

## **A Cross-Cultural Examination of Store Environment Cues and Purchase Intention in Taiwan and the United States**

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*This article examines whether store-related environment cues can be standardized across countries. Based on the characteristics of stores, this research tries to understand what kind of environment cues will influence consumer purchase intention in comparison with two countries. Samples were conducted in Taiwan and United States. The research findings that store environment cues are positively related on purchase intention. The results suggest that each store environment cue may vary across two countries, describe the implications on business transactions and decision making, and provide a set of recommendations on how to succeed in cross-national transactions.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the past few decades, enterprises faced fierce competition, leading to a swift introduction of innovative store concept and style into the market. The fiercer the competition between stores, it would be more difficult for the stores to distinguish themselves from the others using their competitive advantages such as goods, prices, sales promotion, and location (Baker et al., 1994). To draw consumer's attention, the operation managers consider other important cues. When the consumers shop in the retail stores, the store environment cues often influence consumer's decision and purchasing behavior. The store environment has already been considered as important marketing tool recently, it could also prove the market differentiation. Store environment is an important marketing link of direct contact between the consumers and the store, so effective store environment management has already been considered as a practical management strategy. In addition, the industry and academia have great interest towards the store environment now (Seock, 2009).

When the consumers choose a store to shop for products or service, how to create the greatest value of the consumers is very crucial. Consumer's perceived value involves a lot of areas (such as products

attribute preference, the formation of attribute performance evaluation), and these evaluation results are based on the consumer's objective and the purpose of use context (Woodruff, 1997). To create higher consumer perceived value, the enterprises must consider market-oriented objective and focus on the store's consumers to provide the important cues that are needed; these store environment cues are closely related with consumer's objective. Store environment cue provides significant customer purchase intention because the store environment influences the customer's potential benefits and overall perceived value. Therefore, the understanding of customer dynamic purchase intention could be carried out through store environment cue, and the manager should explain the influence of store environment towards the customer purchase intention.

Store attributes include functional and psychological attributes (Martineau, 1958), such as location, quality, temperature, lighting, music, types of products, symbolization, color, price, advertisement, sales force, display, and building construction. These attributes are closely linked with the store environment cue, Berman and Evans (1995) indicated that the consumers would perceive the functional and sentimental characteristics of the store, and then decide the expectation of the overall strategy and practice of the store. Therefore, the retailers understand the importance of store environment cue and attempt to develop effective store atmosphere so as to attract their target consumers (Seock, 2009). This study focused on coffee chain stores to discuss the influence of multiple store environment cues towards the customer's purchase intention. Currently, a lot of coffee chain stores make use of such environment cues as color tone arrangement, decoration, relaxed music, comfortable sofa, neat and convenient environment, and space design to attract consumers; the vision, hearing, sense of smell, and sense of touch match with each other harmoniously, so as to provide good consumption experience. Consequently, the store environment cues are contributive to distinguishing customer's purchase intention.

Since market competition has already become borderless, different cultures would influence consumer's purchase intention and perceived value. Understanding different cultural influences is considered to be a new challenge, in which the characteristics of consumers from different regions must be considered and distinguished in order to find out the preferences of target customers. The economy, politics, and culture of Taiwan are deeply affected by U.S.A. even coffee chain store is introduced and driven by U.S.A. The coffee drinking habit of Taiwanese consumers is influenced by America profoundly. However, the consumption culture of the two countries is somewhat different, so the retailers must consider the consumer's purchase intention cautiously, and whether it is consistent with the purchase intention that the consumers have towards the store environment. This study aimed to discuss the influence of store environment cues towards the purchase intention of Taiwanese and American consumers; this is significant different from the past studies that only focused on one single market as the study subject (Bruner, 1990; Milliman, 1982). In addition, the economical developments of these two regions are good, which is contributive to the process of the experiment. In recent years, the economy in Asia develops vigorously and becomes one of the three biggest economic systems in the world; the cultures and habits in Asia are somewhat different from Europe and America. Hence, this study helps to understand the perceived value that consumers from different regions have when considering the store environment cues. This study made use of cross-national viewpoints to discuss the influence of coffee chain store environment cues towards the customers' purchase intention, so that the managers could understand how to position their stores, how to arrange resources to create attraction, and how to be able to use the best store environment to attract consumers from different regions among coffee chain stores.

