

The emotional power of place: The fall and rise of dominance in retail research

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Abstract

This paper elucidates the relevance of dominance to consumer behavior and marketing management, particularly, retail marketing. Emotions are central to the actions of consumers and managers alike Bagozzi, R.P., Gopinath, M., Nyer, P.U., 1999. The role of emotion in marketing. *Academy of Marketing Science Journal* 27(2), 184–206] and therefore they are vital to our understanding of consumers. On the premise that emotions trigger buying responses [e.g., Gardner, M.P., 1985. Mood states and consumer behavior: a critical review. *Journal of consumer research* 12, 281–300; Hill, R.P., Gardner, M.P., 1987. The buying process: effects of and on consumer mood states. *Advances in Consumer Research* 14, 408–410], marketers place a great deal of importance on the effects of various stimuli on the behavior of consumers in retail settings. According to the PAD model [Mehrabian, A., Russell, J.A., 1974. *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA], pleasure, arousal and dominance are the three basic emotional dimensions, which summarize the emotion-eliciting qualities of environments and mediate approach–avoidance behavior in them. While the role of pleasure and arousal is well established in the literature, the role of dominance has been downplayed in previous research, particularly in retail settings. A critical review of the literature including findings from recent studies conducted in England and Venezuela show that dominance is as legitimate an environmental descriptor as pleasure and arousal. Consequently, the paper discusses the implications of ignoring this distinct emotion for consumer behavior and marketing management, and especially retail marketing. © 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Dominance; PAD; Consumer behavior

Marketing folklore suggests that emotion can stimulate buying interest, guide choices, arouse buying intentions, and influence future buying decisions. All these popular beliefs about the power of emotion have received research support.

(O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003, p. 3)

1. Introduction

The importance of atmospherics to the execution of retail marketing strategies has been emphasized by Kotler (1973/4) among others. Atmospherics are the elements of a retail environment that engender emotional reactions in prospective consumers, encouraging them to remain in the

store setting, browse, evaluate and purchase, or—when atmospherics are deficient—discouraging any of these activities. When they are appropriately managed, these aspects of retail design influence consumer behavior by commanding attention, by conveying a store image and expectations of level of service to potential buyers.

Among the techniques which researchers have employed to explore how atmospherics influence consumer behavior at retail, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) approach to environmental psychology has been well represented in consumer research. Indeed, over the last two decades, consumer and marketing researchers have applied their psychometric scales for the measurement of *pleasure*, *arousal* and *dominance* (PAD) in studies of purchasing and consumption, particularly as they occur in retail settings (e.g., Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Donovan et al., 1994; Sherman et al., 1997) and airport settings (Newman, 1997). Researchers have employed Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) model under the

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assumption that pleasure, arousal and dominance, the three emotional responses, mediate actual consumer behavior such as desire to affiliate with others in the setting, desire to stay in or escape from the setting, willingness to spend time and money, and to consume.

The *pleasure* (pleasure-displeasure) dimension ranges from happiness to unhappiness. *Arousal* (arousal-non-arousal) denotes a combination of physical activity and mental alertness ranging from sleepy to frantic. The *dominance* (dominance-submissiveness) dimension ranges from extreme feelings of lack of control or influence upon one's surroundings to feelings of being influential and powerful, or in control. Russell and Mehrabian (1977) showed these *three* orthogonal dimensions to be both necessary and sufficient for the description of any emotional state. Mehrabian (1995b, p. 353) conducted research for additional development and refinement of the PAD scales. The final results showed a 16-item State pleasure, a 9-item state arousal, and a 9-item state dominance. Compared to the original 6-item PAD scales (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), the refined PAD scales have 16 more items, 10 for pleasure, 3 for arousal and 3 for dominance, and have higher alpha reliabilities coefficients: .97, .89 and .80 versus .81, .50 and .72, respectively (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974, p. 46). There was a $-.04$ correlation between pleasure and Arousal, a .02 correlation between pleasure and dominance and zero correlation between arousal and dominance showing the nearly orthogonal relationship between the three factors.¹

