

## How do Atmospherics of the McKendree University Bookstore Influence on Consumer Purchase Decisions?

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The concept of atmospheric factors within the physical location of a retail store was developed in the 1960's (Turley & Milliman, 2000). However, numerous articles recognize Kotler as the first individual to examine the idea because he coined the term atmospherics in 1973 (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Turley & Chebat, 2002; Kumar et al. 2010). From his observations, Kotler defined atmospherics as "the intentional control and structuring of environmental cues" (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 125). Since the establishment of atmospheric factors, numerous studies have been conducted to determine the relation between different types of atmospheric factors and consumer shopping behavior (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Baker et al. 2002; Mishra et al. 2014; Hasan & Mishra, 2015). Atmospherics range from external to internal components. Exterior factors include "building shape/size, marquee, windows, parking availability and location" (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). In contrast, interior factors include "lighting, music, colors, scents, temperature, layout and general cleanliness" (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). The results from past studies indicate atmospherics play an influential role in the development of store image (Kumar et al. 2010).

As competition between retail establishments has become more intense, retailers have dedicated more time and energy towards their understanding of atmospheric factors in order to further differentiate themselves amongst the competition within their industry (Mishra et al., 2014). Atmospherics have a significant influence on consumers due to their constant presence from the beginning to the end of a customer's shopping experience (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Past studies involving surveys reveal "over 70% of purchase decisions are made in the store while shopping" (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015, p 73). This discovery has been significantly important

for retailers with a large demographic of impulse buyers within their target market (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Verhegan and Van Dolen defined impulse buying as “when people experience an urge to buy a product, without a thoughtful consideration why and for what reason one needs the product” (2011, p 320). Consequently, the decisions made by an impulse buyer are short and spontaneous (Verhegan & Van Dolen, 2011). It can be inferred that an impulse buyer’s decision is made based off their memories and in-store information (Verhegan & Van Dolen, 2011). Unlike other forms of promotion, atmospherics are still able to influence the customer as final purchase decisions are made (Bitner, 1992).

Due to their buying patterns, studies categorize college students as impulse buyers (Roberts, 1998; Roberts & Jones, 2001; Wang & Xiao, 2008). Because the target market of the McKendree University Bookstore consists of college students, atmospherics should exist as a priority for the success of their physical location. Retailers choose atmospherics based on the needs, wants and likes of their target market. By narrowing their focus to a select group of consumers, retailers increase their chances of meeting the standards consumers are seeking (Putler et al., 1996). Thus, this study focuses on a specific target market, college students, to investigate the role merchandise attractiveness, design and social atmosphere play in purchase decisions made within the McKendree University Bookstore.

To respond to the voids within previous research, the present study uses a Stimulus Organism Response Model. The Stimulus Response Model examines the process of companies training consumers to pose a particular reaction to a stimulus (Buckley, 1991). Mostly, the SOR Model is used in the Psychology Field. Ivan Pavlov, a Russian Psychologist, created The Stimulus Response Model while experimenting with the salvation of dogs in response to being fed (Shah, 2014). Overall, Marketing Research examines the psychological conscious and

unconscious reasons of consumers for purchasing a product and/or shopping at a certain store. Research has proven that in a retail environment it is possible to condition a large market of consumers to associate a particular object, image, color, etc. with an action (Baker et al. 1994). Because for-profit companies within the retail industry are in business to sell goods or services, the proposed action is generally to purchase their products. Through the Stimulus Organism Response Model, the effect of store atmospheric factors can be examined. Once the effect is concluded, a retail establishment can then begin to manipulate factors in order to satisfy their targeted market (Baker et al. 2002).

## Literature Review

### **Store Atmospheric Factors:**

#### *Merchandise Attractiveness:*

Merchandise attractiveness is defined as “the perception of the size and attractiveness of the assortment” (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011, p 321). The category encompasses “impressions of the number of products on a site, interesting offers, value of money, and whether products are aligned to fit the consumer’s interest” (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011, p 321). Offering an array of merchandise increases a retailers’ opportunity to meet the variety of interests for consumers within their target market. If the intended consumers cannot relate to the products and services being offered, he or she will have diminished desire to purchase from their facility (Chernev & Hamilton, 2009). However, meeting the interests of consumers does not guarantee a purchase.

