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The effects of retail store characteristics on in-store leisure shopping experience

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of store characteristics (i.e. product availability, product quality, store layout, employee politeness, décor, music, lighting, and aroma) on the various dimensions of in-store leisure shopping experience (i.e. hedonic, flow, escapism, challenge, learning, socialising, and communitas).

Design/methodology/approach – In order to achieve the study's objectives, a quantitative on-site survey was conducted. Respondents were interviewed upon exiting fashion retail stores.

Findings – Findings indicate that not all store characteristics impact the various dimensions of experience in the same way. Product quality and in-store music were found to be the most important in-store characteristics that affected the majority of experience dimensions. Other important store attributes that emerged were store layout and ambient scent. Conversely, product range actually had a negative impact on in-store experience.

Practical implications – By orchestrating the most influential in-store characteristics, fashion retailers could be delivering unique in-store experiences to their customers. This research shows that they would benefit from designing experiential strategies that focus on merchandise quality, price, and availability while simultaneously carefully managing ambient (music and scent) alongside design factors (store layout and décor). Careful consideration should be paid to merchandise variety in order to avoid potentially negative effects on customers' shopping experience.

Originality/value – Until now most studies that document the relationship between store elements and shopping experiences have examined the effects of store characteristics on a limited number of experience dimensions. This study adds to the body of research into in-store leisure shopping experience in two ways: by shedding light on its multi-dimensional nature, and by analysing the effect of the different store elements on the various components of the in-store experience.

Keywords Challenge, Flow, Escapism, Hedonic experience, In-store leisure shopping experience, Store characteristics

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In-store shopping has long been regarded as an entertaining (Jones, 1999) and a social experience (Borges *et al.*, 2010) during which feelings of escapism and adventure are evoked in consumers (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Moreover, total immersion in the process of shopping (Wang and Hsiao, 2012) and the acquisition of new knowledge (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) are other important facets of the in-store shopping experience. In this paper, shopping experiences are examined from the perspective of “leisure shopping” – in contrast to utilitarian shopping – that extends beyond the entertaining aspects of shopping to include more experiential elements (Tsai, 2010; McCarville *et al.*, 2013) and that have to-date received little attention by researchers (Bäckström, 2006). Moreover, in-store leisure experiences are defined as the “sum total of cognitive, emotional, sensorial, and behavioural responses produced during the entire process, involving an integrated series of interactions with people, objects, processes, and environment in retailing” (Bagdare and Jain, 2013, p. 792).



Although most researchers until now have acknowledged the multi-dimensional nature of leisure shopping experience (Bäckström, 2006; Rajagopal, 2007; Tsai, 2010; McCarville *et al.*, 2013), there is little consensus regarding the nature of those dimensions. Moreover, most of the studies on in-store experience have taken into consideration a limited set of experiential elements. For example, Tsai (2010) identified four dimensions of shopping experiences: exhilaration – experiencing excitement and joy; exploration – discovering and acquiring educational information; relaxation – obtaining relief from stress; and socialising – being in the company of friends and interacting with others. Bäckström (2011) suggested shopping experiences can be divided into three main types: hunting (e.g. finding a desired object), scouting (e.g. stimulation, reconnaissance, escapism), and socialising (e.g. enjoying shared experiences with friends/family). Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz (2013) identified three experiential types of shopping: seductive – impulse-buying and pursuing pleasant emotions; interactive museum – exploration and the acquisition of new knowledge; and social shopping – interaction with friends and family and familiar strangers.

Based on the preceding analysis, it can be seen that to-date researchers have indeed focused on some of the dimensions that comprise the leisure shopping experience (Lucia-Palacios *et al.*, 2016) such as the hedonic dimension (feelings of entertainment, excitement, and pleasure), escapism (consumers' imagination, daydreams, and escape from everyday problems), learning (acquisition of new knowledge), as well as the social aspect of shopping. However, other important aspects of shopping experience have been ignored. For example, on many occasions, in addition to simply buying a product, consumers desire to become fully immersed in the consumer experience (Firat *et al.*, 1995) as well as to experience feelings of adventure (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). These aspects of flow (immersion) and challenge (adventure) have rarely been identified as distinctive dimensions in their own right in previous conceptualizations of in-store leisure experience. Moreover, even though researchers, in general, acknowledge the importance of the “social” facets of shopping, most of the time they confine their measurement of social shopping to a single dimension only, that is mainly centred around activities such as going shopping with friends and family. According to Kang and Park-Poaps (2011) social shopping is a rich construct that should also include as a distinct facet the “new socionetworking” aspects of shopping where shoppers are actively interacting with other consumers. Hence, it can be concluded that the available conceptualizations of customer experience in retail settings have ignored several experiential aspects (Bagdare and Jain, 2013).

This study aims to fill these gaps in the conceptualisation of the in-store leisure shopping experience by measuring it in a way that is more inclusive of factors that have been ignored in previous studies. In order to do this, the seven-factor structure as put forward by Triantafyllidou and Siomkos (2013, 2014) has been used here in order to assess the experiential elements of leisure shopping experience gained within bricks-and-mortar fashion stores. It consists of seven dimensions: hedonic, flow, escapism, challenge, learning, socialising, and communitas.

Understanding the complex and dynamic nature of in-store experiences has to be the first step towards truly effective retail marketing. A further step derives from identifying the factors that enhance customer experience in retail settings (Spena *et al.*, 2012; Bagdare and Jain, 2013). According to Terblanche and Boshoff (2004) in-store factors that are controlled by retail managers (e.g. merchandise, service, and atmosphere) can influence consumers' shopping experiences. Fiore (2007) also noted that a store's environmental variables consisting of ambient, design, and social cues can have impact on consumer cognition (e.g. thoughts, perceptions), consciousness (e.g. fantasy, imagery), emotions, and experiential benefits (e.g. pleasure), and so can affect their experience. A number of past studies have explored the relationship between store characteristics and customer experience (e.g. Walsh *et al.*, 2011; Ryu and Jang, 2008; Foster and McLelland, 2015; Dong and Siu, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2013; Seock and Sauls, 2008; Joseph-Mathews *et al.*, 2009;

Tsai, 2010; McCabe *et al.*, 2007). Most have investigated the impact of retail store characteristics on one or a few experience dimensions. To the authors' knowledge no study to-date has analysed the simultaneous impact of multiple store cues (functional, ambient, design, and social) on the dimensions of in-store experiences that have been largely ignored by previous studies (e.g. flow, challenge, learning, and socialising). Hence, this study makes a theoretical contribution in this respect.

To sum up, the aim of this study is twofold. First, to measure in-store shopping experiences via seven dimensions: hedonic, escapism, flow, challenge, learning, socialising, and communitas. Second, to test the effects of multiple store characteristics (functional, ambient, design, and social) on the different dimensions of in-store leisure shopping experiences by applying a holistic approach. Spence *et al.* (2014) highlighted the need for a holistic approach when examining the influence of store characteristics on shopping experience. Such holistic approaches enable researchers both to examine the impact of many store characteristics on experiences and to identify the most pertinent ones (Ballantine *et al.*, 2015).

Knowing which store cues can enhance or inhibit certain experience dimensions will help retail managers design "an environment in which consumers can obtain a satisfactory total consumption experience" (Kim, 2001, p. 289). This way, retailers will be able to add value (Gentile *et al.*, 2007), affect consumers' future behavioural intentions (Lacher and Mizerski, 1994) and their loyalty (Pullman and Gross, 2004), enhance their store's reputation (Terblanche, 2009) and its market share (Grewal *et al.*, 2009), and also develop competitive advantage (Tsaur *et al.*, 2007). Hence, this study is expected to benefit fashion store managers by indicating how manipulating store cues can effectively enhance their positive impact or avoid their negative influence on in-store experiences.

