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Keywords

Improving, Store, Design, Male, Fashion, Apparel, Retailers

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Improving The Store Design Of Male Fashion And Apparel Retailers

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Abstract

This study focuses upon men's store preferences when shopping for fashion and apparel items and represents an extension of Torresa, Summers and Belleau's (2001) research, which displayed a rank-order of ten shopping preferences of male University students. An additional item of 'ease of finding items', which is arguably a critical component of consumers' first impressions of a store and their degree of comfort in-store, was included in the rank-order activity of the current study. The participants of the current study were drawn from the general population, consisting of a convenience sample of 226 men of all ages. Similar to the findings of Torresa, Summers and Belleau (2001) quality, price and selection of merchandise were the three most important factors when selecting a fashion store. However, ease of finding items was ranked 5th of the 11 attributes. The findings of the survey research are combined with a store audit analysis that reinforces the need for retailers to improve their store layout and design to appeal to the growing market segment of "hunter" versus "gatherer" shoppers, particularly for young male shoppers.

Keywords: store layout and design; fashion retailers; male shopping preferences; ease of finding items

Introduction

This research investigates the issue of store layout and design and how retailers can better accommodate the preferences of male shoppers by building upon the work of Torresa, Summers and Belleau's (2001) study. The current store layout and design of many retail fashion stores largely reflects the shopping preferences of female shoppers as they shop more frequently and have a greater interest in fashion than men. Given the recent increase in young males shopping for their own clothes more research and attention needs to be devoted to this target market (Seo, Hathcote and Sweaney, 2001).

Torresa, Summers and Belleau (2001) argue that changes in men's lifestyles has resulted in changes in the menswear industry, thus their study examined only men's shopping satisfaction and store preferences, specifically investigating the importance (in rank order) of various store attributes to male shoppers. A sample size of 201 university students was surveyed. The 10 attributes that were rated were: (1) price of merchandise, (2) quality of merchandise, (3) friendly personnel, (4) brands carried in the store, (5) selection of merchandise, (6) sales service, (7) stock newest fashion, (8) employee knowledge, (9) convenience to home and (10) charge credit. The study found that the most important attributes for participants when shopping for their own apparel were 1) price 2) quality and 3) selection of merchandise. The 10 attributes tested by Torresa, Summers and Belleau (2001), while seemingly comprehensive, did not include a potentially critical consideration of male shoppers when shopping for fashion and apparel items, namely an integral aspect of store design, being the *ease of finding items*.

Korlimbinis and Thornton (2004) found that the majority (67%) of men when shopping for fashion items are “Hunter” shoppers, reflecting their preference for finding items straight away and shopping in stores where products would be easy to find. Furthermore, “Hunter” shoppers disliked shopping, spent less time in one clothes store and made decisions more easily compared to gatherer shoppers. Other researchers have drawn similar conclusions, for example Underhill (1999) and more recently Bakewell and Mitchell (2004), and report that males prefer to get in and get out as quick as possible preferring to see what they want straight away while females enjoy browsing and taking their time mixing and matching items. In a study conducted by Dholakia (1999) the male/female differences were quite consistent with prevailing stereotypes. A study conducted by Laroche, Saad, Cleverland and Browne (2000, p.509) found that “males are less comprehensive searchers, and rely more on the heuristics strategies such as consulting a sales clerk when shopping for a Christmas clothing gift”. Additionally, Anon and Anon (2004) used a projective technique that asked participants to give their initial (first) impressions of a store and determined that 82% of the responses were comments on store design, atmospherics, layout, variety of merchandise, displays, lighting, and merchandising techniques. This finding supports Newman and Cullen’s (2002) belief that “the store interface with the customer is (arguably) the most important of the elements of the retail business” (as cited in Newman and Foxall, 2003, p. 597). Beyond creating first impressions and inviting the customer into the store, the layout and atmosphere will also affect consumer comfort, perceptions of convenience, time spent in a store, likelihood of purchasing and repeat visitation (Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Gilmore, Margulis and Rauch, 2001; Newman and Foxall 2003; Sherman, Mather and Smith, 1997; Spies, Hesse, and Loesch, 1997). All of these findings provide further support for the need for including *ease of finding items* in a study regarding shopping preferences, particularly when understanding male shopper segments.

