



Consumer perception and behavior in the retail foodscape—A study of chilled groceries



Ulla Lindberg^{a,b,*}, Nicklas Salomonson^c, Malin Sundström^a, Karin Wendin^{d,e}

^a SIIR (Swedish Institute for Innovative Retailing), University of Borås, Sweden 501 90 Borås, Sweden

^b RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, Department of Built Environment-Energy and Circular Economy, P.O. Box 857, 501 15 Borås, Sweden

^c University of Borås, Department of Business Administration and Textile Management, and SIIR (Swedish Institute for Innovative Retailing), Borås, Sweden

^d Kristianstad University, Kristianstad, Sweden

^e University of Copenhagen, Denmark

1. Introduction

In the retail grocery business, new competitors such as pure e-commerce players are growing fast, and, in order to compete, ‘brick and mortar’ stores such as supermarkets need to become more professional at providing excellent customer service, and to use the physical servicescape as the main competitive advantages. However, supermarkets also face a challenge to offer consumers high quality products while at the same time providing a pleasant and functional servicescape. Products like groceries often need to be stored in cabinets due to strict regulations and in order to maintain correct temperatures. Some of these cabinets have doors which make them more energy-efficient (Evans et al., 2007; Faramarzi et al., 2002), reduces costs, and contributes to grocery quality, but it can also affect the perceived servicescape, and risk a negative impact on sales (Waide, 2014; Kauffeld, 2015). For example, moisture from the atmosphere that condenses on the inside of the door glass (Fricke and Bansal, 2015) may make the cabinets less transparent, and doors can obstruct consumers from passing by. Thus, having chilled groceries in cabinets with doors can be both beneficial and problematic. However, no studies have been conducted on how open (no doors) or closed (with doors) cabinets for chilled groceries impact consumer perception and behavior. Hence, the purpose of the study is to contribute to an understanding of how consumers behave and what they perceive when shopping chilled groceries from cabinets with doors and without doors in the supermarket.

Based on a qualitative research approach, combining in-store observations and focus group interviews, and focusing on Bitner's (1992) three environmental variables in the servicescape, i.e. (1) ambient condition, (2) space and functions, and (3) signs, symbols and artifacts, the study investigates the question: do open or closed cabinets for chilled groceries in the supermarket impact consumer perception and behavior, and if so, how?

Our results indicate that consumers' behavior and perceptions of the foodscape differ when there are doors or no doors on the cabinets. The paper thereby contributes to servicescape research by focusing on a

particular part of supermarkets – the foodscape for chilled groceries—and by enhancing the understanding of environmental variables in the servicescape. The results further show how doors lead to different forms of approach or avoidance behavior in terms of accessibility and that consumers' vision, olfaction and tactility all influence consumers' perceptions of freshness and cleanliness in relation to doors or no doors. Our results also have practical implications for retailers who are designing new stores or considering changes in existing store layouts.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to understand how consumers behave and what they perceive in front of cabinets for chilled groceries, we elaborate on the term servicescape and its different dimensions.

2.1. Servicescape and environmental dimensions

The term servicescape, as a concept, was coined by Bitner (1992) and based on the idea of Booms and Bitner, p. 36) (1982) as: “[...] the environment in which the service is assembled and in which seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service”. Bitner (1992) describes the servicescape as a complex mix of three environmental dimensions that influence consumers' and employees' responses and behaviors: ambient conditions (temperature, air quality, noise, music, odor etc.), space/function (layout, equipment, furnishing, products etc.), and signs, symbols and artifacts (signage, personal artifacts, style of decor etc.). The dimensions of the physical surroundings thus consist of both tangible and intangible features which jointly include “[...] all of the objective physical factors that can be controlled by the firm to enhance (or constrain) employee and customer actions (Bitner, 1992, p. 65).

The servicescape is important in retail settings. It has the ability to influence responses and behaviors (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Gilboa and Rafaei, 2003; Mari and Poggese, 2013; Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Wakefield and Baker, 1998), and has generally been used in order to

* Corresponding author at: SIIR (Swedish Institute for Innovative Retailing), University of Borås, Sweden 501 90 Borås, Sweden.
E-mail addresses: ulla.lindberg@ri.se, ulla.lindberg@hb.se (U. Lindberg).

understand the overall consumer experience (Reimer and Kuehn, 2005). Within the servicescape, different variables interact, variables such as ambience (e.g. light, music, scent, color, cleanliness), space/function variables (wait expectations, shelf space, product display, power aisle, layout, flooring), and signs, symbols, and artifacts (Mari and Poggesi, 2013), in order to contribute toward a positive experience. The servicescape as a concept has also been used to understand congruity, interaction between two environmental cues, and multiple cues effects with more complex effects. As argued by Ezeh and Harris (2007), research into the effects of servicescape on consumers is sizeable, but there is still a lack of empirical research addressing the role of the different types of servicescape (Chebat and Dubé, 2000; Cronin, 2003; Hoffman and Turley, 2002; Kearney et al., 2013; Wakefield and Blodgett, 2016), especially in the grocery retail context. Recent research has addressed this need by studying, for example, virtual servicescapes (Mari and Poggesi, 2013), e-servicescapes (Hopkins et al., 2009), leisure servicescapes (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996, 2016), and on-line servicescapes (Harris and Goode, 2010). In this paper, we apply the servicescape within the context of grocery retailing, focusing on open or closed cabinets for chilled groceries.