Consumers seek for merchandise to meet their interests as well as an equivalent quality for the price. This concept is referred to as value of money (Baker et al. 2002). Generally, a positive image of value and quality is built up over time through consistency. Collaborating with well established brands can assist in advancing value and quality. Determining the value and

quality of products and services is difficult because it is relative to each individual's experiences (Baker et al. 2002).

It is relatively easy for competitors to also meet consumer interests as well as provide valuable products and services; however, it is increasingly difficult for retailers to imitate interesting offers. The competition can imitate the offers of a highly successful business, but one is always going to implement the offers better than the other. The first company to successfully initiate the idea will be the ones to do it better.

*Design:*

Design encompasses a wide array of variables. In a general context, atmospheric design is referred to as “elements more perceivable and in the foreground of customers' consciousness” (Kopp & Langenderfer, 2014). Due to the variety and complexity of design, Turley and Milliman divided the elements of design into five categories (2000). The first category consists of exterior components such as “building size and shape, the marquee, windows, parking availability and the surrounding area” (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). Interior variables, which include “light, music, color, scents, temperature and cleanliness”, compose the second category (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). Turley and Milliman selected layout as the third category (2000). Layout comprises of “merchandise groupings, traffic flow and aisle placements, department locations, racks and fixtures, and placements of cash registers” (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). The fourth category contains point-of-purchase and decoration variables like “displays, signs and cards, product displays and interactive displays and kiosks” (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). Lastly, human variables are taken into account. In particular, “employee characteristics, employee uniforms, crowding and density” are considered (Turley & Chebat, 2002, p 129). Human variables may be divided into a separate atmospheric, known as social ambience (Kopp &

Langenderfer, 2014). All of the elements stated above assist in defining the design atmosphere of a retailer (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

Within the following study, the design elements, interior colors and organization as a part of overall attractiveness of the physical facility for the McKendree University Bookstore, are investigated. Color has been a common variable within studies of atmospherics (Babin et al. 2003; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). A spectrum of colors exists. Instead of measuring each color separately, colors are generally separated into two groups, warm and cool (Babin et al. 2003). For studies examining colors more in depth, further divisions are made (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Warm colors range from red to orange and cool colors range from violet to blue (Babin et al. 2003). Consistently, past studies have found cool colors to be preferred compared to warm colors (Babin et al. 2003). When inspecting a reason as to why, researchers found warm colors to be associated with higher levels of intensity and passion while cool colors are identified with peace and calm (Cheng et al. 2009). Therefore, the colors present within the McKendree University Bookstore may contribute to consumer's perception of the physical location.

While color portrays emotion, the physical attractiveness of a store suggests the value of the products and services within the physical location (Cheng et al, 2009). All elements of design, as detailed previously, can be contended as contributions toward physical attraction. Specifically, the following study focuses on the organization element of physical attraction. Stores considered high end are associated with organization and cleanliness compared to low end ones (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). When products and services are organized in a logical manner, it is easier for consumers to find the item he or she is looking for. Consequently, convenience is offered as a benefit to consumers (Baker et al. 2002). In addition, an organized layout ensures

adequate space for consumers to move around while shopping to avoid feeling cramped or claustrophobic (Baker et al. 2002).

*Social Ambience:*

Kopp and Langenderfer define social atmosphere as “social conditions represented by the number, type, and behavior of other customers and employees” (2014, p 35). Common measurements of other customers include crowding, privacy and characteristics, while common employee measurements are availability, knowledge, and characteristics (Turley & Milliman, 2000). As the definition portrays, the social atmosphere of a retailer is comprised of human variables. Human variables are unpredictable and make the social atmosphere of a retail environment difficult to control (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

Due to the small size of McKendree University, the attributes of other customers is not a frequent issue, except for during high priority shopping times, such as at the beginning and end of the semester. Therefore, the following study concentrates on employees within the McKendree University Bookstore. When not enough employees are on the clock in order for the facility to function properly, the physical location is considered understaffed. An understaffed retailer increases the likelihood a consumer will become irritated and frustrated when searching for assistance. In consequence, the consumer will develop a negative connotation with the store, especially if understaffing occurs frequently (Baker et al. 1992).

Even if enough employees are available, their presence does not positively impact the shopping experience unless consumers perceive them as helpful and friendly. If a store does not have a product or service, an employee’s attitude can still create a positive experience for the customer. The role of employees is to provide good to exceptional customer service. Since

moods tend to be infectious, the positive attitude of an employee can hopefully translate into a positive attitude within the customer (Baker et al. 1994).

