

“All the (Retailing) World’s a Stage”: A Dramaturgy of Retailing

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Abstract

Given the increasing competition to attract consumers to stores and the impact of technology such as the Internet on store visits, retailers have had to be creative in devising strategies to attract their target audiences. Retailtainment—described by many as a hybrid between retailing and entertainment with the aim to keep consumers entertained while they shop—has been a recent phenomenon. As a result, not much research has been done on this new retail concept. The aim of this study is to apply a dramaturgical perspective to the retailing environment and then use the dramaturgical metaphor in an exploration of retailtainment. We present a model that looks at retailing as dramaturgy, exploring the actors, audience, props, scripts, performances, and reviews that are all part of this dramaturgy. Retailtainment, then, can be evaluated on the basis of this metaphor. The propositions in our model relate to customer response to an essential element of the drama of a retailtainment, the *performance*. This conceptual paper proposes ways in which performance can be assessed, in order to ensure that retailtainment events attain retailers’ objectives. The framework also has practical implications for employee training, as retailers might focus their efforts on effective executions of the “scripts” that form a central part of this dramaturgy.

Keywords – dramaturgy, retail theater, retailtainment

“Consumers still demand the best service, the highest quality, the newest product. That will never change. But now they want something more. They are saying: ‘Give me some excitement with your value proposition. Give me something new and different.’ In short, ‘Entertain me.’ As you might expect, there is already a name for it—retailtainment...It is the future of retailing. The marketplace is becoming theater...” (Excerpt from the 1999 Estée Lauder Chairman’s Message)

"It's not enough to be a good merchandiser anymore," advised one presenter. "Today, retail is about the experience," added another. "A store needs to have good lighting, with products placed strategically," noted a third retailer panelist. "And don't forget about events. A store should have lots of events. If your customers enjoy your event they'll come back again," advised yet another. "And the events need to be well-planned. They need to go off without a hitch, with every employee doing their part to make sure that the event is a success." (Weiskott, 2007)

“Wedding bells will soon ring at Publix Super Markets when the chain reaches out to newlyweds with elaborate displays that marry ideas for the big day and beyond, including cakes, flowers and easy recipes for their home life together...The promotion is intended to add excitement and theater to the store by combining Center Store with the chain's award-winning bakery departments and other perimeter departments, said Yvonne Turnbough, Campbell's team leader for Publix...Campbell's sales force has rallied around it, taking what could have been a traditional in-store promotion and making it a complete in-store wedding experience by contacting local limo companies, bridal shops, tuxedo rentals and DJs, and including their information on tent cards included in the displays. In some cases, vendor merchandise such as tuxedos and wedding dresses adorn the displays.” (Angrisani, 2008)

The above vignettes highlight what has become a major undertaking by a number of retailers, buoyed by their need to attract and retain customers over the long term: entertaining customers in the retail environment. The first of the opening vignettes points to the fact that, given changing consumer shopping behaviors and the increasingly competitive retail environment, retailers have been seeking new and creative ways to attract consumers to their establishments. This is probably even truer today than when Estee Lauder Chairman Leonard Lauder wrote the above statement in the firm’s annual report. A weakening economic environment combined with increased competition has forced retailers to look for compelling ways in which they can differentiate themselves. Over the past several years, and even more so recently, a number of retailers have

embraced the concept of retailtainment—a term used to describe the mixing of retailing with entertainment to make the shopping experience an entertaining one.

Examples of this phenomenon are numerous. *American Girl Place*, with locations in New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, on their website encourages patrons to “[c]ome spend a day your favorite girl will never forget...it’s a place for magical experiences and memories she’ll cherish forever.” In addition to purchasing the \$150 and up dolls, accessories, and other American Girl products at the stores, customers can watch live musical theatre and have their dolls’ hair styled at the hair salon. Another well-known children’s retailer, New York’s FAO Schwartz toy store, offers overnight birthday parties for children starting at just \$25,000. Saks Fifth Avenue recently used a double-decker bus to ferry their customers from their flagship NYC store to the Upper East Side, where they received free admission to several museums. REI is known for providing customers with climbing walls in their outdoor-gear stores, NikeTown for providing customers with interactive sports museums, Bass Pro Shops for having waterfalls, trout ponds, putting greens, and a variety of classes, and Build-A-Bear stores for allowing customers to create customized stuffed animals. Williams-Sonoma stores now offer free cooking and technique classes, and even banks are taking steps to provide sensory experiences by adding espresso cafes and wireless Internet. Some Starbucks locations provide live music for customers to listen to as they drink their lattes. And at the Galleria, a shopping mall in Guam, one major draw is its retailtainment concept, a hybrid experience of entertainment and traditional shopping that sets the Galleria apart from other stores.

