

The ephemeral point of sale's atmospheric dimensions.

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Abstract:

Although the traditional point of sale's atmospheres has been the subject of several academic research since Baker's identification in 1987, very little research was interested in studying the ephemeral store atmospheres. To fill this gap, this research was interested in understanding whether ephemeral store atmospheres have the same dimensions as those identified for traditional stores. We highlighted new dimensions relative to ephemeral store atmospheres out of 27 semi-structured interviews conducted with French brand managers; these dimensions are conviviality, participation and « *rendez-vous* ».

Key words: Ephemeral retail, pop-up stores, ephemeral store atmosphere

Paper track: Retailing & Omni-Channel Management

Introduction: ephemeral stores around the world and in France

An interesting aspect is revealed when comparing a traditional point of sale to an ephemeral point of sale (Klépierre & QualiQuanti, 2015): A “pop-up” (ephemeral store) is rare, surprises and entertains thanks to the animations of the entertainment which it proposes, it is convivial because it creates moments of socialization with the brand and the customers, and is an exclusive event (Schwab, 2014) in which the customer participates and feels privileged. In contrast to a traditional point of sale, which is a stable benchmark and operates at a steady pace, an ephemeral store is also a sales or distribution tool (Guingois, nd) that appears and disappears at its convenience.

A report published in 2014 indicates that a 16% increase in these points of sale took place between the years 2003 and 2009 in the United States, and this especially in the cities of Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Stockholm, Tokyo and Shanghai (Nicasio, 2015). Despite the success of ephemeral stores, their use remains mostly limited in the United States and the United Kingdom until the year 2011. Other countries are beginning to adopt this type of retail business (Haas & Schmidt, 2016). In France, the first ephemeral store appeared 8 years ago, around the year 2011 (Boussol, 2019) and since that point was considered as being a means of expression for brands (Klépierre & QualiQuanti, 2015).

1. Conceptual framework:

1.1 Traditional store atmospheres and ephemeral store atmosphere:

A traditional store’s atmosphere is defined as all tactile, sound, taste, olfactory, visual and social factors (Daucé & Rieunier, 2002). It represents all the intangible elements that surround the intrinsic characteristics of the product. The point-of-sale atmosphere, perceived in a holistic manner (Sánchez Fernández & Iniesta Bonillo, 2009), has a positive influence on customers, such as the amounts spent by customers (Lemoine, 2005) (Lemoine, 2004).

Ephemeral store atmospheres are renewed with each feat or project and are presented in a theatrical way, with an elaborate staging (De Lassus, 2012), and showing creativity of design, architecture or presentation of merchandise. (Picot-Coupey, 2013) (Fowler & Bridges, 2010);

atmospheres are even imagined as art forms (Picot-Coupey, 2012) designed to involve customers in series of theatrical, memorable and hedonic experiences (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015).

1.2. Customers in touch with traditional store atmospheres and ephemeral store atmospheres:

Customers are affected by the stimulation emitted by the point of sale. In fact, founding articles on the analysis of the effects of the sensory dimension of the point of sale on customers were advanced by Kotler in 1973 and Russel & Mehrabian in 1976 (Bonnin, 2003 and Lemoine, 2003) to highlight the existence of a relationship, an interaction, between the point of sale and the individual. The elements of the store's atmosphere can be controlled to trigger cognitive or psychological emotional effects in customers (Lemoine, 2004). The different dimensions of the environment are perceived by both the staff and the customer, each responding cognitively, emotionally and psychologically to the environment (Daucé & Rieunier, 2002).

Today's customers are looking for fun as they look for animations and surprises (Influencia, 2015). It is through the design of the ephemeral store, its location, and its interior that the relationship between the brand and the customer is established. Designed in a theatrical way, they are considered as an art form (Picot-Coupey, 2014) and appeal to hedonic customers thanks to their novelties and their distinctive characteristics in terms of the atmosphere of the point of sale, the selection of the goods or the communication.