In addition to availability, the attire of the employees influences a consumer's perspective of a store's image. The appearance of the employees conveys the quality of the products and services offered by a retailer. Employees dressed in clean, organized and professional attire portrays higher quality as compared to employees dressed in the opposite (Baker et al. 1994).

### **Attitude:**

Attitude is defined as the "manner, disposition, feeling, position, etc. with regard to a person or thing; tendency or orientation, especially of the mind" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The attitude consumers develop toward a store, brand or product corresponds to his or her likes, dislikes, wants, needs and past experiences. Whichever of these elements takes precedence during a particular situation, determines if a consumer is shopping within a hedonic or utilitarian attitudinal dimension (Voss et al. 2003). When a consumer chooses stores, products or services within a hedonic dimension, he or she is searching for some form of internal gratification (Voss et al. 2003). Oppositely, consumers choose stores, products or services for their beneficial functions in a utilitarian dimension (Voss et al. 2003). Within the present study, the effect of the atmospheric dimensions along with merchandise attractiveness, design, and social atmospherics, on one's attitude will be examined.

### **Purchase Intention:**

Once a consumer creates a set attitude towards a product, brand, or store, their purchase intention has been established. Purchase intentions indicates whether or not a consumer wants or

needs to shop at a particular store. Likewise, purchase intention can be attributed to a product, service, or brand.

### **Customer Loyalty:**

Customer loyalty attributes a link between their attitude towards a retail establishment and a consumer's repeat patronage habits (Dick & Basu, 1994). When examining customer loyalty, a retail establishment must additionally research the degree of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1999). Even though a consumer may be loyal to a retail establishment that does not consequently imply his or her satisfaction has been fully met (Oliver, 1999). If a consumer's merchandise needs and wants are not fulfilled, a consumer's loyalty may be established due to atmospheric factors (Oliver, 1999). When a consumer is comfortable in an environment, his or her likelihood to return increases significantly. An individual's situational factors, such as amount of disposable income, can also serve as influential elements (Dick & Basu, 1994).

### **Hypothesis:**

Many atmospheric factors contribute to the shopping experience, such as merchandise attractiveness (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015), design (Turley & Chebat, 2002) and social ambience (Kopp & Langenderfer, 2014). These three atmospheric factors of the McKendree University Bookstore will be assessed in the following study. It is hypothesized a positive correlation exists between each atmospheric variable, merchandise attractiveness, design and social ambience, of the McKendree University Bookstore to consumer attitude. When consumers express a positive attitude towards a retailer, their perspective towards purchase intention becomes positive. Positive intent to purchase may lead to customer loyalty.

***H1: Merchandise Attractiveness leads to consumers' positive attitudes toward the store.***



Hasan and Mishra inferred from their results better display of merchandise can lead to a more satisfying buying experience (2015). It has been suggested that merchandise attractiveness is linked to emotional responses. The emotional state of a consumer affects his or her browsing behavior. Therefore, merchandise attractiveness encourages browsing (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011). Browsing is described as “in-store examination of a retailer’s merchandise for recreational and informational purposes without an immediate intent to buy” (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011, p 322). Positive emotions have been found to increase the amount of time a consumer spends browsing. The longer a consumer spends within the physical location of a retailer, the more likely he or she is to make a purchase (Verhagen & van Dolen).

***H2: Design leads to consumers’ positive attitudes toward the store.***

Interior colors have been a common variable within past studies (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Turley & Chebat, 2002; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). In 1983, Bellizzi and his research team discovered that consumers associate color with physical attraction. Their remaining results were contradictory. Throughout the experiments, participants were drawn to warm colors more than cool colors even though they stated to find them unpleasant. A few years later, in 1992, Bellizzi teamed up with Hite to conduct a similar study involving color. Their results in the new study were opposite from the first study. When exposing participants to blue and red environments, consumers responded more positively to the blue environment. When Baker and her research team designed a study to analyze the colors of physical objects within a retail location, their results found consumers to perceive physical locations with a darker shade of carpet as higher quality than ones with a lighter shade of carpet (Baker et al., 1994).

***H3: Social ambience leads to consumers’ positive attitudes toward the store.***

Baker and her research team found a high-image social store environment will provide greater arousal than a low-image social store atmosphere (1992). In addition, Baker and her research team discovered social factors only influence consumer satisfaction when low ambient factors are present (1992).

