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# WOMEN'S BOUTIQUE DESIGN AND ITS IMPACT ON PURCHASING DECISION

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## ABSTRACT

*A review of different literature testifies the influence of store design in stimulating customers purchasing. Generally, store environment includes ambient elements such as lighting, music; and design elements such as store layout, materials, and colors. Among the two categories, the design factors are considered more influential in regard to consumers' reactions. This research was carried out in five upscale women's apparel boutiques in Bahrain City Center Mall (BCCM), the reason why chooses women's boutique is because women usually go shopping more often than men. Hence, this research was conducted in five different upscale women's boutiques in the Bahrain City Center Mall (BCCM) and a sample of (168) consumers were collected randomly through a questionnaire that applied Likert's scale. The results of this research confirm that the store design image does have a profound influence on increasing purchasing levels as customers feel satisfied with the services submitted. Retailers must direct their efforts toward customer's attraction to increase their sales through improving their store design image.*

**Key words:** interior design, boutique, Bahrain City Center Mall (BCCM), consumer behavior, store layout.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, retail stores are defined as a shop that sells one type of merchandise and retailers tend to overload their stores with different products as possible to reach the highest sales per square meter. Nowadays, due to the rapid changing in the fashion industry, stores have to be designed and modernized to have a specific image that attracts more customers and in turn increase revenues. Store design includes store layout, and the use of colors, sound, scent, and merchandise displays that affect store atmosphere and make the store more legible for customers. Different researchers claim that store image is a determinant factor for consumers in choosing a store that stimulating their purchasing decisions [1]. In addition, many studies support that design elements support the store image, attract the attention of customers, and store loyalty rather than ambient elements [1, 2]. In addition, store design is considered more

influential as it affects peoples' perception of the overall brand and alters customers purchasing mood [2, 3]. According to marketing researchers, store image is an important marketing strategy that has an influential role on store loyalty and patronage decisions rather than merchandise and price [1, 4, 5, 6]. To quote the designer Leandro Artigala, "One of the key things in retail is that consumers have to feel that they're in the environment that they are looking for"[3]. Different studies show that when consumers face multiple similar options, their choice will be based on the differences between these options [4].

### 1.1 Research Significance

The research will address the influence of store image on consumers purchasing behavior. As the competition between retail businesses continue increasing, store image becomes increasingly important and more challenging to capture an adequate market share [1, 3]. Different studies revealed that a high percentage of shopping is done by female especially clothes; therefore, stores should be designed and decorated well to be more appealing [7].

### 1.2 Retail in Bahrain

Retailing in Bahrain is composed of different holding companies that own the leading retail brands in the country. Hence, several shopping malls were established, including various retail outlets with globally recognized and trendy merchandise that attract numerous customers. In order to enhance their businesses and attract more customers, retailers make use of interior design to distinguish their store; therefore, each store has a distinctive identity, see fig. 1.



Figure 1 Retail stores at BCCM.

## 2. RELATED LITERATURE

*"...the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes"* [1: pp.16].

A boutique is a retail business which sells fashionable clothes and accessories or a special selection of other merchandise. Usually, boutiques' customers have a significant discretionary income boutique that prefers a pleasant interior environment accompanied with a variety of a high-quality products[1]. Therefore, the interior designer's role is to design a physical attractive store that affects consumers' perception and experience and provides specific emotional effects which affect the profitability of retailers. This physical store environment includes many elements, like ambient elements (nontangible) and design elements (tangible). The ambient elements like music, lighting, temperature, ambient scent, while design elements like: store layout, displays, colors, materials; and exterior like a display window[8,9, 10, 11]. These elements create store identity and influence consumers' decision to frequently purchase from a particular store [8, 12]. A study on the effect of interior store environment on store employee reveals that employee feel more productive and cooperative with the customer [6]. Similarly, there is good synergy between store design and the products

at the design reflect the stylistic identity of the products, also, store image has a role to build brand equity and a strategy of influencing promotion of the product, see fig. 2[3].