## **CONSUMPTION DIFFERENCES IN AMERICA AND TAIWAN**

In different cultures, racial differences often lead to different behaviors. One race is a kind of difference, which means having the characteristic of significantly different behavior (Lee et al., 2002; Steenkamp et al., 1999; Torres and Briggs, 2005). In an ethnic group, its people share common norms and beliefs, they keep the original cultural characteristics of their country, and every ethnic group constructs a unique social group and specific cultural value. In different consumer behaviors, race is an important characteristic, especially regarding purchase (Seock, 2009). Taiwan and U.S.A. have different cultures, so

the ethnic differences would cause important influence towards purchase behavior. Understanding the consumer behavior of different regions is contributive to the retailers to set up appropriate marketing strategy. Currently, the annual consumption of coffee beverages in America accounts for more than 22.2% worldwide, which is the second highest coffee consumption country (Views Wire, 2011). In 2011, coffee drinking frequency has become the highest among the beverages in America for the first time, with consumers quaffing coffee on an average of 6.2 times per week (AlixPartners, 2011). Daily consumption of coffee beverages among consumers remained unchanged as compared to 2009, with 56% of adults partaking (The National Coffee Association of U.S.A., Inc., 2010). The coffee shop industry domestically includes 20,000 stores with a combined annual revenue of about 11 billion dollars (IMCR Case Studies and Management Resources, 2007). The stronger the American consumers could feel that the shop provides personalized services, the better the American consumer's impression towards the shop and the easier the American consumers would purchase in this kind of shops. If a lot of diagrams with social significance are displayed in the shop, the consumers would like to purchase in this kind of shops as well (Hu and Jasper, 2006). Besides, colors of the shop and background music would also influence the purchase behavior of American consumers (Bellizzi and Kite, 1992; Bruner, 1990; Milliman, 1982).

About 5.7 million Taiwanese consume coffee beverages, and the sales in coffee beverage market is about NT\$13.5 billion annually, where fresh-brewed coffee accounts for about 50%; thus, the growing potential and space of coffee beverage market in Taiwan is quite big. When consuming in coffee chain store, Taiwanese consumers would consider service quality, aesthetic feeling, and interest, these factors would influence consumer's purchase behavior and attitude (Lin et al., 2007). Consumer's preferences towards coffee chain store environment are bright, modern, having European feeling, playing pleasant music, and providing comfortable seats (Wu, 2009). The cultures in America and Taiwan are different, but consumers pay attention to the environment of coffee chain stores. Consequently, establishing multiple store environment cues is contributive to promoting the perceived preferences of the consumers and then their purchase intention could be influenced. How much Taiwanese and American consumers care about the store environment cues would further influence the construction of store image; thus, discussing the purchase intention of the consumers from these two regions towards coffee chain store environment would be contributive to the store owners to understand consumer's preferences and draft market operating strategy.

## STORE ENVIRONMENT CUES AND PURCHASE INTENSION

The retailers would underestimate the importance of purchase experience sometimes, and they prefer to use sales promotion to attract the consumers to enter the store. However, sales promotion is not a cure-all, overusing it would make the consumers have bad store impression such as bad quality and negative store impression. The retailers start to understand the importance of environment cues and try to develop effective store atmosphere so as to increase the profit by attracting the target consumer (Seock, 2009). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) indicated that an environment could change the consumer's mood, and it could influence the behavior of retailing or service provider's performance. In the past, most of the store environment studies focused on store impression, how consumers evaluate the products, and improving the perception towards the quality of products and service (Baker et al., 1994; Darden and Babin, 1994). The current studies have not discussed how multiple store environment cues shape the consumer's perceived value and how these perceptions influence consumer's purchase behaviors yet (Baker et al., 2002); discussing store environment cues would be contributive to designing appropriate environment to satisfy consumer preferences. Baker (1986) presented a typology categorizing the elements of store environment into three categories: social, design and ambient factors. Social factors relate to salespeople in the store, ambient factors relate to the non-visual elements of a store's environment, and design factors are visual in nature (e.g. layout, color, cleanliness, clusters, space, etc.). Social cue means that the existence of human beings is one of the important parts of environment; social cues include the number of salespersons, crowdedness of the environment, sales style, and the interaction between the consumers and salespersons. Atmospheric cues refer to the intangible factors in the environment and background,

including temperature, light, music, and scent (Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990). Design factor refers to the convenience that can satisfy the consumers, including how to get in and out the shop fast and find the desired products fast. Considering the social, atmospheric, and design cues of the store environment could help the store owners to design proper cues based on customer's needs, which could be the reference for evaluating the values of the products or services provided by the store. Consumers thus look for cues from the store environment to make sure that they will not experience a loss when making a purchase decision.

