

The role of office atmospherics on enhancing internal marketing effectiveness in fulfilling job satisfaction: an application to the shipping industry

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Abstract

Managers are continually adopting sensory stimuli in their integrated marketing communication strategies to influence consumers' behavior. However, marketing literature does not provide evidence of managers' and employees' responses about internal environmental stimuli and the effect on their behavior in the service sector. This research in-progress, examines how the use of atmospheric elements in the workplace can influence and enhance internal marketing effectiveness in fulfilling employees' job satisfaction. Using a mixed-method approach of interviews and questionnaires, employees in shipping companies will evaluate the use of sensory stimuli in their working environment and the impact on their level of satisfaction. Results obtained will be used to fill important theoretical and practical gaps.

Keywords: *atmospherics, sensory stimuli, internal marketing, integrated marketing, job satisfaction*

1. Introduction

The importance of working environment has been in discussion since the 1950's (Hoffman & Turley, 2002). Environmental psychologists discuss the influencing role of a context on the behaviors of both the employees and consumers (Hoffman & Turley,

2002). It seems that atmospherics entered the marketing literature in the 1970's and yet is a field under examination (Loureiro, 2019; Ballantine et al., 2015; Krishna & Schwarz, 2014; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Kotler, 1973). They can be defined as the targeted indoor and outdoor design that engage humans' senses for the achievement of a desired behavior (Petit et al., 2015; Kotler, 1973). In literature, atmospherics are mainly investigated in retailing (Roggeveen, Grewal & Schweiger, 2020; Smith & Burns, 1996) rather than the service industry. On the other hand, the field of service marketing turned the attention of various researches toward the employees' satisfaction and performance in a customer-oriented manner (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2010). It is widely accepted that employees are increasing worldwide, hence it is plausible that researches focus on their wellbeing (Wineman, 1982). The field of service marketing and work environment gained a great importance. In the marketing literature, it is supported that within a physical context where behaviors and actions occur, employees are influenced in terms of "satisfaction, productivity and motivation" (Bitner, 1992, p. 57). Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to examine the influencing role of atmospherics on managers' and employees' job satisfaction, which "still lack an up-to-date systematization of both theoretical and empirical findings" (Mari & Poggesi, 2013, p. 171). Retrieving managers and employees' responses, will be investigated if atmospherics influence their attitudes towards positive job experience. Furthermore, it will be examined whether atmospherics act as an incentive to strengthen the adoption of integrated internal marketing effectiveness. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is defined as "various marketing communication tools" that are relevant to "external and internal audiences" (Kitchen et al., 2004, p. 1419). Atmospherics in interaction with the internal marketing are employed as an integrated internal marketing strategy that affects employees' behavior and leads to "enhanced returns" (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015, p. 34). The current study contributes both to the integrated internal marketing and the sensory marketing literature, with the physical environment be considered as an element of the internal marketing mix (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Ahmed et al., 2003).

Shipping industries in Cyprus are reported to be of great importance with the island enjoying a leading position (PwC Cyprus, 2017; Cyprus Shipping Chamber, 2016). Drawing upon these statements and as no indicators were found for the investigation of the sensory stimuli in this context, shipping industry is selected to support this study. The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, to investigate the influential role of atmospherics

at the shipping workplace on employees affective and cognitive responses. Secondly, to detect the relationship between these internal responses in relation to the internal marketing effectiveness which will form the job satisfaction.

2. Literature review

There have been previous studies that provided the relationship between the atmospheric elements of a place and their influence on behavior. Given the extant research, as the main issue of the present study is to investigate the role of atmospherics on the enhancement of internal marketing effectiveness which leads to job satisfaction, the chapter of literature review is divided in the main relevant fields of the topic and research gaps are discussed.

2.1. Atmospherics

According to Kotler (1973, p. 50) atmospherics are defined as the “conscious designing of space to create effects in buyers”. According to this rationale, atmospherics can generally be about all those features ·physical or not, in a context, that aim on attracting consumers’ attention through sensory stimuli (Francioni et al., 2018). Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of atmospherics (Roggeveen et al., 2020; Hulten, 2019; Krishna & Schwarz, 2014; Spence et al., 2014) as the use of such stimuli is vital for sensory strategies to create unforgettable experiences (Ifeanyichukwu & Peter, 2018; Rowley & Slack, 1999). Such experiences can be defined as the sensory perceptions created after an exposure to sensory stimuli (Chen & Lin, 2018). Drawing upon this literature, for the study’s purpose, customers are turned into employees and the retail environment is turned into the service working environment. Even though the importance of an environment on the behaviors has been underlined through many researchers, the field of the relationship between the atmospherics and employees’ behavior is still in its infancy (Skandrani et al., 2011; Hoffman & Turley, 2002). As most of the studies have examined the role of atmospherics in retail context, the need for their examination in the service industry is raised (Hoffman & Turley, 2002). In the same vein, Davis (1984) has discussed that the internal environment of offices should be further examined and understood in the “aspects of management and organizational behavior” (p. 271). Employees are continually not been investigated and explored in relation with the atmospheric environment they interact daily, and is a field that has gained little interest (Skandrani et al., 2011; Bitner, 1992).

