



Engaging consumer through the storefront: Evidences from integrating interactive technologies



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ABSTRACT

Although previous studies identified the importance of storefront windows on consumer's entry decision, there is still a lack of research on engaging consumers at the storefront through the integration with interactive technologies.

The purpose of this study is to carry out an exploratory investigation into the consumers preference for a certain store based on the storefront windows (in terms of entry decision), with emphasis on the current most attractive interactive technologies. Thus, we examine the extent to which an exploratory sample of consumers is influenced by storefront interactive technologies.

Emotional aspects emerge as the most influencing ones in the case of traditional storefronts, while both emotional and functional aspects emerge as the most influencing factors while considering the integration of interactive technologies. In particular, our results shed light on the way these elements can be managed for the design of future attractive storefront windows, by providing important insights for scholars and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Prior studies figured out the importance of exterior store atmospherics with emphasis on the storefront windows on consumers behaviour (Sen et al., 2002; Cornelius et al., 2010; Oh and Petrie, 2012; Jain et al., 2014). These represent the first contact point between consumer and retailer, while it is able to persuade consumers to enter the store and subsequently purchase (Jain et al., 2014). Hence, in a short time these visual elements need to (i) create a visual impact, (ii) differentiate retailers from other competitors, and (iii) anticipate a further exceptional experience in the store.

Moreover, changes in consumer demand, and the availability of innovations for enhancing retail process including new interactive tools for supporting shopping experience may affect consumers' preferences of a certain store, which in turn pushes marketers to understand the extent to which consumer's behaviour towards retailers varies as a function of different characteristics (Jain et al., 2014; Pantano, 2014). For instance, in the last decades a huge number of points of sale changed their format and layout, service offer, and delivering modalities, by integrating advanced technologies with the promise of superior shopping experiences (Kourouthanassis et al., 2007; Papagiannidis et al., 2013; Ngo and O'Cass, 2013; Rese et al., 2014). As a consequence, there was a shift from

traditional points of sale with basic service functions to technology-based services, under the principle that the combination of technological, interactive and entertaining technologies would attract more consumers (Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Pantano and Viassone, 2015). In fact, offering more services while enriching the traditional ones may induce consumers to engage more purchases in stores. To achieve this goal, few retailers recently introduced some interactive technological elements within the storefront window for a trial period, such as Lacoste and Kate Spade. In particular, for celebrating the 80th anniversary, the first one introduced an interactive sculpture on the storefront window at the 5th Avenue, New York, consisting of 50 tennis balls attached to a stepper motor, while the motion tracking camera (located within the window) tracked the movement of pedestrians as they walked, and moved the tennis balls accordingly, to catch consumers interest and invite them to enter the store. Similarly, another interactive storefront concept has been tested in July 2013 in New York by the partnership between eBay and Kate Spade, which allowed consumers to select and buy anytime products of the brand through the touch screen located within one of the 4 storefronts window who introduced the technology. Thus, customers were able to choose among 30 different products available, while new products have been added each Saturday during the opening hours of the store. Another example set in October 2014 in Italy, when the Italian Luxury Department store, *LaRinascente*, launched innovative mannequins in Milan for the brand Moschino. These new mannequins consisted of a screen (based on three-message

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trivision sign) displaying the virtual image of the 3 different clothes, which in turn changed in order to frequently provide mannequins wearing new clothes, while the “head” was a traditional mannequin head. These changes in storefront were able to catch pedestrians' attention.

Despite the increasing interest of scholars and practitioners towards the power of storefront and the enhancements prompt by new technologies (Paradiso and Leo, 2005; Reitberg et al., 2009; Dennis et al., 2010; Oh and Petrie, 2012; Jain et al., 2014), a comprehensive view of the advantages of the introduction of interactive technologies and related services directly at the storefront window is still missing.

The aim of this study is to examine consumers' store choice based on the storefront windows, with emphasis on the integration with interactive technologies available directly from the storefront. The study focuses on the Italian context, involving a sample of 52 consumers.

The reminder of this paper is organised as follows. First, we summarise prior studies on consumers' preference of storefront window and discuss the importance of entry decision. Next, we outline the design of our experiments, followed by a discussion of the sample and data collection. Then, we provide details of the set elements emerging as the most influencing ones. This paper is completed with a discussion of the findings, and future research directions and implications for storefront design and development.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Store atmosphere and shopping behaviour

Store environment is able to solicit consumers' emotional response, by affecting their purchasing decision making (Thang and Tan, 2003; Oh et al., 2008; Michon et al., 2005). In fact, the physical surroundings stimulate either positive or negative behaviours within the shopping environment, in terms of time spent, amount of purchases, positive word-of-mouth, loyalty to retailer and brand, etc. Hence, creating a pleasant store atmosphere plays a key role in the development of the most efficient retail strategies (Thang and Tan, 2003; Pantano, 2014; Poncin and Mimoun, 2014).