A multi-dimensional perspective of in-store leisure shopping experiences

In-store shopping experiences are consumer experiences – a specific type of consumption experience – that take place when consumers interact with companies as well as other fellow consumers (Carù and Cova, 2003). Moreover, shopping experiences can be characterised along a continuum from utilitarian to leisure experiences (Fiore and Kim, 2007). In utilitarian experiences consumers act as rational problem solvers and view shopping as a task that want to accomplish in an efficient way (Babin *et al.*, 1994), whereas in leisure experiences consumers place less emphasis on the utilitarian aspects of shopping and more on pursuing shopping as entertainment (Carù and Cova, 2007). Although utilitarian experience is an inherent part of in-store shopping experience, it should be noted that the present study focuses only on leisure shopping experience which according to Rajagopal (2007) is a multi-dimensional construct comprising of different dimensions. As Bäckström (2011, p. 208) notes, "researchers who do not recognise the multi-faceted and dynamic character of leisure shopping ignore important facets of this phenomenon". However, previous studies of shopping experiences have placed emphasis on some of the elements that comprise experiences such as hedonic, escapism, learning, and communitas. For example, the hedonic dimension has long been regarded as an inherent part of leisure shopping experience. The word hedonic is related to the Greek word *hedone* (ἡδονή) which means "pleasure, enjoyment, and delight" (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). McCarville *et al.* (2013) used the term "hedonistic shopping" to describe shopping as an entertaining, fun, exciting, and satisfactory experience. The hedonic dimension of leisure shopping is related to feelings of entertainment (Kim, 2002), enjoyment (Guiry *et al.*, 2006), pleasure, and excitement (Kim and Kim, 2008) that shoppers might experience "from just being at the marketplace, experiencing stores, products, and people" (Bäckström, 2011, p. 205). Moreover, in-store hedonic experience is related to emotions like happiness, joy, and fun that are elicited in customers when they walk into a store, interact with its environment, and look at the merchandise (Diep and Sweeney, 2008; Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013). In this research,

hedonic experience is considered to be that which describes the pleasure, fun, and enjoyment consumers feel when they interact with all the cues of a store.

Another commonly found dimension in the retail experience structures is escapism. In-store experiences act as fantasy escapes through which consumers are “encouraged to sink into their fantasies” (Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013, p. 249). Shopping in a store “is about the quest rather than the conquest, the search rather than the possession, and it is concerned with the aspirations, fantasies and visual feasting that a display of merchandise, an evocative image or an attractive scenario can engender in people as consumers” (Stevens and Maclaran, 2005, p. 283). Pine and Gilmore (1998) have acknowledged the need for retailers to create staged, escapist experiences where consumers create their own special world, play different roles, and fantasise about being in a different time and place. In the present study escapist retail experiences are related to consumers’ fantasies of being in a different world and playing different roles when they shop in stores.

The social aspect of shopping (Borges *et al.*, 2010) has been highlighted by the majority of studies on shopping motivation, since many consumers enjoy visiting stores to meet or hang out with their friends (Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013), as well as to enhance their family relations and friendships (Jamal *et al.*, 2006). This social dimension includes activities such as shopping with friends and family (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003), spending time with the “shopping team” and building and maintaining bonds with the members (Prus, 1993), but also creating shared experiences with them (Bäckström, 2011). A sense of belonging engendered by being accepted by one’s shopping pals may also arise when a consumer goes shopping with others (Hsieh and Costa, 2001). Shopping as a way of getting closer to friends and family and feeling part of a shopping team closely resembles Turner’s (1969) term “communitas” which refers to the feelings of communion one cultivates with friends and family, as well as feelings of linkages and belonging with them (Arnould and Price, 1993). In the present study, the communitas dimension of leisure shopping experience captures the feelings of belonging that shoppers experience when they shop with friends and family.

Learning has also been found to be an important dimension of retail shopping experiences. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), customer experiences are also educational events that can increase customers’ knowledge. An early study by Tauber (1972) supports the notion that shopping is a learning activity through which customers explore new products or services in the marketplace, get new ideas about what to purchase and find out about the latest trends and fashions. In other words, a visit to a store is often associated with knowledge or epistemic benefits (Bloch *et al.*, 1994) since consumers update their knowledge (Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013), obtain new information about products/services through browsing and exploring the store (Ng, 2003), and keep abreast of new trends (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). The learning aspect of in-store shopping activities (i.e. collecting information about the purchase options, the prices and the brands, learning about the available selections, latest fashion and new arrivals, and keeping up with new trends) was also highlighted by Bäckström (2011) under the term “reconnaissance”. In the present study, in-store customer experiences are regarded as events that are educational, make consumers’ knowledgeable, and stimulate their curiosity to learn through their shopping trips.

Although the aforementioned dimensions appear in most conceptualizations of leisure shopping experience, other equally important elements such as flow, challenge, and socialising have failed to receive sufficient attention. Specifically, a rather ignored aspect of in-store experiences is the feelings of flow that a trip to a store can induce in consumers. Flow is defined as “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1977, p. 39). It occurs when a person’s high-level skills are applied in a highly challenging task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Woodruffe-Burton *et al.* (2005) through a qualitative study found that shoppers frequently experienced feelings of flow when they tried to match their skills to the challenging task of finding the right purchase and became

“fully immersed in the shopping activity, shifting away from thoughts of, or attention to, the self to total involvement in their shopping task” (Woodruffe-Burton *et al.*, 2005, p. 475). In-store experiences are capable of inducing feelings of flow because most of the time they require the total focus and attention of consumers (Bäckström, 2011). These are shoppers who might lose track of time due to being totally absorbed in the retail experience given that it sometimes requires a lot of time and effort to reach the right purchasing decision (Wang and Hsiao, 2012). However, it should be noted that although flow has been recognised as an integral part of retail experiences, there are very few studies that incorporate flow as a distinct factor. Herein, flow is regarded as a retail shopping experience dimension that captures shoppers’ feelings of immersion, absorption, total focus, and attention when they interact with a store’s environment.

In a number of studies shopping has been described as an adventurous activity (e.g. Babin *et al.*, 1994), or “a challenge, an arena in which one shrewdly assesses situations and exhibits competence in dealing with the obstacles encountered” (Prus and Dawson, 1991, p. 153). In-store shopping activities such as bargain hunting, looking for discounts or low prices (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003, p. 81), browsing, variety seeking, and assessing price and quality induce feelings of thrill and adventure (Rintamäki *et al.*, 2006). The search process that often accompanies in-store experiences is seen by many consumers as a challenging opportunity both to practice and master their shopping and bargaining skills and show off their competence to others (Bäckström, 2011). Off-price retailers such as T.J. Maxx have focused on creating experiences where “bargain hunters” can live an adventure through a variety of low-priced, branded merchandise (Greenwald, 2014; Loeb, 2015). These stores focus mainly on price, variety, and quality while their atmosphere is simple so that shoppers can create their own treasure hunt (*The Economist*, 2016). Moreover, challenging experiences can be induced by store attributes such as ease of navigation (Diep and Sweeney, 2008), mild scents and pleasant colours (Pop and Dabija, 2012), convenient store facilities, and great customer service (Nguyen *et al.*, 2007).

Other aspects of challenging in-store experiences are feelings of risk-taking (Prus and Dawson, 1991) as well as an adrenalin rush (Parekh and Schmidt, 2003) that are often elicited in customers when they are confronted with purchasing problems. To-date the “challenge” construct has been included mainly as a shopping motivation dimension (e.g. Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) or a single-item in the shopping experience value scale (i.e. while shopping, I felt a sense of adventure) (Babin *et al.*, 1994). However, studies on leisure shopping experience have so far not incorporated the element of challenge as distinct among the various experiential dimensions. In the present study, the challenge dimension refers to consumers’ feelings of adventure and thrill while trying to practice their skills and exhibit competence in order to overcome the uncertainty and risk associated with their purchases.

