

The IKEA Experience

A case study on how different factors in the retail environment affect customer experience

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PREFACE

The work of writing this thesis has been a journey of hard work, filled with good and bad moments where the latest often ended in laughter. The Spring of 2006 led us not only to the accomplishment of writing our bachelor' thesis but also into new insights that will most definitely be guidance in the future. The thesis was written for the Division of Industrial Marketing at Luleå University of Technology where we have had the opportunity to look into the shopping experience from the customers' perspective of one of the most unique companies existing today. First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor Mr Tim Foster, at the Department of Industrial Marketing at Luleå Technical University, for his encouragements and great creativity at times when our own well of ideas ran dry.

Furthermore, we would like to thank our participants for taking the time to contribute to our thesis by taking part in interviews in which their personal shopping experiences at IKEA made it possible for us to reach the purpose of this study.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our families for showing us priceless support and giving us the confidence to always do our best.

Finally, we hope that our work will be a useful learning material as well as a source of inspiration.

Luleå University of Technology, June 2006

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ABSTRACT

IKEA is one of the world's largest retailers in the world. They have managed to make their products and services more popular based not only on price but by creating a unique shopping experience for the customers. The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of the "IKEA experience." In order to reach this purpose research questions focused on which factors affect the customer's decision to visit IKEA and how the retail environment can be designed to enhance customer experience. Based on the research questions a literature review was conducted, resulting in a conceptual framework that was used to guide the data collection. The study has a qualitative case study approach where the primary data collection was through interviews with IKEA customers. The findings indicate that customers who choose to visit IKEA base their decision mainly on cost-advantages as well as the size of the assortment. The study found that social factors along with social activities also have an impact on the customers. The study also found that the customers plan their shopping at IKEA in advance because of the distance to the store, the size of the store, and the wide product assortment. Regarding the second research question, it was found that IKEA's retail environment is used to enhance the customer experience. IKEA markets itself as a retailer that offers a large number of products in various designs for low prices. Our study indicates that IKEA is perceived by the customers in this way. IKEA's customers also feel that there is uniqueness over IKEA and that they can not be compared to any other retailer. Customers are generally satisfied with their experiences at IKEA. Even though certain complications during their shopping experience might occur, customers would not hesitate to re-visit the IKEA store.

SAMMANFATTNING

IKEA är en utav världens största möbel återförsäljare. De låga priserna är inte enda sättet IKEA har lyckats göra deras produkter populära utan de har också lyckats skapa en unik köp - upplevelse åt deras kunder. Avsikten med denna studie är därför att bidra med bättre kunskaper om "IKEA upplevelsen". För att kunna uppnå ändamålet för uppsatsen formulerades forskningsfrågor om vilka faktorer som påverkar kundernas beslut att besöka IKEA samt hur detaljhandeln kan utformas för att förbättra kund upplevelsen. En litteratur studie genomfördes, baserat på forskningsfrågorna, vilket ledde till en teoretisk sammanställning som användes för att vägleda databehandlingen. Uppsatsen är utförd via en kvalitativ fallstudie där data samlades in genom intervjuer med IKEA kunder. Slutsatserna visar att kunder som väljer att besöka IKEA baserar deras beslut på främst på kostnads fördelar samt storleken på sortimentet. Studien upptäckte att sociala faktorer tillsammans med sociala aktiviteter också påverkar kundernas köp upplevelser. Studien visade också att kunderna planerar deras besök till IKEA i förväg på grund av distans till affären, storleken på affären, och det breda produkt sortimentet. Då det gäller den andra forskningsfrågan visade studierna att IKEA's detaljhandel används för att förbättra kund upplevelsen. IKEA marknadsför sig själva som ett företag som erbjuder många produkter i varierande formgivning till låga priser. Våra studier påträffade att IKEA upplevs av deras kunder på detta sätt. IKEAs kunder känner att det är någonting unikt med IKEA och att de inte går att jämföra med andra företag. Allomfattande är kunderna nöjda med deras upplevelser på IKEA. Fastän kunderna kan stöta på vissa komplikationer under deras köp upplevelse, skulle de inte tveka att återbesöka IKEA.

