Gender orientation and retail atmosphere: effects on value perception

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Abstract
Purpose – Evaluative processes made in retail environments have been shown to vary between groups, particularly between men and women. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that a hedonic or utilitarian store atmosphere leads to different evaluations depending on the consumer's gender orientation.

Design/methodology/approach – A pre-test identifies hedonic and utilitarian store atmospheres. A main study uses an experimental design to compare the impact of these atmospheres on overall store quality, price perceptions and willingness to pay for products in these stores in function of the consumers' gender orientation.

Findings – The results show that hedonic atmospheres lead to higher quality perception, higher price perception and higher purchase intention among female-oriented consumers. Moreover, female-oriented consumers are willing to pay 32 per cent more for the same product when this product is offered in a hedonic store atmosphere. Retailers should consider carefully how store design affects evaluations among male versus female-oriented consumers.

Research limitation/implications – The use of students reduces the generalisability of the results. Future research can test the propositions further.

Originality/value – The results suggest that perceptions of store atmospheres are moderated by gender orientation, which is a segmentation variable that may be more relevant in today's gender-blurring retail environments. Furthermore, the results show how value can be perceived from store atmospheres and transferred to products.

Keywords Consumer behaviour, Store ambience, Stores and supermarkets, Gender, Design, Store atmosphere, Gender orientation, Hedonic and utilitarian, Value

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Responses to retail environments vary greatly and depend on many variables. Given these dynamics, retailers cannot expect all customers to respond homogeneously to...
changes in design and merchandising (Bitner, 1992). Marketing research demonstrates that consumers use atmospheres and cues stemming from atmospherics to make quality inferences as well as to direct their behaviour (Bitner, 1992; Darden and Babin, 1994; Baker et al., 1994). Thus, the research results suggest ways that retailers can successfully modify the shopping environment. Cue-specific changes in the atmosphere, including changes of odour and/or music, can result in correspondingly more or less favourable store evaluations (Spangenberg et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2010).

The theories underpinning such effects describe how all cues, including environmental, social, and ambient cues, come together to influence shopper perceptions and behaviour (Bitner, 1992). The interactive process involving consumers and the environment culminates in value (Babin et al., 1994) and helps consumers define their identity (Woodruffe-Burton and Wakenshaw, 2011). However, the degree to which this process varies across basic consumer segments remains understudied.

Are men and woman different? John Gray popularizes the idea that men and women require different regimes to achieve true happiness (Gray, 2003). However, for the most part, marketing research treats men and women as one and the same. In retail settings, the concept of gender rarely appears as a feature with the potential to influence store perceptions and evaluations. Recent research looks at the gender associations of cues in the environment and their congruity with the gender-affiliation of the products offered (Spangenberg et al., 2006). Beyond the notion of gender associations, it is possible to consider consumers based on their gender orientation, or the gender to which they orient themselves to most. Gender orientation, like gender affiliation, may moderate not just store evaluation but also the way value is transferred from environments to products. This paper addresses gender orientation as a potential moderator of store atmosphere (hedonic or utilitarian) effects on shopper evaluations including store image quality, price perceptions, and patronage intentions. Specifically, the aim of this research is to show whether a hedonic or utilitarian atmosphere influences store evaluation and purchase intention according to the consumers’ gender orientation. Implications for retailing theory and practice are discussed.

Theoretical development
Consumer responses to retail environment and atmosphere
Numerous researchers explore ways in which shoppers and environments interact. For example, Argo et al. (2005) outline how the presence of others and their proximity alter affective reactions. The other social actors in the retail environment include customers and employees and the dynamic interactions taking place between them (Bitner, 1992). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) apply the Stimulus – Organism – Response paradigm to show how the environment induces various levels of pleasure, arousal and control. Both arousal and pleasure have effects that depend in part on an individual’s shopping orientation (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006). This moderation is likely to extend to other more specific affective reactions as well (Machleit and Eroglu, 2000). The interplay between consumer and environment is of particular interest and provides a basis for the interpretation of that environment as a servicescape (Bitner, 1992). The retail environment can also lead to cognitions, creating an interpretation of the various cues as a whole, which helps solidify an image for the consumer. Cues within the spaces can lead to categorization (Locken and Ward, 1990) and attribution (Bitner, 1990). “In other words, people may use their beliefs about the servicescape as surrogate indicators in
forming beliefs about service quality and other attributes of the service” (Bitner, 1992, p. 63). Perceptions of an environment can be affective and cognitive. Both are likely to influence behaviour and together can lead to the creation of beliefs.

