An experimental research on emotional stimuli of consumers: The case of H&M flagship store influence on the millennial customer experience in Barcelona

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Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of this exploratory research study was to demonstrate the extent to which customers' approach-avoidance responses to fast fashion flagship stores can be predicted from their emotional states framed according to the PAD (Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance) model and information rates.

Design/methodology: Data was collected through a survey questionnaire from 72randomly selected millennials visiting H&M flagship store, just after their visit (55% women and 45% men). Data was analysed using exploratory factor analysis to classify the measures and later through regression analysis explaining the predictor variables.

Findings: In accordance with the theory and past research on PAD measures, results show PAD as a highly predictable variable over most of the approach-avoidance behaviour in a flagship store environment. Pleasure variable shows highly significant relationship with affect, approach-avoidance (average of all measures of approach-avoidance), and time spent in the store and to an extent significantly relates to purchase intentions. This signifies that in a highly pleasant environment, an individual's affectionate behaviour, to remain exploring in the store for a longer time, and on an average the approach behaviour to the flagship store will be highly positive.

Originality/value: This study is a unique exploration, as very little is known in the literature, on flagship store influences over consumer experiences. Findings suggest interesting advancement in the field of in person shopping effects and encourages future research in flagship store economic investments and marketing impacts, which may extend consumer behavioural scopes as well. This exploratory research may have implications of interest for business strategic decision, brand management, and for marketing as well. As brands seek to recover consumers in their physical stores, offering them a safer and more complete shopping experience, flagship stores can play a key role in encouraging online customers' visiting stores in-person, which may ultimately increase sales.

Keywords: Flagship store, H&M, Experiential marketing, Consumer behaviour, Brand image, Customer experience

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1. Introduction

In recent times, flagship stores have emerged to refer to a brand's most prominent store, generally targeting high-income shoppers. Its purpose is to go beyond generating profits, contributing to the successful development of relationships between the brand, its distribution partners, the fashion media, and consumers (Plazibat & Brajevic, 2011). The "flagship" concept (Blazquez, Boardman & Xu, 2019; Kozinets, Sherry, DeBerry-Spence, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit & Storm, 2002; Martínez, 2016) was imported to Europe from the United States and the textile sector has one of its greatest exponents in this type of stores. The characteristics or own elements that differentiate the flagship stores from other traditional establishments could be summarized as: location and strategic size; welcomes and surprises the consumers above selling; making the customer enjoy trying to be the absolute protagonist (Martínez, 2016).Previous research has shown how a store's atmosphere can elicit emotional responses from shoppers (Baek, Choo, Wei & Yoon, 2020; Kauppinen-Raisanen, Mühlbacher & Taishoff, 2020). According to the past research models related to the psychology of physical environment (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), the variables of pleasure, arousal and dominance drawn from the PAD model (Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance) are highly predictable in most avoidance or approach behaviours (Anninou & Foxall, 2019; Wu & Gao, 2019; Lin, Gursoy & Zhang, 2020), which can be applied to the nature of flagship environment as well. As flagship stores are a new marketing strategic launch compared to traditional establishments (Jahn, Nierobich, Toporowski & Dannewald, 2018; Brown, 2009), there is a need for research in understanding the emotional response as return on investment for these specific growing stores in important cities, which has the main objective of raising emotional feeling, thinking, and acting (Baker et al., 2002; Blazquez et al., 2019). As introduced by Baker et al. (2002), the PAD model is a measure of feeling (emotional attraction to the environment), thinking (cognitive reasoning to analyse likes and dislikes), and acting (influence on purchase behaviour), to represent emotional responses on purchase behaviour, appropriate to the given characteristics of flagship stores. As the PAD model has been applied to different fields of research in the past, such as in marketing and consumer behaviour (Yang, Kim & Zimmerman, 2020; Hsieh, Lee & Tseng, 2021); psychology (Bran & Vaidis, 2020; Krause & North, 2017); engineering and technology (Huang, Ali & Liao, 2017); neuroscience (Heraz & Frasson, 2007; Gorham & Gorham, 2016) as a representative model of emotions, in our study we use this model to measure the emotional response impact of consumers from the unique characteristics of flagship stores.

As flagship stores are establishments with the objective of the brands going beyond the simple sale of products, it represents a rich context for empirical research on consumer behaviour (Foxall & Greenley, 1999; Foxall & Yani-de-Soriano, 2005). Generally, although they are points of sale that include elements like normal stores, it differs from traditional stores as they are places with fascinating architecture and decoration, where the consumer is transported to a world of sensations in which he /she can get in touch with the very essence of the brand. They are designed to live a unique and unforgettable experience inside as they are authentic brand "temples"-, taking exquisite care of aspects such as location, architecture, or design (Martínez 2016). Although recent research has focused on the flagship characteristics from different fields and areas of research (flagship stores as sustainability communication channels (Arrigo, 2018); as a market entry method (Moore, Doherty & Doyle, 2010); as a classification of promotion approach (Webb, 2009); and as means of forward verticalization (Nierobisch, Toporowski, Dannewald & Jahn, 2017), there is yet no research on the above-mentioned emotional impact measured by PAD model on the approach-avoidance aspects of consumer behaviour.

