FITTING ROOM OR SELLING ROOM? MILLENNIAL FEMALE CONSUMERS' DRESSING ROOM EXPERIENCES

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Short title: Fitting Room

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Abstract

As retail experiences have become more important to the modern consumer, the store environment has taken on greater significance. The store environment is especially of great significance to the millennial consumer. These consumers tend to spend more time in the fashion retail store, while their expenditure on fashion items increases on a yearly basis. The dressing room must be seen as the clothing retailer's selling room – the place where the retail environment plays an immense role with regard to a consumer's cognitions, emotions and purchasing behaviour. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe young millennial clothing consumers' Functional, aesthetic, emotional and symbolic dressing room experiences. A qualitative research strategy was followed. Two unstructured interviews were held with 15 participants. Participants had to take photos of retailers' dressing rooms before the second interview. A photo-elicitation technique was employed during the second interview. Findings revealed that participants had specific expectations with regard to the functionality and aesthetics of the dressing room, as well as with regard to the symbolic messages and the emotions that they expected to experience. If the dressing room did not meet their expectations they got disappointed, experienced negative emotions and thoughts and the need to leave the dressing room. The behavioural response of avoidance strongly came to the forth. Findings of this research point to the importance of the dressing room as part of the retail experience and have implications for consumer specialists and retailers.

Key words: Dressing room, Fitting room, Retail Experience,

Introduction

Survival in today's fashion retail environment is no longer just about low prices or new products. It is pre-eminently about the creation of a pleasant experience for the shopper (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). Creating a pleasant environment for the consumer has therefore become a competitive retailing strategy and in itself a tool to improve customer satisfaction. Today's focus is therefore on what the consumer wants and not on what a competitor does. Kim (2001) indicates that, for today's consumer, experience expands beyond the tangible product to include multi-sensory systems such as taste, smell, vision and hearing. The focus is to make connection with consumers and to give them sensorial, emotional and cognitive pleasure in all areas of the retail environment. The dressing room is one space in a clothing store where most female consumers spend a substantial portion of their shopping time. Unfortunately the dressing room is many times not treated as an important space in the retail environment and without due consideration of what the consumer would like to experience when fitting her clothes. This paper sheds light on millennial female consumers' dressing room expectations and experiences.

It is especially the millennial shoppers that are strongly influenced by the experiential attributes of the shopping experience. Millennial consumers are between 16 and 34 years old and although the youngest members of this group are still financially dependent on their parents, most of the members of this generation are entering their peak earning and spending years (Barton *et al*., 2012). These consumers tend to spend more time in the fashion retail store, while their expenditure on fashion items increases on a yearly basis (Xu, 2007; Noble *et al.,* 2008; Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). They have been socialized into consumption at a younger age than their parents and are recognized as a sizeable clothing market (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003; Tran, 2008; Pentecost & Andrews, 2010; Zhang *et al*., 2011). This consumer

market has therefore grabbed the attention of retailers who now acknowledge the important differences between this market's and older markets' shopping involvement, shopping experiences, shopping behaviour and decision-making styles. Barton *et al.* (2012) from the Boston Consulting Group therefore noted that "the millennial generation is poised to leave its mark on the world – and its dollars in the cash registers. What's more, millennial attitudes toward and preferences for marketing and media are early indicators of trends that will eventually spread beyond this group to non-millennial consumers. And unlike with past generations, the influence of millennials is far from passive and narrow".

Research has shown that young consumers who experience positive retail experiences are more likely to reach a purchase decision, have a greater willingness to buy and make a greater number of purchases (Baker *et al.,* 2002). Kim *et al.* (2009) noted that consumer decision-making has shifted from the rational to the emotional and experiential. This is especially true for the millennial female consumer. Kinley *et al.* (2010) found that these clothing consumers are high-involvement shoppers, who see shopping as fun and tend to make unplanned purchases.