The retail images and atmospheres that guide behaviours lead an environment to include relative amounts of both functional and affective qualities (Darden and Babin, 1994). Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006) stipulate that “few consumers find grocery shopping intrinsically satisfying” (Levy and Weitz, 2004, p. 110). The presumption is that a majority of grocery store customers enter the experience with a strong task orientation – wanting to get the job done efficiently. In contrast, those who shop in fashion boutiques enter this experience with a different set of orientations. Here, a willingness to indulge and explore creates much more of a recreational mind-set. Thus, retailers try to accommodate the different orientations by varying the relative amounts of functional and affective qualities (Babin et al., 1994), knowing that shopping value, both utilitarian and hedonic, can lead to increased satisfaction and behavioural intent (Ryu et al., 2010).

The functional aspects of shopping include features like merchandising, the knowledge and skills of employees, pricing policies, convenience and other attributes that are closely linked to utilitarian shopping value. In contrast, the affective qualities include attributes that help to create a unique shopping experience, including features such as the combination of music, colours, scent and lighting, the friendliness of employees and the excitement generated by new products and exclusive brands (Babin et al., 1994). Thus, stores that emphasize functional aspects engender a utilitarian value proposition while stores that emphasize affective aspects engender more of a hedonic value proposition. The classification of shopping dimensions based on hedonic and utilitarian value results in various taxonomies of consumers, helping retailers better tailor their environments to the needs of consumers (e.g. efficiency versus pleasure) (Cardoso and Pinto, 2010).

Transfer of atmospheric evaluation to product perception
Research demonstrates that in pleasant store environments, consumers are likely to spend more time in the retail location, have a greater desire to affiliate and interact with the service providers and are likely to buy more as well (Babin et al., 2004; Borges et al., 2010). These effects extend specifically to consumers’ self-reported time spent (more than they had intended) in pleasant and arousing environments (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). The two emotional dimensions, pleasure and arousal, end up serving as key mediators to consumer behaviour in retail environments and in consumer-environment interactions in general (Babin et al., 1994). More recently, it is shown that attractive and facilitating atmospheric cues are likely to influence hedonic retail experiences (Ballantine et al., 2010).

Previous research also raises the question of transfer of affective responses experienced within an environment to individuals and/or objects that are part of that environment. Individuals in pleasant retail settings report more positive evaluations of the products available to them in that situation than those consumers who are in unpleasant retail settings (Obermiller and Bitner, 1984). Other research examines the impact of specific environment cues such as music, colour and lighting on product evaluations (see Turley and Chebat, 2002).

Gender orientation and shopping behaviour
The stereotypical view is that women are born to shop and that men are born to loathe shopping. This view may be narrow, but research exists suggesting that women and
men do indeed differ in shopping orientations and reactions to the shopping environment. Women are more involved shoppers, more likely to plan their shopping, more inclined to process product information, go shopping more often, are less interested in simply getting the shopping trip over with and more prone to seek out price discounts than their typical male counterparts (Dholakia, 1999; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991; Polegato and Zaichowsky, 1994; Zeithaml, 1985). Shopping is more likely to be part of the social identity for women as opposed to men and women are certainly more acutely aware of elements not involved in product acquisition (Johnstone and Conroy, 2005). The female sex role leads to expectations that women respond more favourably to the relational and hedonic aspects of the shopping environment (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991). More specifically, women generally have a greater appreciation for a hedonically oriented shopping experience than men. However, this must be considered in the light of the fact that women also use more product information and are concerned with more details of the deal than are men.