***H4: Consumers' positive attitudes toward the store lead to purchase intentions.***

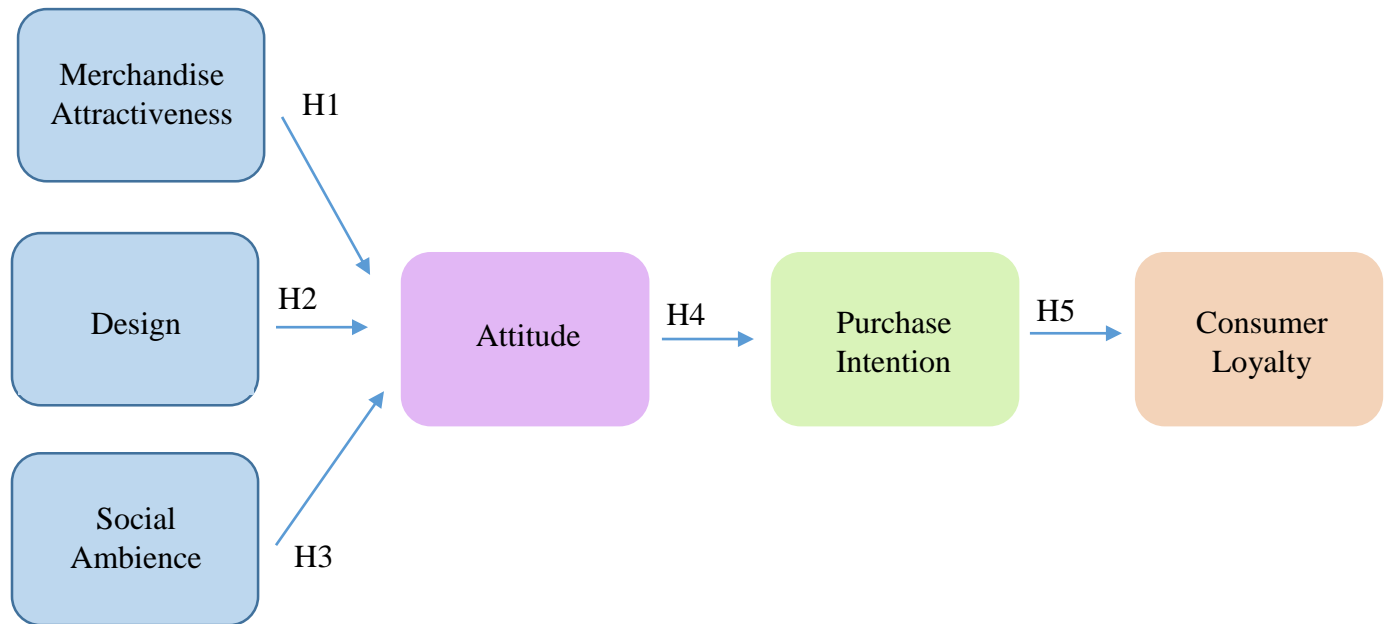
Until recently, marketers viewed attitude towards stores, products and brands as one dimensional (Voss et al. 2003). However, researchers in the disciplines of sociology, psychology and economics have found attitude is a complex and multidimensional construct (Voss et al. 2003). These fields suggest attitude is comprised of hedonic and utilitarian dimensions (Voss et al. 2003). In 2003, Voss and his research team applied these attitudinal dimensions to the marketing field. Their findings support the notion attitude exists as a complex and multidimensional construct within the marketing field (Voss et al. 2003). In addition, Voss and his research team found the attitude consumers possess toward a brand or product contributes to their purchase intention (2003).

***H5: Consumers' purchase intentions lead to consumer loyalty.***

Baker and her research team identified a positive relationship between consumer willingness to buy in correlation to pleasure and arousal (1992). In addition to purchasing more at the present time, consumers are more likely to return to an establishment if he or she is satisfied with the combination of present factors (Baker et al. 1994). Once consumers repeatedly encounter positively satisfying experiences, a form of loyalty may be established (Baker et al. 1994). The dependence of multiple factors determines the degree of consumer loyalty (Baker et al. 1994).