Solomon and Rabolt (2004) noted that fashion decision-making differs from other product decision-making processes because most of the stages of the fashion decision-making process take place in-store, and specifically in the dressing room where the consumer tries the item on, evaluates how it fits on her body and makes the final decision to purchase or not to purchase. Retailers therefore need to realize the importance of the dressing room in consumers' purchase decision-making process. The dressing room should be seen as the clothing retailer's selling room – the place where the retail environment can play an important role with regard to a consumer's cognitions, emotions and purchasing behaviour. Unfortunately, despite the importance of the dressing room as 'point of selling', very little research has been done on the influence that the dressing room has on clothing consumers'

shopping experiences. This leaves retailers in the dark with regard to what their markets actually expect from a dressing room and in the end also what to offer their markets in terms of a positive fitting experience. This is specifically true with regard to the millennial shopper who, according to Barton *et al.* (2012) have different expectations than older consumers for in-store service and the overall shopping experience. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore and describe young millennial clothing consumers' functional, aesthetic, emotional and symbolic dressing room experiences. A solid understanding of millennials' expectations with regard to these dressing room experiences can assist retailers to reinvent themselves, especially given the growth of online and mobile shopping and the importance that this consumer segment places on the shopping experience.

Literature

The consumer decision-making process is a goal-oriented, problem-solving procedure that is concerned with the interaction between the consumer's behaviour, cognitions, affective processes and environmental elements (Levy & Weitz, 2005). If one of these elements is not adhered to, it becomes a blocking mechanism to the consumer. If cleverly used, store elements can evoke many desired intentions in a consumer (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). The shopping environment consists of formal as well as social, expressive and symbolic qualities which are pleasing in themselves and can influence the acceptance of the merchandise in general (Fiore & Kim, 2007). Kim *et al.* (2009) and Clarke *et al.* (2012) noted that, because consumer decision-making has shifted from the rational to the emotional and experiential, the consumer now needs an experience that taps into all five senses and satisfies her on a functional and aesthetic level, but also on an emotional and cognitive level.

Dressing rooms can be seen as the point and place in the clothing retail environment where most decisions are made (Lee & Johnson, sa: 2). Dressing rooms are therefore essential to the retail experience and often stand for that final instance where the consumer decides whether to make a clothing purchase or not. Bell and Ternus (2006) believe that the dressing room is regularly overlooked and is often placed in such a tiny space that its location is difficult for consumers to find.

The visual message of the dressing room must fit in with everything else that the store is trying to create (Bell & Ternus, 2006; Machado & Diggines, 2012). A retail store's aim is for the space to be designed in such a manner that it increases and encourages the continuous sale of products (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007; Rengel, 2007). A consumer should be able to walk on a traffic trail in the store and easily find the dressing room area while cubicles should be spacious enough for the consumer to comfortably move around while trying on clothing products.

Store environments communicate various messages to consumers. Cognition involves mental activity which stimulates the brain in such a manner that it creates symbolic meaning (Fiore & Kimle, 1997). This mental processing is stimulated by environmental cues that help in shaping beliefs about the product, retailer and the brands (Machado & Diggines, 2012). The use of different sensory elements such as music (De Nora & Belcher, 2005), aromas (Kim *et al.,* 2009; Soars, 2009; Machado & Diggines, 2012; Rimkute *et al*., 2015) and textures and surfaces (Fore & Kimle, 1997; Rath *et al*., 2008; Machado & Diggines, 2012) can create a store environment that improves a shopper's experience and influences her in-store behaviour. The same applies to the dressing room.

Stimuli in a product and environment not only influence the consumer's senses, but also play an important role in the consumer's emotional experience (Fiore & Kimle, 1997; D'Astous, 2000; Burns & Neisner, 2006), and in the end may also affect customer

satisfaction. Bagozzi *et al.* (1998) and Hunter (2006) stress the importance of positive, anticipated emotions in the consumer's shopping experience and final decision-making. Emotions are multifaceted reactions that involve both the minds and bodies of consumers (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). Emotion is evoked when a situation is evaluated as being of personal significance to the consumer. An emotional experience is brought about by an evaluated situation, which may be either consistent or inconsistent with one's expectations (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003; Demir *et al.,* 2009). Without the arousal of emotion, paralysis would occur in the consumer's decision-making, as she will not be able to make up her mind (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003).

