Retail store design

Lesson 4.1.1 | Consumer psychology

Core ideas

Store design can shape where customers walk, what they notice and how long they stay in a retail environment.

Layout choices such as grid, racetrack and free-flow designs guide movement in different ways.

Product placement affects visibility, comparison and impulse buying by changing how easily items are encountered.

Aisle width, entrance space, signs and checkout position can affect comfort, crowding and wayfinding.

Point-of-purchase displays can draw attention to products at the moment when buying decisions are made.

Research on store design must consider confounding variables such as price, brand, staff, music, lighting and customer purpose.

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Key terms

Store layout: The arrangement of aisles, displays, entrances and checkout areas.

Grid layout: A structured layout with straight aisles, often used in supermarkets.

Free-flow layout: A flexible layout that encourages browsing through less rigid pathways.

Racetrack layout: A looped route designed to guide customers around many store areas.

Product placement: Where products are positioned to affect visibility and access.

Wayfinding: How easily customers can navigate and locate products.

Point-of-purchase display: A display placed near where buying decisions are made.

Traffic flow: The pattern of customer movement through a store.

Further detail and evidence

Exterior design includes the storefront, entrance, windows and landscaping. Mower et al. (2012) varied window displays and landscaping in boutique images rated by US students. Both improved liking and patronage intentions, but neither produced a main effect on pleasure or arousal. Intentions were measured, rather than actual purchases.

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Continued

Interior layouts: grid uses regular parallel aisles; freeform uses less rigid groupings that encourage browsing; racetrack uses a main loop around displays. Compare ease of locating a planned product, exposure to other products, browsing pleasure and available floor space.

Virtual layouts need separate testing. Vrechopoulos et al. (2004) compared online grocery stores using grid, freeform and racetrack structures. Grid was perceived as easier to use; freeform was more entertaining/useful, while freeform and racetrack encouraged longer shopping. Physical-store assumptions did not all transfer unchanged.

Applying the ideas

A supermarket can use a grid for routine search and clear product categories. A boutique may use freeform browsing and attractive windows. A virtual store also needs navigation links, search and usable comparison tools: a screen cannot simply reproduce walking through a physical aisle.

Evaluation and connections

Images provide controlled comparisons but lack smell, movement and real spending. Student ratings limit demographic generalisation. Longer time in a store can indicate engagement or difficulty, so interpret it alongside satisfaction and task success. A layout suitable for browsing may frustrate a customer completing a quick planned purchase.