The key aspect in hypothesizing differences between the male and female response lies in the increased shopping involvement displayed by female shoppers. This is particularly true for characteristics that go beyond convenience and are meant to enhance and possibly extend the shopping experience (Polegato and Zaichowsky, 1994; Johnstone and Conroy, 2005). For many routine types of shopping, men simply want the shopping trip over within the least amount of time; for women, ancillaries are actually a necessary component of a quality shopping experience.

Whereas women have reached parity with men in the Do-It-Yourself sector in terms of planning and buying, industries like cosmetics and toiletries consider the male-market as one with great potential for growth. While sex-based differences occur in retail settings, the notion of gender orientation may be more appropriate in the contemporary era where gender blurring is more frequent and sex differences are less stereotyped.

Conceptual framework

The moderating role of gender orientation on store evaluations

Quality inferences regarding stores are the results of affective and cognitive appraisals (Bitner, 1992) and are often created from cues in the environment (Ballantine et al., 2010; Gardner and Siomkos, 1985). In fact, the atmosphere of the store itself has been shown to influence quality perceptions of the store image as a whole (Zimmer and Golden, 1988), of the merchandise (Zeithaml, 1988), and patronage intentions (Darden et al., 1983). Baker et al. (1994) point out that cues inherent to store environments (ambient, social and atmospheric) are likely to influence quality inferences regarding the merchandise, the service, and the store image quality.

Shopping helps consumers confirm their personal identity (Woodruffe-Burton and Wakenshaw, 2011) and the link between environmental features and consumer evaluations can be a key to determining consequential behaviour. Congruency between consumer and store personality leads to more positive consumer evaluations (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006; Nasar, 1987). Similarly, a match between anticipated task orientation (Darden and Babin, 1994) as well as the gender-particular orientation of the shopping experience (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991) should lead to more favourable evaluations of the setting and potentially the products within the environment (Obermiller and Bitner, 1984; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982).
Thus, since males are more utilitarian or task oriented and women are more hedonic or pleasure oriented when it comes to shopping (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991; Polegato and Zaichowsky, 1994), gender orientation should have a moderating role on the impact of the store atmosphere on store perceptions. More formally:

**H1.** Subjects with a female orientation will see a store with a hedonic atmosphere as having: better store image quality; better price perceptions; and will express higher buying intentions than in a store with a utilitarian atmosphere.

**H2.** Subjects with a male orientation will see a store with a utilitarian atmosphere as having: better store image quality; better price perceptions; and will express higher buying intentions than a store with a utilitarian atmosphere.

As an extension of the gender-related orientations and effect, extant research shows that women are more price sensitive but this does not mean that women always chose the lowest price alternative (Zeithaml, 1985). Men are less price aware and thus should show little variance in willingness to pay no matter what type of atmosphere they are presented with. In contrast, the increased acuteness that women have when shopping makes them more aware of both quality and price differences. As a result, they are more willing to pay a higher price when the brand and service experience are truly of high quality. In addition, one way a consumer reciprocates for the hedonically rewarding experience is through a willingness to expend more resources. Therefore, a hedonically rewarding environment should send quality signals that should trigger expectations of higher price points, combined with improved quality for those with a female orientation. More formally:

**H3.** Subjects with a female orientation will be willing to pay more for a product in a hedonic store atmosphere than in a store where the atmosphere is more utilitarian.

**Methodology**

**Study pre-test**

An initial study of current retail environment allowed us to identify retail environments that could be modelled as either utilitarian or hedonic and at the same time avoid types of store catering specifically for women or men. Therefore, we included a store type that offered both men and women’s products and included products commonly sought out by both women and men. Initial results indicated comparable levels of familiarity with everyday health and beauty products such as soaps, shaving lotions, after-shaves, colognes, perfumes, deodorants, etc.