Another ignored aspect of in-store shopping experience is related to the socialising process that takes place when consumers interact with other unknown shoppers in a store. According to Kang and Park-Poaps (2011), most of the studies that identify the social value of shopping have only considered a single dimension of social shopping, that of interacting with friends and family (communitas). As they further note, these studies have ignored the social value derived by shoppers when they visit stores in order to interact with other customers besides family and friends (i.e. strangers). This dimension of social shopping was termed “new socionetworking” by Kang and Park-Poaps who referred to shopping as a means of interacting with other shoppers, of creating new friendships and making new shopping pals, as well as engaging in conversations with other shoppers. Interacting with other shoppers was also identified by Jones (1999) as a main shopping motivation. In addition, in-store shopping may satisfy consumers’ need to talk to other people with whom they share similar shopping interests (Tauber, 1972). This is particularly evident in hobby-related stores. Acknowledging the need to measure social shopping experiences from a more holistic perspective, this study includes important and distinct facets of social shopping such as communitas with friends and family, and socialising with other shoppers.

Taken together the dimensions of hedonic, flow, escapism, challenge, learning, communitas, and socialising are considered to be important dimensions that comprise multi-faceted in-store leisure experiences. It should be noted that the scale used in the present study focuses on leisure shopping and the experiential view of shopping which, according to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), deals with consumers' subjective states of pleasure, fantasy, and feeling. On the other hand, the utilitarian view of shopping as a rational, information-processing task (i.e. planned purchases) (Babin *et al.*, 1994) receives minimal consideration in this present study through the dimension of learning (e.g. knowledge acquisition).

The effect of store characteristics on in-store leisure experience dimensions

Store characteristics comprise all the functional attributes related to the physical characteristics of a store's merchandise (e.g. quality, variety, price, and availability) (Usitalo, 2001) as well as store environment cues. Store environment cues can be further grouped into three categories: ambient, design, and social (Baker *et al.*, 2002). Ambient cues refer to a store's atmosphere including background music, scent, temperature, etc. Design cues are related to consumers' perceptions of a store's layout, colour scheme, facilities, and merchandise displays whereas social cues reflect perceptions' of the behaviour and appearance both of the sales staff and other consumers.

Holistic approaches in the study of store atmospherics and customer experience suggest that experiences arise from customers' encounters with the blend of store attributes used by retailers (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010, 2015). It is the "whole" (Petermans *et al.*, 2013) and the total of all the interactions with a store's design, atmosphere, and personnel that can produce emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual experiences in shoppers (Sachdeva and Goel, 2015). Thus, the various dimensions of in-store leisure shopping experiences can be influenced simultaneously by a number of store characteristics. Below, previous work concerning the effects of the different store characteristics on the in-store leisure experience dimensions is presented and hypotheses are developed for each experience dimension.

The effect of store characteristics on hedonic experience

A considerable amount of research has tested the impact of different functional characteristics as well as store environment cues on shoppers' hedonic experience. For example, Yoo *et al.* (1998) investigating Korean shoppers found that the availability, variety, and price of a store's product assortment are important triggers of consumers' positive emotions (i.e. pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction). Positive feelings of pleasure and joy were found to be influenced by shoppers' evaluations of a store's merchandise quality (Walsh *et al.*, 2011) and prices (Johnson *et al.*, 2015). Here shoppers' evaluations comprised the perceptions and judgments they made regarding the store characteristics. Thus, favourable perceptions and positive judgments of a store attributes lead to positive evaluations.

Pleasure felt during consumer experiences in coffee shops was found to be a significant by-product of shoppers' perceptions about ambient cues such as background music, and scent (Walsh *et al.*, 2011; Ryu and Jang, 2008). Design attributes related to the store's layout, and décor proved to be major triggers of pleasurable dining experiences (Ryu and Jang, 2008). Andreu *et al.* (2006) highlighted the importance of design elements such as a store's décor on shoppers' positive emotions (i.e. joy, interest, and contentment). Social (e.g. sales staff) as well as design (e.g. layout) factors were also found to influence shoppers' feelings of pleasure and joy elicited when visiting fashion (Sherman *et al.*, 1997) and apparel stores (Johnson *et al.*, 2015). The preceding discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

- H1. Shopper evaluations of a store's (a) product availability, (b) product range, (c) prices, (d) product quality, (e) music, (f) aroma, (g) layout, (h) décor, and (i) employee politeness significantly influence the hedonic aspect of their experiences.

The effect of store characteristics on flow experience

There is a lack of research which links shoppers' evaluations of store characteristics and flow experience in retail settings. As mentioned earlier, flow is a feeling of heightened attention, focus, and total absorption where the consumer loses track of time (Nakamura and Csikzentmihalyi, 2002). According to Foster and McLelland (2015), the appropriate manipulation of atmospheric cues in themed retail environments (Hard Rock Café) such as bright lights and uptempo-high volume music can induce feelings of immersion in consumers as they are likely to lose the track of time and become absorbed during their interactions with the store's environment. Moreover, Kallinen (2004) suggested that when background music is used, customers might not be easily distracted by other factors, helping them to concentrate and become immersed to a greater extent in the shopping activity. Similar effects on flow experience can be produced by the lighting conditions in a store. Veitch *et al.* (2008), investigating the effects of lighting on store employees, found that bright lights positively affect their focus as well as their task performance. Ambient scent is also proven to be a positive trigger of flow since pleasant ambient scents can grab consumers' attention and improve their task performance (Bradford and Desrochers, 2009).

Besides comprising focused attention and temporal dissociation, flow is also related to high levels of skill/control and challenge/arousal (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Jackson (1995) highlighted the fact that arousal is an antecedent of flow experience. Prior studies, using Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) environmental psychology model, found that ambient factors such as scent and music were positively related to consumers' arousal (Sherman *et al.*, 1997; Walsh *et al.*, 2011; Chebat and Michon, 2003). Design factors (e.g. spaciousness, complexity, and novelty of a store's environment) (McGoldrick and Pieros, 1998) as well as social factors such as employees' friendliness and politeness (Hou *et al.*, 2013) can also lead to high levels of arousal, which in turn can induce immersion in consumers. In a similar way, consumers' perceptions of functional attributes such as merchandise quality (Areni *et al.*, 1996), and product range (Tai and Fung, 1997) can increase consumers' levels of arousal. This heightened arousal, engendered when a consumer finds the product quality and variety that they are looking for, can lead them to experience flow. Based on the preceding analysis, a further hypothesis is proposed:

- H2.* Shoppers' evaluations of a store's (a) music, (b) lighting, (c) aroma, (d) layout, (e) décor, (f) employee politeness, (g) product quality, and (h) product range significantly influence the flow aspect of experiences.

The effect of store characteristics on escapist experience

Studies have explored how store characteristics affect shoppers' escapist experiences. In the tourism sector, Albayrak *et al.* (2016) found that consumers' perceptions of a store's escapism value were positively influenced by attributes related to product quality, price, and availability as well as the behaviour of employees. Dong and Siu (2013) revealed that consumers who desire to escape from reality and fantasise about being in a different world while shopping are affected by ambient as well as design elements of a store such as music, aroma, décor, and layout. Fiore *et al.* (2000) also noted the impact of ambient scent on consumers' fantasies and daydreams. They found that shoppers' more readily engaged in fantasising, seeing themselves as part of a fantasy image when a product on display was appropriately fragranced compared to when a product was inappropriately fragranced. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- H3.* Shopper evaluation of a store's (a) product quality, (b) prices, (c) product availability, (d) employee politeness, (e) music, (f) aroma, (g) décor, and (h) layout significantly influences the escapism dimension of in-store experiences.

The effect of store characteristics on challenging experience

While previous research has analysed the effects of store characteristics on consumers' adventure shopping motivations, few studies have examined their impact on the feelings of challenge that are elicited in shoppers. According to Rintamäki *et al.* (2006), the adventure shopper who shops in order to have an adventurous experience is characterised by being variety seeking and an active assessor of price and quality. Moreover, shoppers who view shopping as an adventure are more likely to be affected by product quality compared with other types of shoppers (Seock and Sauls, 2008). The range and availability of items in a store can also influence the levels of adventure reported by consumers (Lee *et al.*, 2013). Another important attribute of adventure shoppers is that they seek sensory stimulation by experiencing exciting sights, smells, and sounds (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003, p. 80). Thus, a store's atmospheric cues (i.e. music, lighting, aroma, and design) will act as triggers of challenging experiences. The interior layout of a store was also found to be an element that was evaluated as positive by adventure shoppers (Budisantoso *et al.*, 2016). As Chebat *et al.* (2005) note, consumers who shop for the feeling of adventure and challenge enjoy getting lost in stores with a spacious layout. Hence, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

- H4. Shopper evaluation of a store's (a) prices, (b) product quality, (c) product range, (d) product availability, (e) music, (f) lighting, (g) aroma, (h) layout, and (i) décor significantly influences the challenge dimension of in-store experiences.