As far back as in its 1999 Annual Report, Wal-Mart explained that Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Reba McEntire, Brooks and Dunn, the BeeGees, and Hanson had all played concerts for Wal-Mart and its customers. These performances were shown on the retailer's Wall of Eyes, the banks of televisions in Wal-Mart's electronics departments. There were also performances by a champion cheerleading team that, according to the report, "loves to perform at Wal-Mart when they're not competing for national titles or performing at San Diego Chargers games." Cookie-stacking contests, clowns painting children's faces, spectacular holiday-themed displays, and couples stopping by the store on dates to check out the entertainment have all been evident at Wal-Mart in recent years. Recently, a British-based retailer decided that it would train its salespersons to be entertainers, so that they will be able to "perform" for shoppers.

These are but a few of the growing list of examples of retailers who seek to engage and entertain patrons in a memorable way, in their efforts to win over customers. Some have dubbed this new move "experiential retailing," referring to the attempt to make an emotional connection with the consumer (Wilson, 2001). This results from the fact that increasing competition in retailing for consumers' dollars has triggered the search for ways in which to build connections between retailers and consumers to obtain repeat patronage and brand loyalty. Hence, it is not surprising that, in the opening vignettes, we find examples of the move towards building connections with consumers by placing emphasis on making consumers' shopping experiences entertaining experiences.

The shopping environment is becoming more and more a center where retailers are drawing on elements of drama to make shopping a pleasurable and entertaining

experience for patrons, or guests, as they are often called. Surprisingly, little research has looked at this trend. Our paper is, therefore, an attempt to apply the dramaturgical metaphor to the retailing environment, given the developments cited above and the fact that retailing teems with interactions, events, and activities that can be perceived as elements of a drama. These interactions, events, and activities can be managed as drama, and the framework can be used to develop appropriate methods for handling retail encounters and employee training. This is especially true in a retailing environment that is increasingly turning to concepts such as retailtainment, as retailers endeavor to attract and retain customers.

This paper is organized as follows: We first explicate the concept of dramaturgy, focusing specifically on the work of Goffman (1959, 1973). We then review the literature on the application of dramaturgy to business-related activities. We then propose reasons for a dramaturgy of retailing and develop a model that explicates the connection between retailing and dramaturgy. This is subsequently applied to retailtainment events, where a series of propositions are generated. These are based on store-related and customer-related factors and relate specifically to likely customer response to an essential element of any retail drama, the performance. This is followed by a general discussion regarding the implications of the model and the need for research to validate the propositions.

Dramaturgy

The dramaturgical perspective is a social constructionist perspective (Goffman, 1973) that is one of many different perspectives on impression management. Impression management concerns behaviors that individuals use to create and maintain desired impressions (Schlenker, 1980). The origins of dramaturgy derive from the sociological

school of thought known as symbolic interactionism. The symbolic interactionism perspective proposes that action is the result of how a person comes to understand a situation, specifically a social encounter. According to this perspective, any object, symbol, or action, such as facial expressions, physical gestures, language, clothing, and so forth, can potentially influence the way in which individuals interpret interactions and thus, how they respond.

Dramaturgy is based on individuals' behavior as drama metaphor and depicts social interaction as theatrical (Grove and Fisk, 1989). It offers a way of describing, rather than explaining, behavior. Goffman (1959, 1973), who used the framework of behavior as theatrical performances, provides the basis for most of the contemporary work on dramaturgy. He studied individuals' social interactions and how people come to interpret and respond to situations. According to Goffman, peoples' understanding emerges from negotiations between actors over the "definition of the situation" (DOS). The DOS is essentially comprised of what kind of context the actors are in and what their respective roles vis-a-vis one another are. According to Goffman, when actors enter a situation, they may have different ideas about what the situation entails and what their roles are. Thus, the interaction starts out with a kind of negotiation over these components. The negotiation can be more or less protracted, depending on the stakes of the different actors. Usually it proceeds by one actor offering signs and symbols to establish what the situation is and what her role is and the other actor returning signs and symbols indicating the acceptance or rejection of the first actor's definition. The signs and symbols are not usually direct verbal statements, but rather non-verbal and representative symbols (e.g., smiles, nods, appearances -- style of clothing, as well as other physical

symbols like business cards, diplomas, job titles). When the actors reach an agreement on the definition of the situation, then they are said to share a "working consensus." It is a working consensus because it allows the actors to continue their interaction. Yet an important insight about a working consensus is the fact that an author may accept another's definition of the situation, but may not necessarily believe it is objectively true. This often happens when the stakes are low and the actor simply wants to get through the interaction. A working consensus is required in order to get on with the interaction.

The metaphor of the theatre comes into play because Goffman (1959, 1973) and Moreno (1943) both adopted the notion of the stage to describe factors that are critical to pull off an interaction once a working consensus is achieved. They consider the working consensus as akin to "a play." The actors assume particular roles with particular scripts. The purpose is to put on a convincing performance that the audience will buy into. They also rely on props to enhance the effectiveness of the performance, as well as collusion (in which the actors cooperate to convey a particular definition of the situation, even if they know it is not objectively real). Goffman (1959, 1973) also describes how actors cooperate to cover up one another's errors. For instance, if one actor does not enact the correct script, the other actors will work together to "cover" for the actor. Moreover, Goffman describes how work on the "backstage" is critical for the effective presentation of the performance.

