad	broad	restricted
Displays	Non standart	standard medium	standart
Price	moderate low	moderate	high

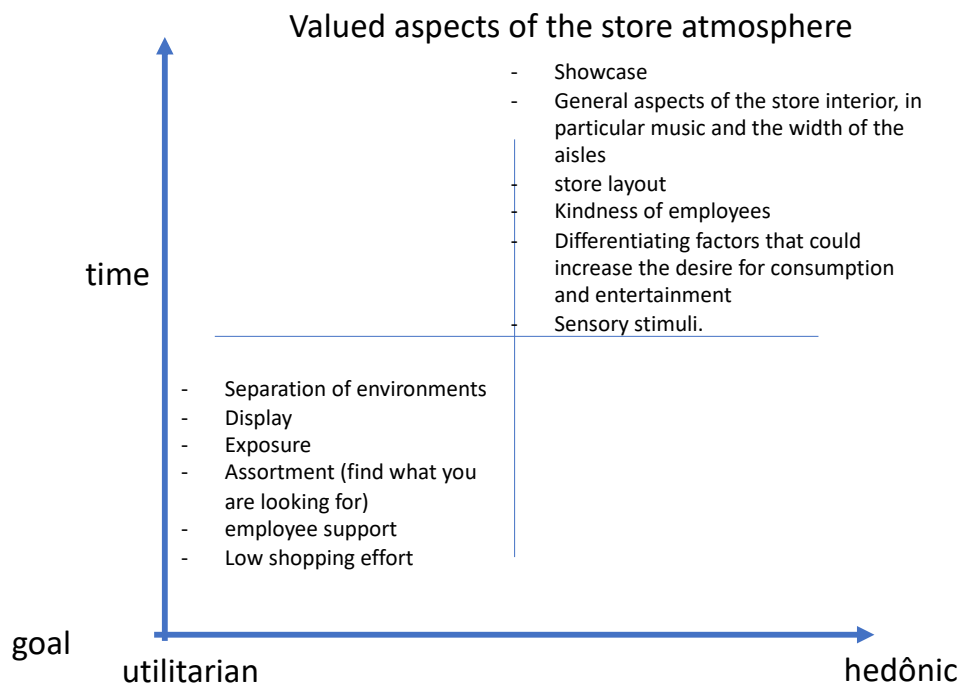
Source: The authors.

It was observed that the experiential value created by stores with more stimulated purchasing environments mainly impacts the attraction of the store entrance, the time that the customer invests for the moment of purchase, and the pleasure he has during this process. This observation reinforces what Turley and Milliman's (2000) claim about the link between store atmosphere and sales volume because the longer the customer invests in the store the more he tends to spend. The customer seems to feel valued in stores that work with an innovative environment and that appear to have been specially made to meet the objective and subjective needs present at the time of purchase.

Retail purchase is associated with two main factors: time and purpose of the purchase trip (KALTCHEVA; WEITZ, 2006). That is, depending on the type of purchase trip (utilitarian or hedonic) associated with the available time, it was observed that there is an appreciation of different attributes of the store atmosphere. The bibliographic review and field research support

the proposal presented in Illustration 3, that describes the aspects valued in the store atmosphere. Only the extremes were illustrated because they have more remarkable characteristics. That is, the utilitarian purchase trip, which has a specific objective and usually a more restricted time, is characterized by the behavior of those who want to solve the problem as quickly as possible, that is, values aspects that make them have low effort in the purchase, as well as adequate communication and support of employees. On the other hand, in shopping trips with a leisure goal and a longer time available, the consumer wants to be enchanted and values an environment with a more significant number of stimulations, innovation in store, entertainment, and wide and differentiated assortment. The authors believe that even on a utilitarian shopping trip, the customer feels valued when entering a differentiated space, as long as it does not increase their purchasing effort.

Figure 3 - Aspects valued in the store atmosphere.



Source: The authors.