As regarding the approach-avoidance behaviour, it is measured through the store environment-to- consumer relationship based on the affiliation, affect, time spent, and consumer satisfaction (Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003;

Solomon, Russell-Bennett & Previte, 2012; Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018). The flagship stores have unique characteristics which induces these approach-avoidance aspects giving a close store-consumer relationship. For example, the flagship stores allow the client to participate in leisure, socialization, or relaxation experiences (Kozinets et al., 2002; Moore et al., 2010), becoming the new leisure centres, as happened in the past with the shopping centres. This means that, in a highly pleasant environment, the approach behaviour of an individual is modified with the intention of continuing to explore the store for a longer time, so that the attitude of closeness with the point of sale will be highly positive. Authors such as Clifton, Hunt and Hunt (2010), also explored the notion of the store image as an indication of the quality of a brand or product, as well as its influence on the evaluation that the consumer makes of it and the effect on their disposition of purchase and satisfaction. If the image of the store has a high standard, the quality of the merchandise will be perceived as positive, and this will also help to differentiate the brand from the competition. With these objectives, Cachon and Swinney (2011) suggested focusing on the design of improving the store experience, to increase the incidence in the rapid response of the consumer and in their positive purchasing behaviour. In these lines, the flagship stores make a significant contribution to creating brand profile in an extremely competitive market. Its design -sometimes associated with world-renowned architects and often in historical buildings- and its physical appearance, also contribute to its exclusivity. Furthermore, its large size provides a positive signal regarding the identity and prestige of the brand, and acts as the central axis around which to start the development of a relationship (Plazibat & Brajevic, 2011). Shopping in them is a hobby for many customers, which has made them grow in popularity and as consumers become more demanding and time constrained, they refuse to settle for less than the best possible shopping experience (Plazibat & Brajevic, 2011).

Therefore, given the above approach-avoidance triggers provided by the flagship environment, in this study, we intend to delve into the aspects focusing on fast fashion flagship stores that affect the consumer experience at the point of sale, trying to identify their nature and assess their relevance. Furthermore, we investigate the emotional states (i.e., Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance), information rate, and flagship characteristics generated at the point of sale and their influence on consumer approach-avoidance behaviour, such as, affiliation, affect, time spent, consumer satisfaction, as well as their subsequent purchase intention. To do so, we analysed data collected from the specific case of H&M from Barcelona as an exploratory study using the responses of 72 millennials, randomly selected as participants, who responded on the different measures just after their visit and exploring inside a H&M flagship store within the establishment. The following sections elaborate the conceptual framework, methodology, results, and conclusions drawn from the findings.

2. Literature review

2.1. Approach-avoidance behaviour, PAD model, information rate, and flagship characteristics

According to the M-R model, behaviour towards a specific environment can also be classified in two ways: as approach or avoidance behaviour. The approach is related to the will or desire to move forward, stay, explore, interact positively, have a good experience and return to that environment. On the other hand, avoidance behaviours are related to aspects opposite to those previously described: dissatisfaction, anxiety and boredom, hostility towards others, and a desire to leave this environment in order not to return (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Therefore, we propose that the PAD measures, information rate emotional stimuli, and along with flagship characteristics will predict appropriately the approach-avoidance behaviours.

The PAD model introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), specifically analyses three emotional consumer traits to describe perceptions produced through physical environments: pleasure, arousal, and dominance (PAD model). Pleasure refers to whether the individual perceives the environment as pleasant or not; arousal reflects the extent to which the environment stimulates the individual; and the dominance indicates whether the individual considers that the environment affects him. The PAD model has been frequently used by marketers to assess emotions associated with different atmospheres (Cho, Lee & Pyun, 2019; Marinkovic & Lazarevic, 2021; Ortiz-Ramirez, Vallejo-Borda & Rodriguez-Valencia, 2021) and in retail environments (Anninou & Foxall, 2019; Fagerstrom, Eriksson & Sigurdsson, 2020; Lata & Singh, 2020; Szymkowiak, Gaczek, Jeganathan & Kulawik., 2020; Turley & Milliman, 2000), with other experiences of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Numerous studies also consider that the three components of the PAD model are independent of each other, although others claim to have found empirical support that these components can affect each other (Hui & Bateson, 1991; Ward & Barnes, 2001; Koo & Lee, 2011).