INNEHÅLLSFÖRETECKNING

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1 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter will introduce the study and give a background to the thesis. First, the background discusses the research area, followed by a problem discussion. Thereafter follows the statement of the research purpose as well as the research questions of this thesis. Finally the demarcations of the research area will be presented, as well as a layout for the thesis.

1.1 Background

Many customers make a decision regarding where to shop based on their attitude toward a mix of stores, the shopping centre environment and the entertaining shopping experience. The author also groups shopping motives into three categories: product-oriented, experiential and a combination of product and experiential. The last motive category occurs when the shopper seeks to satisfy a purchase need as well as enjoying a pleasurable recreational experience (Ibrahim 2002).

Khalifa (2004) argues that the value that matters is the value in the customer's experience not the value in the product. According to Barnes (2003) value is the single most contributor to the beginning of the process that leads from customer satisfaction to retention and loyalty. The author claims that companies can create two forms of value; functional value, which is related to the firm's or brand's ability to be convenient, accessible, easy to use, and its ability to save the customer time and money, and; emotional value which is the extent to which the firm and its employees make the consumer feel important, valued and special (ibid). Barnes also gives examples of some forms of values that firms can create to develop efficient, functional customer relationships such as; convenience, access, product quality, value for money, accuracy and communications, and other forms of values that are more central to the feelings and emotions of the customers such as; shared history, values, goals, reliance, intimacy and trust. If a firm or brand does more for the customer than anyone else does and more than the customer would normally expect from such a company or brand, the company is using a strategy for creating value (ibid).

Managers need to recognize the importance of creating value for their customers in form of experiences (Berry *et al.* 2002). Offering products or services alone is not enough; organization must provide their customers with satisfactory experience (ibid). Gilmore & Pine (2002) agree by saying that the way for a company to reach its customers is through creating an experience within them. They claim that companies should be urged to create market experiences by creating places – real or virtual – where customers can try out offerings as they immerse themselves in the experience. The author further claim that it is crucial that the experiences the company creates are treated as distinct economic offerings that engage the customer and create memories within them (Gilmore & Pine 2002).

According to Seider *et al.* (2002) the majority of retail innovations are driven by customer demand for convenience. Corbett (2006) brings up that dramatic technology changes have been made for a vastly improved shopping experience. Seider *et al.* (2002) agrees and adds that the most sophisticated technologies are self-service, requiring customer acceptance and buy-in. The authors also remind us that the definition for shopping convenience is constantly changing and therefore is difficult to deliver. According to Rau (2005) companies that offer products and services that offer a favourable comparison in one or more of the “Big 3” –

better, faster, cheaper – strike a positive response with customers who relate them as superior to other products or services.

Jobber (2001) describes IKEA as a classic example of how the marketing mix can be designed to meet customer needs better than the competition. He also states that their strong competitive advantages are the bases of their success (ibid). Arnold (2002) claims that IKEA offers an immediate satisfaction and a pleasurable shopping experience to the consumers and that decentralized decision making is an important feature as well as a basis for IKEA's leadership in its industry.

1.2 Problem discussion

According to Arnold (2002) an essential element of the corporate culture is to continually seek for more cost effective ways of running their business. It is able to do so by following a global strategy of cost leadership. The author also mentions IKEA's three main principles; self-service with appealing informative catalogues, disassembled furniture that is re-assembled by the customers and a cash-n-carry concept for suburban stores as innovations in the furniture retail category (ibid). Czinkota and Ronkainen (2004) state that IKEA's strategic positioning is unique and that the value-added dimension differentiates IKEA from its competition because making products and services that are really valuable to the customer and stand out from the competition is very difficult (ibid).

