

EXPLORING NEW WAYS OF MARKETING IN RETAIL OUTLETS

Timea CISMA^{1,*}

¹ Politehnica University of Timisoara, Management Department, Romania

* Correspondence: timea.cisma@student.upt.ro

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the perspective of consumers at a retail institution with the objective of identifying new marketing methods. Consequently, a set of objectives was delineated. First, a comprehensive analysis was conducted on four pivotal environmental factors, namely ambient music, attractive plants, overall cleanliness, and ambient lighting, revealing their substantial impact on customer decision-making. Additionally, our objective was to ascertain the clients' perspective about the utilization of plants as a present technique. Plants have a favorable correlation and possess an inherent environmental attractiveness. By providing clients with a plant, retail enterprises may elicit a feeling of positivity and vitality, while also communicating a message that is in line with ecologically sustainable principles. Beyond that, our objective was to investigate the impact of plants' giving tactics on customer behavior. More precisely, our objective was to examine the impact of the variable on purchase intention, customer loyalty, customer attitude, and the likelihood of repeat patronage.

Keywords: advertising, retail outlet, gift strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

In highly competitive marketplaces, it is imperative for retailers to differentiate themselves from their competitors in order to gain a competitive advantage. Advertising plays a crucial role in enabling stores to establish a unique identity and distinguish themselves from their competitors. Beside it, ambient factors contribute to the collective ambiance and emotional state encountered by customers throughout their shopping experience (Izvercian & Ivascu, 2015).

Advertising, being a fundamental aspect of contemporary marketing, undergoes constant transformation in order to adapt to the dynamic

nature of consumer behaviours, technological progress, and cultural changes. In our study, we propose a new way of advertising, which is offering a plant as a gift. The objective of providing a gift is to incentivize customers to engage in desired actions by augmenting the perceived worth of the transaction. Plants have a positive association and an environmental appeal. Through the act of offering customers with a plant, retail establishments are able to evoke a sense of optimism and energy, while also conveying a message that aligns with environmentally conscious practices (Ardelean, 2021). Moreover, a living plant provides a tangible and lasting experience that can leave a positive impression.

The ambient details of a retail outlet are also a crucial element in the field of marketing. The function it assumes to mold the whole customer experience is of utmost importance, as it possesses the potential to significantly impact a consumer's opinion of a brand and their inclination to engage in a transaction. The sensory components of the physical surroundings contribute to the collective ambiance and emotional state encountered by customers all through their shopping experience (Ivascu et al., 2021; Sarfraz et al., 2021). These variables are of utmost importance in molding consumers' impressions, exerting influence on their behavior, and facilitating the creation of a memorable shopping experience. Ambient variables cover a range of sensory aspects that are perceptible to customers when entering a business, including visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli.

The goal of our study is to examine the perception of customers at a retail establishment with regards to ambient elements and the effectiveness of using plants as a gift advertising approach. Consequently, a collection of research questions was established:

RQ1: What are the significant environmental elements that influence consumer behavior.

in a retail setting?

RQ2: What is the view of customers about the approach of gifting plants?

RQ3: What is the impact of plants' gifting strategies on consumer behavior?

The present study is organized in the following manner: the subsequent section presents a comprehensive literature review, while the third section outlines the methodology employed in this study. This is followed by a detailed report of the findings in section four. Finally, section five presents the conclusion, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research endeavors.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The retail atmosphere is subject to several influences, including design, ambient and social considerations. There creates a notable positive link to the customer's behaviors. The climatic aspects of a store have the potential to impact not just the emotions of customers, but also their cognitive evaluations of the products and services being offered (H.-S. Chen & Hsieh, 2011). Without a doubt, beside the behavior, the environment in a store influence how the customer feels. Hence, environmental factors have influence on consumers' purchasing decisions (Triantafillidou et al., 2017). Significant retail characteristics are music, ambient fragrance, lighting and colors. The scent in commercial establishments should include qualities that are aesthetically beautiful and appealing to individuals of all genders. The cleanliness determines whether the customer will return or not to the store. Adequate illumination enhances the visibility of the items, while the music establishes a calming atmosphere (Hussain & Ali, 2015). All these environmental factors influence the customer's overall perception of the store, as well as the quality of the services and products provided (Nguyen & Nham, 2022).