A pre-selection of 22 images of health and beauty locations was reduced to six based on relevance for the context and the absence of confounds such as the inclusion of men or women in a picture. Five expert judges (retail professionals and retailing academics) evaluated the six images of health and beauty boutiques/pharmacies to classify these images into one of two categories: a utilitarian oriented or hedonic oriented environment. Interjudge agreement was 100 per cent, with three store environments classified as hedonic and three store environments classified as utilitarian. These images were then used as the stimulus for the pre-test.

A sample of 53 undergraduate business students participated in the pre-test. Store environment was manipulated in a between subjects design over two levels: utilitarian
or hedonic as described above. Each subject rated their perceptions of the retail environment as appropriate for male and female shoppers via three questions described below. All measures used a seven-point scale unless otherwise indicated.

A first item asked subjects to rate the likelihood of male patronization of the depicted stores. There was no significant difference between subjects assigned to the utilitarian and hedonic environments on this item ($X_{\text{utilitarian}} = 3.04; X_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.63; t = 1.02; p = 0.310$). The second question asked subjects if they believed that they would find more men than woman in this store. No significant difference is found on this item ($X_{\text{utilitarian}} = 2.92; X_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.41; t = 1.32; p = 0.191$). Likewise, no significant difference is found either for the third question, which asked subjects if they believed “that most clients of this store are men” ($X_{\text{utilitarian}} = 2.69; X_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.41; t = 0.71; p = 0.480$). The results of the pre-test confirm that there is no perceived gender orientation associated to either hedonic or utilitarian stores atmospheres. In other words, both men and women shop for health and beauty aids in stores that display hedonic or utilitarian atmospheres. For the subsequent research, it can therefore be assumed that any effect can be related to the utilitarian or hedonic dimensions evoked by the store atmospheres, and not an underlying gender or sex-role confound.

Study 1 – main experiment
Sample. A total of 209 undergraduate business students were assigned to one of two experimental conditions. Subjects (average age = 21 years old) were told they were participating in a survey about general shopping habits. In the first condition, subjects observed images of a utilitarian health and beauty store environment – the utilitarian store atmosphere. The utilitarian condition depicted clean, tidy, functional store environments – those akin to pharmacies and drugstores. In the second condition, subjects observed images of an upbeat, stylish health and beauty store environment – the hedonic store atmosphere. The hedonic condition depicted beautifully decorated stores characterized by a pleasant decor and modern merchandising.

After viewing the printed photos of the store, subjects were asked to answer different questions about their perceptions of the stores, then about a product they were asked to look at, and then regarding their gender orientation. After completing the survey, subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures. Three dependent variables were measured using a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The first was the overall quality of the store image, which was adapted from Grewal et al. (1998). This multi-item measure includes items asking respondents to rate if each store “…is a pleasant place to shop”, “…offers an attractive shopping experience”, and “…has a good store image”. The composite scale yields a Cronbach alpha of 0.90. The second dependent variable was price perceptions, adapted from Biswas et al. (2002). The items incorporated in this dimension asked if prices of the store X are:

- “very interesting”;
- “…very good”;
- “…lower than their competitors”.

Retail atmosphere
A higher score is associated with the perception of lower prices. The resulting scale yields a Cronbach alpha of 0.88. The third dependent variable measured was patronage intentions (Kukar-Kinney and Walters, 2003). The three items are: “I would probably buy beauty products at Store A”, “It is likely that I will buy beauty products at Store A” and “It is possible that I will buy beauty products at Store A”. The scale results in a Cronbach alpha of 0.91.

Another dependent measure, willingness to pay, was calculated by asking the participants what price they would be ready to pay for a specific hand cream. The photo and the product brand was the same in both the hedonic and utilitarian experimental conditions, and the brand of hand cream was unfamiliar (from a small local supplier originating from a different country) to the subjects participating in the study.

For this research project, the emphasis was on comparing male/female orientation rather than on biological sex, particularly as retail sectors are no longer segregated along a purely demographic parameter. Thus, a measure of gender orientation rather than a simple dichotomous biological sex question was deemed more appropriate.