Emotion and the expression of feelings essentially has three dimensions, namely, pleasure, arousal and dominance. Pleasure is the easiest dimension to identify as it is part of whether an item or environment is liked or disliked. Arousal can be seen as a state that ranges from being frantic with excitement to sleeping, while dominance has to do with the consumer feeling that she is in control of the circumstances. The pervasive power of an emotional reaction has previously been recognised by marketers in different areas such as product usage, advertising and shopping (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000; Guimond *et al.*, 2001). Store-induced enjoyment influences the amount of time spent in the space as well as the inclination to interact with store employees, while negative emotions can lead to a consumer perceiving the merchandise as of lesser value. This is especially true if a customer is aggravated or annoyed with a retail space, where she may develop a feeling that she is losing more than she is getting.

Methodology

Given the purpose of the study, the researchers decided on a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research as it is conducted in a setting which is natural to the people that are being researched. It is also more process focussed, the person's view is highlighted, it aims to obtain thick descriptions as well as a broad understanding of behaviour, and it is not about generalising, but more about understanding social behaviour in its natural setting (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Sample

The units of analysis for this study were female clothing consumers between the age of 18 and 25 years. A purposive, snowball sampling technique was used to firstly identify three respondents who met the sampling criteria. They were then asked to recruit other members who also met the criteria. Respondents lived in a major city in South Africa. In the end fifteen respondents took part in the study when data saturation could be assured (Schurink *et al*., 2011). All participants willingly took part in the study and signed a consent form. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data collection

Two interviews (30-60 minutes each) were held with each participant in a quiet room at a university. The aim of the first interview was to gain an understanding of the expectations that the participants had with regard to the dressing room experience. Participants were

probed with questions like "how do you expect a dressing room should be?" Each answer was followed with a question "why do you say so"?

A photo-elicitation technique was employed during the second interview. Photo-elicitation involves the use of photos during the interview. During the second interview the researchers were interested in exploring the participants "real-world" dressing room experiences. At the end of the first meeting participants were issued with a digital camera and asked to visit two branches of the same retailer whose clothing products are more affordable and aimed at the younger consumer. They had to try on six clothing items. While trying that on they had to take photos of anything that made an impression on them, whether good or bad. The camera was then returned to the researcher who downloaded and developed the photos for discussion during the second interview.

Photo-elicitation is seen as a technique to sharpen the respondent's memory during an interview. It is used as an external stimulus that can bridge communication gaps between the researcher and the participant and enhances the flexibility of coverage and the exploration of new areas, resulting in richer data (Burt *et al*., 2007; Reavey, 2011:xxvii; Lachal *et al*., 2012). Participants were asked questions like "why did you take this photo?" or "what did you think about this dressing room?" Each answer was again followed by the question "why do you say so"? Adopting such an approach a researcher usually aims to capture phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Data analysis

Qualitative data can be analysed using various ways, and the method of analysis can be altered as the analysis is being conducted (Schurink *et al*., 2011). The method used depends greatly on the research question of the study (Schreier, 2012). All interviews were tape-

recorded and verbatim transcribed. Field notes were also captured on the computer after each interview (Payne & Payne, 2004).

The second step was about breaking down the compiled data into tinier pieces. This was done by first reading repeatedly through all of the written text. Significant words, passages and phrases were highlighted by writing codes/memos as it helped with the exploration of the data (Payne & Payne, 2004 & Schurink *et al.*, 2011). Coding or the writing of memos involves the recording or identification of certain words/passages/phrases by one word, which in some way epitomises the same descriptive or theoretical initiative (Gibbs, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Thus, all the data that epitomised the same descriptive or theoretical initiative was labelled with the same code/memo (Gibbs, 2007).

The third step entailed the reorganisation of the smaller pieces compiled in step two (Yin, 2011; Schreier, 2012). Colour-coding was used to identify the pieces so that they could be reorganised/clustered, using the conceptual literature on the definition of the retail environment and objective of the study as point of departure (Payne & Payne, 2004; Gibbs, 2007), while the photos served as confirmation of the verbatim. This is seen as intellectually the most challenging step in the data analysis process, as this step integrates the whole endeavour by identifying recurrent ideas, prominent themes, belief systems and associations drawn across all the text (Payne & Payne, 2004; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Schurink *et al.*, 2011; Schreier, 2012).