Fushbein and Ajzen (1975) believed consumer's purchase intention includes the attitude towards a certain product and other external factors, referring to the consumer's subjective tendency to a certain product, and that tendency was proved to be the important indicator to forecast consumer behavior. Gulas and Bloch (1995) suggested a small change of an environment could increase the perceived novelty and joyfulness of this environment, therefore better evaluation could be created and the consumer behavior could be promoted. Kotler (1973) stated that the design of purchase environment could make the consumers produce certain specific feelings, so that the opportunity for the consumers to purchase would be promoted. Similar studies also discussed other stimuli, for example, color could increase the consumer's intention to enter the store to look around (Crowley, 1993). Similarly, strong and smooth music is shown to be able to change the consumer's time perception (Kellaris and Altsech, 1992) and the time that the consumer is willing to spend in the retail environment is longer (Milliman, 1982; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1988). Spangenberg et al. (1996) also pointed out that if the store presents acceptable scent would be contributive to promoting the purchase intention of the products. What deserves to be mentioned is that for the consumers with low information sensitivity, the product display in the store plays an important role in consumer's purchase intention, the sales skill of the salesperson should be adjusted according to this kind of consumers, and the pictures in the store should also consider the need of this kind of consumers (Hu and Jasper, 2006). Presenting attractive environment cue in a store should be able to promote environmental arousal function; therefore the consumers would feel interested and joyful to this store. The atmosphere or environment of the store would influence the shopper's mood, and the relationship between the product varieties, sales and after-sales services of the salespersons, and store atmosphere and the mood would influence the consumer's attitude towards the store. According to the above mentioned points, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1: The higher the perception of the consumers towards the social cues in the store environment, the stronger the purchase intention would be produced.*

*H2: The higher the perception of the consumers towards the atmospheric cues in the store environment, the stronger the purchase intention would be produced.*

*H3: The higher the perception of the consumers towards the design cues in the store environment, the stronger the purchase intention would be produced.*

## **METHOD**

This study made use of documents and study hypotheses to establish a causal relationship model based on the social, atmospheric, and design cues of the store environment, so as to discuss whether the consumer's perception towards the social, atmospheric, and design cues of the coffee chain store would influence the consumer's purchase intention or not. For coffee chain stores selection, since this study cannot proceed with the study in accordance with various coffees and stores, therefore the widely different and representative Starbucks is conducted as the study object. This store classification is used to understand whether the store environment cue will influence consumer's evaluation towards purchase behaviour. Because the chain stores with high fame and store cue has higher interests, so that the consumers can apply the store cues and it is also easier to gain consumers' acceptance. So the store selection is mainly according to the store that has high fame in consumers' mind and the consumers are willing and able to purchase.

## Sample and Procedures

The sample consists of 570 subjects, 200 subjects from Taiwan, representing a response rate of 77 percent, and 132 from American, with a response rate of 66 percent. Survey data in American was collected from California consumers during summer 2010. This study focuses on consumers in Taiwan and American. The reason for choosing these countries as the study population is mainly because a study of buyer-seller relationships can bridge different systems and environments in the same industry, and because it can control certain extrinsic changes (Dyer and Chu, 2000). Second, carrying out a survey of quality perception under different economic systems is contributive to understanding whether the product attributes that consumers of each country rely on is the same or different. The sampling method this study adopts is "convenience sampling." Since the sample sources of American are difficult to master, this study entrusted students who are now studying in American to conduct the investigate. Before the investigation, the investigators were trained. Training content included explanations on questionnaire investigations and methods of investigation so as to ensure the validity of questionnaire retrieval. In addition, questionnaire items were translated into American by two American students. To ensure an accurate translation, this study empowered one Starbucks manager (U.S.A) to do a back-up translation. The completion of these questionnaires was entirely voluntary and responses were anonymous. In Table 1, we present the sample characteristics.

**TABLE 1**  
**SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Characteristics	Taiwan (%)	U.S.A (%)	Total (%)
Gender			
Male	187(42.0%)	55(41.7%)	242(42.2%)
Female	255(58.0%)	77(58.3%)	332(57.8%)
Education			
College	297(67.2%)	52(39.4%)	349(60.8%)
Over Graduate School	145(32.8%)	80(60.6%)	225(39.2%)
Income			
Under \$5000	84(19.0%)	70(53.0%)	154(26.8%)
\$5,001 ~ \$10,000	278(62.9%)	21(15.9%)	299(52.1%)
\$10,001 ~ \$15,000	55(12.4%)	15(11.4%)	70(12.2%)
Over \$15,001	25(5.7%)	26(19.7%)	51(8.9%)
Purchase frequency			
Once a week	55(12.4%)	35(26.5%)	90(15.7%)
Once a month	157(35.5%)	60(45.5%)	217(37.8%)
Once a half-year	230(52.1%)	37(28.0%)	267(46.5%)