Dramaturgy, Business, and Retailing

The application of the dramaturgical approach to business settings is not novel. For example, several researchers in the services literature have considered the theatrical qualities of service performances. Grove and Fisk (1989) discussed the application of

dramaturgical approaches to impression management in services marketing and developed an example in the context of health care. John (1996) demonstrated how the drama metaphor may be particularly useful in understanding customers' quality perceptions in health care settings, and focused on three critical elements in that context: actors/audience; the setting; and performance. Clark and Salaman (1998) examined the activities of management consultancies in terms of the dramaturgical metaphor. They argued that, because management consultants must convince clients of their quality and value, impression management is critical and that the principles of theatre – actions, settings, scripts – underscore the way in which consultants seek to manage their relationships with clients. Grove, Fisk, and John (2000) argued that “services *are* theater” and moreover that services provided by restaurants, banks, airlines, hospitals, hotels, and such on are “easily characterized as theater” (p. 21). They outlined four theatrical elements that make up the service experience: the actors (service personnel), the audience (customers), the setting (the venue in which the service process happens), and the service performance (the actions that shape the consumers' experience).

Baron, Harris, and Harris (2001) assessed the use of the theater metaphor in retailing, specifically looking at four forms of theater, including theatrical realism, political realism, surrealism, and absurd theater, each of which is intended to provide different experiences to the audience. Grove and Fisk (2001) applied the theater metaphor in the service context of airline travel and likened the service experience to that of a three-act play, where the three acts are the airport departure, airline flight, and destination arrival. Grandey (2003) also viewed the service encounter through a dramaturgical lens and described the work floor stage as one that uses carefully designed lighting and

costumes/uniforms, and a place where service employees perform for a customer audience in order to engender a positive response. John, Grove, and Fisk (2006) use an apt analogy to describe services as performances that require flexibility and adaptability in their enactment, and look to jazz improvisation as a metaphor for understanding the features that contribute to excellent service performances. Grove, Fisk, and Laforge (2004) propose that if services are theatre, then providers should look for theatrical ways to train service workers, particularly those who interact with customers.

The retail environment can be construed as an environment to which the dramaturgical metaphor can be applied, as illustrated by Baron, Harris, and Harris (2001). It is an environment that is characterized by a number of interactions among marketers/retailers, representatives of marketers/retailers, and current or potential customers. For example, when a customer approaches a sales representative in the electronics department of a major retail store, or the sales representative approaches the customer, the approach launches an interaction between the sales representative and the customer. An act takes place, replete with the actors, a possible audience (for example, other sales representatives or shoppers who may be privy to the interaction), and a script, as well as expectations regarding the way such an interaction ought to be. In this interaction, the sales representative may be motivated to make a sale because he or she is being paid on a commission basis, while the customer may be motivated by the need to get the best advice about a prospective product purchase. Both may employ impression management techniques, and both may make attributions as to why the other is behaving in a particular way.

Table 1 highlights elements of drama and their illustrations in the retail setting, and Figure 1 presents a model of the dramaturgy of retailing. The table and the model form the basis for the discussion that follows next.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

Actors, Audiences, and Roles

The actors and audiences in a *drama* in the retail setting constitute the representatives of the retailer, such as store managers, sales representatives, customer service representatives, check-out clerks, and customers, who may be store loyal customers, new customers, or prospective customers. In addition, given the nature of retailing initiatives such as retailtainment, invited entertainers would fall in the category of actors. Other audience members include personnel such as visiting representatives from distributors and window shoppers. The overlap—as both actors and audience members—is on the basis of the ‘series of selves’ that make up an individual. Clark and Salaman (1998), for example, in discussing a dramaturgy of management consultancy, posited that during an encounter, “an individual may function as playwright, director, audience, and critic” (page 26).

In a typical retail environment, each of the parties identified in the preceding paragraph are playing a *role*, and certain expectations are associated with each role. For example, a consumer who is in a retail store to make a major purchase might be expected, in his or her role, to solicit information from a retail salesperson. The retail salesperson, in turn, would be expected to provide that information, in a professional manner.

However, the interactions among actors in the retail environment would be impacted by many of the factors that impact any other kinds of social interactions. For example, in interacting with a prospective consumer who wants to make a major purchase, a retail salesperson may be motivated to behave in a manner that would lead to a successful conclusion to the interaction: the consumer makes the major purchase. Thus, the salesperson may be motivated to use impression management tactics or ingratiation, in order to endear himself or herself to the consumer.

There have been prior studies that have indicated how impression management and ingratiation techniques work in influencing social interactions (see, for example, Bande Vilela, Varela Gonzalez, Ferrin, and del Rio Araujo, 2007; Strutton and Pelton, 1998). This stream of research has confirmed that the use of impression management or ingratiation tactics usually leads to favorable evaluations of the user by the parties with whom the tactics are used. Hence, it is conceivable that in a retail setting, an employee in the role of salesperson may use these kinds of tactics to generate a successful outcome to the *scene*.