As suggested by Hall, Elliot and Meng (2017), who considered various determinations, such as, it is a useful tool for understanding environments where people can meet; the three components of the PAD model are likely to impact each other: the dominance component can affect the components of arousal and pleasure; the arousal component can directly impact the pleasure component, in the present study we propose PAD model of flagship environment to affect approach-avoidance behaviour.

As for the information rate, it is defined as a key element for the influence of environmental stimuli on consumer responses such as purchasing intentions and satisfaction (Bakker, Voordt & Vink, 2014). The three dimensions that measure the information rate are described as follows: *pleasure*: in terms of positive or negative feelings; the use of connotations such as excitement, relaxation, love and tranquility in the face of cruelty, humiliation, disinterest and boredom; *arousal*: conceived as a state of feeling to which they mainly applied adjectives that refer to mental activity (from sleep and intermediate states of drowsiness and alertness to frantic excitement) and; *dominance*: related to feelings of control and behavioural restrictions caused by physical or social barriers. Therefore, we propose that the information rate-oriented flagship emotional stimuli will impact positively on approach-avoidance behaviour.

Finally, as for the flagship characteristics, according to literature, the flagship characteristics can be identified into following aspects of unique features present in its environment: *Location*: an attractive point of sale is mainly related to three elements: where its customers are located, access via public transport and its location in the commercial sector of a given city or town (Wooda & Reynolds, 2012). *Space distribution and visual merchandising*: the similarity of merchandise in the competitive environment of fashion, forces the industry to use architecture and visual merchandising to improve brand visibility, as well as product presentation and differentiation, favouring impulsive purchasing behaviour (Mehta & Chugan, 2012). It is about impacting the purchase decision of customers through an effective presentation of products (Walters & White, 1987), providing the right one at the right time. *Customer service*: the attributes and attitudes of the employees at the point of sale can also be important and affect the quality of the service (Baker et al., 2002), so that the perceptions and interpretations of the customers regarding the behaviour of the employees can alter their purchase disposition (Cowley, 2005). *The atmosphere*: the sensorial factor of the consumer when she/he is at the point of sale has been studied on many occasions and the results have shown that the stimuli we receive contribute to building our perception and brand image, especially at the point of sale (Martínez, 2016).

In the flagship stores, all variables related to sensory marketing and its influence on the consumer are handled with great care. Smell, music, colour, lighting and temperature are essential in this type of store and contributes to strongly position the brand both in the minds and hearts of consumers, influencing their purchasing intentions (Martínez, 2016). Therefore, we propose that flagship characteristics will affect positively on the predictions of approach-avoidance behaviour.

From the theoretical background discussed above, we formulated the main objectives of this exploratory research to demonstrate the extent to which consumers' approach-avoidance responses, i.e., satisfaction, time spent, affiliation, affect feelings, satisfaction towards flagship stores can be predicted from their emotional states, information rate, and flagship characteristics.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and procedure

Data was collected using the responses from 72 millennials from the unique case of H&M flagship store of Barcelona. We chose H&M flagship store of Barcelona as a representative of highly invested flagship store, being one of the biggest of the world (5,000 sqmt), which is the only shop in Barcelona, which combines both shopping experience and architecture, decoration, flax & kale gastronomic concept. The participants were

randomly selected as they were in-store exploring H&M flagship store. They were first approached by one researcher and asked for consent of participation on the study. As they accepted, they were told to answer the survey questionnaire just when they were finished the visit and before leaving the store in the entrance door, where the other researchers were waiting. They took about 20 minutes to finish the filling the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 55% women and 45% men, with an average age of 26 years.

3.2. Measures

The elaborated questionnaire has included the three different measures that were used in the PAD model:

    a) The emotional construct of the items of pleasure-arousal-domination, elaborated using scales formed by pairs of opposite adjectives, to measure the dimensions of pleasure, arousal, and dominance (Baker et al., (2002); Mehrabian & Russell (1974)(Table 1).

    b) The behavioural intention measures according to the avoidance-approach elements (Damminga, Wu & Johnson, 2012; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982) (Table 2).

    c) The stimuli that use the information rate measures (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018) (Table 3).

In addition to the PAD model, to find the influence of the stimuli present in the commercial environment of the flagship store, elements related to the following factors were included (Table 4): music, smell, temperature, lighting, colour, commercial and visual disposition of the products, location (includes the proximity of the store to the residence of the customers and its location / access in commercial points) and customer service (includes, contemplating in this service the interaction and assistance of the staff).

The responses to all measures were based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement) and were extracted from validated scales to measure emotional stimuli and approach-avoidance behaviours.

