



The restorative potential of shopping malls



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ABSTRACT

This article illustrates that shopping centres can promote individual and societal well-being by offering shoppers restorative servicescapes. The study links attention restoration theory to biophilic store design, thus merging greenery with physical environments, such as urban shopping centres. To date, natural and environmental psychologists have empirically explored the positive impact of green areas on human mental and physical health. This article expands on these findings and shows that shopping centres that incorporate green elements into retailing areas may promote good health. In a mall shopping centre possessing restorative qualities, similar to natural settings, the study empirically demonstrates that shoppers who perceive restorative qualities hold favourable attitudes and exhibit positive behaviours towards the shopping centre. Theoretical and practical implications for enclosed malls are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Marketing academics tend to consider the concept of place as a tactical, marketing-mix tool that includes corporate activities to make available products to target consumers at specific locales (Armstrong and Kotler, 2015). On the one hand, many places in the commercial realm are inert and homogeneous points of exchange that serve simply to facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers (Sherry, 2000). On the other hand, some places in both the commercial and non-profit realms have the potential to transform and promote human well-being (Anderson et al., 2013; Frumkin, 2003), usually by serving as natural forums for their customers' social relationships, or place-based communities (Fournier and Lee, 2009; Meshram and O'Cass, 2013) that facilitate the exchange of life-enhancing social supportive resources (Rosenbaum, 2008). Indeed, social psychological literature provides compelling evidence that social network involvement is positively linked to health and well-being across an individual's life span (Rook, 2015). Thus, healthy places exist in the commercial realm.

To date, marketing researchers (Kang and Ridgway, 1996; Rosenbaum et al., 2007) have tended to draw on psychological theories of social support (Cohen and Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988)

to show how some commercial establishments, such as diners, fitness clubs, video arcades, and other so-called "third places" (McGinnis et al., 2008; Meshram and O'Cass, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2008), may enhance consumer well-being by providing particular venues that encourage meaningful social interaction between and among customers and employees (Nicholls, 2010). Other service researchers (Rosenbaum and Smallwood, 2011; Rosenbaum and Wong, 2015), adhering to the burgeoning transformative research paradigm (Ostrom et al., 2015), have drawn on attention restoration theory (ART), a seminal theory in natural psychology (Berman et al., 2012; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995) and environmental psychology (Korpela et al., 2001), to show that physical stimuli present in some settings can support customers' mental health and overall well-being. In essence, marketing researchers have used ART to suggest that built servicescapes can offer consumers the same health benefits as natural settings, or so-called wilderness servicescapes (Arnould et al. 1998).

Although researchers know a great deal about the positive impact of natural landscapes on restoring human mental and overall health (Velarde et al., 2007), considerably less is known about the restorative impact of commercial landscapes that purposefully incorporate natural elements into their built environments, or servicescapes, with the intention of appealing to consumers. The purpose of this article is to address this void by achieving two objectives.

First, this research builds on recent findings in the services marketing domain by drawing on ART to empirically demonstrate

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that shopping malls may enhance customers' well-being by incorporating natural green spaces and places for social interactions and relaxation (e.g., comfortable benches, seating, tables) into the physical design. Although environmental psychologists have speculated about the restorative potential of shopping mall, this article empirically tests this speculation—shopping centres that incorporate green elements into their physical designs may be idyllic settings for promoting shoppers' well-being.

Second, this article breaks new ground in the transformative service research paradigm by linking restorative shopping centres to managerially relevant outcomes, including customer satisfaction, intention to recommend the mall to others (positive word of mouth [WOM]), loyalty, Net Promoter Score, and monetary expenditures. In particular, this work demonstrates that mall landscaping, green efforts, and furniture that encourages socialization and relaxation not only facilitate perceptions of the restorative qualities of the mall but also create a shopper segment that rewards the mall for its cathartic qualities by exhibiting favourable behaviours and holding positive attitudes towards the mall. Thus, in incorporating such designs, mall developers may encourage shoppers to patronise their malls, help shoppers restore their mental health, and, ultimately, realise profitability.

