THE INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ON BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE IN LIFESTYLE CENTERS IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of customer experience on consumer behavior towards lifestyle centers in Bangkok using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. In addition, the influences of the stimuli such as mall environment, customer-to-customer interaction, and mall tenant mix (variety), on behavioral response (revisit intention and desire to stay) were found in this study. A self-administered questionnaire was employed to collect data from customers who had visited lifestyle centers in Bangkok area in the period during which the study was conducted. The survey period was during January 2013, and 492 questionnaires were used to analyze the data by using a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. Results show that affective dimension of customer experience has the greatest influence on the revisit intention and the desire to stay. Mall tenant mix (variety) has the greatest influence on the affective dimension of customer experience, followed by store social interaction, and the ambient factor. Customer-to-customer interaction also influences both the revisit intention and the desire to stay but has a lesser influence on the desire to stay than the ambient factor.

Key words: Customer experience, Environmental stimuli, Social interaction, Tenant mix, Revisit intention

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์หลักของการวิจัยนี้คือ การสำรวจพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคต่อไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ในกรุงเทพฯโดยใช้ แบบจำลอง สิ่งเร้า-การรับรู้-การตอบสนองต่อสิ่งเร้า รวมทั้งอิทธิพลของสิ่งเร้าอาทิเช่น สิ่งแวดล้อมของไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลูกค้า และความหลากหลายของร้านค้า ก็ยังส่งผลกระทบต่อพฤติกรรมของลูกค้าซึ่งได้แก่ ความ ตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์และความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ แบบสอบถามด้วยตนเองได้ถูก แจกจ่ายเพื่อรวบรวมข้อมูลจากลูกค้าที่เคยมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ในกรุงเทพฯ และช่วงเวลาในการแจกแบบสอบถามอยู่ ในเดือนมกราคม ปี 2556 แบบสอบถามจำนวน 492 ฉบับ นำมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง ผลการศึกษาพิสูจน์ได้ว่า ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลมากที่สุดต่อความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์และ ความประสงค์ ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ได้แก่ประสบการณ์ด้านความรู้สึกของลูกค้า ยิ่งกว่านั้นความหลากหลายของร้านค้าก็มี อิทธิพลอย่างมากต่อประสบการณ์ด้านความรู้สึกของลูกค้า รองลงมาได้แก่การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคม และสภาพแวดล้อม ของไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ ทั้งนี้การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลูกค้าก็ยังส่งผลต่อความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ และความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ของลูกค้า อย่างไรก็ตามสภาพแวดล้อมของไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ส่งผล ต่อความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ของลูกค้ามากกว่าปัจจัยด้านการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลูกค้า

คำสำคัญ: ประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า, สิ่งเร้าจากสิ่งแวดล้อม, การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคม, ความหลากหลายของ ร้านค้า, ความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the retail industry is one of the most important industries due to its continuous growth. The Retail Sales Index rose from 178.73 in 2010 to 186.30 in 2011, and then to 220.48 in 2012 (Bank of Thailand, 2013). The community mall, the so-called lifestyle center, is popular and

has been growing rapidly in Thailand since 2011 (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2012). Century 21 Research Company estimated that in the next few years, the area occupied by lifestyle centers will be greater than 150,000 square meters, with more retail centers entering the market (Century 21 Thailand, 2011).

Colliers International Thailand Research (2008:2) identified that a lifestyle center is designed to meet the changes in customers' needs and lifestyles. The mall/center offers a casual feeling where customers can shop, drink coffee or eat snacks and dine in a relaxing atmosphere, and is normally located in the centre of community areas or near residential projects, such as J Avenue and The Crystal, in Bangkok. Levy and Weitz (2009) pointed out the importance of lifestyle centers as opposed to other types of mall because customers visit lifestyle centers 2.5 times more often than other types of mall, and spend around 50 percent more in the United States market. Verhoef et al. (2009) also pointed out that creating a better customer experience is considered as the main objective for a retailer. Even though some researchers such as Berry, et al. (2002) acknowledged the importance of customer experience, they only provided some suggestions for improving managerial outcomes. Verhoef et al. (2009) identified the scarcity of academic research on the customer experience construct and asked that more research to clarify the concept of customer experience be conducted.