3.3. Data analysis and variables

To analyse each of the measures, we computed the factor analysis separately based on principal components analysis, using the varimax rotation of factors with eigenvalues greater than or equal to 1.0 (Kaiser, 1958). The results of the factor analysis of the PAD measurements, the approach-avoidance responses and the information rate items are shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The loadings greater than 0.40 were retained for further analysis (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The element reliability estimates for each of the factor index-based constructions were calculated using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Following construct formation, subsequently, predictions of each of the independent variables (i.e., PAD, information rate, and flagship characteristics) were introduced in the regression models to predict each of the avoidance-approach measures separately and in aggregated form (Tables 5 and 6).

3.3.1. Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance

As in lines with (M-R) PAD model, the items loaded into three factors (Pleasure, arousal, and dominance). Pleasure ranged from unhappiness to extreme happiness and used adjectives such as happy-unhappy, pleased-annoyed, and satisfied-unsatisfied to define a person's level of pleasure. Arousal describing the state of feeling linked to adjectives such as stimulated-relaxed, excited-calm, and wide awake-sleepy. Dominance was related to feelings of control and the extent to which an individual feels restricted in his behaviour. It linked to adjectives like dominant-submissive, controlling-controlled, overcrowded-uncrowded.

Measures		Factor Loadings Three factors with eigenvalues ≥ 1.0 are shown		
		Pleasure	Arousal	Dominance
Happy	- Unhappy	0.63	-	-
Pleased	- Annoyed	0.76	-	-
Satisfied	- Unsatisfied	0.65	-	-
Contended	- Melancholic	0.59	-	-
Hopeful	- Despairing	0.38	0.58	-
Relaxed	- Bored	0.49	-	-
Stimulated	- Relaxed	-	0.70	-
Excited	- Calm	-	0.76	-
Frenzied	- Sluggish	-	0.80	-
Jittery	- Dull	-0.50	0.29	-
Wide-awake	- Sleepy	-	0.58	-
Aroused	- Unaroused	-	0.64	-
Overcrowded	- Uncrowded	-	-	0.77
Controlling	- Controlled	-	-	0.84
Dominant	- Submissive	-	-	0.71
Influential	- Influenced	-	0.27	-
Free	- Restricted	-	-	0.17
Important	- Insignificant	-	-	0.35
Variance		**18%**	**34%**	**48%**

Table 1. Factor loadings for the 18 Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance Measures

3.3.2. Approach-avoidance

The approach-avoidance measures consisted of items regarding intentions related to the flagship retail environment, which describes an individual's desire to enjoy staying for some time, spend more money than expected in purchase, feeling to return due to high satisfaction, the affect towards the store, and finally the affiliation perception to the environment (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

As approach-avoidance intentions are the predictors to the objective of the present study, we split the measure into various dependent variables in accordance with the Mehrabian-Russell model (Table 2). The responses of items with intentions to return and likeness to the flagship retail environment were aggregated, as both signify satisfaction with the environment. The reliability coefficient was acceptable, although weak (.68) and we included it as a dependent variable with the label satisfaction. The rest of the dependent variables were computed related to the unidimentionality nature of the approach-avoidance responses (Donovan & Rossiter 1982) for each participant: affect (likeness to stay in the environment); affiliation (to be friendly to strangers in such an environment); time (the willingness of participants to spend time in the flagship environment); spend (willingness to spend more than expected in a flagship retail outlet); approach-avoidance (the average of responses to all items related to the environment above) with a reliability coefficient (.85). Since the inter-correlations among all the variables were quite low (26% to 33%, p < .01)), we proceeded to introduce them as dependent variables in the later analyses.

Measures
How much time would you like to spend browsing in this store?
Would you avoid ever having to return to this store?
Is this a place in which you would feel friendly and talkative to a stranger who happens to be near you?
Would you want to avoid looking around or exploring this environment?
Do you like this store environment?
Is this a place where you might try to avoid other people, and avoid having to talk to them?
Is this sort of place where you might end up spending more money than you originally set out to spend?

Table 2. Items of Approach-avoidance measures

3.3.3. Information rate measure

Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) study suggests that among the 14 items measuring information rate in an environment, at least three dimensions should exist. In compliance to this view, the factors loaded into three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Table 3 shows each of the items with loadings above .60 to the three factors. We labelled each of the factor as accordance to previous research studies: novelty (usual-surprising, common-rare, familiar-novel, symmetrical-asymmetrical) with an acceptable reliability coefficient greater than .74, complexity (patterned-random); density (sparse-dense).