Findings

An experience occurs for a consumer when a business deliberately uses services and items as props to entice the individual consumer in a manner that it creates an unforgettable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In order for the consumer to be enticed, one needs to know what a

consumer expects of the retail experience so that an "unforgettable event" can be created. The dressing room experience can be seen as the moment where the consumer experiences a response to the environmental attributes that either matches her expectations or not. This could be a sensorial response due to the functionality and aesthetics of the dressing room, or a cognitive or emotional response.

The functionality of the dressing room includes the layout, space, furniture and fixtures. Participants in this study expected that a clothing store's layout should be such that it is easy for them to locate the dressing room area.

> I tried to find a dressing room; I didn't even see it. I left, and I had clothes in my hand – I wanted to fit them, but then I tried to look for a dressing room – I didn't see it. (#9) When you start shopping you're very excited and then there's a drop in your mood. You're not feeling the excitement anymore because you're a bit bothered for looking for the room. And when you're not excited to fit clothes you're probably not going to buy a lot of clothes. (#15).

Being able to see where one wants to go is so important that it can be put at the centre of a store's layout efficiency (Soars, 2009). Proper layout can help the consumer feel orientated within a space, as she will know where she is and where to find what she is looking for. Unfortunately participants sometimes struggled to find the dressing room area as the layout of the store made it more difficult for the participants to spot the dressing room area from the main selling floor.

> I actually did struggle to find it. Not only is it because there's things all over the place, but it's also hidden. I wish that they could have more signs directing you towards the dressing room. (#4)

The participants expected the space of the actual dressing room cubicle to be large enough so that they could feel comfortable.

They're a bit too small. I don't have enough room to say, "wow, I look good". (#1) ...it's small so you're not really free to actually try on nicely. (#2)

They also expected that the walls, door and ceiling of a dressing room cubicle should be fully closed when inside the cubicle.

Some of them are still on curtains instead of doors. I think it's below standard, because first of all, not only is it cheap, it is cheaper quality and less privacy. (#4) Normally the doors are short, like you can actually see the other person's legs and what they are doing. This is not good. I feel that they are actually looking at me. (#8)

Ballantine *et al*. (2010) found that a large space can have a positive influence on a consumer's interaction with products. Unfortunately the participants were unsatisfied with some of the dressing room cubicles. The participants noted that the cubicles were too small. They felt unsafe and just thought of getting out of there.

When I walked into this one I was like I just had this shock-moment, because like the moment I walked in I was like, "oh, it's so small"! (#14) It's small. It's like your mind is also limited in a way. So you are not really free to actually try on nicely. (#9)

In terms of furniture and fixtures, the participants expected at least a bench, hooks against the wall, a mirror and good lightning in the dressing room.

…that's why you go into a dressing room, to see if it fits and looks good on you. You don't just fit and leave, you fit and say, "Does this look good on me"? I like to take some time from all that shopping and sit down and am like, "okay, this is the one that I want". (#1) I think

the mirror, they need to get those side mirrors, and you know those

ones that go on the side so that you can see the back and everything.

(#6)

They also expected the lightning in the dressing room to facilitate the task of trying on clothing items.

Okay, certain lights make you look good, because you're like… okay

fine, they're enjoyable, and then some of them, they just, I don't know,

maybe they can crowd your vision and then your judgement as well

with the clothes, because you're like, "ah-ah, no, not this'. (#2)

There were many complaints about furniture and fixtures in the dressing rooms. The participants felt that the management did not consider their customer base before putting benches in the cubicles of the dressing rooms and that the store management was underestimating the size of their customers by putting small benches in the cubicles, on which only a certain size person can sit.

...how small their benches are and if you are a bigger sized person you

wouldn't be able to sit on the benches, and it was in the corner, so I felt

that was really unreasonable for anyone who was big, and it felt unfair.

(#10) I like that the hooks are clean, but then they're still small. (#8)

It's old; it looks rusted, so I took a picture of that and I was like, they

can fix that; they should be maintaining that, they don't care at all and

it's just another dressing room to them. (#10)

The layout, space, furniture and fixtures in the dressing room do not only affect the functionality of the dressing room, but also the consumer's aesthetic experience in the dressing room. It was found that specifically sight, sound and smell played an important role in the participants' aesthetic experiences in the dressing room. Visser *et al. (*2006) found that

colour is important in terms of how consumers formed an image of a store, as it brings with it perceptions of gender, weight and temperature (Rengel, 2007). Participants specifically wanted the dressing room to be beautiful and clean.

