

Climate can affect retail decisions

By  Brandon Bester

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Recent North American [research](#) into the effect of room temperatures on decision-making indicates that higher temperatures can hamper performance on complex decision-making processes. This has significance in the retail industry, as South Africa heads into winter.



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While neuro-marketing plays a big role in brand messaging contained in adverts, product packaging, product design, etc, it is also important to consider the actual environment in which products are being sold.

How often have you walked into a retail store during winter, where they have the heat cranked up to a noticeably warmer temperature? How did you find your shopping experience in these circumstances? I have personally had many an experience where I have walked out of a very warm retail store, frustrated and without making a purchase.

Reducing complex thinking

Some light can be shed by research conducted by Cheema A & Patrick V. In their research, they were able to demonstrate that warmer temperatures in particular can actually hamper our performance on complex decision-making tasks. Using five smartly structured studies, it was shown that warmer temperatures:

- Reduced the likelihood of consumers choosing innovative products
- Increased consumer reliance on heuristic (investigative) decision making
- Reduced consumers' cognitive resources for complex tasks

The temperature ranges explored were quite modest; between 19 and 25 degrees Celsius. These are temperature differences that can easily be experienced in Winter when moving from outside to a heated retail environment.

Our bodies have a greater tolerance for colder temperatures than for warmer temperatures. Keeping the body cool in warmer temperatures diverts resources (such as glucose) from our energy-hungry cognitive brains, which influence the resources we have available for effortful decision making, therefore causing us to rely more on heuristics and to spend less effort on complex decisions. Temperature differences are relative ie, a warm temperature for a consumer in Cape Town in winter would be different to a warm temperature for a consumer in Durban.

Applying temperature strategies

The underlying constructs of the research findings are important, particularly for retail environments where consumers are faced with lots of choice and where the consumer needs to make a choice that is not routine eg purchasing a new outfit, choosing a new/different brand of hair shampoo. If the temperature is too warm, the consumer will not spend time looking for an outfit and would simply revert to his or her habitual brand purchase for the shampoo. Car showrooms would also potentially benefit from cooler temperatures, where the consumer needs to consider many different variables as part of the decision making process.

If your consumers are in a setting where complex decisions are involved or if you want them to try something new, then cooler temperatures would be better suited (around 20 degrees). If your consumers need to make more intuitive decisions, then you are better off at warmer temperatures (24 degrees). However, temperatures would all be relative to the climate, so further analysis would be required.

ABOUT BRANDON BESTER

Brandon is a Director at Neural Sense - a South African Neuromarketing research company. Hailing from the technology industry, Brandon has a keen interest in technology. He also has a passion for understanding consumer behaviour.

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