Measures			Factor Loadings Three factors with eigenvalues ≥ 1.0 are shown		
			Novelty	**Complexity**	**Density**
Usual	-	Surprising	0.61	-	-
Common	-	Rare	0.67	-	-
Familiar	-	Novel	0.67	-	-
Symmetrical	-	Assymetrical	0.63	-	-
Patterned	-	Random	-	-	0.95
Sparse	-	Dense	-	0.99	-
Variance			22%	36%	49%

Table 3. Factor loadings for the Information-Rate Measures

3.3.4. Flagship store characteristics

Table 4 shows the list of items used to measure the flagship in-store characteristics. The reliability coefficients for all the items related to each of the dimensions characterizing the unique ambience effect of flagship retail outlets ranged from.74 to .91 for all dimensions. Additionally, as a specific characteristic of flagship retail stores, items corresponding to the importance of store location was included to find their influence on the approach-avoidance behaviour of participants. The reliability coefficients for each of the variables; approximity, accesibility to the flagship stores through public transportes, and located in commercial points ranged from .58 to .98. It should be noted that approximity had a .58 alpha score, which is slightly lower than the acceptable score .60 (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2003), but following Perry, Charlotte, Isabella and Bob (2004), who demonstrate that short scales (less then 5 items) have a sensibility to score lower Cronbach value, we have proceeded to accept it for the final analysis.

Items	Reliability
Music	
a. Listening to music creates a relaxed atmosphere while shopping	
b. Music in store motivates me to buy more.	
c. Pleasant environment created by music makes me spend more time in the store.	0.91
d. The adequate rhythm of the background music makes me comfortable	
e. The sufficient volume of the background music makes me stay longer.	
f. The existence of background music increases my well-being and comfort.	
Smell	
a. The fragrance in this retail chain outlet encourages me to purchase more.	0.88
b. The fragrance in the store makes me revisit retail chain outlet.	
c. Fragrance of the retail chain outlets makes me to stay more time	
Temperature	
a. The quality of the air conditioning store made my presence in the store comfortable.	0.90
b. Fully air-conditioned environment makes me comfortable while shopping.	
c. Retail chain outlets with no air conditioning discourage me towards shopping.	

Items	Reliability
Lighting	0.82
a. Lighting in retail chain outlets is fine.	
b. The lighting in the outlets is pleasing to the eyes and makes me stay more.	
c. Good colour of lighting attracts me towards products.	
d. The lighting of the outlets makes things more visible and attractive to me.	
e. The lighting in products allows me to evaluate the quality of the product.	
f. The different lighting used in each area inside the store is important.	
Colour	0.78
a. The colour of the retail outlet chain is fine.	
b. The outlet colour creates a positive image in my mind.	
c. The colour of retail outlets creates a positive perception in my mind.	
Visual merchandising	0.85
a. I tend to buy more when i come across attractive and impressive displays	
b. There is a sufficient display of in-store information.	
c. Display motivates me to look at the products more critically	
d. The retail chain outlet display allows me to see displayed products clearly.	
e. The creative and systematic arrangement of products in the retail chain outlet helps me in the selection of products.	
Customerservice	0.85
a. Staff/assistance interaction with consumers	
b. Formation of the employees (empathy, etc)	
Importance of Location of a flagship store	0.96
a. close to residence, work or entertainment places	
b. Easy access through public transport	
c. Flagship stores in a main commercial zone	

Table 4. Items measuring various unique characteristics of flagship retail outlets

4. Results

4.1. PAD measures, information rate and approach-avoidance measures

We proceeded for additional analyses (regression models) to attain our main objectives to first find the relationship between the dependent variables (approach-avoidance measures) through the previously mentioned explanatory variables, pleasure-arousal-dominance measures and information-rate measures (Table 5).

In acordance with the theory and past research on PAD measures, pleasure, arousal and dominance variables show as a highly predictable variable over most of the approach-avoidance behaviour in a flagship store environment. Pleasure variable shows as a highly significant relationship with affect, approach-avoidance (average of all measures of approach-avoidance), and time spent in the store and to an extent significantly relates to purchase intentions. This signifies that in a highly pleasant environment, an individual's affectionate behaviour, to remain exploring in the store for a longer time, and on an average the approach behaviour to the flagship store will be highly positive. Spending intention in a pleasant environment is appropriately shown to be statistically significant enough to support the relationship.

As predicted, affect (attitude) behaviour, spending intentions, and time spent in the flagship environment are also significantly related by dominance variable. This result helps to better understand the dominance nature of the environment over spending and other approach behaviour towards the store environment unlike many past studies where the relationship was not found to be conclusive enough. Also, arousal variable shows similar results except for the time spent in the environment, which is not significant enough. Although highly aroused environment seems to make individual's intention to spend less time in the environment, the relationship with spending intentions is highly significant to support the predictive power of arousal towards approach behaviours in the flagship environment. The PAD measures do not seem to be related significantly to the satisfaction and affiliation in the environment, except for dominance variable showing a positive significant relationship with affiliation variable. This may be due to the fact that unidimensional nature of both the variable are not reliable to be predicted by PAD measures.