Baker (1986) classified these elements into three main groups: ambient factors, design factors and social factors. Ambient factors consist of the conditions of the store, including non-visual elements such as music, lights, scent, temperature (Chebat et al., 2001; Dube and Morin, 2001; Michon et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2008). Design factors includes store architecture, dimension, layout, product display, colours, style, etc., (Thang and Tan, 2003; Kent and Kirby, 2009; Kirby and Kent, 2010; Paswan et al., 2010). While social factors refer to the people within the store, including the number salespersons (if limited consumers may perceive an inadequate access to service encounters), number of consumers, behaviour of salespersons (Michon et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2008; Noon and Mattila, 2009). In particular, the high number of consumers, perceived as crowding, might discourage consumers to continue the activity, by soliciting negative feelings towards the human density. The crowded store environment results from a limited human space, scarcity of merchandise allocation, and insufficient floor layout design, with negative consequences on clients' satisfaction and purchase intentions (Li et al., 2009; Noon and Mattila, 2009; Lee et al., 2011).

The introduction of advanced technologies might improves the physical store features, by enhancing product display, location, information access, purchase modalities, etc. (Papagiannidis et al., 2013; Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Poncin and Mimoun, 2014; Baek et al., 2015). Examples include self-checkout cash desks at

groceries, informative touch screen displays in large department stores for identifying and searching items in the stores, mobile apps providing a sort of shopping guide within the store, etc. In the one hand, these innovative systems enlarges the products offer; in the other one they while provide enriched information on the items, while evoking consumers' positive feelings (Dennis et al., 2010).

Starting from the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989) and its extension (Kim and Forsythe, 2009; Gross, 2015; Evanschitzky et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2015), the majority of the studies declined consumers acceptance of the technological innovations in retail settings as a consequence of perceived ease of use, usefulness, enjoyment, trust in the employed technology, etc. The above mentioned studies agreed on the possibility to influence consumer purchase behaviour through the store environment, referring to the interior variables (including atmosphere, enriched service prompted by technology, etc.), while the external ones, mainly devoted to the visual appeal of the storefront window, provides the first impression of the store and influence consumer entry decision (Oh and Petrie, 2012). Hence, the external atmosphere, with emphasis on the storefront window is still under investigated.

2.2. Storefront windows and consumer behaviour

Storefront windows are a powerful tool for communicating products and motivating consumers' to enter the store (Yildrin et al., 2007). This decision might be further influenced by need of collecting more information on products they saw on the window display or learning more about the sales and promotions announced there, etc. (Sen et al., 2002; Oh and Petrie, 2012).

Similar to the role of store atmospherics, effectiveness of a store window relies to the visual stimuli used to positively influence consumers' behaviour (Oh and Petrie, 2012; Kernsom and Sahachaisaeree, 2012). These stimuli involve (i) design elements, such as brightness, saturation, colour, light intensity, texture, shapes, textual style, and merchandise display; (ii) product and product positioning (including price); and (iii) window display style (including concept, content, season and product) (Oh and Petrie, 2012; Kernsom and Sahachaisaeree, 2012). Concerning the design elements, certain colours are able to solicit more positive feelings in consumers creating a particular mood potentially pushing consumers to make a purchase (Jain et al., 2014). For instance, before the Valentine's Day, the most of the stores are characterized by red colour, usually associate with the passion and love, inviting consumers to buy a Valentine's gift. Concerning the product and product positioning, products can be located in the centre of the display surrounded by other elements, or they can occupy only a limited part of the scene. Similarly, the price or details on price and promotion might be or not visible from the storefront. The right number of displayed information might solicit consumers attention without totally satisfying it, in order to influence their entry decision. Concerning the display style, windows often tend to reproduce the season, for instance in the winter time they tend to recreate winter and snowing scenarios, or in the Christmas time, they propose Christmas trees and other elements recalling the holiday.

Prior studies proposed a further classification of the window typologies, such as (i) the merchandise-one able to support *understating*, and the artistic one promotes the *exploration* (Oh and Petrie, 2012); (ii) the flat, arcade or corner window (Yildrim et al., 2007). The flat category consists of a straight line with the entrance aligned on this line, arcade category extends from the shop's entrance set back between two windows in order to increase the surface for showing products, whereas the third category is specifically employed for those stores located in corners; and (iii) the thematic and non-thematic based on the design (Oh

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