The audience in this context is likely to be other consumers in the store environment who may also or may not be taking part in a particular scene (for example, a particular interaction between a consumer and a salesperson could be viewed as a scene). As with any other groups of onlookers who observe social interactions, these audience members are likely to make judgments about the scenes they view. These judgments may be accurate, but could also be replete with errors and faulty judgments, as indicated by the stream of research on attribution and attributional biases (Ross and Fletcher, 1985; Shaver, 1975, 1985).

Stage, Props, and Costumes

In the context of a drama, certain elements that lead to a successful performance include the props and the stage on which the drama unfolds. This current discussion assumes that the drama unfolds in a typical “brick-and-mortar” environment. In this context, the stage can consist of two parts: the front stage, where action between consumers and sales representatives take place and which action can be observed by audience members; and the back stage, which is not visible to the current actors and audiences on the front stage. The various aisles and departments in the retail establishment are, in this model, considered as part of the front stage. In addition, elements of store layout and atmosphere will add or detract from the front stage. Lighting, music, and décor, all elements of store atmosphere, are important elements of the front stage on which the drama of shopping unfolds.

There have been prior studies that have indicated the impact of store atmosphere on consumers’ judgments and decision making. This underscores the importance of the front stage in this dramaturgical context. For example, Donovan and Rossiter (1982) and Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, and Nesdale, (1994) found that store atmosphere played a role in emotional arousal. Spies, Hesse, and Loesch (1997) conducted research that confirmed the positive impact on consumer mood of a pleasant store environment. Schlosser (1997) found a link between store atmosphere and consumers’ perceptions of products or store features that related to social identity. It also impacted the likelihood of consumers buying products from the stores to use on social occasions. In a more recent study, Oh and his colleagues found effects of store atmosphere on consumption behavior in an online context (Oh, Fiorito, Cho, and Hofacker, 2008).

In the case of props, our model contends that such elements as store fixtures, including display cases, video cameras and other visible security devices; shopping carts; point-of-purchase displays, be they temporary or permanent; in-store ads, in particular print ads; shelf talkers; and merchandise can all be considered as props. In the case of uniforms worn by employees, these items could be viewed as costumes, since they are associated with a particular retail store.

Script and Performance

Normally, for a performance to take place in the retail drama, there have to be interactions between the consumer and the retail salesperson. However, this is not always the case. For example, a retail salesperson could be involved in a monologue when he or she conducts an in-store demonstration or other kind of presentation for an audience that merely observes. In addition, some factors may cause a consumer to seek out information or sales assistance, or not seek out sales assistance. In the former case, retail salesperson-customer interaction obviously takes place; in the latter case, it does not. For example, Sujan, Bettman, and Sujan (1986) provide some evidence that familiarity with purchase will lead to different purchasing scripts. Individuals who are familiar with the purchase act will have better formed purchasing scripts

In general, the performances are “unscripted,” in that they unfold based on the circumstances of the customer. However, there may be some element of “scripted” behavior, as retailers usually train their employees in ways to handle customer interactions (see, for example, Craig and Ramaseshan, 1994; Newsome, 2000). Rotfeld (2002) underscored the importance of this training by highlighting some of the possible negative consequences of not training employees. Sharma and Levy (1995) also

conducted research which suggests that, even with training, retail salespeople may perceive customers differently, which may lead to scripted versus unscripted interactions. So, we expect that, in the retail environment, there will be scripted and unscripted behavior.

A personal experience of one of the authors highlights the nature of “scripts” in the retail environment. Having visited a local supermarket, he decided to go to the check-out, despite not finding everything that he wanted on that shopping trip. A typical question in the retail drama in a typical U.S. retail store is: “Did you find everything that you wanted?” The cashier, as is the norm (part of the script of this drama), asked the question of the author, to which the author responded, “No.” To this, the cashier responded, “Okay,” with no obvious effort to offer assistance. The conclusion on the part of the author, based on personal observation, was that the typical consumer usually responds with a yes to the question, which makes any departure from the script difficult to deal with.

Reviews

In any theatrical performance, a review of the performance is an important element. This review can be undertaken by the participants who were involved in putting on the performance, as well as audience members who viewed the performance. The expectation, then, is that both the retail store and the audience members (customers) will provide reviews of the performance. Included in the review for the retailer might be the impact on sales for that day or the number of audience members that were in attendance. Internally, assessment can be made of retail employee participation and elements of the performance that were excellent and others that need to be improved. In the case of

audience members, review can take many forms, including direct compliments to the employees of the retail store as well as word-of-mouth communication to other consumers. Table 1 also provides information on relevant consumer behavior literature that can be linked to reviews, including the literatures on customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction, repurchase behavior, and store loyalty.

Application of the Dramaturgical Model to Retailtainment: Assessing the Performance

Figure 2 posits a model regarding assessment of retail theater, in particular retailtainment events. In the model, store-related factors and consumer-related factors combine to influence consumer perceptions of the retailtainment event. This consists of the actors and their roles, the scripts, and the performance itself. Perceptions of the event have an impact on consumer response to the event, which could involve enhanced store commitment, repeat patronage, as well as negative or positive word-of-mouth communication about the store. These are outlined in the *Outcomes* section of the model in Figure 1.