## Scales and Measurement

The measure of social cue is an adapted version of Saxe and Weitz (1982). The operational measures describe the overall perception that the salesperson brings to the consumers when consumer interacts with the salesperson. There are 12 items in this questionnaire and they are measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). A five-item scale of atmospheric cues, developed by Macinnis and Park (1991); Baker et al., (1992), is used. The operational measures describe the background music cue that a store offers could arouse consumer's sentimental responses. For the design cues, we used three items to measure store environment design cues, developed by Dawson, Bloch and Ridgway (1990); Dickson and MacLachlan (1990). The operational measures describe the convenience perception that the space and arrangement provided by the store could bring to the consumers. To assess their purchase intension, the respondents responded to three items (Dodds et al., 1991; Baker et al., 1992) after reading a short description of Coffee Chain Stores. The operational measures describe the consumer's intention to



purchase from that store again and recommend to friends. The questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### Reliability and Validity

To assess the validity and unidimensionality of the scale, this study employs CFA (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1993), whereas the assessment of convergent validity relies on *t*-tests for the factor loadings (Hatcher, 1994). The CFA results confirm convergent validity (all *t*-values exceed 1.65 at  $p = .05$ ) and show that each factor is a unidimensional construct. The Cronbach's alphas for social cue, atmospheric cue, design cue, and purchase intension are .77, .83, .71, and .74, respectively, which indicate high reliability. Thus, the model appears to achieve adequate reliability and convergent validity.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of social cues, atmospheric cues, and design cues that the Taiwanese and American consumers have towards the store. Taiwanese consumers focus on the store's social cues the most, where atmospheric cues and design cues come the second and the third. American consumers focus on the store's design cues the most, where atmospheric cues and social cues come the second and the third. In this study, countries are the independent variables while store environment cues are the dependent variables, and then average analysis is carried. The analysis result shows that there is significant difference between Taiwanese and American consumers towards store environment. Taiwanese consumer's perception of social cues towards coffee chain stores is different from America, and the salespersons in Taiwan's coffee chain stores bring higher positive perception to the consumers than in America. However, for the atmospheric and design cues of the store environment, Taiwanese and American consumer's perception towards the salespersons does not show significant difference. Table 3 shows the relationship of store social cues, atmospheric cues, design cues, and consumer's purchase intention, where store social cues, atmospheric cues, and design cues are significantly related with the consumer's purchase intention.

**TABLE 2**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Variable	Taiwan		U.S.A		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Social cues	3.95	1.04	3.53	0.97	3.26***
2. Atmospheric cues	3.87	0.96	3.77	1.04	0.36
3. Design cues	3.78	0.99	3.78	1.06	0.56

\*\*\* $P < 0.01$ ; \*\* $P < 0.05$ ; \* $P < 0.01$

**TABLE 3**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS CORRELATION BETWEEN MAIN VARIABLES**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Purchase intension	3.34	0.75	1.00			
2. Social cues	3.82	0.63	<b>0.34</b>	1.00		
3. Atmospheric cues	3.84	0.65	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.47</b>	1.00	
4. Design cues	3.78	0.63	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.52</b>	1.00

Bold indicates the level of significance  $p < 0.01$

## Regression Analysis

This study carried out regression analysis regarding the influence of how Taiwanese and American consumers experience about the coffee chain store environment cues towards the purchase intention. In the regression model, store social cues, atmospheric cues, and design cues were the independent variables, gender and purchase frequency were the control variables, and purchase intention was the dependent variable, and then two regression equations were established. The result of regression analysis (as shown in Table 4) showed that the variance inflation factors (VIF) of both regression equations are smaller than 10 with no collinearity, the values of F reached the significant level, and the adjusted coefficients of determination were 0.29 and 0.43 respectively. This showed that the use of social cues, atmospheric cues, and design cues to explain purchase intention provide a certain degree of properness. In Table 4, one could know that regardless of American or Taiwanese consumers, they believed store social, atmospheric, and design cues have positive and significant influence towards purchase intention. Namely, when the customer feels that the interaction with the store salesperson is greater, the purchase intention produced because of the social cues that are provided by the store would be stronger; thus, H1 is valid. For store atmosphere, Taiwanese and American consumers perceive that the background music provided by the store could cheer up the consumption mood, so the higher the store atmospheric cues the stronger the consumer's purchase intention would be; thus, H2 is valid. For the store design, Taiwanese and American consumers perceive that if the convenience of the entire store arrangement and shopping is higher, the consumer's purchase intention produced because of the store design cues would be stronger; thus, H3 is valid. This study believes that coffee chain stores are very popular, so the consumers could master the store environment cues easily. As a result, the study pointed out that the customers would have high purchase intention with regards to different store environment cue perception, the owners of coffee chain store should try to develop store social, atmospheric, and design cues to influence consumer's purchase intention.