2. Methodology:

The Mehrabian and Russell (1974) Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model is traditionally used to study the effects of a point-of-sale atmosphere on emotional responses and then behavioral responses. Although ephemeral stores are defined as points of sale involving customers and allowing them to live or withdraw an experience, there is no evidence of the definition of an ephemeral store atmosphere and its influence on customer reactions.

In order to answer the question "what is an atmosphere of an ephemeral store?", We adopt a qualitative study (Frisch, 1999) to collect data on the French market. Semi-structured interviews are best suited to understanding a given subject in greater depth (Lunardo, et al., 2012 and Sabiote & Ballester, 2011). Following a comprehensive approach, semi-structured

interviews were chosen to understand the nature of ephemeral stores in France and their atmospheres. Semi-structured interviews are relevant for exploratory studies (Lunardo, et al., 2012, Mencarelli, 2008 and Fosse-Gomez & Özçaglar-Toulouse, 2009).

Data collection by interviews started in October 2017 and stopped in February 2019 when the semantic saturation threshold was reached (Poncin & Garnier, 2012, Roederer, 2012, Lunardo, et al., 2012 and Frippiat & Marquis, 2010). The sample surveyed is relatively heterogeneous (Lunardo, et al., 2012) made up of service providers (23%), individual brands developed or in the process of developing (62%) and brand collectives (15%). which equals 27 brands in total. The distribution sectors are also heterogeneous, ranging from high-end specialty stores to the brands of young designers, as well as service sectors.

An interview guide was constructed based on recurring themes in the literature review and helped to guide discussion of the interview. After taking registration permission, all interviews were fully transcribed. The material was treated by a horizontal reading followed by a vertical and thematic reading before underlining the emerging variables.

3. Results and discussions:

3.1. The vocations of ephemeral stores:

A clear distinction between ephemeral stores with a commercial or event vocation was highlighted. The vocation guides atmospheric conceptions, the type and style of the communicated message and the degree of brand engagement with the customer. The brand will think about the ephemeral store's expected goals and the place the store will occupy in the overall distribution and communication strategy. That being said, the ephemeral store could be the final channel as it could be an intermediary or a complement of other distribution channels or communications.

The atmospheric layout of ephemeral stores with a transactional vocation facilitates access to the offering and is organized in a way that facilitates access to products. The brand may also aim to move customers between its different points of contact; the ephemeral store will be in this case only an intermediary that will guide customers and guide them in the directions that the

brand would like to bring them. The ephemeral store can also refer customers to other retail channels where they will be able to access products offered and thus perform a transactional action.

On the other hand, ephemeral stores can have an event vocation focusing on the playful and fun aspect aiming at greater customer engagement. In that case the atmosphere is designed to allow customers to have more points of contact with the brand: decorative elements such as sofas, tables and chairs or a coffee bar; technological elements such as connected tablets, smart mirrors or screens and human elements that represent the brand as managers, assistants or product managers as well as other visitors or "fans" who come to share their love for the brand and with the others.

3.2. Atmospheres of ephemeral outlets in France:

Comparable to traditional store atmospheres, the ephemeral store atmosphere is a theatrical space and extraordinary and the design depends on the budget that the brand can allocate to the project and is always designed to stimulate meaning of customers. The aesthetic side is as important as the festive side of ephemeral stores; the atmospheric design must be a place where people feel good, a place where there is a social exchange and where we find a friendly side.

An ephemeral store's atmosphere ties a link with digital platforms with the integration of technological tools that are responsible for sharing and exchanging information. Technological tools are also connecting links between the digital communication sphere, customer interaction and its experience at the point of sale.

An ephemeral point of sale's atmosphere includes an aesthetic dimension and a social dimension and takes advantage of technology to amplify and exchange these two aspects. In addition, it is event-driven, experiential and communicative; the ephemeral store is a permanent place of celebration, engaging the customer and inviting him to build and live a unique experience and then give him the opportunity to talk about his experience with his family or on social networks.