Thai retailers are also aware of improving the variety of products/services and strive to offer an impressive experience to customers when they shop at a retail mall. In particular, the retail format called "lifestyle center" focuses on the concept of fun shopping experience trends and aims to be a better place for shopping for their customers (Watchravesringkan & Punyapiroje, 2011). However, there is a lack of research into customer experience in the lifestyle center format, especially in Thailand. Social interaction at malls is the new lifestyle of Thais that should be an important factor for retailers to consider in offering a variety of products/services and experiences. Generally, Thai people visit malls with their family. Malls are the place for them to eat, interact with each other and/or go shopping with their family. Researchers also have stated that social interaction could be a reason for people to visit a service provider or retail mall because they like to interact with other people at that location. It could be a reason for customers to choose one service provider or retail mall over other places (Moore, Moore & Capella, 2005). However, there are limited empirical studies about social interaction (Verhoef et al., 2009).

The first purpose of this study is to examine the relative influence of affective dimension of customer experience on behavioral response when shopping at a lifestyle center. The second purpose is to determine customer stimuli influencing affective dimension of customer experience, and behavioral response when shopping at a lifestyle center. The third purpose is to investigate customer-to-customer interaction influencing affective dimension of customer experience, and behavioral response when shopping at a lifestyle center. The last purpose is to examine the impact of tenant mix (variety) on affective dimension of customer experience, and behavioral response when customers shop at a lifestyle center.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer experience

The customer experience concept was investigated by Schmitt (1999) who referred to the importance of sensory experience in both service and retail businesses. The five modes can be named as sense, feel, think, act, and relate, respectively. Creating engaging and lasting experiences with the customers is a new trend in the marketing field (Berry et al., 2002; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Ismail et al. (2011) defined customer experience as "emotions provoked, sensations felt, knowledge gained and skills acquired through active involvement with the firm pre, during and post consumption". Experiences are broad and complicated because they consist of several types of experiences. Researchers used the term "consumption experience" for general business. The term "service experience" was used in bank and bar service industries in the study of Hui and Bateson in 1991. The term "product experience" was subsequently used when customers purchased products such as boats and electronic guitars. After that, the term "shopping experience" was used by Babin et al. (1994) and Babin and Darden (1995) in the retail industry. During the end of 1990s to the begin-

ning of 2000s, the majority of studies in both service and retail industries used the term "customer experience", such as the work of Pine and Gilmore (1998), Schmitt (1999), Berry et al. (2002). Recently, the term "customer experience" has also been used in retail settings in the work of Ismail et al. (2011). This study uses the term "customer experience" because it is also conducted in a retail setting, and the term "customer experience" is most used nowadays. It is also recognized that customer experience overlaps with shopping, service, product, and consumption experiences both in retail and service settings.

Affective Dimension

The affective dimension was first defined by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) who asserted that the affective dimension refers to feelings or emotions such as fun, enjoyment and pleasure. It can be considered as hedonic consumption based on the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products. Regarding affective dimension, researchers emphasized emotion (Babin et al. 1994; Hui & Bateson, 1991; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Therefore, this study implies that the affective dimension can be considered as emotion, such as pleasure or enjoyment and arousal or excitement (Babin et al., 1994; Babin & Darden, 1995) in accordance with the feelings of each customer when shopping at a lifestyle center.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm in a retail context demonstrates the relationship between the physical environment at malls (environmental stimulus) as an antecedent or independent variable, the internal dimensions (organism) as a mediator, and behavioral response as the dependent variable. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) first tested the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm. They found that environmental factors had positive relationships with emotional states and responses. The studies of Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman (1994), Baker et al. (2002), and Wakefield and Baker (1998) similarly classified stimuli into three main factors: social factors (relationship between customer and employees), design factors (visual senses such as decoration), and

ambient factors (non-visual senses such as temperature and music). This study used the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory which includes the three stimuli (ambient factor, design factor, and social factor), and has adopted the S-O-R paradigm as the main theory to explain the relationship between customer experience and behavioral response. This is due to its wide acceptance by many researchers and its application in both service and retail settings (Baker et al., 1992; Bitner, 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

Antecedents of Customer Experience

Antecedents of customer experience consist of mall appearance (environment), customer-to-customer interaction, and mall tenant mix (variety). Mall appearance (environment) is illustrated by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory.

Mall Appearance (Environment)

Mall appearance or environmental factors consisted of ambient factor, design factor and social factors. Bitner (1992) described ambient conditions as factors such as temperature, lighting, and music that tend to affect non-visual senses (Baker et al., 2002:121). Bitner (1992) assessed space and function (similar to design; equipment, furnishings, colors) which tend to affect visual senses (Baker et al., 2002:121). Fiore and Kim (2007) stated that the social factor in malls consist of the interactions between staff and customers. Baker et al. (1992) showed that friendly employees in a mall had a positive influence on customers in terms of both arousal and pleasure.