The most commonly used measure of gender orientation, having been employed in over 1,000 research projects (Spence, 1993), is the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). This scale measures psychological gender (relevant sex-role mannerisms or characteristics that one perceives him or herself to possess) rather than biological sex. The scale is based on a premise that one’s orientation toward maleness or femaleness is not dichotomous but reflects instead a tendency toward adopting traits traditionally assigned to the female sex-role or male sex-role. The value of this scale lies in that it reduces the biological gender bias that may cloud results (Bem, 1974), especially when testing for differences between groups and may allow for more explanation of variability in gender oriented psychological experiments (Holt and Ellis, 1998). Subjects respond to multiple items measuring how much they believe that they possess each of 20 feminine, 20 masculine and 20 androgynous traits (Bem, 1974). The items include the following types of questions: if the subject is the kind of person who:

- likes to help others;
- is sensitive to others’ pain;
- is careful of others;
- listens attentively to others;
- comforts others;
- loves children;
- is gentle;
- is affectionate;
- is soft;
- is warm.

The items yield a Cronbach alpha of 0.93 indicating adequate internal consistency. Subject responses were summed so that a high score indicated femininity and a low score indicated masculinity. Each subject was then classified into a feminine and a masculine group based on a median split.
Results

Manipulation checks
Two manipulation checks verify that the patterns regarding the hedonic and utilitarian store atmospheres outlined in the pre-test were reproduced in the main study. The first question asked respondents to rate the following statement: “I think shopping at this store would be a pleasant and enjoyable shopping experience”, and answers were anchored on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Subjects viewing the hedonic store atmosphere perceive the stores they evaluated as significantly more hedonic than subjects exposed to the utilitarian store atmosphere ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.66$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 2.49$; $F(1, 207) = 788.92; p < 0.001$). The second question asked respondents to rate the following question: “I think shopping at this store would be a rational and functional shopping experience”. Answers were also anchored using a seven-point agreement scale. In direct contrast to the first manipulation check, subjects viewing the images of hedonic store atmospheres score the stores they evaluated as significantly less utilitarian than did subjects exposed to the utilitarian store atmosphere images ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.35$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.47$; $F(1, 207) = 520.39; p < 0.001$). These two results confirm that the manipulation of the store atmosphere is successful.

Hypotheses tests
The hypotheses were tested by conducting a 2 (store atmosphere frame: hedonic vs. utilitarian) × 2 (gender orientation: male vs. female) univariate analysis of variances (ANOVAs). The results are presented in Table I.

Overall, there are some interesting main effects of the store atmosphere on consumers’ evaluations. Subjects perceive the hedonic store as having better quality ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.37$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.31$; $F(1, 205) = 125.58; p < 0.001$), and higher prices than the utilitarian store ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.53$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.79$; $F(1, 205) = 614.88; p < 0.001$). Moreover, subjects declare a higher willing to pay for the same product when this product is offered at a hedonic store as opposed to a utilitarian store ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 14.55$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 11.44$; $F(1, 205) = 25.38; p < 0.001$). No significant difference in patronage intentions between the two store atmospheres is observed ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.26$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.28$; $F(1, 205) = 0.71; ns$).

More interesting though, the interaction of store atmosphere and gender orientation is significant for all main dependent variables. The results show that the effect of the store atmosphere on the store quality perception depends on gender orientation ($F(1, 205) = 65.96; p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.24$). Planned contrasts show that that the