The information-rate measures overall show a highly significant relationship with the intention of spending in a flagship environment. The complex and dense the environment load alone predicts affect behaviour and satisfaction in the environment to an extent by complexity. Higher the complex nature of the in-store arrangements and dense, individuals seem to be stimulated to a higher spending intention and indeed create an affect behaviour along with satisfaction to the environment. Furthermore, the results also show that, in a way if the environment is shown to be familiar and known (novelty), the intentions towards spending decreases. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the familiar nature of environment is not preferred in a flagship retail store. Individuals seem to like a different uncommon arrangement along with the dense and complex arrangements to feel induced towards spending in the flagship retail store. Therefore it may be noted that unlike results of previous research on store environment emotions, which shows positive relationship with familiar and known arrangements to spending intentions, in a flagship environment individuals want different, unique, complex, and dense arrangements. This is shown from the highly increased predictive power of 80% over spending variable, as complexity and density variable were added. Finally, the information rate measures are not significant enough to explain the time spend in the environment and affiliation behaviour towards the store. Overall, itshould be noted that the PAD measures and information rate measures show higher predictability over the spending intentions and on average over the approach-avoidance behaviour with a variance of 80% and 87% respectively and a notably significant predictive power over affect in the flagship environment.

4.2. Flagship in-store characteristics and approach-avoidance measures

Among the characteristics specific to flagship retail stores, in-store colour, special lighting in the sales points and customer service (which includes staff interactions with empathy etc., staff assistance) shows to relate positively with the approach behaviour in general to flagship stores. In-store colour variable shows significantly positive affect behaviour and satisfaction with the flagship store. Special lighting in the in-store effects also is shown to affect positively individual's affect and affiliation behaviours. In-store smell shows a negative relationship with affect behaviour and in general to the approach-avoidance behaviour. Since smell variable shows a significant relationship, it may be noted that smell actually decreases the affect behaviour and in general approach-avoidance behaviours. In-store temperature also is found to show a negative effect on affiliation behaviour, which is significant enough to conclude that actually temperature in the environment may decrease the affiliation sensations. It gives the store staff to be cautious about maintain the temperature balanced for clients to stay in the environment comfortably. Customer service is the only variable which shows highly positive significant relationship with spending intentions and to stay in the flagship store for a longer time. It is also related positively to the approach-avoidance behaviour in general. Therefore, it may be essential for managers to note that staff interactions with empathy and staff assistance is shown to increase customer stay in the store browsing and may finally lead to purchase intentions. Finally, in-store music, visual merchandising, and location do not seem to affect significantly the approach behaviours to a flagship retail store.

Although results (Table 5) show some of the variables of in-store characteristics of a flagship retail store to be highly significantly related to an individual's approach behaviour to the store, we conducted further joint analyses in order to find which of the most significant variables affect the approach behaviours importantly and specifically when interacted with emotional variables in the flagship environment (PAD measures and information rate measures).

Variables	Affiliation	Affect	Spending	APR-AVD	Satisfaction	Time
Pleasure	0.75	0.57****	0.51*	0.67****	0.11	0.47****
Arousal	0.46	0.21****	0.30****	0.06	0.02	0.31
Dominance	0.15*	0.27****	0.53****	0.26*	0.63	0.25**
Novelty	-0.11	-0.26	-0.35*	-0.04	-0.24	-0.48
Complexity	-0.01	-0.07*	.15**	-0.01	0.04*	-0.03
Density	-0.1	-0.09*	-.17*	-0.02	0.02	0.04
R²	8%	51%	80%	87%	29%	54%
F-statistic	0.94	11.07****	44.64****	75.74****	4.41****	12.61****

Note: *p*-value < .1*, <.05**, <0.01***, <0.001****

Table 5. Regression analysis for predicting approach-avoidance behavior by PAD, information-rate and flagship characteristics measures

4.3. Joint effects of emotional experiences (PAD, information rate measures) and in-store characteristics of flagship retail

The joint-analyses with all the emotion variables (PAD and information-rate measures) in the environment of a flagship retail store along with the in-store specific characteristics of flagship retail stores, overall shows pleasure-arousal-dominance, density and novelty as most important emotional variables and in-store lighting, colour, and visual merchandising as the most important significant predictors inducing the approach behaviour (Table 6).

For all the approach behaviour variables, a pleasant environment increases the predictive power along with other previously mentioned emotional and in-store characteristics in a flagship retail store (explained variance increases ranging from 33% to 87% for affect, satisfaction, general approach-avoidance behaviors and the stay time of individuals in the flagship store). The visual merchandising of the store also shows to increase the predictive power highly for spending intentions (87% variance explained).