The effect of store characteristics on learning experience

A few studies have suggested that store characteristics can have an effect on shoppers' learning experience. According to Bäckström (2011) the learning experience of shoppers is related to the acquisition of information about, and knowledge of, newly available products, their quality, and prices. Hence, it is herein suggested that consumers' evaluations of a store's product quality, range, availability, and prices will enhance their knowledge acquisition. A consumer's educational experience in a store can be influenced by ambience factors as well, such as lighting (Joseph-Mathews *et al.*, 2009). It seems that appropriate lighting helps consumers acquire the information that they seek in order to make a purchase. Another atmospheric factor that further enhances the in-store educational experience of consumers is music. Specifically, soothing and pleasurable music affects consumers' cognitive processes and increases the depth of their information processing (Chebat *et al.*, 2001) which in turn results in greater consumer learning (Arnould *et al.*, 2001). Similar findings were also reported by Morrin and Ratneshwar (2000) with regards to the cognitive effects of ambient scent in memory. Research on olfaction has shown that odours can produce strong emotional memories (Stafford *et al.*, 2009). When odours are present during an event they become encoded simultaneously with the other information associated with the event, before being stored in memory (Hughes, 2004). Hence, odour-associated responses can activate recall of memories (Holland *et al.*, 2005) which in turn can lead to associative learning (Herz, 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that ambient scents can link shopping experiences with specific responses and emotions, create memories, and help consumers acquire knowledge. Based on the preceding discussion the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- H5. Shopper evaluation of a store's (a) product availability, (b) product quality, (c) prices, (d) product range, (e) lighting, (f) music, and (g) aroma significantly influences the learning dimension of in-store experiences.

The effect of store characteristics on *communitas* experience

Regarding the *communitas* dimension of experience, Davis and Hodges (2012) found that the value that department store shoppers gain from product quality, variety and prices is

related to the positive experiences that they have as they shop with their friends/family. Nsairi (2012) tested the impact of various factors (i.e. store atmosphere, motivations, mood, time of visit, and shopping companions) on the different shopping value dimensions (i.e. aesthetics, play, excellence, efficiency, social practice, social interaction, status, spirituality, and shopping value). Results showed that browsers' evaluation of ambient and design cues such as music and lighting, as well as the layout of a store, significantly influences the social practice value that consumers derive from sharing experiences and being close to friends and family while shopping. Based on the above, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

- H6.* Shopper evaluation of a store's (a) product quality, (b) product variety, (c) prices, (d) music, (e) lighting, and (f) layout significantly influences the *communitas* dimension of in-store experiences.

The effect of store characteristics on socialising experience

A number of studies have examined the effects of store characteristics on the socialising dimension of in-store experiences. Specifically, Tsai (2010) found a positive relationship between the socialising dimension of mall experience (e.g. interacting with other consumers) and shoppers' evaluation of stores' product quality, assortment, and prices. In another study, McCabe *et al.* (2007) segmented shoppers based on their shopping motivations into three clusters, namely goal-oriented, social, and bargain shoppers. Findings indicated that social shoppers who like to shop for a socialising experience were more influenced by the physical environment of stores (atmosphere and layout) than non-social shoppers. Eroglu *et al.* (2005) revealed that music tempo also had an impact on socialising shopping experiences. More shoppers reported that they talked with other customers during their shopping trip when exposed to slow-tempo music compared with other shoppers exposed to fast-tempo music. Zemke and Shoemaker (2007) further note that a pleasant scent positively affects consumers' social interactions with other consumers. Moreover, ambient factors such as music and lighting, as well as design factors like the store's layout were also found to influence the social interaction value of shoppers (Nsairi, 2012). Thus, based on the above, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

- H7.* Shopper evaluation of a store's (a) product quality, (b) product range, (c) prices, (d) music, (e) aroma, (f) lighting, and (g) layout significantly influences the socialising dimension of in-store experiences.

Method

Measurement

In order to measure the in-store leisure shopping experience of consumers, this study used the experience scale developed by Triantafyllidou and Siomkos (2013). This scale was modified in order to fit the in-store experience. The experience scale consisted of seven factors (i.e. hedonics, flow, escapism, personal challenge, learning, socialising, and *communitas*) and included 31 items. All items of the experience scale were evaluated on five-point Likert scales ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree". Moreover, respondents responded on five-point Likert scales ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" on whether the store had: merchandise available when the customer wanted it (availability); a wide range of products and brands (range); high-quality merchandise (quality); reasonable prices (prices); attractive interior décor (décor); pleasant music (music); appropriate lighting (lighting); a pleasant aroma (aroma); a layout allowing customers to move around with ease (store layout); and employees who consistently treated customers in a courteous manner (employee politeness). It should be noted that the

questions regarding respondents' evaluations of product availability, product quality, store layout, and employee politeness were adapted from the retail service quality scale developed by Dabholkar *et al.* (1995). Participants also reported the number of their previous shopping trips in the store by answering the following question: "In the past, how many times have you visited this store?" Responses were (1) "one time", (2) "one to three times", and (3) "4 or more times". This question helped to better describe the study's sample.

Data collection

The objectives of the present study were to measure in-store leisure shopping experiences through seven dimensions: hedonic, flow, challenge, learning, socialising, and communitas, as well as to test the effects of multiple store characteristics on the different dimensions of in-store experiences. In order to accomplish the study's objectives a survey was conducted using on-site personal interviews in two metropolitan cities in Greece during April 2015. Respondents were contacted upon exiting fashion retail stores such as Zara, Nike, Bershka, and H&M. These stores were chosen because they seek to deliver entertaining, exciting, and immersive experiences through the manipulation of cues related to atmosphere, merchandise, and employees (Floor, 2006; Leeman, 2010; Dawson *et al.*, 2006).

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was piloted with the help of ten Greek customers of the aforementioned retail stores. These customers were university students who volunteered to participate (two participants per store). Students were required to have visited one of the stores at least once before. Pilot participants were given the questionnaire and asked to recall their recent shopping experience at one of the stores. Minor modifications to the wording of the questionnaire were made as a result of the pilot.

The main survey took place during the second and the fourth weeks of April over six days (three days per week: Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday). In order to minimise the sampling bias, data were collected on different days and at different times. Specifically, on weekdays the interviews were conducted during morning and evening hours except for Saturdays when interviews took place in the morning since stores in Greece are only open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays. It should be noted that during the survey period the stores examined had no special sales on, nor other promotional activities that might affect the study's results. Every tenth shopper was approached and asked to participate in the survey after coming out of the stores. Thus, participants reported their immediately recalled in-store shopping experiences. This avoided memory bias. Face-to-face interviews following the shopping experience do not allow for random selection of respondents through probability sampling techniques like telephone interviews or for speedy and low cost data collection like online surveys (Evans and Mathur, 2005). But the method was chosen for the current study for two main reasons: to control the recall bias, as telephone and online surveys might have yielded distorted answers due to the time interval between the occurrence of the experience and its time of assessment, to be able to conduct the survey at the place where the consumption or purchase event actually took place (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), and to be able to provide immediate explanation and clarification to respondents when needed. Moreover, face-to-face mall-intercept surveys can produce just as high-quality results as other survey methods (e.g. telephone surveys) (Bush and Hair, 1985).

