

What irritates students in the shopping environment?

“Whoever said money can’t buy happiness, simply didn’t know where to shop.”

The shopping environment, a topic that has been researched extensively, has proven to produce positive emotions among consumers. Retailers can create a shopping environment that produces positive emotions and this, therefore, increases purchases. However, since a shopping environment can produce positive emotions, surely it can also produce negative emotions? And if it produces negative emotions, will this not have a greater influence on a consumer’s behaviour?

Irritating aspects in the shopping environment are those environmental aspects that create negative emotions. A shopping environment’s physical environment is divided into three components, namely ambient factors, design factors and social factors. There are a number of irritants that are classified according to each of these factors. These irritating aspects ultimately result in shopper dissatisfaction. With the current boom in retail property development in South Africa, there is increased competition and this means that it is even more important to ensure shopping satisfaction now – more than ever before.

A study was undertaken by a team of honours students, including [Nontu Mashaba](#) (staff member in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) to identify a student’s perspective on irritation in the shopping environment. Given the diversity of South African consumers, understanding not only how consumers perceive irritation, but also understanding differences in the perception of irritating aspects amongst consumers can be of great value to, and can have a positive implication for retailers. Retailers will be able to design their store environments to reduce or eliminate any irritations that their customers may experience whilst shopping, and thus reduce the likelihood of their customers switching to their competitors.

The results of the study indicate that student shoppers perceive irritations from social factors as far more irritating than irritations from ambient and design factors in the shopping environment. Consistent with previous research, females are significantly more irritated by ambient factors than men. It is, however, interesting to note that there were no gender differences with regards to design factors. Females were also significantly more irritated by social factors than men. Furthermore, there were no ethnical differences with regards to ambient factors; however, there were ethnical differences with regards to design factors, where white shoppers were significantly more irritated by not being able to find what they need than Indian shoppers. Finally, people in general, irrespective of ethnic background or gender, are sensitive to irritations in the shopping environment. This indicates that from a managerial point of view it would be in their best interest to avoid any situation that will potentially irritate their customers.

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