Variables	Affiliation	Affect	Spending	APR-AVD	Satisfaction	Time
Colour	0.10	0.20**	0.05	0.01	0.01**	0.18
Lighting	0.21*	0.19*	0.00	0.01	0.15	0.12
Music	0.10	0.07	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.00
Smell	-0.05	-0.12*	-0.16	-0.04*	-0.01	-0.10
Temperature	-0.18**	-0.10	-0.14	-0.05	-0.04	0.01
Visual Merchandising	0.05	0.07	0.10	-0.02	0.01	0.14
Customerservice	0.50	0.02	1.79**	0.70*	0.76	1.77*
Location	0.30	0.69	0.33	-0.16	0.42	0.25
R²	12%	2%	10%	17%	21%	21%
F-statistic	1.11	1.93	.89	1.61	2.14**	2.10**

Note: *p*-value < .1*, <.05**, <0.01***, <0.001****

Table 6. Flagship in-store characteristics predicting approach-avoidance behaviors

5. Discussion

Flagship stores are of current style of delivery of retail products to marketing and strategic departments of a retail company. The current paper demonstrated that the emotional appeal of customers measured through the PAD model comprising of constructs; pleasure, arousal, and dominance, have a significant potential to predict approach-avoidance behaviors to these flagship stores. Furthermore, the empirical models analyzed demonstrate that flagship store characteristics make an appealing impact on customer experience and adds positively to their expected behaviors.

Our findings suggest various essential contributions to the advancement to the area of in-store customer experience and specifically to flagship stores. Firstly, regarding the flagship in-store characteristics, the findings show that the denser or more complex the store atmosphere is, the more individuals seem to be stimulated to a higher spending intention. It is even shown that a familiar environment diminishes such purchase intentions.

Therefore, it should be kept in mind that the flagship store does not need an overly familiar atmosphere, but rather a different, unique, complex and dense one (Davies & Ward, 2002; Bitner 1992; Levy & Weitx, 1996; Berman & Evans, 1995; Davies & Ward, 2002). Unlike previous studies that did not sufficiently show the dominant nature of the atmosphere regarding spending and other behaviors of approach to the store environment (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn & Nesdale, 1994; Turley & Milliman, 2000), in our study this influence is confirmed for the case of flagship store.

Regarding the specific characteristics of the flagship, it is concluded that elements such as color, special lighting and customer service are the ones that most positively influence consumer behavior and satisfaction, which in turn positively influences the purchasing behavior and increase the time spent in the store.

Secondly, customer service stands out for its positive influence on the time spent in the store and the intention to spend. Therefore, it may be important for managers to note that the interactions and assistance of staff with empathy are shown as factors determinants in the increase of purchase intention. Instead, smell and temperature negatively influence consumer behavior if they are inappropriate. Other elements such as music, visual merchandising, and the location of the flagship, do not seem to significantly affect the emotional state of consumers and their purchasing intentions.

Lastly, findings show that emotional stimuli such as pleasure, arousal, dominance, and flagship stores' characteristics along with perceived novelty, complexity, density all together have a higher impact on the approach-avoidance behavior of consumers during their visit to flagship stores. This highlights on the need for marketing strategies to impulse not just emotional stimuli, but also the cognitive and affective elements of the characteristics of the flagship in-store. Consumers are stimulated with emotional stimuli most often, but the cognitive elements are the aspects which diminishes their continuous inspirations to become satisfied and show loyalty to the in-store environment. These combinations may result interesting for future marketing segments to trigger the online consumers to march towards once lost, in-store consumers. Furthermore, these results also may add to the ongoing research in financial impact of customer experience measures and on the effects of differential impacts such as flagship stores. Also, it may help the understanding on the differences in investments when it comes to the cost-benefit comparisons between investing in flagship and non-flagship environments.