In total, 300 respondents participated in the survey. Table I shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. Based on Table I, the majority of participants were women (78.3 per cent), who were single (88.3 per cent), aged 18-25, and students (47.5 per cent) with secondary education (50.5 per cent). In addition, 79.2 per cent of the participants were repeat visitors of the stores in question having previously visited the store four or more times. χ^2 tests were conducted to examine whether customers of the four stores differed with regard to their characteristics (i.e. demographics, and frequency of visits). Results indicate that customers of the four stores differed significantly ($p < 0.05$) with respect to gender ($\chi^2(3) = 70.16, p = 0.000$,

Table I.
Characteristics
of the sample

Variable	Percentages	Variable	Percentages
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Marital status</i>	
Male	21.7	Single	88.3
Female	78.3	Married	10.3
		Divorced	1.4
<i>Age (years)</i>		<i>Occupation</i>	
18-25	69.0	Freelancer	9.7
26-30	17.7	Unemployed	18.7
31-40	11.3	Private sector employee	18.4
Over 41	2.0	Housewife	0.7
		Retired	0.3
		Student	47.5
		Civil sector employee	4.7
<i>Education</i>		<i>Previous store visits</i>	
Secondary education	50.5	One	0.7
College	16.8	1-3	20.1
Bachelor	27.6	4 or more times	79.2
Master	4.0		
PhD	1.0		

$V = 0.48$). Specifically, customers of Zara, Bershka, and H & M were predominantly female, while most of Nike's customers were male. Moreover, significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were observed across the four stores with regard to the frequency of visits ($\chi^2(6) = 22.21, p = 0.000, V = 0.19$). Again, customers of the four fashion stores (Zara, Bershka, H & M) were more frequent shoppers compared to Nike customers. No other significant differences ($p > 0.05$) were found between customers of the four stores in terms of marital status ($\chi^2(9) = 10.79, p = 0.290, V = 0.11$), education ($\chi^2(12) = 12.27, p = 0.424, V = 0.11$), occupation ($\chi^2(18) = 24.53, p = 0.138, V = 0.16$), or age ($\chi^2(12) = 20.84, p = 0.053, V = 0.15$).

Data analysis

First, the fit of the measurement model was evaluated using Amos 8.0. It should be noted that single-indicator latent constructs were used for each of the store characteristics (i.e. availability, range, quality, prices, décor, music, aroma, lighting, store layout, and employee politeness). The use of single-indicator latent variables was preferred over single-items that are estimated without measurement error assuming perfect reliability. Moreover, the factor loadings of the single-indicator latent constructs were set to 1 and, in line with Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) recommendation, the error variances were fixed to the smallest error variance value of the other variables in the model (0.082). Although, this method is somewhat "arbitrary, it has the advantage of being based on information specific to the given research context. That is, indicators share a respondent sample and survey instrument with the other indicators" (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988, p. 415). Then, structural equation modelling was performed in order to test hypotheses *H1-H7* and test the effects of store characteristics on the seven experience dimensions. Figure 1 summarises the hypothesised model.

Results

Table II shows the mean scores and standard deviations for consumer evaluation of the ten store characteristics. Based on the results, one can conclude that respondents' evaluation was favourable on the stores' product availability, layout, décor, and music. Also, respondents gave high ratings for employees' politeness and gave moderately positive evaluations on product variety, quality, and prices.

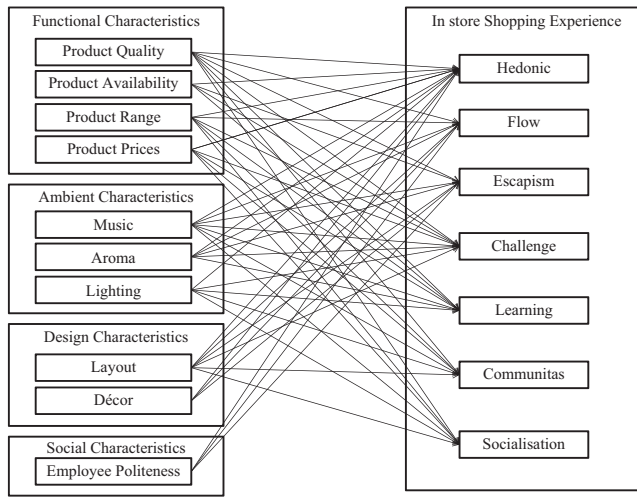


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Factors/Items	Mean	SD
This store has merchandise available when the customers want it (availability)	3.98	0.77
This store has a wide range of products and brands (range)	3.52	0.98
This store offers high-quality merchandise (quality)	3.34	0.98
The prices at this store are reasonable (prices)	3.12	1.00
The store layout at this store makes it easy for customers to move around in the store (layout)	3.72	0.95
Employees in this store are consistently courteous with customers (employee)	3.76	0.89
The interior décor at this store is attractive (décor)	3.70	0.93
The music at this store is pleasant (music)	3.74	0.90
The lighting at this store is appropriate (lighting)	3.78	0.88
The store's aroma is pleasant (aroma)	3.82	0.89

Table II. Descriptive statistics of respondents store attributes evaluations

Measurement model

The goodness-of-fit measures for the measurement model suggested that it was reasonably good since the values of the indices (comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)) exceeded the 0.90 criterion proposed by Byrne (2010). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) were below the cut-off values (RMSEA < 0.06 and SRMR < 0.08) as proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999) ($\chi^2 = 784.32$, $p = 0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 1.96$; CFI = 0.953; IFI = 0.953; TLI = 0.945; RMSEA = 0.056; SRMR = 0.045). Table III shows the mean values, the standard deviations, as well as the standardised factor loadings of the items that comprised the in-store experience scale.

In-store shopping experiences that were examined through this study were characterised by moderate feelings of hedonic, flow, socialising and communitas and moderate to low feelings of escapism, learning, and challenge. Moreover, the factors that characterised personal challenge received the lowest scores. Thus, findings suggest that shopping experiences in the stores featured in the study were primarily ordinary and regular events with moderate or low intensity.

Factors/Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standardised Factor Loadings
<i>Hedonics (AVE = 0.63, CR = 0.92, $\alpha = 0.92$)</i>			
I experienced joy	3.65	0.85	0.76
The experience was fun	3.52	0.83	0.85
The experience gave me good feeling	3.46	0.87	0.82
I felt cheerful during the experience	3.57	0.93	0.84
I felt I was having the ideal experience	3.20	0.83	0.76
It was pleasant just being there	3.07	0.84	0.77
I enjoyed the experience for its own sake	3.30	0.81	0.76
<i>Flow (AVE = 0.65, CR = 0.90, $\alpha = 0.90$)</i>			
I was totally immersed in the experience	3.20	0.96	0.65
I was totally absorbed in the experience	2.89	1.01	0.80
My total focus and attention was on the experience	2.78	0.96	0.87
I felt deeply all that happened	2.67	0.84	0.87
I was thinking of nothing but what was happening at that moment	2.76	1.02	0.85
<i>Escapism (AVE = 0.73, CR = 0.91, $\alpha = 0.92$)</i>			
I felt that I was living in a different time and place	2.41	0.95	0.76
I felt that I was in a different world	2.35	0.90	0.83
The experience let me imagine being someone else	2.23	0.87	0.92
I felt I played a different character here	2.20	0.85	0.91
<i>Challenge (AVE = 0.73, CR = 0.93, $\alpha = 0.93$)</i>			
I felt a sense of adventure and risk	2.11	0.92	0.90
I felt personally challenged	2.26	0.97	0.89
I felt an adrenalin rush	2.19	0.96	0.80
I felt that my skills were appreciated by others	2.15	0.90	0.85
During the experience I tested my limits	2.27	1.04	0.84
<i>Learning (AVE = 0.69, CR = 0.87, $\alpha = 0.87$)</i>			
The experience was highly educational to me	2.38	1.07	0.88
The experience had made me more knowledgeable	2.55	1.09	0.86
It stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	2.15	0.94	0.75
<i>Socialisation (AVE = 0.67, CR = 0.89, $\alpha = 0.88$)</i>			
I met new people	2.64	0.98	0.82
I met people with similar interests	2.67	1.06	0.87
I made new friends	2.17	0.84	0.85
I talked to new and varied people	2.89	1.07	0.73
<i>Communitas (AVE = 0.72, CR = 0.88, $\alpha = 0.88$)</i>			
I was satisfied with being part of a team	2.46	1.08	0.88
I felt closer to friends and family	2.63	1.14	0.89
I felt in harmony with others	2.48	1.06	0.79

Table III.