**TABLE 4**  
**REGRESSION ANALYSES: EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT**  
**CUE AND PURCHASE INTENSION**

Variable	Taiwan		U.S.A	
	$\beta$	t-value	$\beta$	t-value
Sex	0.25	3.57***	0.07	1.12
Purchase frequency	0.14	6.16***	0.09	1.41
Social cues	0.14	2.90***	0.32	4.34***
Atmospheric cues	0.11	2.22**	0.25	3.11***
Design cues	0.27	5.46***	0.29	3.86***
Adj.R2	0.29		0.43	
F-value	37.31		20.78	

\*\*\* P<0.01; \*\* P<0.05; \* P<0.01

## DISCUSSION

This study focused on the influence of coffee chain store environment cue (social, atmospheric, and design) perception and store environment cues towards the consumer's purchase intention. Taiwanese and American consumers have different perception towards coffee chain store environment (see Table 1): The order of the store environment cues that Taiwanese consumers pay attention to is social cues, atmospheric cues, and design cues; while store design cue is the most important store environment cue for American consumers, where atmospheric cue and social cue come the second and the third accordingly. This result shows that Taiwanese consumers think the salespersons of coffee chain stores should interact with consumers cordially and bring good perception to the consumers; this is the cue that the consumers value

the most. Secondly, the background music that the store provides makes the consumers forget themselves in the joyful atmosphere, making them feel relaxed and comfortable and then their perceived value is influenced. Finally, hardware and space arrangement should allow the consumers to get in and out of the store conveniently and should be neat and tidy as well. American consumers think design cues (convenience of hardware and space arrangement) are the most important, the second is atmospheric cue (background music makes people feel joyful) and the third is social cue (the salesperson should interact with the consumers cordially), this is consistent with the analytical result concluded by Seock (2009). Because of different eastern and western cultures, the perception cues provided by the store environment should suit the measure to local conditions and adjust timely so as to strengthen consumer's purchase intention. This study result shows that the environment cues provided by coffee chain stores are contributive to promoting the consumer's purchase intention, and the store environment cues would still promote the customer's purchase intention even though under different cultures. After comparing the influence of three kinds of store cues towards consumer's purchase intention cross-nationally (see Table 4), the result shows that Taiwanese and U.S.A consumers would evaluate the purchase intention according to the social, atmospheric, and design cues provided by the store, and the result is consistent. If the consumers perceive that the social interaction that the store presents is higher, then their purchase intention would be stronger; this shows that Taiwanese and American consumers believe that the overall interaction perception between the store salesperson and the consumers could promote personal purchase intention. This result is different from the number of salesperson that Baker at al. (1994) claimed to be a must to the store social cues, instead the interaction between the consumers and the salesperson should be considered further. If this key element is missing, then the consumers are unable to experience the clear socialized process, which is a serious impact to the store impression and thus the consumer's purchase intention would be influenced.

When the consumers perceive that the atmosphere of the store could change their mood and make them feel happy, then their purchase intention would be promoted. The store design could often bring novel and convenient feeling to the consumers, especially the space and entire shopping arrangement. The higher the convenience that store design presents, the better the customer's purchase intention could be promoted. These results implied that the presentation of store environment cues is contributive to promoting the customer's purchase intention, if the chain store owner hopes that the store could deliver a valuable purchase experience to the customers, then understanding the customer's need is very important. However, the store environment cue that every consumer needs during the purchase time is different, which involves different value judgment; thus, the researchers must plan specific purchase experience carefully, and different kinds of cues could be presented in the brick-and-mortar store after communicating with the consumers.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The fact that this research's focus on the single coffee chain store -- Starbucks -- with self-evaluation may limit the generalizability of the findings. The current results reflect the nature of the measures used, especially those related to purchase intention. However, the importance of sub-dimension factors underlying purchase intention, such as personal pride, warranties, and country-of-origin of products, are perceived in varying degrees due to cultural constructs. Future studies might benefit from exploring other indicators of purchase intention, in the context of a specific measure setting. In addition, future study should amplify and verify the cultural impact on the store environment cues as well as customers' perceived quality using more heterogeneous consumer samples. Moreover, this study only focused on examining whether the store environment cues can influence purchase intention across different cultures. Future research should utilize other relevant function attributes to compare with those impacts of product characteristics.



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