Therefore, the results obtained in the present study falls in line with the few recent studies available on flagship stores, which convey the engaging experience and significantly predicts brand's essence within consumer experiences. For example, Kozinets et al. (2002) analyzed ESPN Zone Chicago which is a sports-themed retail brand store and found that themed flagship brand stores have a mythological appeal of narratives conveyed by their physical and symbolic structure. Similar to our findings on the location, through a qualitative study, Brown (2009) showed that flagship projects are distinguished by their location and differentiation, thus they have a role in strategic marketing and communication of the organizational ability to differentiate itself. Similarly, Nierobisch et al. (2017) analyzed two flagship stores in they study and found that flagship stores have a strong brand experience, brand equity, brand attachment, and loyalty. Arrigo (2018) went a step forward to investigate the role played by flagship stores in communication sustainability commitment of luxury fashion brands through a qualitative research design and proposed a conceptual framework on the design of flagship stores to display sustainable development. Blazquez et al. (2019) in their study showed the need for further research on the holistic experience of flagship stores on consumers' purchase behavior. Their study was based on a luxury store using qualitative method to explore atmospheric cues on the influence of consumers' impressions of the brand towards purchase behavior. They also showed that product displays, layout of store, and design and experience of the fitting rooms made an impact on the brand image. Likewise, Jahn et al. (2018) investigated through an experimental study from a flagship store visit showing that retail experience confirms the brand experience moderated by brand salience in a flagship store. Although the above noted research studies on flagship stores have found the effectiveness of flagship store design and experience on consumer purchase and brand image, there has been yet research on the emotional effects of detailed flagship designs, architecture, decoration etc. on the approach-avoidance behavior of consumers. Our study results show significant impact on these features of flagship stores on the emotions of consumers which drives them towards approach (i.e., affiliation, affect, time spent, and satisfaction) and purchase behavior. In these lines, the present study advances research on flagship

stores and emphasizes the main characteristic of a flagship store to have impulse on emotions of consumers as a marketing tool to enhance brand image and brand experience. Therefore, there is evidence that among the millennial's flagship stores create emotional experience through arousing pleasure and dominance on their positive experience in the store which leads towards purchase behavior. Future research can lead us to understand more on these psychological processes behind the impact on brand experience and strategic marketing communications found in the previous research on flagship stores.

5.1. Concluding remarks

As a general conclusion of this work, we can point out that the unique environment of the flagship stores influences the approach-avoidance behavior of consumers. In other words, the study confirms that the emotional state of consumers affects the time spent in the flagship environment and their purchase intention, since it has been possible to support the predictive power of excitement with a behavior of approximation to the flagship and its relation to the purchase intention. Furthermore, when the characteristics of the flagship have been related to the effect of the degree of PAD of the participants and the rate of perceived information, we discovered that the measures of that rate are highly related to the intention to spend money in a flagship.

Although results of this study help us to identify the aspects that are important for consumers approach to the purchasing process and the stimuli that have the greatest impact on this process, this study presents certain limitations. The study was based on millennials alone and the results may not be generalizable to other generations. Although data was collected during the in-store experience which is recommended by recent researchers, as opposed to post-store visit which affects customer's memory imbalances to emotional stimuli, the study is limited, as it is only studied at a single time and from one store. Longitudinal study based on multi-stores would make up for deeper knowledge on emotional patterns. Additionally, it would be of interest for future research to study influences of individual differences such as personality on the emotional stimuli differences and its impact on customer behavior in flagship stores. The study is also limited by measuring purchase intentions and not real purchases. Future lines of research may include these variables in subsequent analysis. Finally, the present study (based on H&M brand from Barcelona) followed the previous research studies where mostly single or couple of flagship stores alone were concentrated on exploring the models analyzed under research. The reason for studying one or two flagship stores is firstly, there are not much flagship stores in each city, may be due to the reason that it is a unique strategic marketing tool and requires a huge investment to create the competitive advantage; secondly, each flagship store has its unique features within the concept of featuring differential design and structure to the establishment, which makes research constrains to compare different flagship stores. Thirdly, flagship stores have usually different themes and cultural impact depending on the area of its establishment, which makes the comparisons or aggregation of results complex.

Having highlighted the limitations and future research need for more research on the psychological processes of consumer experience, the present study demonstrates several managerial implications in lines with previous research studies on marketing and strategic importance carried by these flagship stores. Firstly, emotional experiences of consumers are a process of purchase behavior and flagship stores have the impulse to predict these emotional aspects. Secondly, millennials are looking for difference in their time spent within the store atmosphere compared to traditional stores. Findings from present study suggests that the more denser and complex the product arrangements and store atmosphere, the higher the intention to spend time in the store. This confirms in lines with other past research that more the familiar shop atmosphere, lesser the intention to spend time and finally leading to lower purchase behavior. In similar lines, colour, special lighting, and customer service have been found positive influence on purchasing behavior, which may indicate the special attention of managers to invest within the atmosphere care. On the other hand, smell and temperature needs to be regulated and administered constantly, as they seem to relate negatively to the time spent and purchase intentions of customers. Finally, music, location, and visual merchandising do not have any emotional arousal to the consumers which may affect significantly on purchase intentions. Overall, results suggest the need for marketing strategies to stimulate not just emotional stimuli, but also the cognitive and affective characteristics of the flagship stores which may lead towards approach-avoidance behaviors, as it is a feeling, thinking, and action process described by the PAD model.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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