Customer-to-customer Interaction (friends, family and other customers)

Customer-to-customer interaction has gained the attention of some researchers (Moore et al., 2005) because it is an important factor in the customer experience to increase satisfaction and loyalty (Bitner et al., 1990). Tauber (1972) pointed out that people also shop for social reasons. Social factors are characterized as social experiences and communication with other people who have a similar interest, such as peer group attraction.

Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)

Mall tenant mix (variety) is defined as the number of tenants in mall, such as restaurants, entertainment services, apparel shops, and technological shops to satisfy consumers when shopping at a retail outlet (Teller & Elms, 2010). It outlines the success of a specific mall because a proper tenant mix can attract more loyal customers (Teller & Reutterer, 2008; Yiu & Xu, 2012).

Dependent Variables of Customer Experience

The dependent variable of customer experiences in this study is behavioral response and consists of desire to stay, and revisit intention. It can be considered as approach behavior or the behavior of customer to stay and shop at the mall (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). In this study behavioral response includes both the intention to shop, and the desire to stay longer at the lifestyle center (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996).

METHODOLOGY

In the initial phase, this study conducted an exploratory research to provide useful information and enhance understanding about beliefs, thinking, feelings, experience and the behavioral response of customers in the lifestyle center format. The personal interviews were conducted without making prior appointments with the respondents. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30-50 minutes for each person. The personal interviews were conducted with ten tenants at the lifestyle centers in Bangkok to learn about their opinions and experience about the mall environment and customers. Next, personal interviews were also conducted with 20 customers in Bangkok to learn about their shopping experiences. The interviews were conducted during November 28, 2011 to December 4, 2011 at some lifestyle centers including The Promenade, Amorini, The Nine, Punya Village, Nawamin Festival Walk, and Nawamin City Avenue with both tenants and customers. The results of the interviews are discussed in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of In-depth Interview

Factors	Quotation
Customer-to-customer Interaction (Friends)	"I always come to this lifestyle center to meet friends at some restaurants" (Interview with customer)
	"I only come here because of my friends. They want to eat and meet at the famous restaurant name "Wine I love you" (Interview with customer)
	"Normally, my customers come here to interact with their friends. Sometimes, they come together but sometimes they come and wait for their friends. Some customers come and interact with me. Now, we are friends". (Interview with owner of coffee shop)
	"Most of my customers come here with their friends. They can have a happy time staying together. I think that they enhance their relationships here". (Interview with sales people of ice-cream shop)
Mall tenant variety	"Normally, I come here with my husband and son. My son learns piano at Siam Yamaha in this lifestyle center. I do some shopping at the supermarket and small apparel shops while I am waiting for my son. Then, we will have lunch together at some restaurants here" (Interview with customer)
	"I come here to eat Japanese food. This lifestyle center has enough Japanese restaurants for me" (Interview with customer)
	"I usually go to eat at S&P, McDonald's, or MK restaurant. This lifestyle center has all the standard shops that I want" (Interview with customer)
	"There are suitable numbers of apparel shops here" (Interview with owner of apparel shop2)
Mall's appearance (environment)	"I really like the decoration and design. It makes me feel like I live in Australia" (Interview with customer)
	"The lifestyle center that has a better mall environment attracts more customers to visit" (Interview with owner of apparel shop1)
	"I like the environment here rather than the open market at Tawana" (Interview with owner of apparel shop2)
Affective experience	"I enjoy shopping at the lifestyle center" (Interview with customer)
	"I feel like I can forget some problems/anxieties when I shop here" (Interview with customer)
	"The time spent shopping here is enjoyable" (Interview with customer)
	"My customers have told me that they like to come here because they enjoy spending time here" (Interview with owner of restaurant2)
Desire to stay	"I spent more time at the lifestyle center" (Interview with customer)
	"My customers have told me that they like to come here because they want to spend a longer time with their friends" (Interview with owner of restaurant2)
Revisit intention	"Next time, I will also want to come to the lifestyle center" (Interview with customer)

Source: Developed for this study.