<table>
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<th>Sources</th>
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<th>Price perceptions</th>
<th>Patronage intention</th>
<th>Willingness to pay</th>
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</thead>
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<td>614.88 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.71 (0.401)</td>
<td>25.38 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
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<td>38.16 (0.000)</td>
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<td>175.17 (0.000)</td>
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<td>Interaction SA × GO</td>
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<td>5.14 (0.024)</td>
<td>164.17 (0.000)</td>
<td>25.84 (0.000)</td>
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Notes: $F$ statistic presented for each effect on each dependent variable followed by corresponding $p$-values provided in parentheses.
interaction is due to the female orientated subjects’ higher store quality perception in the hedonic atmosphere versus utilitarian atmosphere condition ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.79$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 3.92; p < 0.001$). The interaction effect on store price perceptions also is significant ($F_{(1,205)} = 5.14; p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.02$), consistent with $H1b$. Subjects with a female orientation believe prices are higher (lower score on price perceptions) when the store atmosphere is hedonic relative to when it is utilitarian ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.79$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 3.92; p < 0.001$). The interaction effect on store price perceptions also is significant ($F_{(1,205)} = 5.14; p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.02$), consistent with $H1b$. Subjects with a female orientation report higher patronage intentions when the store atmosphere is hedonic than when it is utilitarian ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.59$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 3.79; p < 0.001$).

$H2$ predicts effects for subjects with a male gender orientation. Planned contrasts revealed that subjects with a male orientation perceive slightly higher store image quality when the store atmosphere is hedonic than when it is utilitarian ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.84$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.54; p < 0.05$), disconfirming $H2a$. However, male gender oriented subjects report more (less) favourable price perceptions in the utilitarian (hedonic) store atmosphere condition ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.88$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.66; p < 0.001$), supporting $H2b$. Planned contrasts confirm $H2c$ as well. Subjects with a male gender orientation declare higher patronage intentions when the store atmosphere is utilitarian than when it is hedonic ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 2.63$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.54; p < 0.001$) (Tables II and III).

$H3$ predicts that subjects with a female orientation would show a greater willingness to pay for a product placed in a hedonic store atmosphere compared to a utilitarian store atmosphere. The interaction effect is significant, which implies a moderator role of gender orientation on willingness to pay ($F_{(1,205)} = 25.84; p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.11$). The results of the study confirm this hypothesis as female oriented subjects are willing to pay 32 per cent more for a product offered in a hedonic store environment than in a utilitarian store environment ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 18.09$ and $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 13.67; p < 0.001$). No significant difference are found regarding subjects with a male orientation ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 10.08$ and

| Gender orientation | Store atmosphere frame |           |           |           |
|--------------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                    | Utilitarian            | Hedonic   | Total     |
| Male               | 4.54                   | (0.71)    | 4.84      | (0.71)    | 4.68      | (0.72) |
| Female             | 3.92                   | (0.68)    | 5.78      | (0.63)    | 5.11      | (1.11) |
| Total              | 4.31                   | (0.76)    | 5.37      | (0.81)    | 4.88      | (0.95) |

**Note:** Standard deviations shown in parentheses

| Gender orientation | Store atmosphere frame |           |           |           |
|--------------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                    | Utilitarian            | Hedonic   | Total     |
| Male               | 4.65                   | (0.74)    | 2.08      | (0.67)    | 3.48      | (1.47) |
| Female             | 5.03                   | (0.60)    | 2.88      | (0.63)    | 3.66      | (1.21) |
| Total              | 4.79                   | (0.71)    | 2.53      | (0.76)    | 3.57      | (1.35) |

**Note:** Standard deviations shown in parentheses
Discussion
The study results demonstrate clearly that hedonic store atmospheres elicit different reactions than utilitarian store atmospheres. An analysis of the overall means of the consumer evaluations measured – store image quality, price perceptions, patronizing intentions, and willingness to pay – shows various patterns. While all variables except for patronage intention support the notion that hedonic and utilitarian atmospheres can sway consumer perceptions, it is the intricacies between the atmosphere and gender orientations that proves more interesting.

Subjects displaying a female gender orientation demonstrate a consistently more favourable reaction to hedonic store atmospheres. Not only do these subjects display significantly higher store quality perceptions, they also associate the environment with higher priced products and also profess more willingness to pay. More importantly, subjects with a female orientation declared higher patronage intentions when the store atmosphere was hedonic then when it was utilitarian – justifying the combination of both features in a retail environment targeted to women. The advantage of the hedonic atmosphere for consumers with a female orientation is further confirmed by their willingness to pay – with a significant 32 per cent increase in value. Overall, the results show that female shoppers are better able to convert the value proposition offered by a pleasant atmosphere into realized value.