2.2 Internal Responses

In the environmental psychology field, Mehrabian and Russel (1974) introduced the Mehrabian-Russel (M-R) model indicating that individuals tend to have internal responses that work as moderators towards their behavior. This model is translated into emotional responses an individual has before a behavioral decision; approach or avoidance (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2016; Eroglu et al., 2003; McGoldrick & Pieros, 1998). These emotional responses are commonly known as the Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance (PAD) scale (Skandrani et al., 2011; Bitner, 1992). There have been numerous studies that analysed the emotional states from the PAD perspective, with pleasure and arousal dominating the influence (McGoldrick & Pieros, 1998). Other findings indicated that consumers, or employees in this case, are responding in both affective and cognitive ways (Skandrani et al., 2011; Eroglu et al., 2003). In 1992, Bitner in her research introduced the model further, indicating the physiological response as the third internal state after the exposure to a servicescape. However, the affective and cognitive responses remained stronger and mainly researched. The emotional/affective aspect, indicates whether the individual is pleased or unpleased, the emotional state and mood. From the cognitive perspective, it engages the workers' beliefs and rationale towards an environment (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2016; Bitner, 1992). Hence, it is plausible to posit that the environmental stimuli in a work environment, moderate employees' emotional and affective responses which in turn, may enhance internal marketing effectiveness towards their job satisfaction.

2.3 Internal Marketing

In the late 1970s, Internal Marketing entered the marketing and service management literature with attention to the internal operations of the organization (Varey, 2000; Varey & Lewis, 1999). Internal marketing is proposed in various disciplines. It was originally proposed as an approach to service management which entailed the application of the traditional marketing concept and the associated marketing mix within an internal market (Varey, 1995, p. 40). It has also been proposed as a management approach motivating employees to examine their role and act with customer-oriented manner (Cowell, 1984). Furthermore, it has been evaluated as a model for implementing integrated marketing strategies. Employees' influence can be attained with the use of internal marketing mix or a set of controllable instruments inside the organization (Yildiz & Kara, 2017; Gounaris, 2006; Ahmed et al., 2003). Taştan and Davoudi (2020) indicated that workplace characteristics are among the antecedents of employee job satisfaction. Ahmed

et al. (2003) provided the system of internal marketing mix in which the physical environment is among its elements that shall be considered when implementing internal strategies.

In many service businesses, the quality, the trust and the commitment of the labor force have become a major source of competitive advantage (Andrew et al., 2020; Melewar et al., 2017; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016). Yeum et al (2020) supported that internal marketing can facilitate firms to enhance their competitive advantage. This, attracted the interest of many researchers in the field of internal marketing (Gounaris, 2008; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Grönroos, 1995; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993; Berry, 1981). The internal marketing concept supports that the personnel of the organization is the first market. Organizations, while addressing the external objectives, they shall turn into their employees to motivate them, to support their needs and wants and train them for service-mindedness and customer-oriented behavior (George, 1990; Grönroos, 1990; Berry, 1981; Berry et al., 1976).

2.4 Job Satisfaction

Evidence indicated that the right use of atmospherics leads to satisfaction, where as a result consumers are evaluating retailers in a positive manner (Chen & Lin, 2018). From the employees' perspective, when job provides psychological benefits, employees develop strong bonds with their employer (George, 1990), forming a psychological connection with customers (Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2008). This integrates employees' work to a relational exchange and the interaction with customers works as a component of high job performance (Korschun, Bhattacharya & Swain, 2014).

Literature presents the effort of researchers to identify the mediating role of internal marketing on the relationship between job satisfaction and work engagement (Mainardes, Rodrigues & Texeira, 2018; Bailey, Albassami & Al-Meshal, 2016). Internal marketing has been found to have a critical role for implementing sustainable strategies (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008) and is one of the main antecedents of market orientation (Lings & Greenley, 2009; Lings, 2004). Berry and Parasuraman (1993) explained that when employees are satisfied, gaining value from the work they perform, this is mirrored into the external customers. Internal market orientation is seen as a prerequisite for satisfying customers by involving the employees' satisfaction (Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2009). Taking into consideration that external customers' satisfaction seems to be influenced by internal customers' (employees) satisfaction (Narteh & Odoom, 2015; Huang & Rundle-

Thiele, 2014; Czepllel & Rosenberg, 1977), internal marketing researchers look into two potential sources of competitive advantage: a) employees (Bailey et al., 2016; Ahmed et al., 2003) and b) the market orientation, since the internal marketing actions are decided from the perspective towards the final customer (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Naude, Desai & Murphy, 2003).

2.5 Shipping Industry

According to the PricewaterhouseCoopers' report, Cyprus is in a very competitive position in the shipping industry of Europe (PwC Cyprus, 2017, p. 2). Based on the shipping statistics, the island ensures a predominant position and in the shipping centre due to its both infrastructure, geographical position and tax regulations (PwC Cyprus, 2017; Cyprus Shipping Chamber, 2016). Presumably, this is what leads to the establishment and success of many shipping companies in the country, making the Cypriot maritime "one of the largest in EU" (PwC Cyprus, 2017, p. 4). Bearing in mind the above statements and statistics, there is a challenge investigating the role of the environmental stimuli on employees' behavior in such companies, that are stated as of great importance.

