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Effects of In-Store Decorative Elements on Children Shopping Behaviour

Mohd Shahril Rusman [1], Yuanyuan Yin [2], Yasmin K Sekhon Dhillon [3], Haszlin Shaharudin [4]

[1,4] Industrial Design Programme, College of Creative Art, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam 40450, Malaysia
[2,3] Faculty of Arts & Humanities, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BF, United Kingdom

mshah153@uitm.edu.my, Y.Yin@soton.ac.uk, Y.K.Sekhon@soton.ac.uk, haszlin@uitm.edu.my
Tel: +6012 576 0516

Abstract
Children play a significant role in determining the family's shopping expenses, which is as important as an adult's. However, the research found that having a child companion can reduce positive shopping values due to the child's behaviour. The focus of this research is to understand the effects of in-store decorative elements on children aged between three to seven years of shopping experience. The qualitative methodology using ethnography studies is employed to identify key factors affecting children's emotional and behavioural responses. It also discusses research insight that could help to improve business strategy for children customers.

Keywords: Children shopping experience; shopping atmospheric variables; in-store decorative elements; ethnography studies.

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Shopping Centre Environment
The function of modern shopping centers (*SC*) has expanded significantly over the centuries, providing service outlets, entertainment, relaxation, excitement, and education (Joseph, 2013; Lucia-Palacios, Pérez-López, & Polo-Redondo, 2016a). As *SC* is known for its tourist attraction and family-friendly leisure space, these modern commercial spaces offer a variety of businesses and services to their customers. From traditional trading, enterprises have expanded and diversified their commodities, offering tangible purchases and services and experiences for their customer (Jain et al., 2017). For businesses, understanding and managing customer strategy, including children, is the central focus for making profits, uniqueness, sustainability and success (Shaw, 2007).

Over the years, designers from various disciplines and marketing experts have been working together in producing either a product, service or the retail environment to obtain targeted marketing goals (Bruce & Bessant, 2002). In making sure continuation for the customer to come in and preserve current ones, there should be strategic way from time to time to cater to the current demands and trends and adapt to strategic marketing and business tactics (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2016a). Bruce and Bessant (2002) stated that a good design adds value to the tangible aspects and product appearance and evokes uniqueness that helps set it apart from the competition and convey the company's message. Additionally, a creative design implementation will make the company's identity memorable to their customer and become an effective medium that helps to increase the price and impulse purchase rate of one product or service.

1.2 Literature Review

The main theory referred by researchers to investigate customer experience is the shopping atmospherics variables (SAV) by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). In marketing, the term 'atmospheric' was first defined by Kotler (1973) as a conscious designing of space to create specific effects in buyers (Kim & Kim, 2012). Businesses designed their shopping environments intending to evoke positive feelings which will affect customers' behaviour and purchase probability (Ballantine, Parsons, & Comeskey, 2015). Customers engage with both tangible and intangible aspects of the store design through the customer's main sensory channels: sight, sound, scent, and touch. Since its first introduction, numerous studies have confirmed significant impacts of retail's atmospheric variables on the customer from diverse perspectives, such as shopping companion and colour (Borges, Chebat, & Babin, 2010; Brengman & Geuens, 2004).

Identified as 'future customer in the making,' a child customer is significantly as important as an adult customer (Valkenburg & Cantor, 2001). Occasionally, children, especially those with a considerable amount of pocket money, have a substantial role in influencing family purchases as their preference towards specific brands lasts well throughout their adulthood (Valkenburg & Cantor, 2001). Children begin to develop their identity through the association and collection of objects, events, and experiences as they grow up, including those obtained at *SC* (Healy, Beverland, Oppewal, & Sands, 2007). Little ones aged between three to seven years old (*y/o*) are crucial years of being at their perceptual stage, making them an ideal age group for this research (de Faultrier, Deli-Gray, Matura, & Árva, 2014).

Commonly, parents accompany the children as a carer, legislators, and peers (Cook, 2003). Borges et al. (2010) state that a shopping companion helps one make better shopping decisions, reduces stress levels, and enhances a buyer's confidence, making the overall trip more enjoyable. However, Borges et al. (2010) also stated that having a children companion may reduce positive shopping values to the parents and other customers. The research found that having family companions, especially children, could make parents experience embarrassing moments, difficult to make a purchase decision and stress due to the children's behaviour (Ebster, Wagner, & Neumueller, 2009).