The results suggest the possibility for a transfer of perceived value from the atmosphere to the products offered in that environment. This is particularly the case with hedonic store atmospheres for female oriented clients. The result is consistent with the previous literature suggesting synergy resulting from the fit between atmosphere and orientations (Darden and Babin, 1994; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991) behaviours. The results of this study offer clarity on the relationship not just within the two constructs of atmospheres and sex orientations but now between them as well.

\[ M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 10.10; \text{ns} \]. Thus, the effect of atmosphere type on willingness to pay appears isolated to those with a high female orientation (Tables IV and V).

<table>
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<td>Hedonic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>5.59</td>
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Note: Standard deviations shown in parentheses

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<td></td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>11.44</td>
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Note: Standard deviations shown in parentheses

Table IV. Store patronage intentions means by experimental condition

Table V. Willingness to pay means by experimental condition
While the results tend to be more pertinent for female orientation, the male oriented results are also interesting. In fact, consistent with previous research (Polegato and Zaichowsky, 1994; Zeithaml, 1985), male gender orientation is associated with more favourable reactions to utilitarian atmosphere for both price perception and store patronage behaviours. However, gender orientation does not influence their willingness to pay for products.

The overall results suggest the stores should not be evaluated as offering homogenous environments and rather should be examined in terms of the atmosphere they portray to consumers – either hedonic or utilitarian. Concurrently, the findings also suggest that these atmospheres result in different behaviour, depending on the orientation of the consumers who interact within the environments. Understanding these two constructs and how they work together is vital for retailers as the multiple permutations possible in retail settings will not result in the same types of behaviour.

Managerial implications and limits
This study provides retailers with interesting findings. First, hedonic store atmospheres reduce the notion of discounts for women, meaning that retailers could use hedonic environments to reinforce luxury perceptions of brands. In addition, a hedonic atmosphere with a female orientation is shown to be the optimal combination to encourage repeat patronage behaviour. For purchases that are large ticket, or not as common, or likely to be perceived as slightly frivolous, it may be in the retailers’ best interest to create a hedonic atmosphere, as a means to reduce cognitive dissonance. Finally, having a greater understanding of the type of environment that retailers offer, the types of consumers they wish to target, and then the sort of behaviour they wish to encourage, which will depend on the product category, are all important factors to craft a optimum atmosphere strategy. For example, a retailer targeting men with a product that warrants repeat purchases should consider a utilitarian atmosphere.

Furthermore, to the extent that the results for gender orientation are consistent with stereotypical views of men and women, they provide insights for retail management and theory. In this case, gender-orientation operates in much the same way as sex-roles. A retailer with a biologically male but high female orientation segment needs to consider that their customers may exhibit the favourable tendencies toward a hedonic environment shown here.

This study provides marketing researchers with a useful contribution to better understanding of the moderator role of gender-orientation on the evaluation of store atmosphere. Some of the shortcomings of the present effort may provide avenues for future research. Obviously, the sample characteristics and the environment selected are to some extent a limitation. Future efforts should increase the external validity of this study by using a non-student sample.

The use of the health and beauty store is a potential limitation to our results. This type of product is intrinsically related to gender and the results may not be the same for other retailers. Future research can contribute by examining the moderator role of gender orientation on other types of stores (e.g. supermarkets), which would in turn significantly increase the external validity of the results.

This study is certainly not the final work on the role that gender-orientation can play on consumer behaviour and in marketing. The results are encouraging and they
draw attention to the importance of this variable as a potential segmentation factor that can increase the effectiveness of some retailers’ tactics.

Note
1. The price perception scale is reversed. Higher values indicate that the store is perceived as having low prices.

References


**Further reading**

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