3.3. Dimensions of the atmosphere of an ephemeral store in France:

Research findings underline social dimensions, convivial, meeting and “rendezvous” dimensions that reflect ephemeral point of sale atmospheres; these dimensions are added to the aesthetic dimensions (atmosphere and design) that mark traditional point of sale atmospheres.

- Aesthetic dimension (design and layout): The ephemeral store’s layout is guided by the brand's strategy, objectives and its vocation. The aesthetic dimension includes all the design variables, the choice of the theme, the products or collections to be presented and the informational, communication or technological tools elements.
- Social dimension (strong human presence): Brand representatives, customers and other passengers can all be found at the same time in an ephemeral store. Human presence "humanizes" the atmosphere and breaks barriers between the brand and customers and flattens the relationship at a horizontal level.
- Convivial dimension (exchange and sharing): Once the customer or a simple passenger is in the ephemeral store, he is more comfortable to gather the information he needs, to share his opinion(s) or thoughts, or exchange with the brand. The ephemeral store’s atmosphere is reserves a “convivial space” where drinks, cakes or other delicacies are served. The time the customer spends in the atmosphere tends to be longer and his attitude towards the exchange with the brand or other customers is less formal and easier.
- Participative dimension (active participation): The customer is given the space and freedom to act in his own way and at his own pace. He masters his time, his activities and his preferences. The customer also participates in the activities or games that the brand offers in the point of sale.
- Meeting dimension (a one-off appointment): The ephemeral store's lifespan and its unexpected nature means that customers come to meet the brand at a specific time to share, exchange or have a good time with them.

4. Research contributions:

4.1. Theoretical contributions:

Several authors have identified environmental factors or dimensions of a traditional point-of-sale atmosphere. Baker (1987) identified environmental cues in a store as ambient

factors (aesthetic or functional), design factors and social factors. Likewise, Bitner (1992) identified the dimensions of ambience, space, and signs or artifacts. As for Eroglu and Machleit (1993), the retail atmosphere refers to any physical or non-physical element controlled by the brand. Based on the model of Bitner (1992), Daucé and Rieunier (2002) identified atmospheric components that are presented in terms of "factors"; tactile, sonorous, tasteful, olfactory, visual and social.

The dimensions of an ephemeral store atmosphere add to the aesthetic dimensions and social dimensions interactive, participative and convivial human dimensions. In a context of "rendez-vous" between the brand and the customer and the customers themselves, the atmosphere becomes a place of meeting, exchange and sharing whose utilities go beyond the commercial purpose and which upset the traditional conceptions of a point of sale and its atmosphere: from a point of sale to a meeting point.

4.2. Managerial contributions:

Brand managers are invited to rethink the goals for which an ephemeral store is developed in order to design an atmosphere that allows them to meet set objectives while considering atmospheric dimensions that are human oriented and participative; this applies to "native digital" brands, developing brands or brand collectives. Atmospheric conceptions will lead to more dynamic relationships between the brand and customers, and will enable the brand to generate customer reactions.

A brand-customer exchange is a means of collecting accurate and valuable information. The ephemeral store's atmosphere becomes a source of intentionally shared and customer-driven data collection that will allow brands to rethink their future actions or future market propositions. Customers play an important and different role from the role he played in traditional stores; they become suppliers and producers of data that matters to them and that brands will exploit to stay relevant on the market.

5. Future research paths:

This study, being carried out on the French field may reflect local specificities. It would be interesting to collect data from North American, African or Asian markets in order to identify similarities or differences related to ephemeral store atmospheric dimensions. Given the exploratory nature of our research, conclusions drawn deserve to be put into perspective. Indeed, our study has limited external validity due to the size and composition of our sample. The dimensions of ephemeral store atmospheres that differentiate them from the dimensions of traditional store atmospheres can also be tested to verify the existence an influence on customers' emotional reactions, their intentions or their behavioral responses.

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