2.2. Foodscape

When applying the servicescape concept in the supermarket we find it necessary to adjust the concept for this special environment and define it as foodscape. Several researchers have used the term foodscape, but not in order to describe the grocery retail atmosphere. Instead, it is used in order to understand and describe food across urban spaces and institutional settings (Winson, 2004; Yasmeen, 1996), using the geographic and sociological literature on the landscape (e.g. Mitchell, 2001; Zukin, 1991). In our study, the foodscape is built based on the fundamental ideas of Bitner (1992), including tangible and non-tangible variables in the service settings of grocery retail. In order to help consumers find the groceries they want, retailers often display these in different categories (Briesch et al., 2009). This leads to an in-store environment full of information that consumers need to navigate through. Research has also shown that consumers within the fixed store setting are easily affected by external stimuli such as attractive offerings, exposure, and price discounts (Grewal et al., 1996, 1998), as well as internal stimuli such as hunger, feelings, and stress (Mela et al., 1996). In order to enhance our understanding of consumer behavior and perceptions in the chilled grocery sections of the retail foodscape, we focus on the specific characteristics of the atmosphere where consumers select and pick chilled groceries from refrigerated displays, either with or without doors.

This part of the foodscape is characterised by a high level of self-service (Shaw et al., 2004) and by a wide-range of groceries (Briesch et al., 2009), of which several are displayed subject to specific temperature requirements which affect accessibility. The design, display, and shelves for the refrigerated cabinets of the chilled groceries differ in comparison with how other product categories in the foodscape are displayed. For example, due to interactions between the ambient environment and the cold air in the display cabinet, it is common for consumers to experience coldness (Lindberg, 2009).

2.2.1. Perception

The interpretation of sensory information is often the driver of the purchase (Swahn et al., 2012; Imram, 1999). Previous studies (e.g. Spence et al., 2014) highlight the need for further research that addresses the sensory aspects; i.e. how the multisensory retail environment shapes consumers' perception and shopping behaviors. All five of our senses, i.e. vision, hearing, olfaction, touch, and taste (Stone and Sidel, 2004) provide perception data. Ambient cues can be visual (e.g. color and lighting), often directly affecting our immediate impressions (Lawless and Heymann, 2010; Spence et al., 2014). Vision is the most important sense when humans perceive their environment (Lawless and

Heymann, 2010), but also the auditory experience from e.g. noise and background music is important (Andersson et al., 2012; Hynes and Manson, 2016; Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Milliam, 1982, 1986), as these senses might affect the perception of service and the intention to purchase (Morin et al., 2007; Sweeney and Wyber, 2002). The effects of scent or smell on the consumer may also occur and, based on results from studies with inspectors investigating odors in the home, research shows that olfaction serves as a cue for healthiness and freshness of the indoor environment for home buildings (Hägerhed-Engman et al., 2009). Humans often find it difficult to identify scents by name (Cain et al., 1998; Herz and Engen, 1996; Schab and Crowder, 1995), but are able to distinguish between different scents that have previously been smelt, even after long periods of time (Schab and Crowder, 1995).

From the foodscape perspective, chilled groceries are mostly in packages, making it difficult to smell them. Tactility and touch both constitute an important but, perhaps, underutilized aspect of the foodscape which also includes temperature, e.g. people's comfort, even though in-store temperature has prompted relatively little research (Spence et al., 2014). Refrigerated cabinets without doors have been linked to low levels of human comfort (Lindberg, 2009), due to interactions between the cold interior of the cabinet and the ambient environment. Lindberg (2009) studied thermal comfort in the foodscape, concluding that temperature can be uncomfortable for consumers in the foodscape, especially in the chilled food sections.

2.2.2. Behavior

Retailers might use the tangible environment, including doors or cabinets for chilled groceries, in order to control behavior (Bitner, 1992). Environmental psychologists suggest that individuals react to tangible environments using two general, and opposing, forms of behavior: i.e. approach and/or avoidance (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974). Approach involves the desire to stay, explore and affiliate with others in the environment (Booms and Bitner, 1982), whereas avoidance includes 'escaping' from the environment and ignoring the communication attempts of others (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). The foodscape also provides cues regarding the experience in combination with other tangibles, i.e. interior, point of purchase, and decoration variables (Aubert-Gamet, 1997; Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; Baker, 1987; Bitner, 1992; Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Sundaram and Webster, 2000; Sweeney and Wyber, 2002). The physical environment thus affects consumers' perceptions and their behaviors.

Some studies have noted the importance of person-environment interactions that influence shopping behaviors, i.e. regarding location, design, layout and display in-store beyond the core product and, for instance, the emotional states of pleasure and arousal (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Donovan et al., 1994; Markin et al., 1976; Kotler, 1973; Spence et al., 2014). This impacts service (Park et al., 1989) and quality (Mägi and Julander, 1996) in the retail atmosphere.

Retailers are continuously developing their foodscapes to meet different demands and requirements, even though differences between 'scapes' are sometimes hard to reconcile. These differences can be reduced if groceries are verbally described, e.g. using a sign or a poster, compensating for the lack of touch (Peck and Childers, 2003a, 2003b). Sensitive food with thermal storage requirements is usually displayed in refrigerated cabinets, and located in certain areas where design and layout differ (Lindberg, 2009; Ruud and Lindberg, 2015).

3. Method

This study is theoretically designed based on Bitner (1992) and her research on environmental dimensions, where we include specific variables that influence consumers' behaviors. Regarding data collection we used a combination of research approaches consisting of in-store observations and focus group interviews. The focus group interviews were semi-structured and the questions were based on the results from the observations.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5111201>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5111201>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)