Descriptive statistics, validity and reliability measures and standardised factor loadings of in-store experience factors

Notes: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability; α , Cronbach's α

The in-store experience scale was evaluated in regards to the internal and composite reliability of the seven dimensions (Table III) as well as to the discriminant validity of the scale (Table IV).

The model showed good internal reliability since Cronbach's α coefficients for the seven experience factors ranged from 0.87 to 0.93, exceeding the 0.70 criterion suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). All the standardised coefficients of the 31 indicators were significant (critical ratios > 1.96 , $p = 0.000$), and exceeded the 0.50 threshold (Janssens *et al.*, 2008) (Table III). Modification indices were checked to examine whether any items cross-loaded with

other factors (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1988). Modification indices of all items were below 10 (Byrne, 2010) suggesting there were no significant cross-loading indicators.

The average variance extracted (AVE) for all factors ranged from 0.63 to 0.73, surpassing Fornell and Larcker's (1981) critical value of 0.50. Furthermore, composite reliabilities of all experience factors exceeded the accepted 0.70 value criterion (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that the experience scale showed acceptable levels of convergent validity. Finally, the discriminant validity of the experience scale was confirmed since the AVE of each factor was larger than the square of the correlation between the examined factor and the rest of the factors of the in-store experience scale (Table IV).

Hypotheses testing

A structural equation analysis was conducted in order to test the hypothesised relationships. It should be noted that the structural model tested the relationships between all store characteristics and the seven dimensions that comprise in-store experience. The overall χ^2 statistic of the model was significant ($\chi^2 = 1,280.44$, $p = 0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.036$) which is accepted for large samples (Byrne, 2010). According to Hair *et al.* (2009) the p -value of χ^2 tends to be significant in models with large sample sizes ($n > 250$) and more than 12 indicators. The values of the model's goodness-of-fit index exceeded the 0.90 criterion (CFI = 0.925, IFI = 0.926, and TLI = 0.907). Moreover, the RMSEA and SRMR values were lower than their cut-off criteria (RMSEA = 0.059 < 0.06; SRMR = 0.072 < 0.08). Based on the above results, it can be suggested that the hypothesised model showed a reasonably good fit to the data. Support for the hypotheses was examined based on the significance of the standardized estimates of the path coefficients (see Table V).

The first hypothesis tested the impact of store characteristics on the hedonic dimension of in-store experience. Based on the results, a store's product availability ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.44$, $p < 0.05$), prices ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 3.05$, $p < 0.05$), music ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.14$, $p < 0.05$), ambient scent ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 2.96$, $p < 0.05$), and décor ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.11$, $p < 0.05$) were found to be significant predictors of participants' hedonic experiences. Hence, *H1a*, *H1c*, *H1e*, *H1f*, and *H1h* were accepted, whereas *H1b*, *H1d*, *H1g*, and *H1i* were rejected. The store's aroma had the largest effect on hedonic experiences based on the values of the standardised coefficients.

Regarding *H2*, findings indicated that the store's music ($\beta = 0.16$, $t = 2.33$, $p < 0.05$), scent ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.96$, $p < 0.05$), layout ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.25$, $p < 0.05$), and product quality ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 2.62$, $p < 0.05$) significantly influenced the flow experience felt by participants. As a result, *H2a*, *H2c*, *H2d*, and *H2g* were accepted and *H2b*, *H2e*, *H2f*, and *H2h* were rejected. Only escapist experiences were significantly and positively related to store product quality ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 3.22$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, *H3a* was accepted and the remaining *H3* sub-hypotheses were rejected.

The quality of products in a store ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 2.73$, $p < 0.05$) along with the store's music ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.06$, $p < 0.05$) were found to influence significantly the challenge

	Hedonics	Flow	Escapism	Challenge	Socialising	Learning	Communitas
Hedonics	0.503 ^a	0.298	0.166	0.222	0.115	0.224	0.335
Flow	0.298 ^b	0.639	0.496	0.285	0.047	0.344	0.219
Escapism	0.166	0.496	0.648	0.454	0.081	0.375	0.289
Challenge	0.222	0.285	0.454	0.712	0.187	0.242	0.237
Socialising	0.115	0.047	0.081	0.187	0.534	0.147	0.237
Learning	0.224	0.089	0.073	0.242	0.147	0.583	0.464
Communitas	0.335	0.219	0.289	0.237	0.237	0.464	0.589

Notes: ^aAverage variance extracted; ^bsquare of correlations between factors

Table IV.
Discriminant validity
of the in-store
shopping
experience scale

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardised direct effects	Critical ratios	<i>p</i> -value
<i>H1a</i>	Availability → Hedonics	0.15	2.44*	0.015
<i>H1b</i>	Range → Hedonics	-0.01	-0.21	0.830
<i>H1c</i>	Prices → Hedonics	0.17	3.05*	0.002
<i>H1d</i>	Quality → Hedonics	0.06	1.04	0.298
<i>H1e</i>	Music → Hedonics	0.14	2.14*	0.032
<i>H1f</i>	Aroma → Hedonics	0.21	2.96*	0.003
<i>H1g</i>	Layout → Hedonics	0.08	1.22	0.221
<i>H1h</i>	Décor → Hedonics	0.14	2.11*	0.035
<i>H1i</i>	Employees → Hedonics	0.04	0.72	0.471
<i>H2a</i>	Music → Flow	0.16	2.33*	0.020
<i>H2b</i>	Lighting → Flow	0.00	0.68	0.496
<i>H2c</i>	Aroma → Flow	0.15	2.96*	0.003
<i>H2d</i>	Layout → Flow	0.15	2.26*	0.024
<i>H2e</i>	Décor → Flow	0.07	1.05	0.291
<i>H2f</i>	Employees → Flow	-0.07	-1.18	0.238
<i>H2g</i>	Quality → Flow	0.17	2.62*	0.009
<i>H2h</i>	Range → Flow	-0.04	-0.62	0.535
<i>H3a</i>	Quality → Escapism	0.22	3.22*	0.001
<i>H3b</i>	Prices → Escapism	0.08	1.28	0.201
<i>H3c</i>	Availability → Escapism	0.02	0.36	0.715
<i>H3d</i>	Employees → Escapism	-0.10	-1.57	0.117
<i>H3e</i>	Music → Escapism	0.13	1.77	0.076
<i>H3f</i>	Aroma → Escapism	0.13	1.72	0.086
<i>H3g</i>	Décor → Escapism	0.06	0.85	0.398
<i>H3h</i>	Layout → Escapism	-0.01	-0.13	0.898
<i>H4a</i>	Prices → Challenge	0.05	0.91	0.360
<i>H4b</i>	Quality → Challenge	0.17	2.73*	0.006
<i>H4c</i>	Range → Challenge	-0.07	-1.06	0.288
<i>H4d</i>	Availability → Challenge	-0.12	-1.91	0.056
<i>H4e</i>	Music → Challenge	0.14	2.06*	0.040
<i>H4f</i>	Lighting → Challenge	-0.09	-1.32	0.187
<i>H4g</i>	Aroma → Challenge	0.14	1.91	0.056
<i>H4h</i>	Layout → Challenge	0.06	0.86	0.388
<i>H4i</i>	Décor → Challenge	0.05	0.68	0.497
<i>H5a</i>	Availability → Learning	-0.09	-1.37	0.170
<i>H5b</i>	Quality → Learning	0.26	3.96*	0.000
<i>H5c</i>	Prices → Learning	0.07	1.12	0.262
<i>H5d</i>	Range → Learning	-0.16	-2.32*	0.020
<i>H5e</i>	Lighting → Learning	-0.06	-0.82	0.412
<i>H5f</i>	Music → Learning	0.17	2.37*	0.018
<i>H5g</i>	Aroma → Learning	0.17	2.21*	0.027
<i>H6a</i>	Quality → Socialisation	0.20	3.14*	0.002
<i>H6b</i>	Range → Socialisation	0.01	0.10	0.917
<i>H6c</i>	Prices → Socialisation	0.01	0.09	0.930
<i>H6d</i>	Music → Socialisation	0.15	2.10*	0.036
<i>H6e</i>	Lighting → Socialisation	-0.07	-1.03	0.304
<i>H6f</i>	Layout → Socialisation	0.24	3.53*	0.000
<i>H7a</i>	Quality → Communitas	0.23	3.61*	0.000
<i>H7b</i>	Range → Communitas	-0.12	-1.94	0.053
<i>H7c</i>	Prices → Communitas	-0.02	-0.28	0.782
<i>H7d</i>	Music → Communitas	0.15	2.14*	0.032
<i>H7e</i>	Aroma → Communitas	0.13	1.69	0.091
<i>H7f</i>	Lighting → Communitas	-0.11	-1.54	0.123
<i>H7g</i>	Layout → Communitas	0.15	2.18*	0.029