## Measurement Items:

Figure 1) Research Model



## Data Collection:

Study participants were randomly selected on the McKendree University campus. Participants were informed that their participation is done voluntarily and that the survey results will be kept confidential. A total of 114 McKendree students took the survey, 59% males and 41% females. The majority of the participants, 78%, were 19 to 21 years old. The majority of the participants' majors were business administration, 23%, and marketing, 23%. Caucasian was the dominant ethnicity among the participants (77.9%), other ethnic groups were significantly smaller: African-American (12.4%), Asian-American (0%), Hispanic-American (2.7%) and Other (7.1%). Thirty-seven freshman (32.7%), 32 sophomores (28.3), 27 junior (23.9%), and 17 senior (15%) took the survey. In terms of annual income, 11.9 % of the respondents had a low

income (less than \$20,000); 27.5% had a low-middle income (between \$20,001 to \$60,000); 29.3% had a high-middle income (between \$60,001 to \$100,000); and 31.2% had a high income (\$100,001 or more).

**Measurement:**

The atmospherics of the McKendree University Bookstore were measured as three different components: merchandise attractiveness, design and social (*see Table 2*). Scale items for merchandise attractiveness were from Verhagen and van Dolen's study (2011), design and social were from Baker and Parasuraman (2003), purchase intention were from Goldsmith (2002), customer loyalty were from De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder and Iacobucci (2001), and attitude were from Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann (2003). Merchandise attractiveness scale items resulted in Cronbach's alpha of .78; design .80; social .83; purchase intention .88; customer loyalty .86; and attitude .91 (*see Table 2*). All of the survey items for merchandise attractiveness, attitude, purchase intention and customer loyalty were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

*Table 1) Demographic Profiles*

Variable	Valid Percent
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	59%
Female	41%
<b>Age (Range)</b>	18 – 50
<b>Major</b>	
Accounting	8%
Business Administration	23%
Marketing	23%
Organizational Communications	7.1%
Sports Management	8%
Business Management	8%
Health and Wellness	.9%
Political Science	1.8%
Criminal Justice	1.8%
Human Resource	.9%
Economics	1.8%
Computer Science	.9%
Psychology	2.7%
Biology	1.8%
Art	1.8%
Environmental Studies	.9%
Finance	.9%
Computer Information Systems	.9%

English	1.8%
International Business	.9%
Education	.9%
Exercise Science	.9%
Mathematics	.9%
Occupational Therapy	.9%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Caucasian	77.9%
African-American	12.4%
Asian-American	0%
Hispanic-American	2.7%
Other	7.1%
<b>Year at School</b>	
Freshman	32.7%
Sophomore	28.3%
Junior	23.9%
Senior	15%
<b>Family Income</b>	
<10,000	6.4%
10,001-20,000	5.5%
20,001-40,000	6.4%
40,001-60,000	21.1%
60,001-80,000	11.9%
80,001-100,000	17.4%
>100,001	31.2%

Table 2) Reliability

Merchandise	Perceived value for money for McKendree University Bookstore.	.78
	Interest raised by McKendree University Bookstore offers.	
Attractiveness	Merchandise of McKendree University Bookstore alignment with consumer interests.	
	Variety of products within the McKendree University Bookstore.	
Design	The color scheme of the McKendree University Bookstore was pleasing.	.80
	The colors used in the McKendree University Bookstore appeared to be currently fashionable.	
	The physical facilities in the McKendree University Bookstore were attractive.	
	The merchandise in the McKendree University Bookstore appeared organized.	
Social	There were enough employees in the McKendree University Bookstore to service customers.	.83
	The employees of the McKendree University Bookstore were well dressed and appeared neat.	
	The employees of the McKendree University Bookstore seemed like they would be friendly.	
	The employees of the McKendree University Bookstore seemed like they would be helpful.	
Purchase	I am more likely to purchase at the McKendree University Bookstore.	.88
Intention	I would consider purchasing products at the McKendree University Bookstore.	
	In the near future, I intend to buy products at the McKendree University Bookstore.	
Customer	I am someone who likes to be a regular customer of the McKendree University Bookstore.	.86
Loyalty	I am someone who is willing to “go the extra mile” to buy at the McKendree University Bookstore.	
Attitude	Good to bad, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University Bookstore.	.91
	Favorable to unfavorable, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University	
	Pleasant to unpleasant, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University	
	Fun to not fun, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University Bookstore.	
	Exciting to dull, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University Bookstore.	
	Delightful to not delightful, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University	
	Enjoyable to not enjoyable, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University	
	Thrilling to not thrilling, on a scale from 1 to 7, overall impression of the McKendree University	

**Analysis and Results:**

The results of the multiple regression analysis support all hypotheses except for Hypothesis 1 ( $p = .066$ ). Indicating merchandise attractiveness in the McKendree University Bookstore does not contribute to consumer's attitude. In contrast, the results contribute significant data in support of Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 ( $p = .000$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Design and social ambience of the McKendree University Bookstore significantly influence consumer attitude. The results also confirmed Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 ( $p = .000$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Therefore, the data illustrates design and social ambience advance from consumer's positive attitude, to positive feelings towards purchase intention with the McKendree University Bookstore. Once purchase intention is established, a customer is likely to develop consumer loyalty towards the McKendree University Bookstore. In conclusion, the results imply the McKendree University Bookstore should concentrate on design and social ambience, instead of merchandise attractiveness, when modifying their atmospherics.