----- Insert Figure 2 about here -----

Store-related factors

Congruence. Congruence relates to the extent to which there exists a perceived fit between the type of retail store and the retailtainment event that is being put on. There has been research in other areas (for example, celebrity endorsement and event sponsorship) that indicates that congruency between two stimuli enhances the effectiveness of the paired stimuli. Thus, for example, in the case of celebrity

endorsement, perceived fit between the brand and the celebrity endorser enhances credibility (see, for example, Kamins, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994, for work on the match-up hypothesis). Recently, Trimble and Rifon (2006) also showed that in the context of cause-related marketing, consumers responded positively to marketing efforts where they perceived that there was compatibility between the image of the sponsoring company and the event or celebrity that was being sponsored. Rifon, Choi, Trimble, and Li (2004) also highlighted the importance of congruence between a sponsored cause and the sponsoring company in generating positive perceptions of the altruism of the sponsoring company.

In the case of retailtainment, the congruence between the store type and the retailtainment event is expected to operate in a manner similar to what has been highlighted by these researchers. The following proposition results from this:

P1. The greater the congruence between the retail store type and the retailtainment event, the more favorable will be the consumer perception of the retailtainment event.

Store personality

There has been a lot of research that has explored the idea of brand personality (see, for example, Aaker, 1997 for a seminal article on dimensions of brand personality). Brands, like consumers, are perceived to have personalities, and consumers who can relate to these brand personalities are expected to respond favorably to these brands. We propose that retail stores, just like some other brands, also have personalities. Recently, Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein (2008) adapted the Aaker (1997) brand personality scale and applied it to a retail context in Germany. They concluded from their empirical study, conducted among 1,337 consumers in Germany, that the scale can also

be applied to retail brands in Germany. In addition, the scale can be used to differentiate among retailers. Moreover, there are links between the dimensions of the store personality and consumers' store loyalty.

A relevant personality trait that would be applicable in the context of retailtainment is excitement. Among the traits related to this personality variable in the Aaker (1997) and Zentes et al. (2008) typology are: daring; spirited; imaginative; up-to-date. Thus, given that stores can be assessed on this dimension, it is plausible that stores involved in retailtainment can be assessed on this dimension. Given the nature of retailtainment (effort to entertain and generate excitement), we expect that there will be a direct link between the perception of a store on this dimension of excitement and perceptions of a retailtainment event.

P2. There will be more favorable consumer perceptions of the retailtainment event for stores with higher personality ratings on excitement than for retail stores with lower personality ratings on excitement.

Consumer-related factors

Store commitment. Consumers have different levels of commitment to a retail store, and research shows that consumer commitment has a bearing on consumers' response to the objects of their commitment. This *store commitment* can be defined as psychological attachment to the store (Ahluwalia, Unnava, and Burnkrant, 2001; Kiesler, 1971). Prior studies on the commitment construct in other domains have indicated that consumer commitment tends to moderate various kinds of relationships and attitudes: discounting negative information about a firm, for example, in the case of a product-harm crisis (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000); engaging in more favorable processing of potentially negative

information about a company (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava, 2000); protecting service providers in the case of service failure (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002); and forgiving companies for unethical behavior when harm is perceived as low (Ingram, Skinner, and Taylor, 2005). Recently, Lacey (2007) contended that it is customer commitment that “provides the essential basis for distinguishing between genuine and spurious customer loyalty” (p. 317). He showed in a study of customers of an upscale department store and customers of a national restaurant chain in the United States that customer commitment affects consumers’ purchase intentions and key linkages exist between this variable and customer relationship building. Thus, the nature of consumer commitment to the retail store will impact response to any kind of activity undertaken by the firm, including retailtainment activities.

P3. The higher the level of store commitment among consumers, the more favorable will be the consumers’ perceptions of the retailtainment event. Customers who are highly committed to the retail store will rate a retailtainment event put on by the store more favorably than will lowly committed customers.

Consumer persuasion knowledge. Research on consumer persuasion knowledge indicates that consumers respond differently to marketers’ activities based on their level of awareness of marketers’ efforts to influence them (see, for example, Brown and Krishna, 2004; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000; Friestad and Wright, 1994, 1995; Morales, 2005). A recent paper by Wei, Fischer, and Main (2008) explored the nature of consumer response to covert marketing activities when persuasion knowledge is activated. They looked at covert marketing in the context of product placements. They found that consumers responded negatively to brands that were involved in covert marketing; however, the

appropriateness of the covert marketing activity as well as the consumers' familiarity with the brand had a moderating effect on these negative responses. Consumer persuasion knowledge suggests that there are distinctions among consumers regarding their awareness of marketers' efforts to influence them. Higher levels of consumer persuasion knowledge are associated with higher levels of awareness of influence efforts by marketers. This persuasion knowledge can also be applied in the context of retailtainment, since a retailtainment event is an effort on the part of the retail store to influence consumers. This results in the following proposition.