Customer Loyalty can also be increased through the means of ambient. This relationship is dependent on the level of competitiveness in the market (Dragan et al., 2022). In a highly competitive segment such as retail outlet, customer loyalty is highly increased through the means of levelling up the environmental experience (S. C. Chen, 2015).

The role of advertising plays a critical role in the financial success of retail enterprises since it is influenced by several elements. In-store marketing methods serve as a means for retail establishments to distinguish themselves and attract customers amidst a wide range of available options. Creative in-store advertising influences the buyer's intention, effects attitude

towards the promoted brand, and ultimately impacts on attitude towards the advertised goods (Sameti & Khalili, 2017).

The core of advertising should be to increase customer value. Customer value comes in many forms and leads to various options that customers can choose from. Among these options, customers usually prefer to buy products or services that they believe give them the best value. One form of customer value creation is through the means of attractive gifts for frequent customers. When people think about different choices they have for their experiences as customers, and how they look for good experiences through different aspects of customer value, competition becomes an important factor in building customer loyalty by providing value (S.-C. Chen & Quester, 2005).

Gift-giving strategy falls under the broader umbrella of "Promotional Marketing", which involves using short-term incentives to drive consumer action. It has been found that consumers tend to appreciate gifts 2.4 times more than the projected cost of it. Also, men tend to exhibit a higher level of enthusiasm for gift things compared to women (Hudik et al., 2023). However, gift attractiveness is a driver of consumer's decision. Meaning that gifts have to be attractive, desired and offer a value to the customer (Buil et al., 2013).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research aims to investigate the customers' behavior in retail outlets. Therefore, a survey was conducted. The data was collected through the administration of an online questionnaire utilizing the Google Forms platform. The analysis of the data collected was conducted using a statistical tool.

The questionnaire was designed by keeping the three research questions in mind. At the beginning, our objective was to ascertain the individual's view on environmental elements that influence the customer's behavior, as well as

their perspective on plants as a gift advertising strategy. Following, our aim was to evaluate the impact of this approach on customer behavior. Therefore, we established a set of questions intended to comprehend the potential shift in consumer's purchase intention, attitude and loyalty resulting from the implementation of the advertising plan. In addition, we wanted to learn whether the consumer's likelihood of revisiting the retail outlet was influenced by the provision of the gift.

4 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 RQ1: What are important environmental factors for the customers in a retail outlet?

First, we want to find out which environmental factors are most important to consumers when they choose a retail outlet store. For this, we have selected some categories which influence the atmosphere. These are: ambient music, ornamental plants, general cleanliness, and ambient lighting (Table 1. Environmental factors in retail outlet).

Table 1. Environmental factors in retail outlet

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
indoor_music_mean	98	3.95	.619
indoor_plants_mean	100	3.93	.643
indoor_clean_mean	100	3.90	.653
indoor_light_mean	100	3.89	.540

We generated a total of 100 responses in all categories except for music, where we collected 98 responses. The arithmetic mean of the results is between 3.89 and 3.95 (3.89=Ambient Light, 3.90=Cleanliness, 3.93=Ornamental Plants, 3.95= Ambient Music), which shows us that all the analyzed categories are of great importance to the consumers of a retail outlet. To optimize the purchasing experience, it is advisable for the stores to take into account all of the

aforementioned factors (Table 1. Environmental factors in retail outlet).

Table 2. Customer perception towards natural plants

	N	Mean
The store setting is visually pleasing and desirable due to natural plants	100	4.10
I perceive the store as being comfortable in the presence of natural plantation	100	4.06
The aisle (passage way) designed with natural plants give pleasant sense of feeling to avoids shopping stress	100	3.96
I would like to visit the store because of green environment	100	3.87
A store layout with natural plants makes consumer able to spend more time in store to find desired products	100	3.86
Consumers could buy unplanned products if the store decorated with natural plants	100	3.73

Zooming in on the customer perception towards the present of natural plants in indoor retail outlets, we can see that the results indicate a positive impact on the visual aesthetics of the store. The responses mean regarding of how visually pleasing and desirable a store becomes due to natural plants is 4.10, which is very important. Also, the store gives a sense of comfort thanks to natural plants, with a mean of 4.06.

