ELEMENTS OF RETAIL STORE INTERIOR DESIGN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON ENHANCING CUSTOMER IN STORE EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to formulate the essential elements in retail store interior design. The retail store landscape is expected to undergo significant changes and trends in 2024. In this context, digitalization is expected to grow directly in proportion to e-commerce. Several AI-related concepts are also becoming increasingly favored. There are opportunities to explore key design elements in adapting to these developments. A good understanding of these elements can enhance the store's image and create a positive experience. A qualitative method was also used to obtain 10 participants through focus group discussions involving retail store visitors as well as experts and interior product designers. The results showed that there are several important elements in designing retail store interiors, including physical elements such as the exterior area, interior area, display area, interior layout, and point of purchase. These physical elements play a significant role in creating an attractive and functional store appearance. Additionally, social elements are also important, including merchant characteristics, merchant outfits, crowding, customer characteristics, and privacy. These elements help in creating symbols and meanings relevant to visitors. Therefore, retail interior design that considers the store exterior, store interior, interior layout, and store displays can create a pleasant and meaningful shopping experience for customers.

Keywords: Interior layout, meaning retail interior design, store exterior, store interior, store displays, symbols

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan elemen-elemen penting dalam desain interior toko ritel. Lanskap toko ritel diperkirakan akan mengalami perubahan dan tren signifikan pada tahun 2024. Dalam konteks ini, digitalisasi diharapkan tumbuh sejalan dengan *e-commerce*. Beberapa konsep terkait AI juga semakin banyak diminati. Terdapat peluang untuk mengeksplorasi elemen-elemen desain utama dalam menyesuaikan diri dengan perkembangan ini. Pemahaman yang baik tentang elemen-elemen ini dapat meningkatkan citra toko dan menciptakan pengalaman positif bagi pelanggan. Metode kualitatif juga digunakan untuk mendapatkan 10 peserta melalui diskusi kelompok terarah yang melibatkan pengunjung toko ritel serta ahli dan desainer produk interior. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat beberapa elemen penting dalam mendesain interior toko ritel, termasuk elemen fisik seperti area eksterior, area interior, area display, tata letak interior, dan titik pembelian. Elemen-elemen fisik ini memainkan peran signifikan dalam menciptakan tampilan toko yang menarik dan fungsional. Selain itu, elemen sosial juga penting, termasuk karakteristik pedagang, pakaian pedagang, keramaian, karakteristik pelanggan, dan privasi. Elemen-elemen ini membantu dalam menciptakan simbol dan makna yang relevan bagi pengunjung. Oleh karena itu, desain interior ritel yang mempertimbangkan eksterior toko, interior toko, tata letak interior, dan tampilan toko dapat menciptakan pengalaman berbelanja yang menyenangkan dan bermakna bagi pelanggan.

Kata Kunci: Desain interior ritel, eksterior toko, interior toko, makna, tampilan toko, tata letak interior, simbol

INTRODUCTION

Retail-based store landscape is expected to experience important changes and trends in 2024. In this context, digitalization should have a directly proportional growth with e-commerce (Inayah, 2024). Meanwhile, the increase in e-commerce users is changing consumer behavior and preferences, impacting the operation of retail stores and service to customers.

The integration of technologies such as AI is also important but there are challenges in the acceptance of AI-based stores by consumers in developing countries such as Indonesia (Srivastava, 2024). Even though technological advancements are being adopted, progress is made in terms of consumer readiness and acceptance of innovations.

In addition, the development of new retail formats that blend online and offline experiences presents challenges for traditional stores (Tang, 2024). The shift towards "new retail" emphasizes the need for traditional retail stores in remaining competitive and evolving the expectations of consumers. Therefore, the formulation of adaptable interior elements for retail-based stores is very important.

Research on retail-based stores has been widely conducted. In addition to the disciplines of architecture and interior design relating to physical planning, several investigations have been carried out on retail interior design, often referred to as retail store atmosphere. Imani and Shishebori (2014) stated that the elements in interior design that can have an impact on branding are: (1) space, (2) color, (3) material, (4) shape, (5) lighting, and (6) furniture.