It doesn't really make you feel at home. It's just a room, that's it, with a mirror. There's nothing to it, it's just, just there, add a colour, a welcoming colour, because it's just white. (#2) I think they're very dull. When you're going into the dressing room it's just like an open space. They don't have a nice curtain and whatever, with colour, so that you can feel good about yourself when you go in there. (#7)

Consumers tend to feel a sense of order in a space which is tidy, where one does not see dirt or items lying around, but where everything is neat and proper (Rengel, 2007). Participants in this research expected the dressing room to be clean and without any odours.

The floors are not clean. I'm not really comfortable with that. Or maybe pieces of rubbish lying around, you know. (#13) You know, some people… deodorant… and then you walk in it's like… so that's why I was hoping that it would also have an air conditioner thing going on there". (#14 I think it's like a half-hearted effort, then you wouldn't want to buy the clothes, because they don't spend a lot of effort on their customers, so why should the customers spend effort on trying to buy the clothes. (#15)

In terms of sound, the participants expected to hear nothing else but music in the dressing room area so as to keep them happy and focused on themselves.

The radio…. It's okay, because the music they play there is not so bad; it caters for… well it is pop, so it's fun. (#6) Oh, my neighbours…. I don't think you should be hearing them; you should hear them less, so that you can concentrate on yourself and your thoughts of how you look. (#13)

Participants, however, complained about the music in some of the stores, specifically in stores where loud music were played throughout the store and interrupted by loud announcements.

> I liked the music parts, but then when the intercom came on, it kind of disturbed me, it just made me come back to reality I guess. It kind of disturbed my thinking process. (#2) At the one shop I wanted to get out as soon as possible. (#5)

> Fiore and Kimle (1997) believe that background music creates pleasure, promotes merchandise and it also adds to the retailer's image. Several research studies indicate that music can influence a consumer based on its rhythm and tempo and can evoke emotional and behavioural reactions within consumers (Soars, 2009; Ballantine *et al.*, 2010).

The important question was: what happens when the young consumer does not have a positive experience with regard to the functionality and the aesthetic environment in the dressing room? Dressing rooms that were not functional or aesthetically pleasing first of all impacted negatively on the participants' evaluation of the fit of the clothing items. Participants noted that they were able to evaluate the clothing items better in the one store where the cubicles were bigger, the lightning sufficient and where no noises from outside interrupted their concentration.

> It made me feel great, like I remember when I put on the clothes, having been in the bigger cubicle putting on the clothes, I felt more "oh, I look good". I could see myself everywhere and I could walk in the dressing room and see how it's going to look when I walk. (#9) They're small... Well, not miserable but irritated, and then I did not want to fit my clothes. (#13) It gave me like a dark claustrophobic image… I just wanted to change and did what I needed to do, and

compared to the other store where I was like, "ah, I don't mind staying here for a while" because it's like bright and I could actually see what I was wearing. (#14) I just did not like other noises interfering at that moment. I'm fine with music, but then I don't want other outside interruptions. (#2) The other store was really quiet and I just felt I could have my own space. (#5)

It further became clear from the findings that the dressing room's functional and aesthetic environment did not only affect the participants' sensorial and functional experiences, for example that they did not like the music or that the dressing room was untidy, but specifically their emotional and cognitive experiences. Participants wanted to feel comfortable and relaxed in the dressing room that symbolizes for them that the retailer actually cares about his customer. When they did not find the dressing room as they had expected it to be, they got negative symbolic messages, experienced negative emotions and an urge to just leave.

Obviously they don't want you to spend more time in it, I guess. (#2)

It's just not presentable, because a naked bulb symbolises poverty. (#4)

It shows it's classy in a way, it's something I would actually maybe consider putting in my house, because I feel like they put effort in the lighting.(#2)

The fact that they did not get in the dressing room what they had expected, combined with the negative messages that it symbolized for the participants, evoked strong negative emotions in the participants and an urge to just leave.