*Table 3) Atmospherics (Merchandise Attractiveness, Design and Social) to Attitude Multiple Regression Results*

	Merchandise Attractiveness → Attitudes	Design → Attitudes	Social → Attitudes
Beta ( $\beta$ ) Coefficient <sup>a</sup>	-.158	-.374	-.268
t-value	-1.860	-4.386	-3.175
p-value	.066	.000	.002
Adjusted $R^2$ = .378 $R^2$ = .394 F = 23.447 p < .001			



Table 4) Attitude to Purchase Intention Multiple Regression Results

	Attitude → Purchase Intention
Beta (β) Coefficient <sup>a</sup>	-.549
t-value	-6.884
p-value	.000
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .295 R <sup>2</sup> = .301 F = 47.396 p < .001	

Table 5) Purchase Intention to Customer Loyalty Multiple Regression Results

	Purchase Intention → Customer Loyalty
Beta (β) Coefficient <sup>a</sup>	.572
t-value	7.373
p-value	.000
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .321 R <sup>2</sup> = .327 F = 54.366 p < .001	

**Discussion and Implications:**

Both design and social ambience are correlated with a positive consumer attitude while merchandise attractiveness is not. Merchandise attractiveness may not have generated positive consumer attitude because consumers are already likely to purchase the merchandise due to the

University name and/or logo on the majority of it. Students purchase merchandise with their University name and/or logo on it as a sense of pride and belonging. Even though the study only analyzed the McKendree University Bookstore, implications and conclusions drawn from the results may be applied to bookstores for other universities. It is important to study the effect of atmospherics within University Bookstores because the retail sector continues to grow.

According to the Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC), “the retail market for college-licensed merchandise in 2011 was estimated at \$4.6 billion U.S. dollars in the United States, with an annual growth rate of 8% in sales” (Tong, 2014, p 160).

In previous studies of atmospherics, the influence of each atmospheric element on the independent variable was measured individually (Baker et al. 1992; Babin et al. 2003; Turley & Milliman, 2000). However, the dimensions of store atmospherics are not used one at a time. Several atmospheric factors surround consumers during their shopping experience. Consequently, more accurate results may be gathered when atmospherics are measured together. For example, based on the evidence in our study, design and social ambience factors may correlate with each other since both were shown to create a positive attitude within consumers. Since merchandise attractiveness had no effect on the construction of positive attitude within consumers, it may correlate with a different atmospheric element, other than design and social ambience. In future research studies of atmospherics, marketers should focus on the relationships when atmospheric elements are combined.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

Measuring the impact atmospheric elements possess as a combination is more complex than analyzing each one separately. When using surveys as the measurement method, wording questions to measure more than one atmospheric factor at a time may not be possible. Therefore,

responses to a survey may not accurately depict the consumer shopping experience since they are not capable of representing the range of environmental attributes (Baker et al. 2002). In addition to the measurement tool, our study is limited to students of McKendree University. McKendree University resides as a small liberal arts college in Lebanon, IL. Due to the relatively small number of respondents for the study, 114 individuals in total, the findings may not reflect the views of consumers within Universities throughout the United States. To examine the validity and reliability of the results, future studies need to first analyze the consumer basis within large, public Universities.

Most of the past research involving atmospherics, including the preceding study, have been conducted around the consumer perspective opposed to the managerial perspective (Turley & Chebat, 2002). Consequently, a number of key managerial and strategic issues need to be addressed in future research (Turley & Chebat, 2002). One key issue is that managers are unaware of how consumers interpret their environment (Turley & Chebat, 2002). Once the managerial perspective has been evaluated, the implications drawn from the studies of bookstores within Universities may be relevant to other industries. Future studies will need to investigate which industries are applicable. The research may begin with gift shops inside physical locations such as hotels, casinos and airports. Because atmospherics are vast and diverse, numerous studies will need to be conducted in order for reliable correlations to be established.

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