Environmental influences on consumers

Lesson 4.2.1 | Consumer psychology

Core ideas

Consumer decisions can be shaped by the immediate situation, including the physical setting, social setting and time available.

Crowding and density can affect stress, comfort, movement and whether customers continue shopping or leave.

Queues and waiting time can influence satisfaction, perceived service quality and willingness to buy.

Shopping companions, staff presence and other customers can create social influence, reassurance or pressure.

Time pressure can reduce browsing and comparison, while a relaxed context may encourage exploration.

Environmental influences interact with personal goals, product need, price, culture and previous experience.

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Key terms

Situational influence: A temporary feature of the buying context that can affect consumer behaviour.

Physical setting: The material environment around the consumer, such as space, temperature and layout.

Social setting: The people present during the buying situation, such as friends, staff or other customers.

Density: The number of people or objects in a given space.

Crowding: The subjective feeling that a space is too full or restrictive.

Time pressure: Feeling that there is limited time to decide or complete a purchase.

Perceived waiting time: How long a wait feels, which may differ from the actual time.

Customer satisfaction: How far the buying experience meets or misses a customer's expectations.

Further detail and evidence

Wayfinding is deciding and following a route; orientation is knowing where one is relative to destinations. Signs need visible locations, clear wording/symbols and consistent categories. A you-are-here map needs an accurate position marker and alignment that users can interpret.

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Continued

Dogu and Erkip (2000) examined a shopping mall, combining user evidence with its spatial design. Building configuration, visual accessibility, circulation and signage influence wayfinding. Familiarity and goals can change how much support a shopper needs.

Gil et al. (2009) combined CCTV movement traces and exit interviews. Trip patterns included short, round, central and wave trips. Short trips cover limited areas; round trips loop around; central trips rely on central routes; wave trips move back and forth through aisles.

Gil's shopper types: specialists focus on a few products; natives make efficient, relevant-aisle trips; tourists move quickly near main/entrance routes with lower conversion; explorers make long, wide-ranging trips and many interactions; raiders travel quickly and decide efficiently, going farther when needed. These are behavioural clusters rather than fixed personality diagnoses.

Applying the ideas

A clear sign can reduce unnecessary search without forcing every shopper into the same route. Compare a planned top-up purchase with a main weekly shop. Exit interviews explain the mission, while traces show the path actually taken; stated intentions and observed behaviour need not agree.

Evaluation and connections

CCTV supplies detailed natural behaviour, but movement alone does not reveal motives or attention. Consistent coding and independent checking improve reliability. One store's layout and products limit generalisation. A convenient customer sample can miss people deterred from entering by inaccessible design.