Table V.
Results of
hypotheses testing

Note: **p* < 0.05

dimension of in-store experiences. Hence, *H4b* and *H4e* were accepted whereas the remaining *H4* sub-hypotheses were rejected. Positive predictors of the learning experience dimension were identified as product quality ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 3.96$, $p < 0.05$), music ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 2.37$, $p < 0.05$), and ambient scent ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 2.21$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, *H5b*, *H5f*, and *H5g* were accepted at $p = 0.05$ level. Contrary to our expectations, store product range was found to be a significant but negative driver of learning experience ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = 2.32$, $p < 0.05$). The correlation coefficient between learning and product range was calculated to determine whether a collinearity problem was causing the negative relationship between the two variables. A weak negative correlation was found to exist between product range and learning (-0.12) suggesting that there was no bias due to collinearity in the path calculations. As a result, *H5a*, *H5c*, *H5d*, and *H5e* were rejected.

The socialising aspect of in-store experiences was significantly ($p < 0.05$) and positively influenced by store attributes such as product quality ($\beta = 0.20$, $t = 3.14$, $p < 0.05$), music ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.10$, $p < 0.05$), and layout ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 3.53$, $p < 0.05$). Store layout was found to be the most important trigger of socialising experiences since the value of the standardised coefficient was the largest compared to the coefficients of quality and music. As a consequence, *H6a*, *H6d*, and *H6f* were accepted, whereas the rest of the *H6* sub-hypotheses were rejected. Similar findings were found for the *communitas* dimension. Specifically, the quality of the store's products ($\beta = 0.23$, $t = 3.61$, $p < 0.05$) along with the store's music ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.14$, $p < 0.05$), and layout ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.18$, $p < 0.05$) impact significantly and positively the manner the *communitas* experience enjoyed by participants. Based on the values of the standardised coefficients, quality was found to be the dominant store characteristic that exhibited the greatest effect on *communitas* dimension. Hence, *H7a*, *H7d*, and *H7g* were accepted whereas all the other *H7* sub-hypotheses were rejected.

Conclusions and managerial implications

In-store leisure shopping experiences are complex and subjective in nature, being events that derive from shopper interactions' with the store. The present research measured in-store leisure shopping experiences through seven dimensions: hedonic, flow, challenge, learning, socialising, and *communitas* and tested the effects of multiple store characteristics on the different dimensions. Understanding which in-store factors influence shopping experience, and in what way, is a critical task for academics as well as marketers desiring to manage and deliver "unique" leisure shopping experiences.

The present study contributes to research on in-store shopping experiences in three ways. First, the study has enriched understanding of the different dimensions that comprise in-store leisure experience. Previous research had identified a limited number of dimensions of leisure shopping experiences such as hedonic, escapism, *communitas*, and learning (Tsai, 2010; Bäckström, 2011; Bagdare and Jain, 2013; Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013) while other important dimensions such as flow, challenge, and socialising had been ignored. For example, the notion of flow has only been addressed in a few studies in a shopping or retailing context. Although these studies suggested that flow during shopping is intertwined with other experiential dimensions such as hedonic (Wang and Hsiao, 2012) and escapist experiences (Woodruffe-Burton *et al.*, 2005), they do not conceptualise flow as part of the wider experience construct. In addition, the dimension of "challenge", which relates to feelings of personal challenge, adventure, and thrill, has been included mainly as a factor in shopping motivation scales (e.g. Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) as an experience sub-dimension (i.e. hunting) (Bäckström, 2011) or as an item in the hedonic factor value scale (i.e. while shopping, I felt a sense of adventure) (Babin *et al.*, 1994). Hence, this study adds to the relevant literature information on the way the dimensions of flow and challenge contribute to the creation of leisure shopping experiences by conceptualising them as distinctive factors of in-store leisure shopping experience along with other known experiential elements (i.e. hedonic, escapism,

learning, and social). Moreover, this study enriches the literature on social shopping experience by incorporating, in addition to the basic dimension of “communitas” experiences with shopping companions (Kang and Park-Poaps, 2011), the “socialising” dimension which captures shoppers’ interactions with fellow shoppers.

Findings suggest that the shopping experiences in the fashion stores that were examined produced moderate feelings of hedonic, flow, socializing, and communitas. In addition, shopping experiences in these stores were not characterised as intense escapist, learning, and adventure experiences. This ordinariness found in in-store experiences could be attributed to a number of reasons such as the characteristics of shoppers, the stores’ environment, as well as the general economic climate. Perhaps respondents who participated in the survey have a utilitarian predisposition and are more goal-oriented when they shop in fashion stores. These fashion shoppers desire to pursue their shopping tasks fast and precisely (Scarpi, 2006) so they overlook the emotional part of shopping experiences which would require a certain degree of engagement. Another reason for these shopping experiences being “soft” might be store environments designed to help customers accomplish their shopping goals quickly with no effort directed at creating exceptional experiences that would encourage customers to stay longer in the store and enjoy their experience. Moreover, since the study investigated Greek consumers, the effect of the economic crisis on their shopping experiences cannot be ignored. It is true that the economic crisis has altered Greek consumers’ psychology as well as their way of shopping. In the recession consumers have become more rational and are mainly affected by the functional characteristics of stores (i.e. prices). Hence, they pay less attention to their positive experiences during shopping trips due to their low morale trying to cope with an ever-shrinking income. These findings are in line with the study of Karanika and Hogg (2016) who found that Greek consumers try to cope with the economic crisis and their low income by engaging in price comparisons and shopping from discount stores. Moreover, shopping is not viewed by Greek consumers as an intense pleasurable and escapist experience since they actively avoid shopping in order to minimise negative feelings from wanting products that are beyond their reach. Instead they tend to escape from their stressful reality through consumption activities such as watching movies and listening to music at home. These changes in the shopping habits of Greek consumers are reflected in the steady increase in the revenues of discount stores in Greece when other retailers are facing sharp reductions in turnover (Tsakiri, 2010).

Second, this study sheds light on the complex effects of store characteristics on in-store leisure shopping experiences. This complexity lies in the following important findings of this study: not all store elements affect the different dimensions of experiences, some of the influential elements might affect more experience dimensions than others, and influential elements that exert power on the same dimension might have different degrees of effects based on the strength of the effect. As a consequence, it is herein suggested that some store characteristics are more important than others since they might affect more experience dimensions and their influence might be stronger than others. The above results are in line with Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz’s (2013) assertions that different store characteristics have different degrees of influence on the different experience dimensions.

Table VI summarises the key findings of the study grouped by each of the ten store characteristics that were examined.