**Figure 2** Minimalism Interior Retail store

Literatures differentiate between two types of shopping: purchase of a product (economic or utilitarian or task-oriented shopping) and recreational (hedonic or non-task-oriented shopping). The difference between them is that recreational shoppers interested in more services and the store environment than the product itself, whereas economic shoppers interested in the products themselves[6, 13]. Different studies finding indicates that the store's interior is an important agent for purchase attitude as it creates a sense of a high quality product and influence consumer's price perception [2]. Conversely, other literatures discuss that customers are not conscious of the store interior image as their minds are fixed on the product itself [14]. Moreover, several studies argued that store interior space enhances feelings of friendliness, excitement, comfort, and influence consumers purchase intention through rack distribution as its influence customers' movement [9, 15]. Other scholars who studied the correlation between store design and shopping frequency concluded that store design solutions have specific attributes that produce positive signals about the consumer's favorable boutique store as it evokes certain behavioral responses such as the willingness to buy[1]. Furthermore, interior design elements include also the distribution of different furniture types and merchandise displays. These two elements influence shoppers' purchase intentions positively or negatively. Hence, the arrangement of merchandise displays has different effects like providing shoppers with a panoramic view of a store, affect customer's traffic, and reflect the store image[7]. Arguably, these displays can affect store layout and affect shopper's perception if they are organized in order [16]. Also, consumers may perceive a store environment as spacious environment, allowing free movement, while negatively gives a feeling of clutter store which reduces store free movement which as a result decreases the way finding and hinder a consumer task, see fig. 3&4. In addition, customers feel store more attractive when the store is more accessible and legible [7]. Interestingly, few studies describe customer's movement within a store. In relation to store lighting, different studies on the effect of lighting intensity and type and its effect on both products presentation and consumer behavior reveal that a store with a good illumination potentially entertains customers to visit the store and purchase [6]. On the other hand, for recreational shoppers design interiors add excitement and sensory stimulation to shopping trip and less value on products and way finding is of no importance as they have no specific route to follow or product to locate, while for economic shopper's way finding is a prerequisite [8].



**Figure 3** Existing Store Layout without order



**Figure 4** Existing Store Layout with order

In relation to colors, whether warm (high arousing colors) or cool (low arousing colors) are the main factor of interior design that influences consumer's perception about the merchandise. Different scholars argued that high arousing colors like yellow and red in retail stores decrease purchasing, cause tension, and less attractive compared to low-arousing colors like green and blue which is less distracting and over stimulate buyers because color has an important role on people' moods [15,17]. Cho studies on the color preference, found that the customers are more sensitive on store's color when two stores offer the same products [18-20]. On the other hand, external design includes display window, which acts as a medium of advertising and has a direct impact on customers purchasing decisions [21].

As a result, retail store interiors should be updated every five years or less to stay attractive, competitive and fashionable from others in the market [5, 22].

## 2.1. Research Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing discussion, the research main aim is to examine the link between retail store image and customers purchasing behavior.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

The content for this research was collected during a field study in Bahrain City Center Mall (BCCM). This mall is selected because it is the biggest shopping mall in Bahrain that has many upscale fashion stores that attract thousands of shoppers from the whole Gulf Cooperation Council(GCC) countries. A random questionnaire was distributed to women who came into one of these five upscale boutiques (MANGO, ZARA, DOROTHY PERKINS, EVANS, and ANOTAH)between June 3, 2017 and July 17, 2017. The questionnaire included closed ended questions using a five-point Likert-type scale which accurately measures attitudes (5—strongly agree; 1—strongly disagree).The sample size was (185) in which (168) questionnaires were returned and the data was analyzed using SPSS software.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The overall results revealed that the interior store image able to influence peoples' emotions and attitudes towards a favorite and convenient shopping. A total of 168 participated in the survey and all the survey participants have remained anonymous.

### 4.1. Age

Approximately (81.7 %) percent of the respondents were between (20) and (24) years old. Twelve (12) of the participants were between 25 and 32, while seven (7) customers were between 33–40 age category, see table 1. The demographic age mean is 23.7 years.

**Table 1** Age

Age	Frequency	%	Cumulative Percent
20-24	137	81.7	81.7
25-32	20	11.9	93.6
33-40	11	6.4	100
Total	168	100	

### 4.2. Preferred Shopping Time

Table 2 shows different time preferred for shopping as some of the participants were housewives, others were university students and others were employed in different businesses. As a result each of them came for shopping in his free time.

