

Interviewing Real Shoppers about Store Physicality: A Case Study of Target

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Introduction

Currently apparel shopping takes places through multi-channel retailing such as cell phones, touchscreen, laptops and tradition brick and mortar stores (Kim & Johnson, 2015). Despite the growing popularity of online retailing, brick and mortar stores are still one of the most important channels to provide consumers memorable, engaging, and emotional brand experiences (Anderson & Eckstein 2013). A synopsis of previous research studies found that physical stores contribute to experiential consumption, while online shopping mostly relates to utilitarian consumption (Baker & Grewell, 1994; Dolbec & Chebat, 2013). Moreover, a current research conducted by Kim and Johnson (2015) found that several store attributes such as product, store design, atmosphere, and price positively influence store loyalty through the mediating role of shopping enjoyment and place attachment.

The objective of this study is thus to identify and observe potential areas of store physicality for improvement focusing on a specific location of a Target store to enhance consumers' shopping experiences. Davies and Ward (2005) and Kent (2003) posited that "merchandise, in-store promotion and the issues of location, environment and atmosphere" are the focus areas of store physicality. Thirty in-person interviews were conducted at a Target store in the Midwest. The following questions were asked:

1. From the table above which brands have you purchased before?

What kind of clothing or brands that you think the store should but don't yet have for you?

2. Do you like the design, quality, and price of the clothing products here?

3.	How does the product presentation help you to select what you want?
4.	Please tell me how you like the visuals and signage of this store?
5.	How you like the layout of the store? Should anything be rearranged?
6.	Do you want any specific technological features to help you shop at Target?
7.	Do you think the store has enough staff to help with your shopping needs?
8.	How do you like the checking out process? Is the check-out station convenient? Are you wait in line for too long?
9.	What promotions should this Target store have to attract you to continue to shop here?
10.	How should this store improve to make you want to shop here more?

Findings

Seven major findings emerged from the analysis of the thirty in-depth interviews:

Finding 1 (Technological features): Participants expressed that they wanted specific technological features such as QR scan code (22% of participants), VR showroom (7%), digital display (20%), chatbots (27%), mobile wallet (20%), virtual makeover (2%), and digital price tags (2%) that could help them shop at Target. Their detailed suggestions are outlined as the following:

- a. QR scan codes help consumers to get more information about products such as types of fabric and previous purchase history. Also, VR showroom could be applied in the fashion apparel store.
- b. Another important technological aspect is digital display. Some consumers claim that retailers should provide current trending of apparel items and other necessary features in the digital display as well as listing and showing images for all items.

- c. Mobile wallet and virtual makeover (an app where users can virtually try on any makeup to enhance their appearance) are two important technological features that Target could implement to facilitate a better consumer decision making process.
- d. Digital price tags are other important things to consider. Some consumers state that digital price tags need to be integrated with their smartphone that align shopping lists and alert them about what items to look for next.

Finding 2 (product presentation of the store): Participants indicated that Target needs more apparel items, variations in the arrangement of fixtures (25% of participants), coordination of products (13%), freshening up the displays regularly (17%), and rearrangement of the layout of front lines (12%) to improve the product presentation of the store.

- a. Target needs more apparel items to compare fabric materials, texture, style, and price value so that participants can choose the best one. Some male participants mention that the store should increase the selection of apparel items for men's section as this section is super small.
- b. The placement of the apparel items in the store also takes a very small place. So, it would require more space to relocate all apparel items in a manner that everyone could easily look through all apparel items.
- c. Participants do not always want to look the same items in the same arrangement. Sometimes they want to explore the store and look for novelty. They also prefer to see the most purchased products at the back of the store. It will help them to look for other unfamiliar brands. It can be concluded that freshening up the product displays regularly is highly recommended to enhance consumers' attraction to the store.

- d. Consumers want a specific fixture format. Sometimes they could not see products when similar fixtures are used across all rows. Target should arrange their fixtures from smaller to larger that helps consumers in differentiating the products. This store needs more curved tables and racks for proper arrangement of apparel items.

Finding 3 (Promotional features): Participants suggest some important features of promotions that the Target store should implement and those features are:

- a. 35 % of participants noted that email is a great way to promote products because they are always checking email. My findings indicate that consumers feel text messages are more personal than email. Text messages are a good reminder about the products that allow consumers to revisit the items and later purchase them.
- b. Target should advertise their products outside the store (24% of participants). Sometimes, customers walk around the Target store and it will be appealing if they see advertisements of new products. Mostly, they would like to see advertisements of newly arrived and discounted apparel items outside the store.

Finding 4 (Checking out process) Participants commented on the checking out process at the Target store and they suggested:

Overall Target checking out process is very good. However, some participants claim that self-checkout system is always overwhelmed and they will prefer to exclusively use mobile to complete the checkout process (18% of participants). One participant tells that Kohl's combined its customer loyalty program with its membership card to create Kohl's Pay. It is a quick checkout system that uses the shopper's mobile app to store their Kohl's Card, coupons, and loyalty points.

Finding 5 (Quality of brand): Participants shared their thoughts about the brand and the quality of products. They offered these descriptions:

28% of the participants like ready to wear and jewelry/ accessories from the Wild Fable line because those are cheap. As most of participants are undergraduate students, they told me that this brand meets their all required criteria so that they choose this brand.

For clothing, they also prefer highly fashionable clothing from C9 and Hanes. The price of the clothing is also reasonable for participants. In addition, participants claim that sneakers are missing from the Target store (10%). They want Nike brand and sneakers that the store did not have.

Discussion and Implications

This study uses Target as a case in point that reveals real shoppers' needs in store physicality. For example, the transformation of brick and mortar stores into digitalized retail environments are indicated as a need. Technological features such as QR scan code, digital price tags, mobile wallet, and virtual makeover will facilitate better shopping experiences for consumers. Additionally, retailers could use the use of virtual reality, augmented reality, and smart technologies in the retail environment to provide consumers more engaging and memorable experiences. In addition, proper arrangement of fixtures as well as freshening up the product displays regularly can further motivate consumers to shop often at the Target store.

Furthermore, Target could improve promotional features so that consumers will be better informed about their products. Target may regularly email, contact, or text consumers who opt in for marketing information, current trends in fashion retailing to draw consumers' attention. This marketing effort differs from advertising as it gears toward delivering news and educate consumers about news fashions. Lastly, participants demonstrate favorable attitudes towards the quality of Target brands. They prefer Target clothes because the clothing products are highly fashionable and inexpensive.

The results of this study are most pertinent to Target's store physicality. However, similar store formats might exhibit similar issues and thus could get insights from our study. More field work is needed in the study of the store physicality and transforming brick and mortar stores to experiential environments that are sensually engaging and inspirational.

References

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