There have been a lot of statements that describe their thinking but Kippenberger (1998) describes IKEA's philosophy as simple; we do our "bit", you do your bit, and together we save money. The author also portrays the company's shopping experience as family entertainment (ibid). Kippenberger (2000) categorises IKEA as one of the market-driving companies in the world. By market-driving he refers to companies that revolutionize the predictable wisdom of their industry. They are radical pioneers who provided a rise in value for the customer by creating new markets and challenging industry practices.

Kippenberger (1998) also states that any industry is made up of companies that fall into three categories: the rule makers, the rule takers, and the rule breakers. In this case IKEA is considered to be a "rule breaker", which means that they have forced the market to perceive the value of a product or service in a different way by dramatically shifting the price/performance relationship within a product grouping. The rule breaking companies also disassemble and repackage existing benefits offered to customers in a new and different way. In general the companies of this kind also manage to make products and services more than just easy to use- they make them fun (ibid).

Barnes (2003) states that the objective for companies should be to rise above the role of a supplier of a particular product or service to become a partner in the creation of value, one on whom the customer can always rely to produce results. Khalifa (2004) states that customer value is considered central to competitive advantage and long-term success of business organizations. The author describes four types of consumer definitions of value;

- Low price
- Focus on benefits of the product or service
- The quality obtained for the price paid, and
- Total benefits obtained for total sacrifice incurred

and three components of value;

- Dissatisfiers, which are characteristic that are expected in products or services and generally taken for granted. Since they are expected to be there, their presence only brings customers up to neutral but their absence annoys them. These needs drive customer defection if they are not met.
- Satisfiers, which are features that are expected and explicitly requested by customers. Customers are disappointed if these needs are poorly met but have increasing satisfaction (and perhaps even delight) if these needs are met.
- Delighters, which are new or innovative features or characteristics that customers do not expect. Since they are unexpected, there is no negative effect if they are absent, but when present they have a positive effect. An example of this could be IKEA's babysitting services (ibid).

Seiders et al (2002) states that IKEA offers a number of insights on convenience; the depth and breadth of IKEA's range means that the retailer truly offers a one-step shop which together with a family friendly restaurant and extended opening hours make the trip easy.

Burns and Neiser (2006) claim that a stores environment can have the ability to attract customers, to entice purchases and to attract customers back to the store. In fact, a stores environment can be more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision and has the ability to affect the level of satisfaction experienced with the retailer.

Schmitt (2003) describes the shopping experience as something that includes much more than simply getting what you want. It focuses on all the events and activities that are part of it: the design of the shopping environment in the store or outline, the service personnel, how they greet you, whether you bought something extra, and how you felt while you were shopping.

1.3 Overall Purpose and Research Questions

Based on the problem discussion above, the purpose of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the "IKEA experience".

Further the research purpose will be reached by answering the following research questions:

- RQ1 How can the factors affecting the customer's decisions to visit IKEA be described?
- RQ2 How can the retail environment be designed to enhance customer experience

1.4 Outline of Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one introduced the background to the subject and then moved on to the problem discussion of the thesis, which ended in a purpose with two research questions. Chapter two presents a literature review of previous studies relevant to the subject and chapter three provides a conceptual framework. Chapter four describes how the research and the methodology were conducted and chapter five presents the collected empirical data. In chapter six the data is analyzed and compared to existing studies. Finally, chapter seven discusses the findings and conclusions and answers the two stated research questions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, an overview of previous studies related to the problem area and more specifically to the research questions will be reviewed. Firstly, the factors that affect customer decisions to visit IKEA will be discussed. Secondly, a description of the retail environment and how it is designed to enhance customer experience will be stated and finally, the developed conceptual framework of the described theories will be provided.

2.1 Factors Contributing to the Choice of Retailer

According to Barnes (2003) it is important for companies to view relationship from their customer's perspective. The relationship consists of more than just the customers buying product and services regularly. This is due to customers being aware of the difference between; repeat buying, based on convenience, non-emotive factors like price, or situations where the customers return repeated times to the same company or brand because they have a special feeling for them. What a brand or accompany means to a customer is dependent on how it fits with the customers values (ibid).