Moving on, respondents were asked if they feel that the feeling of shopping stress is reduced when the aisle is designed with natural plants. The response was positive, and the mean is 3.96.

In terms of customer perception, we asked our respondents to what extend would they like to visit a store due to its green environment, and

to what extent does an environment that contains ornamental plants contribute to the time they spend in the store, in order to find their desired products. The means of these scenarios are similar, 3.87 and 3.86 respectively. Being close to a mean of 4, this indicates again a positive outcome regarding customer behavior, and stores should take into consideration both.

Lastly, looking at the customer purchasing habits, we wanted to see whether customers are likely to make an unplanned purchase in a store decorated with natural plants. Surprisingly, customers believe that they are likely to make such a purchase, with a mean of 3.73 (Table 2. Customer perception towards natural plants).

Table 3. Customer perception towards store lightening

	N	Mean
The different lighting used in each area inside the store is important.	98	4.11
The lighting of the outlets makes things more visible and attractive to me.	98	4.05
The lighting in the area of products allows me to evaluate the quality of the product	98	4.03
Good colour of lighting attracts me towards products.	98	3.96
The lighting in the outlets is pleasing to the eyes, and makes me to stay more.	98	3.73

Moving on, we wanted to find out to what extent does lighting affect customer behavior in an outlet retail store. For the first question, we observed whether it is important for stores to have different lighting in each area inside the store, or if they should have a general global light.

Out of 98 total responses, we see that people prefer to have different lighting used across areas in the store, with a mean of 4.11. Moreover, customers believe that lighting can

make different outlet products become more visible and attractive to them, the mean here being 4.05.

It is shown here that lighting also has an effect on evaluating the perceived quality of a product. Results show a mean of 4.03 regarding this matter, and a mean of 3.96 when asked if lighting attracts them towards a given product.

Lastly, with a mean of 3.73, customers revealed that they might stay longer in the store if the lighting is pleasing to the eye (Table 3 . Customer perception towards store lightening).

Table 4 . Customer perception towards store music

	N	Mean
Listening to music creates a relaxed atmosphere while shopping	98	4.47
The adequate rhythm of the background music makes me comfortable.	98	4.30
The existence of background music increases my well-being and comfort.	98	4.18
Pleasant environment created by music makes me spend more time in the store.	98	4.02
The sufficient volume of the background music makes me stay more time.	98	3.67
Music in store motivates me to buy more.	98	3.08

Next, we will focus on what role music have in generating competitive advantages among retail stores. In this category we have the highest and a lowest mean if we compare them with the previous phrase. With a highest value of 4.47, customers are most convinced of the fact that music creates a pleasant relaxing atmosphere while shopping. Also, the importance of an adequate background rhythm is emphasized, with a mean of 4.30. Meaning, it is not only necessary to have music in the background, but it needs to have an adequate rhythm and volume.

In accordance to perceived well-being and comfort, a mean of 4.18 responded that music helps them. A pleasant environment curated by music is likely to make customers spend more time in that given store.

However, even though music volume is important, it does not necessarily contribute to customers staying more in the store. With a mean of 3.67, customers tend to be neutral regarding this aspect. Furthermore, when talking about customer buying decisions, music is not a prime motivator in wanting to buy more (Mean 3.08) (Table 4 . Customer perception towards store music).

Table 5 . Customer perception towards store cleanliness

	N	Mean
The cleanliness of retail chain outlet attracts me to visit again.	100	4.08
The clean shelves of retail chain outlet motivate me to stay more	100	3.86
The cleanliness of the outlet floor motivates me to buy more.	100	3.78

Generally speaking, cleanliness is important for the customer. In the cleanliness category, we had 100 respondents. Retail outlets that are perceived as clean are more likely to have returning customers, thanks to this aspect. A mean of 4.08 of respondents claimed that cleanliness motivates them to visit a store the second time. Secondly, clean shelves were also important in order to extend the total time spent in a store, with the results showing a mean of 3.86. Staying more, customers might also be motivated to buy more. When asked about it, the questionnaires said that clean outlet floors tend to motivate them in buying more, with a mean of 3.78 (Table 5 . Customer perception towards store cleanliness).