Subsequently, Hesham (2022) stated that interior design as part of the retail store identity is an essential part of the process in understanding customers' perceptions, needs, and behavior to help interior designers make better decisions when designing a retail store using elements of interior design.

These elements include space, circulation, light, and color. Bitner expanded on the result by identifying additional dimensions such as ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, as well as signs, symbols, and artifacts.

Raja (2023) provided a detailed framework for the atmosphere, including three indicators used as measuring instruments, space, color, lighting, material, shape, and furniture. According to Hesham (2022), Circulation and display positions significantly impact customers from the moment they enter the store.

Proper spacing between displays allows customers to easily view products, choose preferred items, find fitting rooms to try on sizes, and make purchasing decisions. The entire store should be visible to help customers form a visual map of the sections they will navigate.

Sulaiman, in 2017, proposed three important elements of store design, they are store layout, signage, promotional features followed in a retail store, as well as human variables. Meanwhile, Manikam and Norwatha (2021) identified exogenous and endogenous factors. The exogenous factor is impulse buying, and the endogenous factors are merchandising, promotion, and store atmosphere.

The store atmosphere includes lighting arrangements, music, air management systems, layout, aroma, and air regulation. These aspects show the evolution of theory over time and the aspect of technology is yet to be considered, particularly omnichannel methods, where the store is not the only channel for sales.

In addition, changes in preferences toward store atmosphere after the pandemic years should be analyzed (Ruki 2021; Tu 2023; Dila & Grace 2023). In this context, several concepts related to environmental friendliness have become preferred in modern retail design. There is potential to explore essential design elements that adapt to these evolving developments, ensuring that stores not only meet current environmental standards but also anticipate future trends. Therefore, this research aimed to provide a new perspective in exploring interior design elements.

METHODS

This research adopted Focus Group Discussion (FGD), a qualitative method including direct discussion among a group of participants to gain deep perceptions of a specific topic and explore the essential elements of retail interior design.

The participants ranged from 6 to 12 persons and the number was considered sufficient to achieve variation in opinions but was limited in facilitating intensive and focused discussion. Therefore, 10 participants were selected, including 8 productive-aged visitors who frequently visited stores and 2 interior designers specializing in the commercial field. The participants were selected based on criteria relevant to the topic to ensure a variety of perspectives in the discussion.

Salleh et al. (2023) reported the significance of maintaining validity and reliability to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of results. To enhance the validity and reliability, strategies such as designing FGD guides, skilled moderation, and triangulation can be used (Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

Meanwhile, member checking and inter-coder reliability can improve reliability (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Appropriate selection of participants, development of relevant discussion guides, and effective facilitation of discussion can enhance validity. The use of consistent discussion guides and the provision of training to moderators ensure consistency in the delivery and management of discussions. The following is a list of questions for this focus group discussion activity.

Table 1. Several questions in the FGD Activity

No	Question
1	How does the exterior of the store invite you to enter the store? What things do you find interesting at the front of the store?
2	What do you think makes a store's interior design attractive? Are there any specific elements that usually catch your attention when you enter a store?
3	How can a store's exterior invite you to come inside? What aspects do you find appealing at the front of a store?
4	How does a store's interior affect your mood while shopping? Do you have specific color preferences when choosing a place to store? Besides color, what other factors make you interested in exploring a store's interior?
5	What are your thoughts on a good layout in a store? Do you feel more comfortable shopping in a store with an organized and easy-to-understand layout?
6	Do you notice any specific visual designs that are appealing in a store? Are you more interested in stores that use creative visual elements? Or are there any other interactive features?
7	How does the use of technology in a store's interior design affect your shopping experience? Are you more interested in stores that use interactive technology?
8	What is your opinion on product displays in a store? Are there specific ways to display products that you find more appealing?
9	Have you ever experienced the use of interior design elements in a store that made you feel more engaged or valued as a customer?
10	Do you have any suggestions or ideas on how to enhance the interior design of a store to make it more appealing to customers?

The documentation of the activities in FGD is reported below.

Figure 1. FGD Store Visitors.
Source: Private document, 2024

Figure 2. FGD Interior Expert.
Source: Private document, 2024

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the shopping objectives and relation to the desired environment, including the physical (exterior, interior, layout, and display), social (employee characteristics, visitor privacy, and crowd), as well as symbolic and meaningful factors are essential, as they pertain to the store's concept, brand identity, and the emotional connection it establishes with visitors.

