

Psychology of Store Layouts

Informative Essay

We all experience the effects of a store's layout. Whether getting groceries or shopping for back to school clothes, stores are designed to keep customers in the store longer and spend more money. While it is common knowledge that grocery stores strategically place high-profit items at eye level and that clothing retailers are filled with "40% Off!" signs, store layouts are designed to be natural and comfortable, not make you think about why an item is placed where it is. Nonetheless, the store layout, item placement, and atmosphere are strategically designed to make you fill your cart and spend more money.

Store Layout

Have you ever noticed that you tend to turn right when you enter a store? Studies show that shoppers tend to move counterclockwise through the physical space of a store, so the display just to the right of the door is premium real estate. This counterclockwise direction is justified by the fact that most customers are right-handed. However, the paper "Anti-Clockwise or Clockwise?" has a different explanation for why we may be more prone to turn right: "Neurophysiological research suggests a different explanation for this turning preference—the hormone dopamine, which is responsible for locomotion in space. The higher the dopamine concentration on the left side of the brain, the more consumers' attention (and consequently their locomotion) is focused on the right side" (Groeppel-Klein & Bartmann, 2007). Given this conclusion, customers are more likely to notice items on the right side of the aisle.

This paper also suggests that shoppers have a general orientation towards the walls because it makes them feel secure. In a counter-clockwise oriented store, one's attention may be drawn to the right, both because of the security of the wall and dopamine bringing the focus

there. Here, it is more likely that a customer will pay more attention to the products on the right side of the aisle. However, in a clockwise oriented store, customers are likely to notice the items on the left side of the aisle because of the security of the wall, but will also notice items on the right because of the concentration of dopamine. In the study conducted by Groeppel-Klein and Bartmann, customers that were guided clockwise around the store evaluated the store better for perceived ease of orientation and value for money (Groeppel-Klein & Bartmann, 2007).

Even mirrors are strategically placed in a store. While one may assume your favorite clothing store has mirrors on the pillars to see how an item looks, they also serve another purpose. We behave better when we can see ourselves, so mirrors are an effective theft deterrent. Mirrors can also help eliminate blind spots in corners where shoplifters might hide.

Item Placement

The physical arrangement of the store needs to account for consumer psychology and attract not just the purchaser, but the influencer. In the grocery store, this is frequently young children. High-profit items with kid appeal are placed at their eye level. These items further attract children by offering toys or gifts, and the parents buy the product because their children are persistent.

Essential items (i.e., bread, milk, and eggs in a grocery store or printer paper and ink cartridges in an office supply store) are typically placed as far from the door as possible. The distance from the entrance will increase the time customers spend in the store; the more time spent in the store and the more ground they cover, the more money they spend.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere is an aspect of the physical environment that influences customers. Poor lighting, exposed beams, and a warehouse-like feel may be okay in bulk retailers such as Costco

or Sam's Club, but not in a high-end store. Could you imagine walking into Burberry and seeing exposed beams?

Two aspects of the atmosphere that affect customers' shopping experience are the olfactory and auditory experiences. Bakeries know the power of heavenly aromas wafting through a store, and car dealerships understand the pull of that new car smell. Scent generators are useful in creating a pleasant shopping experience. Music matters, too. Classical music typically results in higher spends, and slower tempo music slows shoppers down and increases the amount of time they spend in a store (Michalowicz, 2017).

Conclusion

While some may find it unethical that our favorite stores try to encourage us to purchase more than we intended, there is no way to completely avoid this effect as companies impose similar strategies in their online stores. Strategic store layout is beneficial to the company, but I see no major ethical concerns or potential for unfavorable effects with strategically laying out a store. Whether young or old, we all interact with stores on a regular basis and are prone to the impact of their strategic item placement, atmospheres, smells, and sounds.

References

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