In our investigation, it was shown that consumers are indeed vulnerable to the effect of ambient variables, including music, presence of natural plants, lighting conditions, and

cleanliness. The estimated averages show a high degree of closeness, hence leading to the inference that they possess equal significance. Upon closer examination of each individual aspect, it may be argued that music attains the greatest score. It is crucial to note that each of these characteristics exerts a beneficial impact on various areas. Both music and natural plants have a significant impact on customers' mood, producing a pleasant ambience. Further, lighting has a crucial role in enhancing the appeal of products, hence influencing customers' purchasing decisions. Moreover, the level of cleanliness in a retail environment has a significant impact on the likelihood of client retention. Hence, it is imperative for retail outlets to consider the desired outcomes associated with each environmental aspect throughout the design process.

4.2 RQ2: What is the customer's perception about the plant as a gift strategy?

Furthermore, the second research question refers to the customers' perception regarding the plant as a gift advertising strategy.

Customers generally find this trend appealing, but it is not a major factor in influencing their purchasing decision. The means of this category range between 3.53 and 3.67. We asked about different scenarios, including if the gift strategy is an attractive factor to visit the store, revisit the store, influence purchase decision and respectively buying decision.

The results of our study indicate that clients hold a neutral impression of this marketing technique, with a little inclination towards positivity. Hence, a comprehensive investigation might be conducted to ascertain the underlying reasons contributing to the consumers' neutral opinion with this technique and if it is beneficial to be refined (Table 6. Customer perception towards plants as a gift strategy).

Table 6 . Customer perception towards plant as a gift strategy

	Mean
I can go in because I'm impressed by the retail store natural plants gifts strategy factors	3.67
The retail store natural plants gifts strategy is an inviting factor for me	3.59
The retail store natural plants gifts strategy is very attractive factor	3.64
I can frequently visit because I'm impressed by the retail store natural gifts strategy	3.56
The retail store natural plants gifts strategy play an important role in my decision to select retail store	3.41
The retail store natural plants gifts strategy is the starting point of my decision to select retail store	3.44
The retail store natural plants gifts strategy is effective in my decision to select retail store	3.43
The retail store natural plants gifts strategy is encouraging on my decision to select retail store	3.53

4.3 RQ3: How does the plants a gift strategy influence the customer behaviour?

The final research question aims to understand how does the plant as a gift strategy influence costumer behavior. We wanted to find out its effect on purchase intention, customer loyalty, customer attitude and the likelihood of returning to the store.

The first indicator focuses on customer behavior regarding purchase intention. The meaning of 3.94 shows that customers are likely to tell about their friends and family about the outlet store if they receive a plant as a gifts. Meaning, they would be impressed by the gift. Furthermore, it is likely that they are going to make a positive purchase decision if the store

adopts such a strategy (3.89 mean), are more likely to repurchase in the future (3.80 mean), and are more likely to visit the retail outlet again (3.76 mean).

Table 7. Customer purchase intention

	N	Mean
I would like to tell my family and friends about the retail outlet.	100	3.94
I would like to purchase in the retail outlet.	100	3.89
I would like to repurchase in future.	100	3.80
I would like to visit the retail outlet again.	100	3.76
I would like to shop longer in the retail outlet	100	3.48

However, regarding whether or not such strategies increase the desire to shop more in the store, the results show that it can have a little positive effect, but it is not very high. Customers are generally neutral in this aspect, with a mean of 3.48 (Table 7 . Customer purchase intention).

Table 8 . Customer loyalty

	N	Mean
I am satisfied to my decision to purchase the product at this retail store	100	4.09
I recommend retailer to my friends and family	100	4.05
When I finish shopping and come out of this store, I thought I did the right thing	100	3.86
I plan to maintain my general shopping habits at this retail store	100	3.86
I made a wise judgment to buy the product at this store	100	3.74
I am committed to maintain the shopping at this retail outlet	100	3.67

Looking at customer loyalty, we wanted to find out how shoppers feel about buying in a

store that adopts such a strategy. Most of our respondents felt satisfied with the idea of buying in the given retail store, with a mean of 4.09. Moreover, they would like to recommend such a store to their family and friends, with a mean of 4.05. Plants often give the sense of caring about the environment. This being said, customers felt like they made the right decision when buying from a store that offered plants as a gift, with a mean of 3.86.