The purpose of shopping and the relationship to the environment

In-store shopping purposes vary widely and can determine user behavior. Shopping objectives are crucial in understanding visitor behavior and store design preferences. Motivations include purchase, recreational, relaxation, and self-actualization motivation, as listed in the discussion below.

Shopping in-store is an enjoyable experience. If the design is new, I enjoy refreshing myself after working hard. In a store, if the store design is good, then I am also willing to try products due to the challenges. (A, 24, Female, visitor, worker)

I see some viral products and want to buy them. At that time I will look at the physical products again and whether the store supports it, with good design and displays. It greatly supports trust in the product and the brand. It's important. Also, looking at a good store design. (M, 26, Female, visitor, worker)

The right interior design that can be associated with motivation is crucial for designers. A good design brief with the client and attention to the surrounding environment and segments will make the store design successful. Consistency with channels outside the physical store should also be maintained. (S, 40, Female, Designer).

Store design and visual merchandising are crucial elements that can influence purchasing behavior. Previous research emphasized the importance of store layout, atmosphere, and product placement in shaping consumer decisions (Ebster & Garaus, 2011; Karim et al., 2020).

Omnichannel trends (Suek & Polak, 2017) and consistency should be prioritized since trust in the brand can captivate both visitors and customers. Consistent brand character across different channels and reflected in the store enhances purchase intent.

Different research has explored shopping environments that promote comfort and willingness to take purchasing risks, consider pricing, and enhance repeat purchases (Shannon & Mandhachitara, 2008). Store owners enhance shopping experience and customer loyalty by comprehensively analyzing the factors to modify store design and marketing strategies.

Consumer decision-making in-store is influenced by factors such as perceived value, satisfaction, and enjoyment (Hui et al., 2009; Ahmad et al., 2019; Shannon & Mandhachitara, 2008). These factors are closely related to the elements of retail store interior design.

Retail Store Interior Design Elements

Some results from FGD activities regarding the elements of retail store interior design include physical (store exterior, store interior, store layout, and interior display), social (other visitors, employees, crowding, and privacy), as well as symbolic and meaningful factors. Physical factors may comprise exterior and interior design, layout, and display. Interior design

for commercial areas requires special attention. Proper commercial design plays an important role for visitors, employees, and the business itself. (Valentina et al., 2020) Therefore, these elements are important for enhancing the store experience for visitors.

An attractive retail exterior typically depends on elements such as entrance, wall texture, color selection, architectural signage, and window displays to enhance visibility and attractiveness, building height and width, size, color, material, and style. In this context, the aspects may be seen as discussed below.

An attractive retail exterior generally avoids flashy colors and utilizes minimalist materials, yet possesses abstract shapes. For instance, among the rows of other buildings, this store's shape stands out the most and can grab attention. (J, 20, visitor, student).

The attractiveness of a retail exterior is judged by the overall appearance of the store and attention-grabbing elements such as wall texture, color selection, and architectural signage. (I, 20, visitor, student)

Stores with large windows display products clearly and prominently. The product arrangement behind the window can be creatively and attractively designed, enticing visitors and encouraging them to enter the store. (K, 20, visitor, student)

An attractive retail interior should pay attention to

design by influencing product presentation, store appearance, and shopping experience. Related interior design aspects include wall treatment, flooring, ceiling, color, material, accessories, lighting, ventilation, aroma, and cleanliness, as reported below.

An attractive retail interior should pay special attention to lighting design, ensuring that every area of the store is well-lit to create a comfortable and appealing atmosphere for customers. (J, 21, Male, visitor, student)

The use and arrangement of furniture inside the store made me want to enter the store. Properly arranged and sized furniture can influence the appearance of displayed products as well as the overall look and feel of the store. The proportional use of furniture can enhance the shopping experience for customers. (B, 20, visitor, student)

In each product section, such as men's, women's, and kids, there are distinct colors and textures on the walls or floors. These differences can help attract customers' attention to products that match their needs or interests. (M, 20, Male, visitor, student)

Layout factors become attractive in clarifying and facilitating the shopping journey. Important considerations include arranging products in separate sections to make it easier for customers to find items and encourage exploration, placing cashier areas strategically to leave a lasting

positive impression, and organizing furniture layouts to avoid crowding, thus creating a comfortable and inviting atmosphere that allows customers to navigate the store freely and enjoy a more relaxed shopping experience.