**Table 2** Preferred Time for Shopping

	Frequency	%	Cumulative Percent
10 am-12 pm	13	7.8	7.8
12 pm-2 pm	19	11.5	19.3
2 pm-4 pm	93	56	75.3
4 pm-6 pm	28	16.9	92.2
Other	6	3.6	95.8
2,3	3	1.8	97.6
3,4	4	2.4	100
Total	166	100	
Missing system	2		
Total	168		

### 4.3. Shopping Intentions

Table 3 shows the participants shopping intentions. The responses here have a strong relationship with the participant's occupation and their financial situation. Whereas some of the participants go for recreational purposes, others shopped for leisure and needs. Some of stated they go shopping for a special occasions or other reasons.

**Table 3** Shopping Intentions

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Leisure (1)	103	61.3	61.2
Special occasion (2)	3	1.8	63.1
General clothing needs (3)	10	5.9	69
Other (4)	3	1.8	70.8
1,2,3,4	25	14.9	85.7
1,2	8	4.8	90.5
2,4	4	2.4	92.9
1,2,3	4	2.4	95.3
1,2,4	8	4.7	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.4. Store Design

When participants were asked about the store design and image, nearly all the respondents in the five boutiques admired the design. Table 4 shows the results which had a mean of 4.73.

**Table 4** Store Design Evaluation

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Very Good	132	78.6	78.6
Good	31	18.4	97
Between good & very good	3	1.8	98.8
Neutral	2	1.2	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.5. Store Color Evaluation

When the participants were asked about colors, nearly (97%) stated that they like the colors used in the five boutiques and there is a harmony between the boutique colors and its product. Table 5 shows the respondents opinions, which had a mean of 4.70.

**Table 5** Color Evaluation

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Very Good	123	73	73.5
Good	40	24	97
Neutral	5	3	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.6. Store Movement Clarity

When the participants asked about the movement in the store, ninety-eight respondents between 'strongly agree' and agree mentioned that the circulation is clear and easy, table 6 shows the respondents opinions, which had a mean of 4.67.

**Table 6** Store Movement Clarity

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	128	76	76
Agree	37	22	98
Neutral	3	2	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.7. Store Lighting

Concerning store lighting customers saw that store lighting affects their purchasing decision and can create a cozy image in consumers' mind as shown in table 7. According to the table 79% of the respondents strongly agree that the lighting distribution, color, and type are attractive, while 21% of the respondents assessed it to be good. The mean for lighting respondents is 4.79.

**Table 7** Store Lighting Evaluation

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	133	79	79
Agree	35	21	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.8. Merchandise Displays & Product Arrangement

The ability for customers to see merchandise is the most important stimulus to consider in a fashion boutique. When the participants were asked about the distribution and arrangement of merchandise displays, nearly 83% answered that merchandise displays were very well organized and the products arranged well. Another 13% felt that merchandise displays were good. The merchandise display mean was 4.88, table 8.

**Table 8** Merchandise Displays Evaluation

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	146	87	87
Agree	22	13	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.9. Shopping Satisfaction

Table 9 shows that the (98%) of the participants were satisfied with the shopping experience. The overall mean for shopping experience satisfaction was 4.65.

**Table 9** Shopping Satisfaction

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	113	67	67
Agree	52	31	98
Neutral	3	2	100
Total	168	100	

#### 4.10. Shopping Frequency

When the participants asked about their frequent visit to boutiques, nearly (96%) of the participants agreed that their shopping was frequent to these five boutiques because they like the decoration and the products these boutiques offer. Interestingly, seven respondents reported a disagreement as the products of these boutiques are expensive and they cannot afford to buy from these boutiques periodically. The results had a mean of 4.63, see table 10.

**Table 10** Shopping Frequency

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Agree	112	67	49
Neutral	49	29	96
Disagree	7	4	100
Total	168	100	

The data analyses uncovered interesting results, although the sample of this research used in five specific apparel boutiques, it may be parallel to other stores in other shopping malls. This research provides a useful information and data for interior designers in retail projects. Also, this research encourages further studies in retail design.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The results show positive customer reactions to retail design elements in the five upscale women's apparel boutique. All the design elements in the five boutiques are attractive to the customer and affect their purchasing intentions as it is clear from the foregoing results. The research hypothesis is approved as shoppers in the five boutiques are highly pleased with the design and decoration and the research objective has been met. The results also uncovered which age the retailers should focus on in their business and how to stimulate their purchasing activity. This is supported by several researchers that store images are essential for retailers in achieving customer loyalty[1]. In addition, this research shows how store design contributes to the successful development of business and brand identity. Also, it shows how it influence consumer purchasing behavior, and how consumer react according to design factors which enhance the willingness to visit the store.

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