Academicians and retailers try to understand how children experience their selling environment that could help to create a more pleasant and memorable shopping experience through the design of their store atmosphere (Cook, 2003). However, research on how young children feel, respond and experience shopping environments is still limited (Ayadi & Cao, 2016). Therefore, this research aims to investigate how to improve children aged between three to seven years of shopping experience. Hence, the research objective for this study is threefold. First, this study try to investigate the children's emotional and behavioural responses when engaging with actual in-store decorative elements. Second objective is to identify critical factors that highly influence children's attention and responses when engaging with the in-store decorative elements based from this study and previous ones. Last, this research also propose insights for design professionals or *SC* managerial teams who plan to employ *SAV* as their strategic design tools.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Overview
The qualitative methodology is chosen for this research since it can help discover children's experiences, behaviours and emotional responses within the complex and actual shopping setting. Additionally, the children's experience cannot be measure in the same way as in quantitative methods, and they are non-standardized, unstructured and flexible (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). The research analysis for this research is conducted using the content analysis technique. Three methods are used in the data collection process: cultural probes, digital ethnography, and face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

2.2 Cultural Probes
This research uses the Children Shopping Experience Diary (cSED) to collect less formal information (Gaver, Dunne, & Pacenti, 1999) on how children respond and experience their shopping journey within the shopping atmosphere. Parents may record any information about their child's behaviour, emotion or any form of engagement that their child shows while shopping together.

2.3 Digital Ethnography
The second method used in this study is the digital ethnography technique. During the observation sessions, children's shopping journey is being recorded using the GoPro camera strapped to the research assistant's body. The recording helps establishes patterns, consistencies and meanings through how children respond and experience their shopping atmosphere (Gray, 2013). The observations are conducted at the Marlands Shopping Centre, Southampton. This family shopping center is selected as a location for observation as it provides a wide range of services, fashion retail chains, store chain shops, world-leading brands stores, children entertainment, dining and other facilities ("The Marlands," 2017).

2.4 Face-to-face Semi-structured
Next, a face-to-face semi-structured interview is conducted because it helps explore the children's understandings and aspects of their experiences. However, previous research stated that only a minimal amount of children could recall back specific events that happened during their shopping journey due to the extensive amount of SAV they interacted with during the visit (de Faultrier et al., 2014). Due to

this reason, parents will be the ones interviewed to avoid misleading information since there is a limitation on how the children can verbally describe their perspectives and understandings (Slunjski, 2015).

2.5 Research analysis and validations
Content analysis technique can be used either for qualitative or quantitative research, in the inductive or deductive way to analyse text data collected from various methods including ethnography, phenomenology and historical research obtained from interviews, observations and print media (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The main advantage of using this technique is that it generates detailed descriptions of how children carried out their shopping activity from physical interactions, responses and behaviours. However, this technique is known as time consuming and researcher prone to make an excessive interpretation, especially when the research question is too wide to be covered (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). For validation purposes, the data from cultural probes, digital ethnography and face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carefully triangulated and analysed. Every research procedures were also carefully planned to ensure findings from this research is reliable and have been cross-checked and validated with other published research.

2.6 Research ethics and participants
The ethics approval was granted by the Ethics and Research Governance Online (ERGO), University of Southampton. Meanwhile, participants for this research were recruited using convenience sampling and snowballing sampling techniques. There are 12 pairs of the parent with children have given consents and participated in this research. Only boys and girls aged between three to seven years are selected to take part. All participants have visited the Marland SC at least three times and are considered familiar with the place.

3.0 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Window display
Several children are found to stop and stand, kneel, and even squatting down in front of the window to observe mini figurine toys, game cards, electronic gadgets, decoration items, and other merchandise displayed when walking by a store window display. Children were attracted to take a closer look at merchandise placed inside the window display. Most of the children excitedly tugged their parent's hand and exclaimed with excitement when they see favorable items on display, as shown in Fig. 1 below:

> He looked into the window display in front of the toy store. He saw a bright green Alien toy inside the window display and shouts "toy, toy, it is a toy!" (Boy, five *y/o*).

Fig. 1. (a) Children look at decoration element; (b) Children excitedly tugged parent's hand; (c) Children pull parent's hand into the store
(Source: video observation)

Children's interest in merchandise displayed inside the window greatly influences their behaviour towards one store. Some children are found immediately walking into a store to look at other items inside after observing children's merchandise inside the window display. Additionally, children are also found making purchase requests to parents while observing them:

> He requests his mother to buy him a set of play cards that he saw behind the glass front window display. He then shouts excitedly upon entering the store to check on other play cards and toys on the shelves (boy, six *y/o*).