P4. The level of consumer persuasion knowledge will have an impact on consumer perception of the retailtainment event. Higher levels of persuasion knowledge will lead to less favorable consumer perception of the retailtainment event, and lower levels of persuasion knowledge will lead to more favorable consumer perception of the retailtainment event.

Arousal. The concept of arousal relates to a consumer's response to environmental stimuli (see Mehrabian, 1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1995a, 1995b). Recently, researchers such as Guido, Capestro, and Peluso (2007) showed links between consumers' arousability levels and their preferences for certain types of shopping experiences, hedonic versus utilitarian. Borrowing from Mehrabian, they defined arousability as "the rate with which the internal stimulation level (i.e., the arousal) of an individual changes in response to a sudden increase (or decrease) in environmental stimulation" (p. 367). There was a highly positive relationship, for example, between arousability and hedonistic shopping. In addition, research by Wirtz, Mattila, and Tan (2007) also showed a link between arousal and consumer response to in-store experiences, particularly when there was congruency

between their expected arousal states and the in-store arousal environment. Drawing on the affective expectation model (AEM), they explored the impact of arousal expectations on satisfaction and in-store behaviors. They concluded that retailers need to pay attention to the nature of the in-store environment (pleasant versus unpleasant) as well as to the arousal that consumers are likely to feel in these in-store environments. Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006) also provided a summary of the research on the impact of pleasantness and arousal on various shopping behaviors, including purchase intentions, duration of store visits, unplanned purchase, and satisfaction. In their research, they attempted to address some of the inconsistencies in the impact of arousal on some of the aforementioned shopping behaviors. They found that consumer motivation orientation (task-oriented motivation versus recreational-oriented motivation) moderated the impact of arousal produced by the store on perceptions of pleasantness of the store.

In the context of retailtainment, arousability is likely to have an impact on consumer perception of the retailtainment event. Given the findings by Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006), this impact is likely to be moderated by the motivation orientation of the consumer. This leads to the following propositions.

P5. In general, consumers with high arousability levels will respond more favorably to a retailtainment event than will consumers with low arousability levels.

P6. Consumer motivation orientation will moderate the impact of arousability on perceptions of the retailtainment event. Recreational-oriented consumers will have more favorable evaluations of the retailtainment event than will task-oriented consumers.

Discussion

The foregoing represents an attempt to apply the metaphor of the theater to retailing and, in particular, to generating propositions regarding likely consumer response to retailtainment efforts. This is against the background of retail stores seeking more and more ways these days to distinguish themselves and to have consumers develop lifetime loyalties. Thus, this paper moves beyond simply applying a dramaturgical model to retailing and to using that model to suggest how consumers might respond to the essential element of the drama, the performance. Thus, a combination of store-related factors and consumer-related factors, it is argued, will shape consumer response to retailtainment efforts.

Table 1 provides a synopsis of relevant consumer behavior, psychology, and social psychology literature that can further inform us about the various elements of the drama in a retail setting. For example, in the case of actors and audiences, the literature on impression management and ingratiation can provide insights as to how interactions between retail salespeople and customers can be managed to ensure positive assessments of a performance. In the case of scripts, insights from schema theory can be used in making decisions about scripts, since customers are likely to have certain schemas about retail salespeople, which could impact their interactions with these salespeople.

In the case of the “stages” where performance takes place, the backstage is where support staff makes ready the props that go in the front stage, where the performance occurs. The audience, customers, witness what happens on the front stage, but not the backstage. A key point about the backstage is that the audience cannot see this part. If they do, they will come to realize that the performance they witness is purely constructed and the performance loses its impact and genuineness. If an audience does not perceive

that a performance is genuine, then they become suspicious and would be reluctant to support the performance. Support, in this context, refers to the various outcomes of good reviews enumerated in Figure 1. The framework also has practical implications for employee training, as retailers might focus their efforts on effective executions of the “scripts” that form a central part of this dramaturgy.

One point that may be interesting for retailers to explore is the fact that retailtainment represents an attempt to bring consumers/customers to the retailer, yet it fundamentally changes the "performance." That is, a retailtainment event is different from the usual performances (retail salespersons “acting”) to which customers are often exposed. Thus, there may be an interesting tension that an attempt at retailtainment creates. First, insofar as it is a new definition of the situation that some of the audience members may not suspect, it risks increasing those audience members' discomfort with the situation (see, for example, recent work by Lee, Johnson, and Gahring, 2008 that explored disconfirmation of expectations among small-town customers of local independent retailers). We contend that customers who anticipate discomfort may be less likely to patronize the "performance" (i.e., retailer). At the same time, however, it may expand the performance in a way that meets the needs/interests of more potential audience members. Thus, it could also attract new audience members. In addition, given the fact that retailtainment events are not usually an everyday occurrence on the front stage, retailers using retailtainment need to think about the unique props required for effective retailtainment.