The arrangement of each item in the retail interior should be done by dividing the store area into several separate sections. Each section can be designed by considering the color composition of the displayed products to create harmony. This organized arrangement not only enhances the visual appeal of the store but also makes it easier for customers to find the products they want. (M, 20, Male, Visitor, Student)

The placement of the cashier is crucial in the layout of a store. Based on my experience, if the cashier is placed in the back area, customers who have finished paying will pass through the front area of the store again. This allows them to browse products again, ultimately increasing their desire to purchase additional items. (K, 20, Female, Visitor, Student)

Visitor traffic flow is heavily influenced by the store layout. Good arrangement creates adequate space hence visitors do not gather in one area. Poor circulation can lead to crowding and make the shopping experience unpleasant, thereby reducing visitors' interest in purchasing products in that area. (C, 20, Female, Visitor, Student)

Apart from the exterior and interior, the presence of an appropriate display is very important and some of the discussions can be seen below.

The presence of product displays and prices is crucial in a retail store. Products should be touchable, seen in person, and tried out by customers to provide an optimal user experience. This is important because customers tend to consider the utility of a product before deciding to purchase it. If the product display is not appealing or informative, it is likely to be ignored by customers. (M, 20, male, visitor, student)

Wall decoration can add value to the store's interior, making it more attractive and inviting. Especially if the wall decorations align with the theme or concept of the store, they can create a memorable atmosphere for customers. (B, 20, Male, visitor, student)

The presence of displays such as certificates and Teletext in a store is an important element for promotional purposes, showcasing the store's good reputation, and can be used to convey the latest promotional messages and other important information, which helps increase customer trust and interest. (J, 20, Male, Student)

The social factors found consist of crowd level, privacy, other visitors, and serving staff. In addition, the aspects related to these factors can be observed below.

Providing privacy to visitors. Typically, customers need some alone time to select desired products

without feeling watched or followed by staff. This condition makes them more comfortable and free to explore the available product options and can enhance a positive shopping experience for customers. (M, 20, Male, visitor, student)

One very important social factor in a retail environment is the character of the employees, especially their friendliness. Friendly employees can create a pleasant atmosphere and make customers feel comfortable while shopping. Conversely, if employees do not show friendliness, customers tend to feel unwelcome and may be reluctant to make a purchase. (C, 20, Female, visitor, student)

Another important social factor in a retail environment is the level of crowding. If the store is too crowded, customers may feel uncomfortable and reluctant to enter, but the right level of crowd can also entice customers to enter because it can pique their curiosity. (I, 20, female, Visitor, Student)

There is the factor of symbols and meanings, which is important for the store's presence to enhance a positive atmosphere. Symbols and meanings include the store's concept, brand personality, and self-identity of visitors. Some discussions on the factor can be seen as follows. *Symbols and meanings can originate from the store concept. One store I visited in Bali, the store was inspired by springtime. Therefore, when customers entered the store, they could truly feel the experience as if they were in a place during spring. This experience creates a unique impression hence customers can*

easily remember and recognize the uniqueness of the store. (M, 20, Male, Visitor, Student)

Symbols are important factors in creating a positive atmosphere and reinforcing the identity of the retail store, and one of these elements is the presence of a representative logo. The logo not only serves as an identity but also gives a professional impression to the store. In my opinion, a store without a logo or identity looks like a supermarket lacking unique characteristics. (F, 42, Female, Designer)

The results include physical, social, as well as symbol and meaning factors. These are supported by Kotler (1974), Baker (1986), Barr and Broudy (1986), Bitner (1992), Berman and Evans (1995), D'Astous (2000), Turley and Milliman (2000). Moreover, the designs can influence behavior in stores (Kusumowidagdo et al., 2012, Manikam and Norwatha, 2021).