That's how it makes me feel; it makes me feel rushed, it's like… it's unwelcoming. (#2) Like you're in a dirty place… Not nice at all. It makes you feel like you don't want to be there, because it has chewing

gum on the walls. Oh, it made me feel very angry; I was very, very frustrated – seriously... If I wasn't doing this for you, I'm telling you, I would have left. (#9) In one shop I had to think about it for myself to say, "wait, do I really want this, because I can't actually see what I'm wearing". (#14) You just feel that when you start shopping you're very excited and then when there's like a drop in your mood because your mood has been interrupted and you're not feeling the excitement anymore. And when you're not excited to fit on clothes you're probably not going to buy a lot of clothes. (#15)

Discussion

The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm can be seen as a "mental state" due to the fact that disconfirmation/confirmation is based on the premise that a consumer has a pre-determined expectation of a product or service, which is an essential element in achieving satisfaction (Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012). Consumers' expectations about products/services mainly originate from four different sources, namely: the need recognised by the consumer, what other retailers have to offer, previous experience with a particular product/service, and the communication received from a particular store about its products/services Nirmalya *et al., 2012).* Participants in this study therefore had explicit expectations for the dressing room experience due to specific personal needs or previous experiences in clothing stores' dressing rooms. These young consumers already had clear event schemata (scripts) of fitting and what is supposed to happen in a dressing room, as well as how the dressing rooms' aesthetic and functional qualities should be in order to evaluate mainly the sensory aspects of garments (how beautiful it looks and fits on the body). This process of comparing expectations with

performances comprises a cognitive process within a consumer's conscious control, but also an affective process (emotion) outside of conscious control (Lijander & Strandvik, 1997). It was further clear that these young consumers not only had expectations regarding the sensory aesthetic and functional qualities of a dressing room, but also definite expectations about the emotions that they would like and not like to experience as well as the non-verbal messages that they expected to receive. Dressing rooms should therefore have specific functional and aesthetic qualities in order for them to sensitise the consumer's senses in such a way that it results into positive cognitions and emotions. Hunter (2006) points to the importance of such positive anticipated emotions and notes that these positive anticipated emotions "are the expected emotional consequences of achieving a goal". Without these emotions decision making would be paralyzed because "emotions link to values that are crucial for making trade-offs" (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003:120).

It should be noted that this study was not concerned about retail image as a result of the retail environment, but was specifically concerned about the behavioural, cognitive and emotional consequences due to a "real world" retail experience. For the millennial consumer in this study the clothing shopping experience, and in this case the important experience of evaluating and deciding, is not a task-oriented experience, but rather a recreational and hedonic experience that involves cognitions emotions and behaviours. These consumers do not only need to evaluate the quality of clothes in the dressing room, they need to experience certain emotions and need to get the message that they are special and that the retailer actually cares about them as customers. Carpenter *et al.* (2005) found a positive relationship between hedonic benefits desired by consumers and the uniqueness of the in-store experience, which includes behaviour aspects related to multi-sensory, fantasy and emotional consumption, while Sullivan and Heitmeyer (2008) found in their study of millennial shoppers that experiential attributes of the shopping experience influenced both patronage

and re-patronage decisions. In their joint survey amongst 4000 millennials the Boston Consulting Group and the Barkley and Service Management Group (Barton *et al.,* 2012) found that female millennials prefer an experiential lifestyle environment. They care about the music played, prefer neat and well-lit dressing rooms and like roomier stores with seating for friends to stay.

Participants in this study experienced strong negative emotions when they did not find the dressing room as they had expected it to be. They felt shocked, irritated, frustrated and angry. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) point to the consequences of such negative emotions and state that there must be a goal at stake for these emotions to be aroused. In the case of the so-called "nasty" emotions such as anger, the goal is usually to preserve one's ego in a given situation. On way of coping with negative emotions is through avoidance – in other words to leave the situation and try not to be involved in such a situation again. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2003:125) therefore noted that "This explains why purchases or services that fall well below what was promised (expected) arouse long-term emotions accompanied by a resolve never to deal with the company again".

The behavioural response of 'avoidance' (opposite of 'approach') (Meharabian & Russell, 1974), the consequence of a negative emotion, strongly came to the forth in this study.