In terms of customer retention, respondents claim that they are planning to maintain their general shopping habits in the retail store (mean 3.86).and are committed to maintain shopping at the given retail store (mean 3.67).

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that consumers express satisfaction with their shop visit and exhibit a willingness to recommend the store. However, their level of conviction regarding future commitments appears to be less pronounced (Table 8 . Customer loyalty).

Table 9 . Customer attitude

	N	Mean
When I think of this store, I have favourable attitude	100	3.77
When I think of this store, this store is very good	100	3.73
When I think of this store, I like this store very much	100	3.65

Moving on, we wanted to see how customer attitude towards the store is influenced by the store's decision of incorporating such a marketing strategy. In comparison to the other indicators, none of the results have a mean above 4, the range here being between 3.65 and 3.77. This means that customer attitude is slightly improved by this type of strategy, but not by much. That being said, when thinking about the store, customers tend to have a favorable attitude (mean 3.77), they believe that the store is very good (3.73) and they generally like the store (3.65) (Table 9 . Customer attitude).

Table 10 . Revisit the store

	N	Mean
In the future, the shopping at this store will very possible	100	3.95
In the future, my shopping at this store will very probable	100	3.87
In the future, my shopping at this store will very frequent	100	3.71
In the future, my shopping at this store will very likely	100	3.68

Last but not least, we wanted to see whether or not customers are inclined to revisit the store based on the implementation of plant gift as a marketing campaign. From the first two questions, we can see that it is likely that implementing such a strategy can make the customer revisit the store. A mean of 3.95 shows that future shopping at the given retail outlet is very possible.

However, in terms of frequency, such strategies do not seem to have a very clear effect. When asked if in the future their shopping at this store will be very frequent, customers seemed slightly inclined to believe so, with a mean of 3.71. That being said, we believe that more strategies are needed in order to boost customer frequency.

To conclude, when designing an advertising plan, it is important to consider the underlying objective. Based on the findings, this strategy of offering a plant is effective if the goal is to raise awareness of the store, because the customers are satisfied with the decision to visit the store and will recommend it to others. However, if the purpose is to increase customer loyalty, this strategy might not be the most efficient (Table 10. Revisit the store).

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the utmost importance of environmental elements in influencing consumer behaviors and preferences within

retail outlet outlets. The use of natural vegetation in indoor retail environments is seen as an aesthetically appealing and emotionally pleasant element. Strategic customization of lighting in various sections of a store contributes to improved product visibility, enhanced sense of quality, and increased consumer appeal. The aesthetic qualities of music, including its ability to provide a pleasing ambiance, are highly esteemed by individuals, particularly when it exhibits a suitable tempo and sound intensity. The maintenance of cleanliness is a significant factor that influences the likelihood of repeat visits, extended durations of stay, and higher levels of consumer spending. The impact of the retail environment on consumer perceptions and behaviors is evident, as consumers demonstrate sensitivity to the overall atmosphere and various environmental factors.

The findings of our research suggest that clients maintain a rather neutral perception of this marketing tactic, with a little tendency towards optimism. Therefore, it is important to perform a thorough analysis to determine the underlying factors that contribute to consumers' neutral perception of this specific approach and assess the potential benefits of refining it.

The plant as a gift strategy has an influence on consumer behavior. The majority of individuals expressed contentment with their choice to make a purchase at the specific establishment. Furthermore, they will recommend the business to their friends and family, and there is a strong possibility that they will revisit the establishment. Nevertheless, a significant portion of individuals remained unconvinced about their future commitment to purchasing just from that particular establishment. Hence, employing the plant as a gift approach is seen suitable when the objective is to enhance awareness of the establishment. Nevertheless, if the objective is to enhance client loyalty, this approach may not be the most effective.

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