

The Effects of Visual Complexity in a Fashion Store Environment on Consumer Emotions

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Increasingly competitive markets call for innovative strategies for retailers to enhance the benefits and values that brick-and-mortar store environments provide. Retailers introduce new technologies or decorative art works in their stores to attract consumers' attention and maximize in-store experience, which result in the exposure of consumers to a highly complex retail environment. Complexity is an important variable that influences the first impressions, emotions, and preferences to visual stimuli (Cox & Cox, 2002; Tuch et al., 2009). However, its effects on consumers in the retail context have not been widely explored. A few attempts have been made to examine the effects of visual complexity on shoppers' response, but no attempt has been made from the fashion retail context whose major consideration relies on visual design. Thus, this study investigated the effects of visual complexity of a fashion store on affective responses using both self-report and psychophysiological measures. This study also explored the moderating effects of consumers' fashion involvement, which is an important consideration for marketers because it has an effect on consumer decision making process (Naderi, 2013; O'Cass, 2004).

For this study, we developed two types of virtual fashion stores with different levels of visual complexity using a 3D modeling program. Visual complexity is defined by the designs of walls, floors, ceilings, or furniture, and store layout. We manipulated the levels of visual complexity with the presence of decorative patterns as a design element and the type of layout (grid vs. free form). The amount of products and environmental elements, as well as the size of the store were controlled equally to highlight the effects of visual design with limited space and products.

Study 1 is conducted to investigate the effects of visual complexity on consumers' physiological affective responses in a fashion store. Pleasure and arousal are the major emotions in the conventional S-O-R model and are each measured by the zygomatic electromyography (EMG) and electrodermal activities (EDA). Twenty-four female participants were recruited to take part in the experiment. Psychophysiological data were recorded while the respondents were watching the virtual fashion stores on a 65" ultra-high definition (4K resolution) display. Previous studies on the visual complexity of store environment have addressed the negative

effects of visual complexity on consumers' pleasure experience (Orth & Wirtz, 2014). However, the results showed that visual complexity has no main effect on pleasure. Moreover, the moderating role of fashion involvement suggests that consumers with high fashion involvement exhibited more pleasure in a visually complex store than in a simple store. The present study suggests that visual complexity has a positive effect on consumer's arousal, regardless of their fashion involvement level.

Study 2 collected self-reported data via an online survey with 263 female consumers. The same stimuli were used as in the Study 1. Analysis with self-reported data showed the same results as psychophysiological data. Additional analysis confirmed the moderated mediation effect of pleasure on relationships between stores' visual complexity and store attractiveness. The visual complexity of fashion store had a negative effect on pleasure only for low-fashion involvement consumers, and pleasure experience positively affects store attractiveness. The results also confirmed the mediating role of arousal. Fashion store's visual complexity increases arousal, and high arousal has a positive effect on store attractiveness.

This study investigated the consumers' affective response to the visual complexity of a fashion retail environment. The results indicate that retail managers should manage the level of visual complexity using visual patterns of interior elements and arranging merchandise and furniture aesthetically to design store environments that effectively trigger positive emotions and enhance attention of target consumers. The findings from self-reports and psychophysiology measures enrich existing literature on visual complexity and provide theoretical and managerial implications.

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