The results of the interviews of both tenants and customers at lifestyle centers are mostly consistent with the literature review with regard to the variables, i.e., mall environment and tenant variety. However, some variables which appeared during the interviews have not been widely investigated in literature, i.e., customer-to-customer interaction. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study consists of three types of variable: antecedents (mall appearance or environment, customer-to-customer interaction, and mall tenant mix or variety); affective dimension of customer experience or mediators; and behavioral response (revisit intention, and desire to stay). Hence, these variables are used to develop a model based on the S-O-R. This study investigates the mall environment as stimuli, customer experience as organism, and behavioral response as customer response. The conceptual framework is illustrated in the following model (see Figure 1).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

PRE-TEST

This study measured the reliability of variables from the data set of the pre-test of 60 respondents. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were acceptable ranging from 0.74 to 0.91 (see Table 4).

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Ambient factor (A)	0.74
Design factor (D)	0.93
Store social factor (S)	0.85
Customer-to-customer (CC)	0.89
Mall's tenants mix or Variety (V)	0.82
Affective dimension of customer experience (AF)	0.91
Desire to stay (DS)	0.82
Revisit intention (RI)	0.87

In the pre-test, all constructs obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients higher than the recommended level of 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998; Nunnally, 1978). Therefore, there was no adjustment in wording after the pre-test in this study because all respondents in the pre-test understood all of the questions in the questionnaire.

In the second phase, a total of 492 respondents participated in this study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to test how well the measurement variables represent the constructs before analyzing data using the structural equation model (SEM).
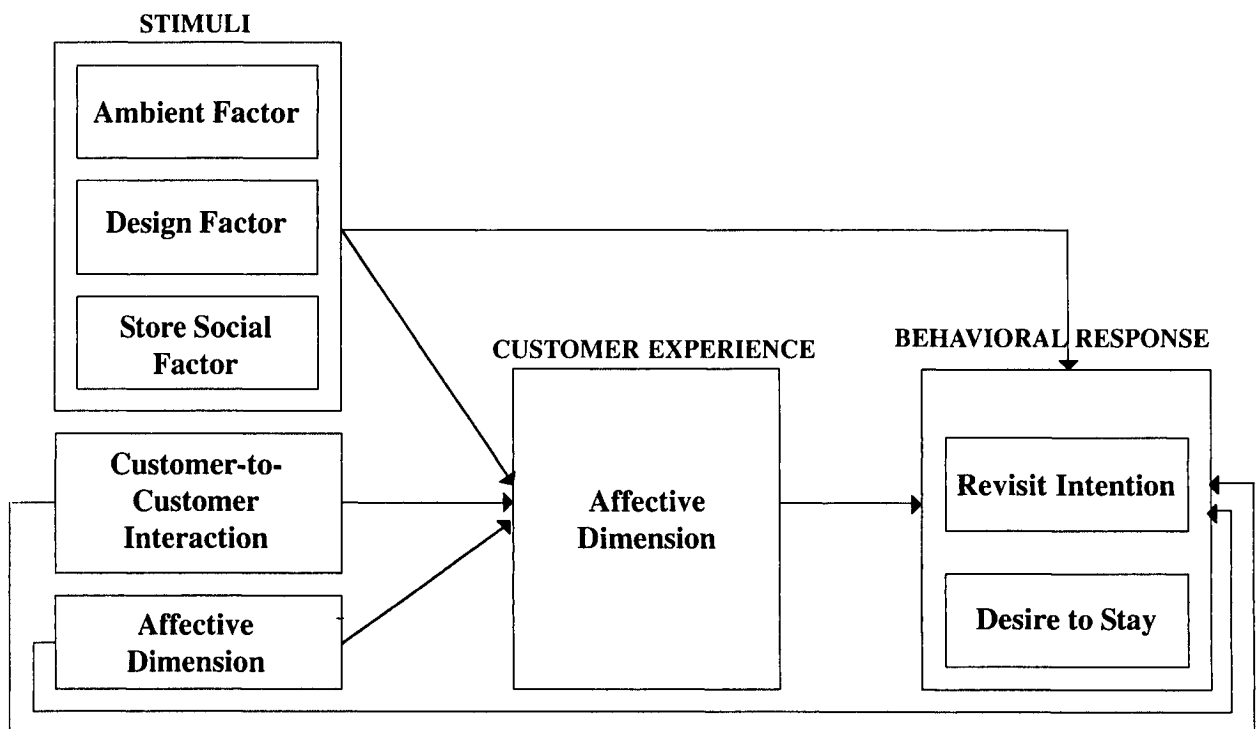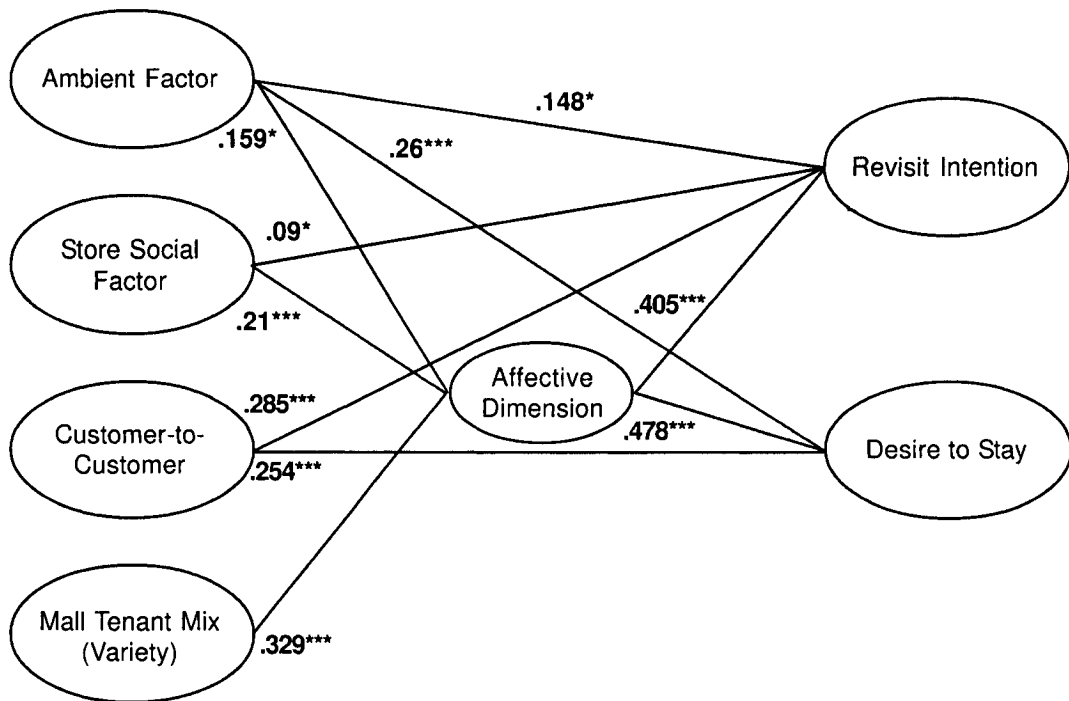

