The Effects of Physical Surroundings and Salesperson's Service on Customer Satisfaction and the Intention to Repurchase

Kim, Sun-Hee
Professor, Dept. of Fashion Design, Kimpo College

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the physical surroundings and the salesperson's service in apparel stores, and to examine their effects on customer satisfaction and the intention to repurchase. The data was collected from a questionnaire conducted on 312 female adults who had just finished shopping, and was analyzed by frequency analysis, factor analysis, reliability analysis, regressive analysis and ANOVA analysis with SPSS 10.0. The results were as follows: (1) As a result of the factor analysis, five factors were identified with regard to physical surroundings: spatial layout and functionality, presentation and aesthetics, ambience, convenience, and information. The factors pertaining to the salesperson's service in apparel stores were divided into four dimensions: knowledge and assurance, convenience and responsiveness, etiquette, and empathy. (2) As far as physical surroundings are concerned, spatial layout and functionality, presentation and aesthetics, ambience, and convenience were all found to influence customer satisfaction. In terms of salesperson's service, convenience and responsiveness, etiquette, and empathy each had an influence on customer satisfaction. (3) Furthermore, physical surroundings and the salesperson's service influenced the intention to repurchase. The intention to repurchase is influenced by spatial layout and functionality, ambience, convenience, and information with regard to physical surroundings, by knowledge and assurance, convenience and responsiveness, and empathy with regard to the salesperson's service. (4) It was revealed that the significance of the physical surroundings and salesperson service factors varies depending on the consumer's age, level of education, and income.

Key Words: physical surroundings, salesperson's service, customer satisfaction, the intention to repurchase

Corresponding author: Kim, Sun-Hee, Tel.+82-31-999-4671, Fax.+82-31-999-4671
E-mail: sunny@kimpo.ac.kr
I. Introduction

Customers require visible hints that enable them to predict a store's efforts in order to reduce uncertainty when making their purchasing decisions. One such visible hint concerns the physical surroundings that can create the mood of the place where their purchase is made.\(^1\) The consumer's purchasing decisions are greatly affected by physical surroundings while interacting at the point of purchase. Retailers utilize their physical surroundings as part of their essential sales promotion strategy, as it is easier to make changes to a store's physical surroundings than it is to change the prices or quality of a given product.

The majority of store-related research projects conducted so far in the field of apparel have analyzed consumer behaviors by categorizing stores according to the criteria of store selection,\(^2\) store image,\(^3\)\(^4\) and patronage behaviors.\(^5\)\(^6\) Further research projects related to stores' physical surroundings have been conducted recently in an attempt to clearly define the differences in consumer preferences and brand effects around the visual factors apparent among the physical surroundings.\(^7\)\(^8\) As such, insufficient research efforts have been made in the field of apparel.

The sales environment includes the personal interaction between the customers and salespersons in addition to the physical surroundings. The salespersons themselves may have a great influence on consumers' purchasing decisions, as their key role is to convert potential customers into real customers. However, the salesperson service has been treated as a key independent variable in only a few previous studies as it has been studied as part of either a store's surroundings or the service quality.

Thus, this study attempts to analyze how consumers perceive such factors as physical surroundings and the salesperson service provided by apparel stores, and to further compare and analyze the influence that the physical surroundings and salesperson service have on customer satisfaction and repurchasing intention. We also attempted to analyze the difference between the physical surroundings and salesperson service based on demographic characteristics. This study may present basic data that are helpful to developing sales promotion strategies by specifically analyzing the physical surroundings and salesperson service and then comparing the relative importance of those factors.

II. Literature Review

1. Physical surroundings

The physical surroundings refers to environment that surrounds consumers includes such specific aspects of physical space as product display, color, noise, illumination and the weather.\(^9\) A store's physical surroundings may enhance its competitive advantage over other retailers by differentiating the store. Bitner asserted that physical surroundings have a very critical influence as the consumers spend money for service within the surroundings of a business.\(^10\) Some other researchers asserted that the consumers' length of stay at, and intention to revisit, a store are the outcome of their satisfaction with the physical surroundings\(^11\) and that the store facilities have a significant influence on the consumers' feelings.\(^12\) Initially, such