Barnes (2003) states that various forms of value exist, firms can create a type of value contributing to functional customer relationships based on; access, convenience, timeliness, product quality, value for money, competency and communications, among others. These factors can result in customers dealing with a firm again or to buy a brand again and again.

Other forms of value are those dealing with the customers feeling and emotions like: goals, interests, shared history, beliefs; sense of commitment, reliance, social support, trust etc. When these types of value exist it contributes to emotional loyalty and more importantly and also more lasting relationships, leading to customers choosing being resistant to competition from competitors that can seem more convenient and efficient (ibid).

Barnes (2003) also states that meaningful customer relationships are those characterized by high level of emotional value, which is created by more than functional and instrumental components; the company and the customer should share something in common it can be background, interests, values and beliefs. For companies to be able to develop strategies leading to meaningful customer relationships they have to gain a deeper understanding of the customers. This can be attained by gaining knowledge about the customers, what role the brand plays in the customer's life, now and in the future, as well as being aware of the expectations of the customers. Real meaning derives from anticipation and a company addressing issues that the customer does not expect them to address (ibid).

Stores have for long been viewed as strictly a place for making transactions but according to Hu & Jasper(2006) stores has since the early years of modern retailing also served as a place for socializing and not only a place for purchasing goods. Some retailers, like discount chains, often focuses strongly on cost- cutting approaches in terms of for example promoting self-service, which might lead to a decreasing social atmosphere in the store. According to Hu & Jasper (2006) value can not simply be defined as price versus utility and therefore the experiential value that a store can provide in terms of playfulness and aesthetic appeal, enhances the customer value. The authors also state that shopping is a socially visible behaviour which means that consumer seeks to satisfy a social need when shopping, often done while accompanied by friends or family. Consumers not only shop because of personal reasons but also for social motives like; Social experience outside the home, communication with others, or reflecting a desire to be part of a certain reference group. To be able to attract

customer back, stores have to be able to introduce social cues, making the shopping environment more personal to the customers by being relevant to their lifestyles and values. Social cues can take two form; personalized customer service and in-store graphics that states social meaning. The interaction between customers might also have an impact on consumer perception of store image and the general shopping behaviour. (ibid)

Andreassen & Lindestad (1998) claim, that by being exposed to information as well as gaining experience, customers develop a corporate image in their mind. Corporate image plays an important role when being successful in attracting and retaining customers, especially when companies within the same industry are becoming more and more similar. Corporate image can influence customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and sometimes even impact the perceived quality of a product, since that brand reputation often is defined as “a perception of quality associated with the name”. Corporate image can also be an outgoing information channel for existing and potential customers, since it affects customer loyalty and hence the degree to which one is willing to spread positive word-of-mouth (ibid).

Gehrt and Yan (2004) claim that consumer behaviour is affected by situational factors such as: physical, social and temporal influences. The authors also remind us that time scarcity has a significant impact on consumer’s product and store choice. There are important differences among the formats in terms of availability of product information, ability to compare products, degree of human intermediation, access, speed of delivery, and amount of shopping time required. According to Gerth and Yan (2004) in terms of time spent finding a certain product stores that offer catalogues were regarded as the most efficient. The authors also claim that elderly people place importance mainly on low prices, the atmosphere of the stores, and the quality of merchandise; while younger people tended to emphasize the selection of merchandize and convenience (ibid).

2.2 The Customer Experience in the Retail Environment

Retailers are, in addition to selling merchandize or services, also concerned with making the shopping experience more rewarding for their customers (Keh & Teo, 2001). In order to increase the value customers receive from the merchandize, provision of customer service is established through a set of activities and programs. (ibid)

According to Wikström (1995) when it comes to business development nowadays great focus is put on the customer. One example is the customer as the co-producer. By engaging the customer in the production process, the author claims that the relationships between the buyer and seller are longer and that it creates value in several ways. The customer represents input into the own consumption, which can be regarded as a production process that creates value for the individual or the family. The whole process is about creating value with the customer and incorporating the customer’s value creation into the system. The co-production activities take place in one of the activities in a value-creating process (illustrated in Figure 2) (ibid).