Donovan et al. (1994) used the PAD model to measure shoppers' emotions during the shopping experience. The significance of their study lies in that it showed how the impact of the emotional variables on store behavior was independent of cognitive variables, such as perceptions of quality and price. The findings confirmed that pleasure could predict consumer behavior such as extra time spent in the store and unplanned purchasing, and arousal could predict underspending in unpleasant store environments. However, the authors failed to measure dominance, deleting it due to lack of support for this variable in their earlier study (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982) in which half the items in the original scale were replaced by ad hoc items.

In line with the work of Russell and Pratt (1980), Donovan and Rossiter (1982), Donovan et al. (1994),

Sherman et al. (1997) did not include dominance in their model, but showed that pleasure was associated with the amount spent and affinity for the store, while arousal was associated with money and time spent in the store, and the number of items purchased in the store. By contrast, work by Foxall (1997), Foxall and Greenley (1998), Soriano et al. (2002) found distinct support for the role of dominance as an influence on consumer behavior. Their findings showed that while pleasure and arousal discriminate between operant classes of consumer behavior according to where they are predicted to be high or low, dominance discriminates between open and closed consumer behavior settings as proposed by the Behavioral Perspective Model, BPM (Foxall, 1990).

This paper aims to critically assess both research where dominance did not seem to work and therefore was deleted from the original PAD scales, and research where dominance is shown to be working. The objective of this analysis is to answer the question of whether dominance is a valid emotional dimension and, if so, what are the implications of ignoring it for consumer research in retail settings.

2. The emotional dimensions

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed simple self-report measures of the emotional dimensions: pleasure, arousal, and dominance by using questionnaire studies in which subjects described a variety of situations using semantic differential type scales. They proposed the theory that physical or social stimuli in the environment directly affect the emotional state of an individual, thereby influencing his behaviors in it. The authors conducted three comprehensive studies obtaining results which were consistent along the three studies. In all these studies three factors emerged: Factor 1 (pleasure) accounted for 27% of the total variance, Factor 2 (arousal) accounted for 23%, of the total variance and Factor 3 (dominance) accounted for 14% of the total variance in approach–avoidance. These factors constitute the PAD scales Mehrabian and Russell defined as the three basic emotional dimensions, which summarize the emotion-eliciting qualities of environments and mediate a variety of approach–avoidance behaviors such as preference, exploration, affiliation, and work performance. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) showed that these basic dimensions were similar to those obtained from earlier studies of verbal cues by Osgood et al. (1957): evaluation (pleasure), activity (arousal), and potency (dominance). Pleasure, arousal, and dominance are conceptualized as follows:

Pleasure. Pleasure-displeasure is a feeling state that can be assessed readily with self-report, such as semantic differential measures or with behavioral indicators, such as smiles, laughter, and, in general positive versus negative facial expressions.

Arousal. Arousal is a feeling state varying along a single dimension ranging from sleep to frantic excitement.

¹Mehrabian has undertaken substantial refinement of the PAD scales so that three sets can be distinguished. The original "PAD₇₄" scales dating from the work with Russell (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) were revised by Mehrabian (1978) and Mehrabian (1995a–c). The first of these remain in the public domain are the most widely used. Although the post-1974 scales exhibit increasing psychometric usefulness, the original scales correlate sufficiently highly with them to ensure their continuing validity and reliability. (PAD₇₄ scales correlate .64 (P), .40 (A) and .60 (D) with the PAD₇₈ scales (Mehrabian 1978, 1980, p. 51). PAD₇₈ scales correlate .96 ($p < .01$), .67 ($p < .01$) and .86 ($p < .01$) respectively with the PAD₉₅ scales (Mehrabian, 1995a–c, p. 356). Although the latest scales are undoubtedly higher in construct validity and reliability than the earlier ones, there is sufficient consistency to make it worthwhile to draw conclusions based on the almost universally used 1974 scales.

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