Our expectation is that most retailers adopting retailtainment as part of their marketing strategy would be seeking to minimize the attrition of their audiences and

maximize the influx of new audience members. Thus, there arises an interesting "applied" problem for retailers: What are the particular ways in which a performance can be managed so that it retains an adequate component of the "expected performance" while also making the novel entertainment components adequately salient to attract new patrons?

The propositions set forth in this paper can be tested in different ways. Initially, experimental studies could be designed in which some of the variables are manipulated to determine how they impact perceptions of a retailtainment event. Data analytic techniques such as structural equations modeling or path analysis can be used to assess the links in the model depicted in Figure 2. Additional store-related and consumer-related factors that might impact assessment of a retailtainment performance can also, over time, be added to the model and explored. Overall, this could go a long way in providing insights to retailers who want to use retailtainment as a way to build customer relationships.

Table 1. Dramaturgy of Retailing

Elements of Drama	Illustrations in Retailing Setting	Relevant Consumer Behavior, Psychology, and Social Psychology Literature
Actors, Audiences Roles	Managers; Salespersons Customer service representatives Customers Extras: Window shoppers Customers/Clients: Informed or knowledgeable shopper; Uninformed shopper Brand loyal/store loyal consumer; New customer; Prospective customer Retailer: Information provider; Assistant (e.g., personal shopper); Advisor	Impression management Ingratiation and other influence techniques Schema theory Role theory Impression management
Stage, Props, and Costumes Stage: Front stage and Back stage	Uniforms: employees dressed alike; Shelves; Point-of-purchase displays In-store ads Shelf talkers Merchandise Retail store—the floor; Aisles; Departments Lighting; Music; Décor	Atmospherics and consumer behavior Situational factors that influence consumer behavior Store layout Store image
Scenes	Departments Interactions with different sales reps Assessment of merchandise	Store layout Consumer knowledge Store image
Scripts	Exchanges between customers and sales reps Unscripted on part of customer Scripted on part of sales rep: for example, through sales training Product purchase Request for product information Product demonstration Samples	Schema theory
Performance	Sales pitch; Sales assistance Interactions between customers and salespeople and customers and other customers	Impression management
Review/Critique	Customer satisfaction surveys Word-of-mouth communication Consumer complaining behavior Suggestion boxes	Customer satisfaction Customer dissatisfaction Customer compliments Cognitive dissonance Repurchase Continued patronage Store loyalty Customer satisfaction surveys Word-of-mouth communication Consumer complaining behavior
Outcome of Reviews	Customer satisfaction; Customer dissatisfaction; Cognitive dissonance Repurchase; Continued patronage; Store loyalty	Customer satisfaction Cognitive dissonance