> That's how it makes me feel; it makes me feel rushed, it's like…
> it's unwelcoming. (#2) Like you're in a dirty place... Not nice at
> all. It makes you feel like you don't want to be there. (#14) Oh, it
> made me feel very angry; I was very, very frustrated – seriously...
> If I wasn't doing this for you, I'm telling you, I would have left.
> (#9)

Many studies have consistently shown that the perceived physical retail environment influences approach-avoidance behaviour (Hui & Bateson, 1991; Bitner, 1992; Babbin & Attaway, 2000; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Andreu *et al.,* 2006). Wakefield and Baker (1998) and Andreu *et al.* (2006) found that the in-store environment plays an important role in determining a consumer's desire to remain in the store, while McGoldrick and Thompson (1992) determined an association between the retail environment and patronage behaviour. As shown in the study of Andreu *et al.* (2006) the findings of this study again points to the positive relationships among consumers' perceptions about the retail environment, consumers' emotions and consumers' behavioural intentions with respect to a shopping environment.

Conclusions, implications and limitations

It can be concluded that the dressing room played an important role in the female millennial consumers' overall retail experience and that the young consumers in this study had definite expectations with regard to the functionality and aesthetics of the dressing room as well as what the dressing room experience should entail for them. These expectations played a role in their experience of the dressing room, their satisfaction with the dressing room and in the end their desire to remain in the dressing room to fit the clothes that they had chosen. For the young consumers in this study the fitting of clothing and the dressing room experience was not only about a physical or sensorial experience of the functionality or beauty of the dressing room, but also a cognitive and emotional experience. The inter-relatedness between the

physical or sensorial experience and the cognitive and emotional experiences in the retail environment became very clear.

The consumers in this study expected the dressing room to be functional in terms of layout, space, furniture and fixtures in order for them to experience positive emotions and to receive positive non-verbal messages in the dressing room. They also wanted to be stimulated by the sensorial beauty of the dressing room which should then evoke in them positive emotions of 'feeling-at-home', relaxed, comfortable and excited, and with the message that the retailer cares about its customers.

It may further be concluded that, if the dressing room does not meet this young millennial consumer's expectations regarding its aesthetics and functionality, they got disappointed, experienced negative emotions and thoughts, and the need to do something about it – in many cases then stopping the fitting process or leaving the environment. In such a case they got angry and disappointed and felt that they did not belong there.

These conclusions all clearly point to the importance of the dressing room as part of the overall retail experience, and have definite managerial implications for retailers who target the millennial market. Often the dressing room can be seen as the place where the final decision to buy or not to buy is made, and where decisions about possible future visits are made, irrespective of the rest of the retail environment. It is the place where the female consumer's body, soul and mind can be captured. It should therefore be treated as an important space in the clothing retail environment.

To stay relevant to millennials and retain them as customers, stores that target them must take notice if these young consumers' sensorial, emotional and cognitive needs – especially given the growth of on-line shopping and the importance that millennials place on the shopping experience. Young millennials are demanding and need to feel that they are valued as a person, even when they know well that a specific store sells more affordable

clothes aimed at the less affluent consumer. They value the opinions of peers more than previous generations and word-of-mouth about a negative retail experience therefore spreads instantly Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008; Parment, 2013). The dressing room experience, as per the findings of this study, may be the final in-store experience before the decision is made to buy or not to buy, or to stay or leave. The dressing room should therefore not only assist the consumer in evaluating the quality of the clothes and to spend enough time on fitting a garment, but should serve as a space where the young consumer can fully 'experience' the message "We care about you". The dressing room should be easy to locate. It is the place where the consumer needs enough room to move around and to view the fit of the garment from all angles, while the 'right' music can give young shoppers a sense of occasion, enabling them to transpose themselves into the places they might go wearing the garment (De Nora & Belcher, 2005). It is the place in the store where the customer should feel relaxed and at home. It should be spotlessly clean with furniture and fixtures such as mirrors, hooks, benches and lightning that all send the message that the retailer actually cares about the customers. Consumer specialists and retailers therefore need to be creative and spend enough money, space and time on their dressing rooms.

This study was a qualitative study. The aim was therefore to explore and describe the phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Qualitative studies have only small numbers of participants participating in the research. The findings of this study can therefore not be generalised to the broader population. However, this study points to the importance of the dressing room as the selling room in the retail environment. It is therefore recommended that future quantitative studies amongst various consumer segments' needs and experiences regarding dressing rooms be conducted.

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