CONCLUSIONS

The atmosphere seems to be a valuable tool for those who seek differentiation in retail, as it can influence the dynamics of purchasing by interacting with consumer perceptions and affecting their behavior (PUCCINELLI *et al.*, 2009); it brings emotions that help determine the value for the customer, and it motivates them to adopt confident choices (BABIN; ATTAWAY, 2000). The holistic perspective on evaluating the store and its effects is crucial. For example, when the customer enters the store, he does not listen to a song in isolation, he does not smell without seeing the colors and does not walk around the floor without feeling the ambience (BALLANTINE *et al.*, 2010). These effects evoke memory. The colors, the shapes that are seen, the sounds heard, and the touch that is felt never actually occurred because they are brought back into this particular configuration for the first time this mental phenomenon was experienced (HIRSCHMAN; HALBROOK, 1982). It is necessary to evaluate the aspects that form the store atmosphere together since they are interrelated and generate different results than when assessed in isolation.

Understanding the effects of the atmosphere, retail can use this tool as a means to tangibilize its customer-centered strategies, thus providing more pleasurable shopping experiences that generate value for its customers. Fulberg (2003) suggests that retailers create environments that involve multiple sensory stimuli- sound, vision, sense, and touch to improve the shopping experience and uses the concept of in-store theatricalization by creating a space in which the brand can entertain consumers using the dramatization of their values. Store managers *and designers* can differentiate themselves by delivering a retail environment that more directly meets the needs of their customers (MASSARA; Liu; MELARA, 2010). The atmosphere created by retail is an essential strategic variable (TURLEY; CHEBAT,2002) that can and should be used with greater intensity by retail.

It was found that stores in the same sector, even meeting a profile close to the public, manage their store atmosphere differently, and this environment can be more or less stimulated. Some environments may be making strategic factors of differentiation of the store. Due to the evidence observed in this research, it is believed that it is essential to make explicit the formator variables of the store atmosphere so that retail can analyze the different stimuli more strategically

and holistically. When retail focuses on the factors that shape pleasurable experiences for its customers, thus understanding what has value for them, there is the construction of a competitive advantage that is difficult to copy.

Stimuli can provide valuable experiences depending on the purchase trip's orientation, whether hedonic or utilitarian. The environments stimulated for an experience where hedonic values are sought show less dependence on low prices and promotions because the experience at the time of purchase composes the delivery of the product, which is not only formed by the good (product) but also by the service provided by retail, among them the atmosphere of the store. The results suggest that the experiential value created by stores with more stimulated purchasing environments mainly influences the attraction of the store entrance, the time that the customer invests for the time of purchase, and the pleasure he has during this process.

As the atmosphere is a determining variable in the formation of the shopping experience, we can conclude that its stimuli are relevant in creating value for the customer who wants to purchase a product in the physical store environment. Because success strategies are customer-centric ones, it is also believed that it is necessary to consider the value to the customer as an essential variable when building or evaluating a store atmosphere. This study sought to contribute, first by the organization of concepts in retail and especially the atmosphere, as well as with the field study establishing a relationship between theory and practice that may be useful for both academics and practitioners.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Because it is qualitative research covering only three stores, the main limitation is the result's non-representativeness and, consequently the impossibility of generalizing the results. Furthermore, because it is the observation method, where all the physical evidence observed is recorded, the collection and interpretation of the data may be the subject of bias by the researchers, who sought the support of a very detailed research protocol to minimize this limitation and avoid the analysis by judgment. As a complement to this research, it would be appropriate to evaluate the impact of the store atmosphere on the customer through direct interviews. A study on the value of the store atmosphere to the customer could be complemented by mapping the value-generating attributes of customers. An attractive methodology for identifying the relevance of each attribute

is the Laddering technique, which demonstrates its usefulness in developing an understanding of how consumers translate attributes into significant associations and values (REYNOLDS; GUTMAN, 1988).

For future research on the subject, there is the opportunity to analyze the store's atmosphere using the concepts of semiotics, which are still little used in this context and can be of significant contribution to understanding the feelings and emotions evoked by the store. Another factor that could be investigated in greater depth is the influence of the store's atmosphere on buying behavior, the increase of the average ticket, and impulse purchases. From a managerial point of view, it would be relevant to understand the stage of retail development concerning the design of strategies of the store atmosphere and whether there is a concern in understanding the needs of the customer in the construction of the plans. From the point of view of brand image, one can evaluate the influence of the store's atmosphere on the formation of the retail brand. Another opportunity is to understand how the store atmosphere can differentiate physical stores from digital retail. That is, in this context of competition between channels, the shopping experience, and the store atmosphere can be a factor that prevents migration between channels. With the relevance identified on the subject and the breadth of research possibilities, it is believed that the retail atmosphere will increasingly be a vital topic for those interested in the retail area.

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