By incorporating these elements into store designs, retailers can create environments that not only meet the functional needs of their customers but also provide a safe, sustainable, and technologically advanced shopping experience. This holistic approach to store design will be crucial in attracting and retaining customers in an increasingly competitive retail landscape. Health and safety, sustainability, and user-friendly interactive technology should be considered for future trends in store design as stated below.

Technology will play a role in creating a unique and

appealing atmosphere in stores. For example, the use of image projection that can alter the store's atmosphere according to the theme can create a more unique and memorable shopping experience for customers. (B, 20, visitor, student)

Store designs that incorporate features supporting social distancing and good ventilation. Touchless technology, interactions, such as LED screens, automatic doors, automatic soap dispensers, and cashless payment systems, can reduce physical contact. These elements will create a more comfortable and safe shopping environment. (K, 20, Female, Visitor, Student)

Perhaps the trend in future store design will be sustainable design with energy-saving technology, designs that maximize the use of natural light and natural ventilation, which can create a healthier environment and reduce reliance on non-renewable energy resources. (J, 20, Male, Visitor, student)

Health and safety have become crucial after COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift in shopping behavior, where consumers prioritize the measures when selecting products, services, or stores (Untaru & Han, 2021). Therefore, retailers should prioritize clean, sanitized environments, with features such as touchless payment systems, and enhanced air filtration systems. Transparent communication about these measures can reassure customers and enhance their shopping experience.

Therefore, the results can be summarized in the diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1. Scheme of Retail Store Interior Design Elements.
Source: Private data, 2024

And in details, the aspects of store's physical elements can be seen in Diagram 2,

Diagram 2. Scheme of Retail Store Interior Design Elements.
Source: Private data, 2024

The results provide several design and managerial implications followed up by interior designers, store managers and owners, as follows:

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Table 2. Design and Managerial Implications of elements to be considered in-store design

No	Interior Elements	The things that matter	Design implications	Managerial implications
1	Physical Elements	Store exterior, Store interior, Store layout, and Interior display	Creating designs that are under marketing strategies considering the segments applied	Important physical elements are adjusted to the segment and marketing strategy, especially recognizing visitors appropriately. The layout should quickly access the products when the store is frequently visited by those shopping for daily necessities.
2	Social Elements	Creating crowds, privacy, other visitors, and also the attitude of employees who serve	Provide sufficient space, pay attention to the territory, and provide several spots to form crowding and clear markers.	Creating a good social environment, events and promotions, employee training and welfare
3	Elements of symbols and meaning	The store concept, brand personality, and existence of visitors	Consistent integration of brands, and creation of stories through design elements.	Good marketing and promotional communications, and creating a store image

Stores can create an attractive and functional shopping environment to enhance satisfaction and sales by considering physical, social, shared meaning, and supportive elements.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, several factors were considered for effective retail interior design. These included physical (store exterior, store interior, store layout, and interior display), social (other visitors, employees, crowding, and privacy), as well as symbol and meaning factors.

Physical factors comprised exterior and interior design, layout, and display. Meanwhile, social factors included various elements such as crowd levels, privacy, and interactions with other visitors and employees. Symbols and meanings were crucial for enhancing a positive atmosphere, namely the store's concept, brand personality,

and self-identity of visitors. Regarding future design trends, health and safety, sustainability, and use of user-friendly technology should be prioritized.

Shopping objectives were also crucial in understanding visitor behavior and store design preferences. Customers with a clear purchasing goal are often looking for efficiency; they appreciate clear signage, logical product placement, and easy navigation that help them find what they need quickly. For those who shop recreationally, the store should offer an engaging and enjoyable environment, with comfortable seating areas, aesthetic displays, and interactive elements that enhance their experience.

Customers also seeking relaxation value a calming environment, with soft lighting, soothing music, and spacious layouts creating a tranquil atmosphere that encourages them to linger. Shoppers motivated by self-actualization look for stores that reflect their identity and values. Stores that offer unique, high-quality products and a personalized shopping experience can appeal to this group, making their visit more meaningful and satisfying.

For future suggestions, research should explore various types of store objects, using quantitative and other mixed-method methods as a follow-up. Different subjects could also be differentiated, targeting specific socioeconomic segments, certain genders, and shopping motivations.

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