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 2: SEM Model with Standardized Loading

Note: $\chi 2/df$ = 3.384; p<0.001; NFI = 0.873; RFI = 0.855; IFI = 0.907; TLI = 0.893; CFI = 0.907; RMSEA = .070

FINDINGS

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The results of the measurement model demonstrate that the chi-square statistic ($\chi 2/df$) is 3.891, p<0.001, and the RMSEA is 0.077. Regarding the rule of thumb, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should not be greater than 0.1 (Ho, 2006), and the incremental fit indices should be above 0.9 (Hair et al., 2006; Ho, 2006). The statistical criteria for determining goodness-of-fit or the baseline comparisons fit indices illustrated a marginally acceptable fit for the hypothesized model (NFI = 0.835; RFI = 0.816; IFI = 0.872; TLI = 0.856; CFI = 0.872) in this study. To improve the fit of the model, some items with high modification indices (MI) values were removed from the model (Hair et al., 2006). Then, the results of the modified measurement model show that the chi-square statistic ($\chi 2/df$) is 3.166, p<0.001, and the RMSEA is 0.066. The baseline comparisons fit indices illustrated a better fit for the measurement model (NFI = 0.882; RFI = 0.864; IFI = 0.916; TLI = 0.903; CFI = 0.915) than the

original measurement model. Hence, the model fit was improved after deleting four items regarding the baseline comparison fit indices of the proposed model.

Structural Equation Model (SEM).