Figure 1. A Model of the Dramaturgy of Retailing

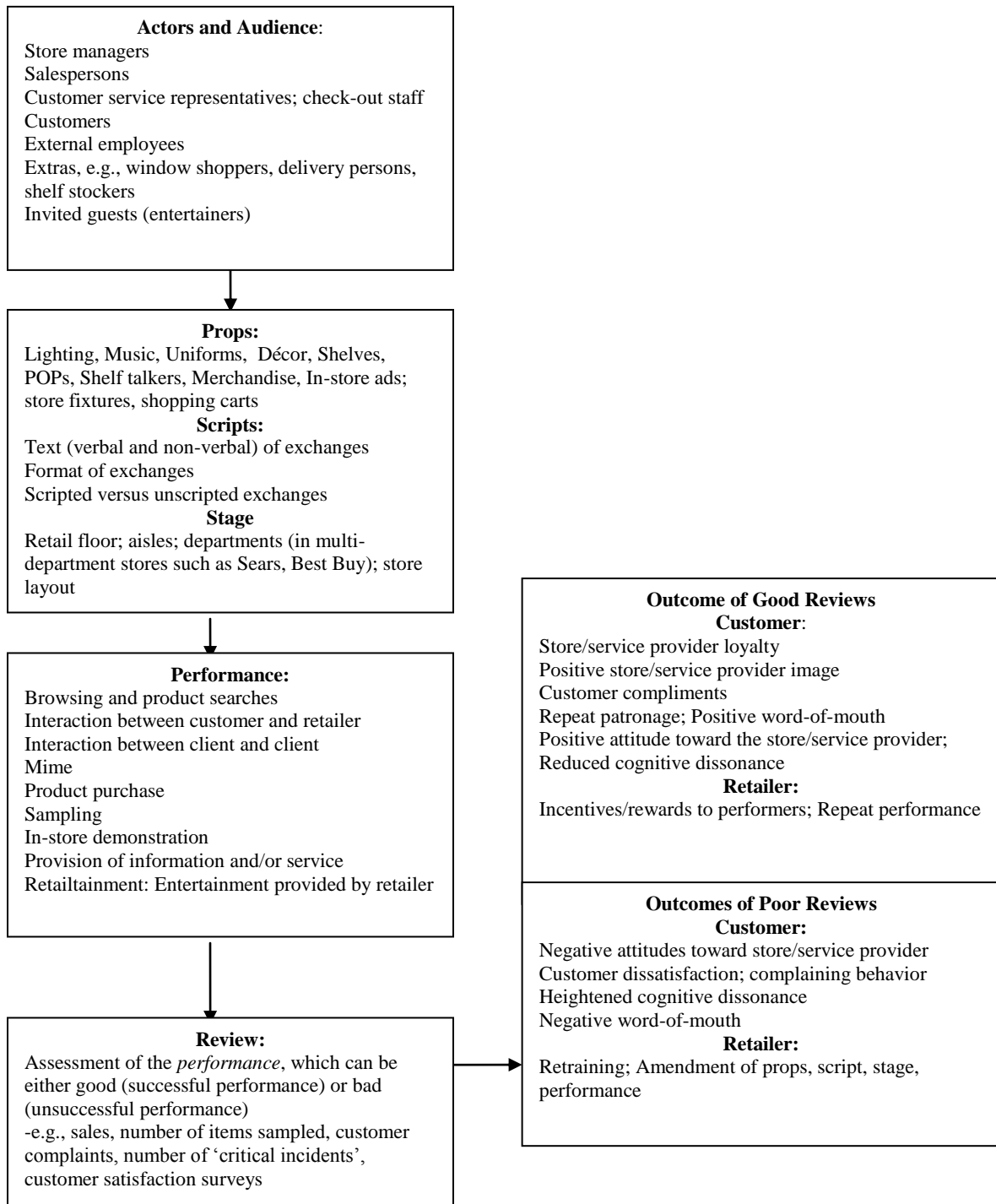
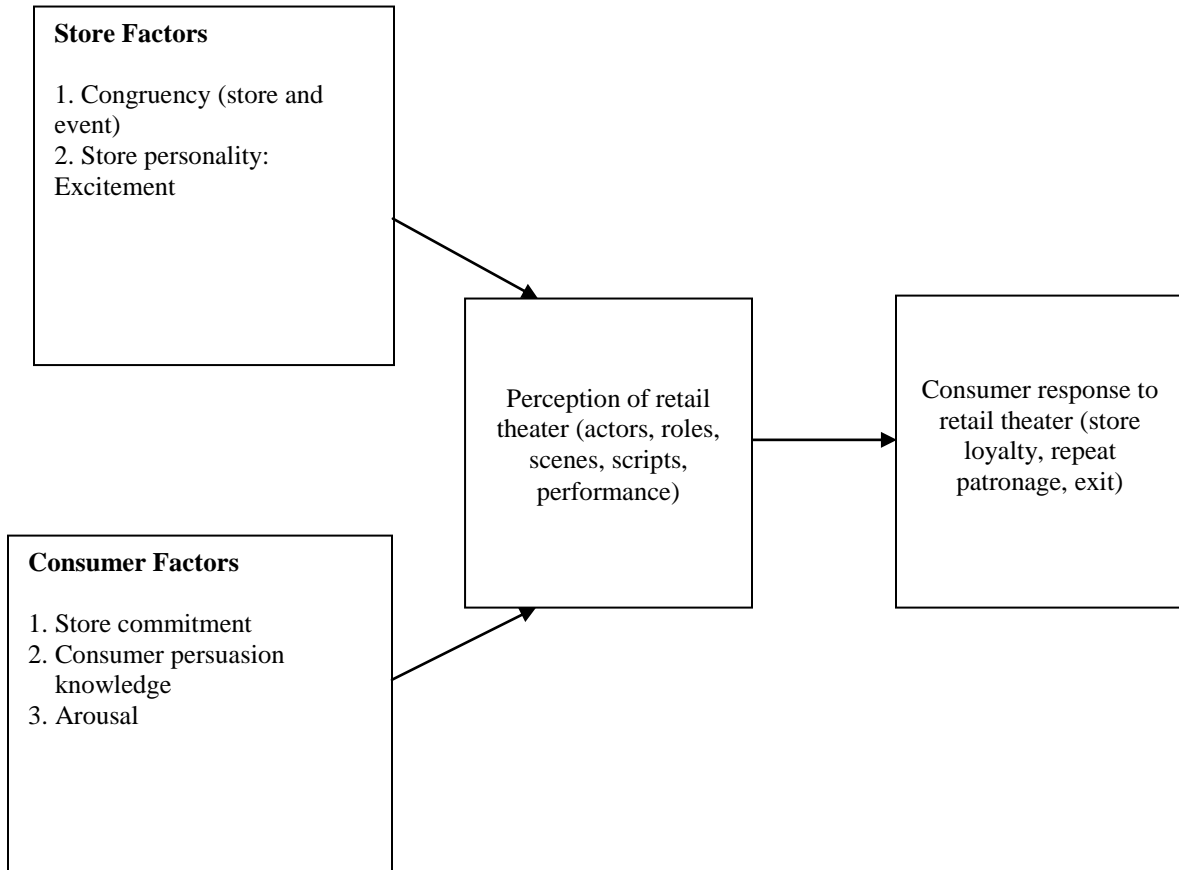


Figure 2. Factors Influencing Perceptions of Retailtainment



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