Research objective and method

The purpose of this study is to extend Torres, Summers and Belleau’s (2001) study on store preference to determine the relative importance of the *ease of finding items* for male shoppers in the apparel and fashion market. Additionally the study analyses the current store designs and layouts used by fashion retailers to determine if there are gaps between what male shoppers want and what they receive in regard to *ease of finding items*. There were two research methods used to collect information to address these objectives: 1) store analysis and 2) survey research.

Store analysis

The first research activity undertaken was a store audit (similar to a content analysis) of 17 men’s fashion boutique stores located within a large metropolitan shopping centre. The purpose of the store audit was to determine the “typical” store layout, design and atmospherics of menswear stores. The analysis was conducted over one day by two researchers who independently used score sheets containing a seven-point semantic differential scale to examine each store according to the volume of merchandise displayed, selection of merchandise, ease of finding items, spaciousness of the store (for example crammed merchandise or crowded shopping environment), store cleanliness, store size, store entrance, ease of moving through the store, window display, and signage. Other retail factors, unrelated to store design and atmospherics, that were rated included the price of merchandise, target market/s, quality of products, discounts advertised in-store and reputation of the brand

of store. Dichotomous pairs of words and phrases were chosen to describe an interior of a fashion store according to several retail marketing books (for example, Levy and Weitz 2004 and Berman and Evans, 2001). Other aspects of atmospherics that could not be rated using a semantic differential but were included in the audit process were the type of store layout, arrangement of products, the shape of the store, type of display items (e.g posters, mannequins), lighting, colour and music. Photographs were taken of each of the stores to allow further analysis at a later stage.

Survey research

A convenience sample of 226 males from the general population were asked to complete a questionnaire containing the rank order exercise of the 11 store attributes [participants were asked to rank the attributes of a retail store from most important (1) to least important (11)], as well as providing information on their age, income, occupation, frequency of shopping, and level of agreement with statements about their attitudes towards shopping for fashion and their shopping behaviour. Trained researchers from a third-year University retail marketing subject conducted the questionnaires with their friends and family members. Researchers were asked to survey four male non-university students, with an even number of males above and below 30 years of age (resulting in 116 males under 30 years of age and 100 males over 30 years of age taking part in the study).

Results

Findings from the Store Analysis

Of the 17 stores, only *three* were classified by the researchers as being suitable for “Hunter” shoppers (who represent two-thirds of male shoppers) as these stores had a clear line of sight into the store – often including a wide entrance and a clear window display that allowed the passer-by to see into the entire store. Additionally the “Hunter” type stores had a spacious layout, used frontal merchandising, grouped products into suggested outfits and by colour, and had bright lighting in their stores, with occasional use of spotlighting. The majority of stores analysed (65%, i.e., 11/17 stores) were suitable for “Gatherer” shoppers – these being stores that were quite cluttered with merchandise, used round-racks to display merchandise, did not have a clear pathway through the store and did not display similar items in the same location. There were also a small number of stores (three of the 17 stores) whose store designs and atmospherics catered for a mix of gatherer and hunter shoppers.

Findings from the Survey Research

Some of the new results (shown in Table 1) are similar to the study carried out by Torres, Summers and Belleau (2001). Quality, price and selection of merchandise were the three most important attributes, but not in exactly the same order, possibly due to Torres, Summers and Belleau’s (2001) sample of young male University students – who were likely to be slightly more price sensitive. The additional attribute added to the current study of *ease of finding items* was rated as the fifth most important attribute.

Table 1: Comparison of male shoppers' rank-order preferences of shopping attributes when shopping for fashion and apparel

Rank	Torresa, Summers and Belleau's (2001) Results	Mean-score of rank	Current study's results	Mean-score of rank
1	Price	2.77	Quality	2.59
2	Quality	3.44	Price	3.19
3	Selection	4.27	Selection	4.38
4	Brands carried	4.95	Brands carried	5.61
5	Friendly personnel	5.65	<i>Ease of finding items</i>	6.02
6	Convenience to home	5.79	Friendly personnel	6.42
7	Sales service	6.37	Sales service	6.52
8	Stock newest fashion	6.61	Convenience to home	7.03
9	Employee knowledge	6.77	Stock newest fashion	7.38
10	Charge credit	8.49	Employee knowledge	7.59
11			Charge credit	9.57