Furthermore, children easily are attracted to approach a store window display with bright coloured promotional items displayed behind the glass window:

> He grabs the red colour balloons inside the window display area. His father took the balloon off his hand and returned it to its place (boy, three *y/o*).

3.2 Colour of the store
Another decorative element that can easily attract children's attention is the colour of the store. Parents mentioned that children are attracted to visit a store "because of the colours they use over there" (Della, mother, 36 y/o) and "… the pink colour of the SC usually attracts her attention" (Zetty, mother, 34 y/o). Research also found that children demonstrate significant interest in the colourful logo:

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"Daddy, what is the (store's) name, daddy?" ask him while looking at the colourful store logo (boy, five y/o). During the observation, children replicated the colourful store logo when doing colouring activities provided at the kids' colouring section. Children's interest in the store colour may also affect children's staying decision in one particular selling space. One of the parents explained that his child would stay longer when visiting a colourful store "...if he steps into that [colourful] surrounding, he tends to stay for a longer period" (Simon, father, 33 y/o).

3.3 High Reflective Surfaces
Children demonstrate great interest in their reflection on reflective surfaces like mirrors or reflective decals. In common, children use mirrors and other reflective surfaces to check over their reflection while role-playing, making funny faces, talking, singing, smiling and even kissing their reflections while shopping (Fig. 2). Parents explained, "if there is any mirror, ...she will get herself entertained by making funny faces, talking and singing to herself… she will just stand in front of the mirror and play with her baby doll" (Iva, mother, 32 y/o). Many children are found excitedly interacting with their reflection images:

Her father lifts her to let her look at her reflection on the panel of the booth. She kissed her reflection a couple of times and giggled joyfully (girl, three y/o).

Meanwhile, research also found that some parents choose to let their children play with these reflective surfaces for some time to keep them entertained "we find a mirror so she can play with her own [imaginative] characters" (Sahil, father, 33 y/o).

Fig. 2. (a) Children interact with reflective surfaces; (b) Children use mirrors to interact with own reflections
(Source: video observation)

3.4 Checkerboards Floor Tiles Pattern
This research also found that children are attracted to play over checkerboard floor tiles patterns while roaming in the store or walkways. The majority of the children demonstrate an interest to jump, slide and play hopscotch along with the checkerboard floor tiles (Fig. 3). They would start jumping where the checkerboard pattern begins and stop at the end of the tile pattern. Children also exhibit joyful emotion when they complete their steps at the end of the checkerboard floor tiles pattern:

He plays hopscotch on the giant checkerboard floor tiles, closely following his mother, who is browsing in the clothing store nearby (boy, five y/o).

Fig. 3. (a) Children play hopscotch along with the checkerboard floor tiles
(Source: video observation)

3.5 Festive Decoration Item
During festive seasons such as Halloween and Christmas, many children are seen excitedly browsing through various kinds of decorative items, including Christmas trees, fairy lights, Halloween masks and Husky dog statues:

He stops in front of the Husky dog statue and strokes its front leg with excitement (boy, four y/o).

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As recorded by some parents, "they put certain Christmas decoration [item] that attract his attention to visit the shelves" (Sid, father, 38 y/o). Remarkably, most children would interact and play with these decorative items as if they were toys to play. Meanwhile, other children were recorded ringing and playing the Christmas decorative doorbells while browsing in the store (Fig. 4). It can be concluded that children respond to store decorative elements including window display, the colour of a store, highly reflective surfaces, floor tiles pattern and festive decoration items through their imaginative play while shopping.

Fig. 4. (a) Children play with artificial snowflakes on Christmas decoration stage
(Source: video observation)

3.6 Discussion

On many occasions, children are found to observe children-related merchandise in the store window displays. They would also hardly stop at any store displaying non-children-related items. Intrigued by these displays, children are seen to enter the store to check on other merchandise inside. This finding is consistent with previous research, highlighting that a customer will enter a store if they are attracted to items on display (Ballantine et al., 2015). Similarly, Lange, Rosengren, and Blom (2016) stated that customers might approach and visit one store if the window display is creatively arranged. On this occasion, children are not tempted by specific merchandise displayed but rather enthralled by the setting and decorations used inside the display.