The plan for the article is as follows: First, we review the ART literature to discuss its background and its place in the marketing domain of shopping malls. This discussion leads us to propose research hypotheses that inextricably link ART with managerially relevant outcomes. Second, to explore the research hypotheses, we undertake survey research with respondents from one of the largest malls in South America, which has recently incorporated restorative qualities into its shopping environment. Third, we conclude the article with theoretical and managerial implications and research limitations. Overall, this research extends the marketing discipline's understanding of why some commercial servicescapes (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011) seem to enhance well-being; that is, some shopping centres may be important venues not only for bringing sellers and buyers together but also for promoting shoppers' mental well-being.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Both academic research and popular press are replete with articles that discuss the so-called greening of shopping centres and the incorporation of natural elements, such as water fountains and aquariums, into retail shopping areas, most notably lifestyle centres, which cater to upper-income shoppers (Yan and Eckman, 2009). Furthermore, marketing researchers have recently advanced the concept of biophilic store design (Bregman et al., 2012; Joye et al., 2010) to show that consumers are innately drawn to in-store and out-of-store greenery.

More specifically, many mall developers and retailers are actively integrating nature into the design of their retail environments because research confirms that greenery and the addition of natural elements into physical retail servicescapes enhance shoppers' moods, encourage them to spend more time and money (Bregman et al., 2012), and prompt their future patronage intentions (Mower et al., 2012). For example, both the Dubai Mall, located in the United Arab Emirates, and the Great Lakes Crossing Outlets, located outside Detroit, installed aquariums to stimulate shoppers' senses and to encourage positive shopping behaviours.

To understand why shoppers universally tend to be attracted to biophilic store design, we draw on ART, whose origins come from James (1892), who postulated that people use two types of attention when they respond to environmental stimuli: involuntary and voluntary. James speculated that involuntary attention is reflexive, enables people to be in a passive state, and requires little

effort or will to remain in an attentive state. That is, involuntary attention is automatic and thus is not intentional and does not require personal effort (Kaplan, 2001).

By contrast, voluntary attention enables people to focus on unpleasant but nonetheless important stimuli, such as concentrating on work despite being constantly interrupted or caring for a sick loved one; it requires usage of an internal mechanism and corresponding resources that may become depleted over time (Kaplan, 1995). Voluntary attention is believed to be integral to a person's mental health, enabling the person to engage in self-regulation (e.g., self-control) and to successfully execute functioning tasks, such as the ability to undertake work-related activities (Kaplan and Berman, 2010).

A key concept of ART is that directed attention allows people to be selective in what they focus on in thought and perception and that depletion of this mechanism, which facilitates directed attention, constitutes substantial impairments of their mental competency and self-regulation abilities (Kaplan, 2001). As a result of depleting internal resources that facilitate voluntary attention, people may experience directed attention fatigue, which causes them to experience feelings associated with 'mental burnout', irritability, depression, stress, inability to concentrate, and even aggression. Furthermore, ART views directed attention as a global inhibitory mechanism; resultantly, fatigue from one task, which depletes a person's ability to focus attention, transfers to other tasks that also require directed attention (Kaplan, 2001).

Although the negative symptoms associated with directed attention fatigue can be extreme, ART posits that people possess an innate means to recover from it and to regain their ability to focus on unpleasant stimuli in the future—namely, by spending time in restorative environments. When people are immersed in restorative environments, they use involuntary attention, thus helping them heal from the fatigue caused by demands requiring voluntary or directed attention (Berman et al., 2008; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989).

Although natural and environmental psychologists emphasise the restorative potential of natural settings, such as parks, beaches, and green areas (Berto, 2005; Herzog et al., 2002), marketing researchers have also shown that any built environment, including commercial and non-profit servicescapes (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Rosenbaum and Wong, 2015), has the potential to promote human restoration, as long as it contains environmental characteristics, or servicescape stimuli, that encourage the healing process. Thus, service organisations may assume a key role in promoting human health.

2.1. Qualities of restorative places

According to ART, environments with particular characteristics possess restorative qualities that may help people recover from fatigued or depleted directed attention. Environmental psychologists have shown that restorative environments should have four characteristics: fascination, a sense of being away, extent, and compatibility (for reviews, see Felsten (2009); Ivarsson and Hagerhall (2008); Kaplan (1995)). Fascination refers to environmental stimuli that have fascinating qualities and do not require mental effort to absorb. A sense of being away refers to people's feelings that they are 'in another place' from their everyday locale, whether actual or imaginary. Extent provides people with the feeling of being in a place large enough that no boundaries are evident. Last, compatibility refers to how well the content of a specific environmental supports the needs and inclinations of the user.

Although these four restorative qualities are sound, environmental researchers have modified the concept of 'extent' to capture environmental qualities of both coherence and scope (Ivarsson and Hagerhall, 2008; Korpela and Hartig, 1996). Coherence

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