The current study was further analysed by age group. As shown in Table 2, *ease of finding items* is ranked as more important by older male shoppers (rank of 4th) than by younger male shoppers (rank of 6th). A larger disparity exists between the *older* and *younger* groups in their rank order of preferences for the attributes “stock newest fashion” (10th versus 5th, respectively), “brands carried” (7th versus 4th, respectively), and “sales service” (5th versus 8th, respectively). All of these differences in findings between the two age groups supports the belief that a greater number of younger men are now: shopping for their own clothes (in this study the average number of shopping trips was 1.7 times/month for young males versus once a month for older males), placing increasing importance on fashion; and have greater confidence when shopping for their own clothes.

Table 2: Comparison of younger and older male shoppers' rank-order preferences of shopping attributes when shopping for fashion and apparel

Rank	Younger males <30 years old	Mean-score of rank	Older males =>30 years old	Mean-score of rank
1	Quality	2.83	Quality	2.31
2	Price	3.20	Price	3.17
3	Selection	4.25	Selection	4.54
4	Brands carried	4.71	<i>Ease of finding items</i>	5.51
5	Stock newest fashion	6.36	Sales service	6.17
6	<i>Ease of finding items</i>	6.44	Friendly personnel	6.38
7	Friendly personnel	6.45	Brands carried	6.70
8	Sales service	6.80	Convenience to home	6.85
9	Convenience to home	7.18	Employee knowledge	7.10
10	Employee knowledge	7.98	Stock newest fashion	8.61
11	Charge credit	10.33	Charge credit	8.64

Discussion, Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The store analysis research activity revealed that a very small minority of retailers are catering for the needs of male (hunter) shoppers. However, a limitation to this finding is that the store analysis activity was subject to the opinions of only two expert judges, and therefore this exercise could be repeated in a future study using a larger number of expert raters. Most of the stores offered a relatively similar selection, quality and price of merchandise, thus creating an opportunity for savvy retailers to create an important point of differentiation by simply improving their store layout and design to increase the *ease of finding items* for their shoppers. One of the easiest conversions a retailer can make to its store layout is to change from a free-form boutique layout to a loop (racetrack) layout that would use the outer walls of the store to display items (using frontal merchandising and suggested outfits) and keep the middle of the store relatively clutter-free (see Figure 1). An exploratory analysis conducted by Woodruffe-Burton (1998) of male consumers' loyalty to retail shops found that there was quite strong loyalty to a limited number of retail stores for this market segment. This implies that males prefer to shop in a few selected stores that they feel comfortable and familiar with. Therefore, catering to the specific preferences of male shoppers is extremely important to a fashion retailer, firstly to attract male customers, and then to increase the likelihood that males will return to your store for their next purchase. Fashion retailers also need to be aware that the preferences of younger and older male shoppers differ quite markedly, and that fashion stores catering to the younger male market need to ensure they promote the brands they carry and more regularly update their stock to make sure they have the newest fashion trends in store.

It has been noted that an alternative 7-point importance or preference scale could have been used versus the rank-order activity to allow for cluster analysis to identify buyer groups or factor analysis to further refine attribute groups, however given the purpose of this study was to replicate Torres, Summers and Belleau's (2001) study a rank-order was used. In addition, in-store observational research of male shoppers, which has not yet been undertaken by the researchers of this study, would also be a useful activity to reveal such facts as the length of time spent in a Hunter store versus a Gatherer store, the distance and pathways travelled throughout the store, and the conversion rates of 'shopper' to 'buyer' in the two main types of stores.

Figure 1: Loop Layout, Frontal Merchandising and Suggested Outfits



Conclusion

This research has extended Torresa, Summers and Belleau's (2001) original study regarding male shopping preferences by adding the overlooked but very important attribute of *ease of finding items* and generating a new rank-order of preferences using a wider sample of male shoppers, not limited to University students. While quality, price and selection of merchandise are still the most important considerations of male shoppers, *ease of finding items* was ranked 5th of the 11 attributes (with this rank not differing greatly for younger or older market segments), which further heightens the need for the majority of male fashion retailers to re-design their stores to cater to the preferences of male shoppers who are classified as "Hunter" shoppers.

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