The results reveal that the chi-square statistic ($\chi 2/df$) is 3.384, p<0.001, and the RMSEA is 0.070. The baseline comparison fit indices illustrated an acceptable fit for the hypothesized model (NFI = 0.873; RFI = 0.855; IFI = 0.907; TLI = 0.893; CFI = 0.907) in this study. The results of hypotheses testing are shown in Table 5.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the ambient factor has a significant and positive influence on the affective dimension. However, design has no influence on the affective dimension and the result of design factor. Another environmental stimulus, store social factor, has an influence only on the affective dimension. This result implies that

32

Table 5: Hypotheses Test Results

Hypotheses	Hypotheses Test Results
H1: Mall appearance (Environment)→Affective dimension	
H1a: Ambient factor→Affective dimensio	**Supported**
H1b: Design factor→Affective dimensio	Not Supported
H1c: Store social factor→Affective dimension	**Supported**
H2: Customer-to-customer interaction→Affective dimension	Not Supported
H3: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Affective dimension	**Supported**
H4: Affective dimension→Behavioral Response	
H4a: Affective dimension→Revisit intention	**Supported**
H4b: Affective dimension→Desire to stay	**Supported**
H5: Mall appearance (Environment)→Behavioral Response	
H5a1: Ambient factor →Revisit Intention	**Supported**
H5a2: Design factor → Revisit Intention	Not Supported
H5a3: Store social factor→Revisit Intention	**Supported**
H5b1: Ambient factor → Desire to stay	
H5b2: Design factor → Desire to stay	Not Supported
H7b3: Store social factor→Desire to stay	Not Supported
H6: Customer-to-Customer Interaction→Behavioral Response	
H6a: Customer-to-Customer Interaction→Revisit Intention	**Supported**
H6b: Customer-to-Customer Interaction→Desire to stay	**Supported**
H7: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Behavioral Response	
H7a: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Revisit Intention	Not Supported
H7b: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Desire to stay	Not Supported

store's social factor or friendly employees in a lifestyle center has a positive influence on customers in terms of affective dimensions (pleasure and arousal). In other words, a store's social factor helps fulfill customer's need for enjoyment which also helps customers have a good time and forget their problems (Timothy, 2005). Among mall appearance, mall tenant mix (variety) has the strongest influence on affective dimension.

It is also noticed that the affective dimension has a stronger influence on revisit intention, when compared to the impacts of customer-to-customer interaction, ambient factor, and store social factor. The affective dimension also has a significant positive influence on desire to stay at the lifestyle center, when compared to the impacts of the ambient factor, and customer-to-customer interaction. Therefore, the results provide empirical weight to the importance of generating exciting and pleasant experiences for customers when shopping at lifestyle centers. In other words, this research suggests that the exciting and pleasant shopping environments are more likely to generate repeat visiting, and desire to stay at these centers.

Customer-to-customer interaction also has a significant and positive influence on revisit inten-

tion and the result is consistent with the exploratory study results. Furthermore, the ambient factor such as music provided at the lifestyle center, and customer-to-customer interaction also have significant influence on desire to stay at the lifestyle centers. This result is also consistent with the exploratory study results. The ambient factor has the strongest effect on desire to stay, followed by customer-to-customer interaction. Therefore, it is apparent that only the ambient factor and customer-to-customer interaction have significant and direct influence on desire to stay at the lifestyle centers. Finally, there is no direct and significant impact of mall tenant dimension, on the desire to stay and revisit intention, mediated through the affect dimension.

CONCLUSION

The findings provide important contributions and recommendations to scholars or academics in the retail industry. For theoretical implications, this study extends knowledge of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory to clarify the relationship between environmental factors (stimulus),

the affective dimension (organism), and revisit intention (response). The results of this study illustrate that the affective dimension is mediating between mall environmental factors, such as the ambient factor and store social factor, and behavioral response (revisit intention and desire to stay). To be specific, the findings in this study suggest that the ambient factor is an important factor that influences the affective dimension, revisit intention, and desire to stay. Wakefield and Baker (1998) found that three environmental stimuli factors (ambient factor, design factor, and store social factor) influence the affective dimension. However, the results of this study indicate only two environmental stimuli factors (ambient factor, and store social factor) influence the affective dimension of customer experience. The results of this study also clarifies that customer-to-customer interaction has a significant and positive influence on both revisit intention and desire to stay but does not have any significant relationship with the affective dimension of customer experience.

This study also provides useful knowledge for managers about the importance of the affective dimension toward behavioral response (revisit intention, and desire to stay). To enhance the affective dimension, managers should also improve the ambience and mall tenant mix (variety). The findings suggest that managers should pay attention to building a better environment at the lifestyle center such as music, lighting, and temperature because it will also enhance the consumers' desire to stay longer. Specifically, it is evident from this study that managers might not have to spend a lot of money on fancy design but should focus more on the ambient factor. This study verified that building a good environment and maintaining a pleasant environment (through factors such as music, lighting, and temperature) can make customers feel good, and encourage revisit intention. Finally, lifestyle centers should consider improving the store social factor by increasing the number of employees in lifestyle centers.

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