Wikström (1995) mentions IKEA as an example of how the customer can be involved in the design process. IKEA, which builds heavily on mass-production, has realized that their customers no longer want to see the same furniture in their friend’s homes as well. Therefore, IKEA arranges for its customers to design their own kitchens in interaction with a trained sales representative. Concerning interaction in production, the author mentions IKEA’s flat packages of furniture as a good example of how the customer can take over the finishing,

getting a better fit and reducing costs. By taking greater part in the process the consumers create their ultimate value, while the suppliers have a supportive role (ibid).

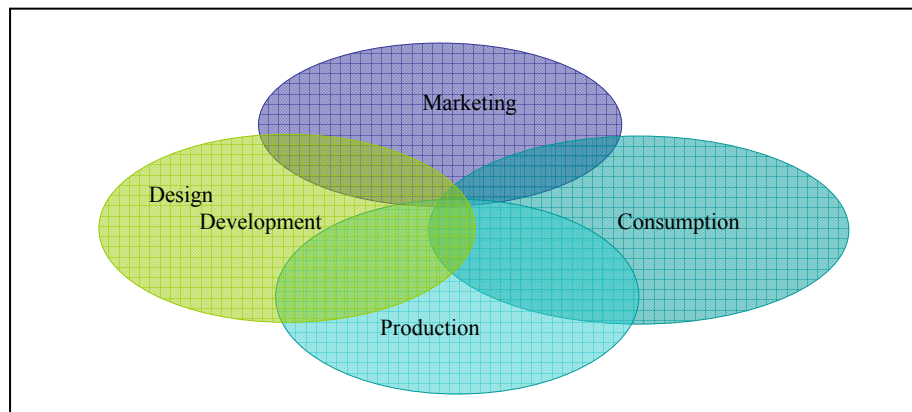


Figure 1 The company-customer process as a simultaneous and interactive process. Source: Wikström (1995)p.10

2.2.1 Customer Experience Management

According to Schmitt (2003) management should strive strategically to create holistic experiences that possess, at the same time, sense, feel, think, act, and relate qualities. We all believe that customer satisfaction creates customer loyalty. Satisfaction is an outcome-oriented attitude deriving from customers who compare the performance of the product with their experience of it. If the product is below customer's expectations, customers will be dissatisfied, if it is above expectations, customers will be satisfied. Experience, in contrast, is process oriented. Experience provides much more guidance because it forces you to identify the details that result in satisfaction. If you pay attention to the experience, satisfaction occurs naturally. Providing powerful and compelling customer experiences will set you apart from your competitors in a way that focusing on simple satisfaction never will (ibid).

Schmitt (2003) defines Customer Experience Management (CEM) as the process of strategically managing a customer's entire experience with a product or a company. Many successful CEM projects employ experiential hybrids that produce several experiences. The CEM framework uses customer oriented, dynamic concept –the experiential platform –to articulate the positioning of a company, brand, or product. CEM must be a seamless process that starts with customer insight, continues with a platform that includes customer input, and ends in a customer-experience driven implementation. The customer encounters the experience in direct experience with the product, in its look and feel, in commercially produced communications, and in store design. The author groups the customer experience into following categories:

- Sense experience = appeals to the five senses; customer value is created through sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell
- Feel experience = appeals customer's inner feelings and emotions; customer value is created through affective experiences that range from mildly positive moods linked to a brand to strong emotions of joy and pride

- Think experience = appeals to the intellect; it creates value for customers by engaging them creatively
- Act experience = appeals to behaviours and lifestyles; creating value for customers by showing them alternative lifestyles or alternative ways of doing business
- Relate experience = contains social experiences. It creates value for the customer by providing a social identity and sense of belonging (ibid).

