



The Influence of Consumer Experiences on Store Choice Criteria and Patronage Intention:
the Case Study of SPA brands

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Background. Based on an array of economic and social data as well as business trends, Pine and Gilmore (1999) agree that current consumers are concerned with engaging experiences rather than just buying goods and services. Pine and Gilmore (1999) conceptualized this new focus of consumer demand as the emerging “Experience Economy” (EE). This perspective views experiences as enhancing consumer value beyond that derived from goods and services. Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed four experience realms of EE—entertainment, educational, escapist, and esthetic. They posited that a consumer environment should include all four realms (the 4Es) to fully engage the consumer. Previous literature found that the enhanced consumer experiences positively affect consumer perception and behavior toward both online and offline retail stores (Jeong, Fiore, Niehm, & Lorenz, 2009). Despite the emergence of experiential marketing, research on the 4Es in apparel store environment is still limited (Jeong et al., 2009). Among many apparel retail formats, specialty store retailer of private label apparel or SPA is one of the most rapidly growing ones, changing the map of fashion industry in Korea. SPA, defined as apparel companies possessing their own private label that are marketed and sold in their own specialty stores (Urakami & Wu, 2010), is successfully appealing to young fashion-conscious consumers with low-priced products, prompt services, and sensory store environment. However, we have found no empirical research that has examined consumer experiences employing the 4Es in SPA store environment.

Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss (2002) explored how store environment cues influence consumers’ decision criteria for store choice, which ultimately lead to store patronage intentions. They examined five store choice criteria as mediating variables between store environment cues and store patronage intentions: interpersonal service quality, merchandise quality, monetary price, time/effort cost, and psychic cost perceptions. Accordingly, consumer experiences generated by store environment cues will affect consumer perceptions for store choice and patronage intentions. Thus, the present research examined the impact of consumer experiences on store choice criteria and patronage intentions in the SPA store environment.

Method. Three hundred twenty usable questionnaires were collected from female consumers in South Korea. The sample was purchased from Panel Insight, a credible marketing research company in South Korea. The company was responsible for sample recruiting, online survey distribution, and data collection. The questionnaire contained multi-item measurement scales found to be valid, reliable, and uni-dimensional in previous research. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their previous shopping experiences at SPA brand stores.

Results. The measurement model confirmed convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. The structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to test the proposed hypotheses. The fit indices suggested a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(244)=672.95$, $p < .01$, IFI= .93, CFI= .93, RMSEA = .07). Among the 4Es, esthetic and escapist experiences were found to influence store choice criteria. Esthetic experience positively affected interpersonal service quality and merchandise quality perceptions, but negatively influenced monetary price and psychic cost perceptions. Escapist experience positively influenced monetary price, time/effort cost, and psychic cost perceptions while negatively affected merchandise quality perception. Among store choice criteria, merchandise quality and time/effort cost perceptions positively affected store patronage intention while monetary price and psychic cost perceptions negatively influenced store patronage intention.

Conclusion. Findings of the present study suggested that, for young, female Korean consumers, only esthetic and escapist experiences could affect their perceptions for store choice and patronage intention in SPA store environment. Results emphasized the importance of merchandise quality and time/effort cost perceptions to improve consumer patronage towards stores. The study contributes to consumer experience and SPA environment literatures and gives managerial insights to SPA brand markers and fashion industry in Korea.

References

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