3. Research Questions

Based on the literature review and the purpose of this study, the following research questions are formulated to support the area of atmospherics, the dimensions of internal marketing and their interconnection;

3.1 Which and to what extent office atmospheric cues stimulate employees in shipping firms?

3.2. Which dimensions of internal marketing evoke positive feelings at the working environment?

3.3 Do positive feelings gained from the overall working environment enhance employees' job satisfaction?

4. Methodological Frame

A mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) will be adopted to examine the relationship of atmospherics on the enhancement of internal marketing's effectiveness, from the employees' point of view. To achieve the objective of the study, managers and employees from shipping companies in Cyprus will be asked to participate in the study. Based on both, the overview of the existing literature that explored atmospherics effect on employees (Table 1) and the more recent literature on the field, a pilot study will be attempted as a trial of the interview protocol which will be developed. The overview of the existing literature indicates that there is a gap over the period of time. Since the last research on the field was from Skandrani et al. (2011), the goal is to adjust all the models and variables measured so far, to achieve the appropriate design of atmospherics. It is worth mentioning that, as the atmospherics in the field of retailing is in a continuous investigation, this study uses Turley and Milliman's (2002) model categorization for the better understanding of the environmental stimuli.

Therefore, the typology of the stimuli is divided into; exterior variables, interior variables, layout and design, decoration and human variables. As the authors of the present study aim to investigate environmental stimuli within the workplace of shipping companies, for the purpose of the study only the interior, layout and design and decoration variables will be measured. Semi-structured interviews will be employed addressing open-ended questions at the research area. Data obtained will be analysed to develop an adequate representation of items that will operationalize the content validity. Furthermore, a trial-run of the questionnaire will follow and a full-scale research instrument will be established. Data will be analyzed to examine (a) managers' perceptions towards the importance of office atmospherics, (b) employees' internal responses on their existing experience as resulted from the environmental stimuli and (c) the level of satisfaction gained from the environmental stimuli.

The conceptual framework is formed as follows in Figure 1;

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

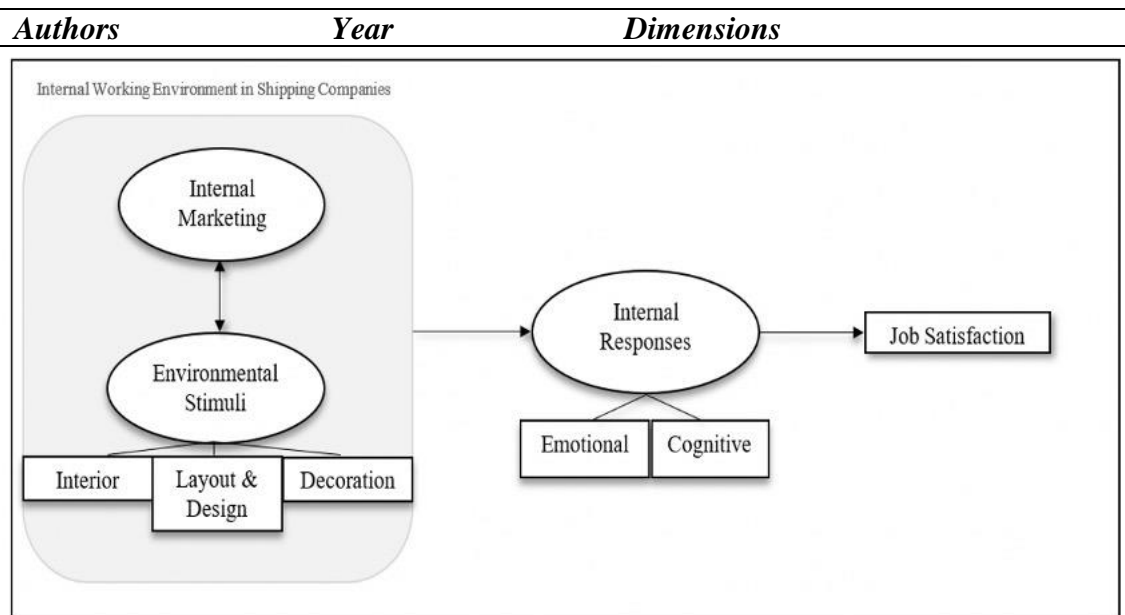


Table 1. Overview of the relevant research on atmospherics and employees

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>
Weinman	1982	Physical Comfort Task Instrumentality Privacy and Social Interaction Symbolic Identification
Davis	1984	Physical Structure Physical Stimuli Symbolic Artifacts
Andrus	1986	Temperature Furnishing Music Layout Equipment
Bitner	1992	Ambient Conditions Spatial Layout and Functionality Signs, Symbols and Artifacts Service Typology and Environmental Dimensions
Hoffman & Turley	2002	Exterior Interior Others
Skandrani et al.	2011	Physical Factors Social Factors

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