Another SAV that attracts children's attention is the colour of the store. Children prefer to visit stores painted in colourful, bright, cheerful colours such as yellow, purple, and bright green. Previous researchers highlighted that individuals respond to colours differently, as the meaning of colours might differ across age and culture (Kathie Alexander, 2010). A few researchers stated that most of the stores aiming at younger customers are painted in bright pastels and lively colours as it evokes positive feelings to their target segment (Ballantine et al., 2015). As a result, children feel a lot happier, calmer and are motivated to browse, spend more time and purchase merchandise. Colours also help increase brand awareness and help them recognize and differentiate one brand from another (Aslam, 2006; Deli-Gray et al., 2016). However, it is also crucial to understand that children's interest in one specific colour is also influenced by their liking, further affecting their judgment to visit and stay longer at one store.

Children were also recorded to respond well towards high reflective surfaces such as mirrors. Most children check on their self-reflection, role-playing, talking, singing, and kissing their reflection while waiting for parents browsing in the store. Similarly, other researchers stated that children commonly use a mirror as a playing tool to seek fun and play opportunities while shopping (Ironico, 2012). Research also found that children are actively playing hopscotch and jumping over checkerboard floor patterns, which is commonly found along the walkways of the SC. The finding is consistent with other research, which explained that children are always looking down to check for any symbol or footprints decals on the floor to keep themselves entertained (Ayadi & Cao, 2016; Ironico, 2012). Children also pay great attention to the festive decorations items during Christmas and Halloween seasons. Most of the decorative elements are designed in striking colours, with famous icons, cartoons and ghost characters in its decoration details. With these kid-friendly characters and features, the shopping atmosphere is transformed, visually striking, attractive, and cheerful for children (Lucia-Palacios, Pérez-López, & Polo-Redondo, 2016b). As a result, most children are found to demonstrate approach behaviour through interaction with balloons, fairy lights, Husky dog statues, Christmas doorbells, and other decorative items.

3.7 Research Insight

Children pay extra attention to a store window display decorated with merchandise of their preference, such as toys, cartoon figurines, princess dresses, and superheroes costumes. Therefore, the store window display should incorporate items that piqued a child's interest to attract them and their family to enter and further spend inside the store. A creative store window decoration may attract customers' attention, increase time spent inside and influence parents' shopping and spending. Children are found interested in visiting and spending more time in bright coloured and colourful stores. The retailer might consider applying bright colours around stores and colourful store accessories when decorating a children's related store. Meanwhile, a non-children-related store can apply these colours to one small section to send a message that the area is dedicated to children to play and do craft activities. Alternatively, retailers can also decorate their store using high reflective surfaces such as mirrors to let children do role-playing and entertain themselves while parents continue browsing in the store. The right selection of floor treatments and decorations can appeal to the customer's eye and is also entertaining for children. Children are also excitedly playing hopscotch over the checkerboard floor tiles surfaces. This application

is practical, especially in areas where children have to wait for parents to make purchase selection or payment. Furthermore, children also pay great attention to animal statues and striking coloured decorative elements. Therefore, the right placement of animal figures within the SC would add value to their shopping experience.

4.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

All three objectives had been discussed thoroughly in this research. This research found that children pay greater attention to the window display, store colour, highly reflected surfaces, checkerboard floor tiles pattern, and festive decoration items while shopping in the store. In conclusion, the key factors are positively influencing children's decisions to interact, staying and visiting intention when browsing in the store. The research insights provide new potential strategies that could help to enhance business success and store loyalty among children customers. Ultimately, creating children's spaces in retail space may leave positive in-store shopping values, enhance shopping satisfaction, patronage intentions, and store loyalty. As for recommendations, it is suggested that future research should look into how children respond towards other SAV, such as children's entertainment units and background music while browsing in the store. Understanding how children respond towards these elements may help improve children's and parents' shopping experience within the shopping surroundings.

5.0 Research Limitations

However, there are some limitations for this research. First, children have limited abilities to explain what they need and if they do, their judgement might be different to adult customer since adult obviously have different shopping motivations compared to them. This research however, only recorded children's shopping emotional and behaviour based from their responses. Future research should conduct an empirical study to confirm some findings from this research. Second, the data for observation is conducted at any time agreed by participants. Therefore, observing children within specific time for example, when they are wide awake and active might exposed different results compared to when they are sleepy or not in good shopping mood. Understanding the effects of shopping mood on children shopping responses and behaviour might help parent and businesses to identify the right shopping time as well as unique marketing strategies for this young customer.

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