The most pertinent store characteristics that affect leisure shopping experiences were identified by the present study. As Table VI indicates, a store’s product quality was the most important functional store attributes influencing six out of seven experience dimensions. Product quality proved to be an important promoter of flow, escapism, challenging, learning, socializing, and communitas experiences. When customers find a store with the quality of products that they like then they become fully absorbed in their

Table VI.
Main findings
of the study

Product availability Hedonism	Product range Learning (-)	Product quality Flow Escapism Challenge Learning Socialisation Communitas	Prices Hedonism	Employees politeness NS
Store layout Flow Socialisation Communitas	Décor Hedonism	Music Hedonism Flow Challenge Learning Socialisation Communitas	Lighting NS	Aroma Hedonism Flow Learning

challenging shopping task, imagine being in a different world, acquire new knowledge, and receive increase social benefits from shopping. Similar findings were also reported by Michon *et al.* (2015) regarding the positive effects of shoppers' perceptions of product quality on shopping value that included elements of escapism and immersion. A store's product availability and prices were also found to be significant factors affecting in-store shopping experiences. These characteristics only affected one of the seven experience dimensions, that of hedonic shopping. It can be concluded that shoppers enjoy their visits to stores as long as the products they need are available in the stores and at the right prices.

Regarding the influence of ambient elements, music had the strongest impact since it affected six out of the seven experience dimensions. Specifically, music positively influenced hedonic, flow, challenging, learning, socialising, and communitas experiences. Again, stores with pleasing music increase consumer feelings of pleasure, flow, risk, and adventure. The appropriate background music can also produce cognitive as well as social benefits in consumers who acquire product information more readily and strengthen their relationships with their important others or with fellow shoppers. Consistent with previous studies, store music can enhance consumer feelings of enjoyment, adventure, and immersion (Eroglu *et al.*, 2005).

Ambient scent also had a positive impact on three out of seven experience dimensions (i.e. hedonic, escapism, and learning). A pleasant aroma induces feelings of pleasure and enjoyment in shoppers and carries them away from reality into a different imaginary world. In addition, ambient scent has been found to improve the educational value of shopping experiences. Contrary to expectations lighting did not influence any in-store shopping experience dimension.

The design elements of store layout and décor were also proven to be important triggers of shopping experiences. Store layout positively affects the dimensions of flow, communitas, and socialising while the interior décor of a store positively relates to feelings of pleasure and excitement. A spacious layout helps consumers during their group shopping to interact effectively with their shopping pals and also provides more opportunities for interaction with fellow consumers. Moreover, shoppers' imagination and fantasy is encouraged by a spacious layout where they can move around easily. As to social factors within a store, employee politeness did play a significant role on in-store experiences.

Third, another major contribution of the present study was the discovery that not all store characteristics had a positive effect on in-store experience. It was found that product range actually had a negative effect on the learning dimension. Product variety acts as a "saboteur" of the learning aspect of shopping experiences. When a store offers a wide range of products, the knowledge or epistemic benefits that consumers derive from their store experiences is reduced as shoppers might feel confused from the size of choice they face (Chernev, 2003).

This finding can be explained by the consumer confusion theory. According to Mitchell *et al.* (2005) a certain type of consumer confusion is overload confusion evoked when consumers are “confronted with an overly-rich environment that cannot be processed in the time available to fully understand and be confident in the purchase environment” (p. 143). Other studies have also shown that product variety to be a factor that enhances consumer overload confusion (Huffman and Kahn, 1998; Schweizer *et al.*, 2006).

Several managerial implications emerge regarding the effective management of in-store shopping experiences. Retailers wishing to provide exceptional experiences to their customers should begin with experience evaluation. This evaluation will help map the in-store experience’s strengths and weaknesses. Then, through the appropriate manipulation of controllable elements related to specific store cues retailers will be able to enhance or preserve certain aspects of in-store experiences.

Managers of the stores considered in this research received moderate to low scores regarding their experiential performance on the majority of leisure experience dimensions. Thus, managers of these particular fashion stores would benefit from placing increased emphasis on merchandise quality in conjunction with the appropriate manipulation of ambient and design elements such as music, scent and store layout. However, attention should be paid to the variety strategy that managers adopt in order to avoid any potential negative experience outcomes.

More specifically, in order to create hedonic experiences, managers should engineer a pleasant atmosphere with the appropriate background music, ambient scent and décor. Prices and product availability are also important elements which contribute to the hedonic experiences of shoppers. The flow aspect of shopping experiences can be enhanced through careful design of the store’s layout combined with the right product quality. Moreover, soft background music and an arousing ambient scent would attract shoppers’ attention and focus.

Shoppers quite often enter stores with the desire to relax, forget their problems, fantasise and imagine being in a different world. Escapist experiences could be enhanced by offering high-quality products. Satisfaction with product quality attracts shoppers and enables them to escape from reality by imagining themselves using the store’s product. Furthermore, retailers who want to target adventure shoppers by offering a challenging experience need to use the right kind of music (i.e. epic adventure music) that would raise shoppers’ feelings of adventure and risk. Since most adventure shoppers engage in quality assessments during their shopping trips, retailers should offer superior product quality in order to increase the challenge dimension of shopping experiences and attract adventure shoppers.

A shopping experience should also satisfy consumers’ informational needs since many consumers visit stores in order to learn about new trends and new products. Shoppers learn from their shopping experiences when they positively evaluate the quality of the products they encounter. Thus, the higher the store’s product quality, the greater the learning aspects of store experiences. In addition, soft background music in conjunction with pleasant aroma can lead to increased learning experience. However, attention should be paid to the store’s product variety in order not to confuse shoppers and negate their learning experience since it was found that a wide product range is detrimental. Thus, retailers need to identify the optimum segment of their product range so as to reduce the level of consumer confusion due to the complexity associated with a large merchandise variety (Huffman and Kahn, 1998) and to ease the learning processes of consumers.

Stores are considered by many shoppers as places where they can visit with their friends or family as well as interact with other fellow consumers. Retailers need to understand these social motives and create the appropriate store setting to enhance customers’ feelings of *communitas* and socialising. This staged setting should include a spacious interior layout

where consumers can easily wander around with their companions. Layout should be designed in such a way as to enhance interaction between consumers. Music can also contribute to the social experience of shoppers. It is herein proposed that soft music is preferred over loud music since it does not stifle conversation between shoppers. According to Yalch and Spangenberg (1990) shoppers' interactions are more often triggered in low-volume music conditions. Similarly, Eroglu *et al.* (2005) found that shoppers interacted more with other customers under slow-tempo music conditions. Areni (2003) interviewed pub managers to reveal that soft music such as calm instrumental music helps to "break the ice" between consumers, help them relax and engage in conversation. In addition, retailers should provide shoppers with discussion topics that will foster their socialising and *communitas* experiences. These discussion topics should focus on product quality as it was found that consumer evaluations of a store's product quality are positively linked to socialising and *communitas* experience.

By orchestrating the appropriate store elements that impact each experience dimension retailers can provide a holistic in-store leisure shopping experience to fascinate shoppers, satisfy them and increase the likelihood of return visits.

Limitations and future research suggestions

The main limitation of the present study stems from the sampling procedure and the representativeness of the sample. The survey was conducted in two Greek cities, outside specific fashion stores and thus shoppers of other stores did not participate in the survey. Hence, results cannot be generalised to all the Greek customers of the particular stores nor to all types of in-store experiences. Future research could be directed towards examining shoppers' experiences in other types of stores such as luxury fashion stores or discount stores. Moreover, further fruitful insights could be gleaned by comparing shopping experiences across different store types.

The moderate intensity of the experiential elements reported by consumers could be attributed to the length of time shoppers stayed in the stores. For example, shoppers who stayed longer in stores could experience more intense feelings of flow as they might had more time to delve into and become engrossed in their shopping task. Hence, the moderating effect of time spend in the store could help to better understand in-store experiences.

Another limitation of this research is related to the way in-store shopping experiences have been measured. Whilst it has focused on dimensions that comprise leisure shopping experiences it has not taken into consideration the utilitarian dimension of consumer behaviour. Future research could be profitably directed towards examining the total shopping experience in the light of utilitarian and leisure shopping aspects. Further studies in this line of research could investigate the relationships between the hedonic dimension with the other experiential elements (i.e. escapism, flow, challenge, learning, socialising, and *communitas*). In addition, an investigation into the mediating effects of hedonic experiences on the relationship between evaluations of store characteristics and post-consumption variables would also be a welcome addition to the body of research.

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