Schmitt (2003) presents a model on how to build the Experiential Platform; an important part of business and marketing strategy is what managers call “positioning” –how the company wants customers to perceive the organization, its brand, and its products –but almost nobody takes implementing the statement seriously because it contains no information about how to accomplish that task. Building an experiential platform has several managerial benefits: first, it captures insight about customers because it is developed out of their experiential world, second, it provides coordination, and third, it is specific and therefore an excellent sketch for implementation. The platform (figure 2) forms the basis for the subsequent three implementation steps; the brand experience, the customer interface, and innovations groups.

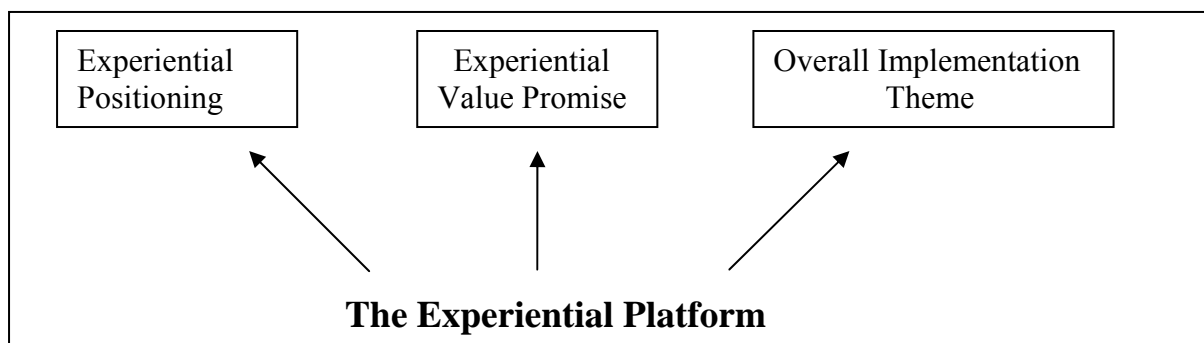


Figure 2 Strategy Components of an Experiential Platform Source: Schmitt, 2003 p.99

Experiential positioning depicts what the brand stands for. It is equivalent to the positioning statement of traditional management and marketing, but it replaces the vague positioning statement with an insightful and useful strategy component that is full of imagery and relevant to the buyers and users of the brand. The experiential positioning should be tangible enough that we immediately know what to do with it. At the same time, it should be intriguing so that we can launch innovative implementations. At times, a company needs to update the experiential platform, for example when implementing their business in different countries.

Experiential value promise (further on referred to as EVP) identifies, in experiential terms, the specific value the customer can expect from the brand. It is the experiential equivalent to the functional value proposition, which is often trite and commonplace because it focuses solely on functional product attributes and benefits. Since the EVP states what the customer will get as an experience; the company must fulfil this promise or the customer will be disappointed.

Overall implementation theme links the positioning and value promise to actual implementation. In other words, it summarizes the style and content of the core message that the company will use across all implementations in the brand experience, the customer experience, and future innovations (ibid).

The experiential platform has been developed to provide differentiation and value to the customer. It is everything that you put in front of the customer. There is much more to the experience a product/brand provides than its experiential and functional features. The look and feel surrounding the product is another key aspect of the experience. Customers do not just get a product features, they get a product with a name, logo, and signage and they buy it in a store or on the Internet, where it is displayed in a certain way (Schmitt 2003).

Ibrahim (2002) also states that a positive mood can result from customers pursuing either type of shopping, and that an entertaining shopping experience is influenced by three broad categories: retailer attributes, customer attributes and the transport/travel attributes. By performing his study about shopping centre experiences, Ibrahim (2002) concludes that three retail factors, two customer factors and five transport factors contribute to an entertaining shopping experience (figure 3).

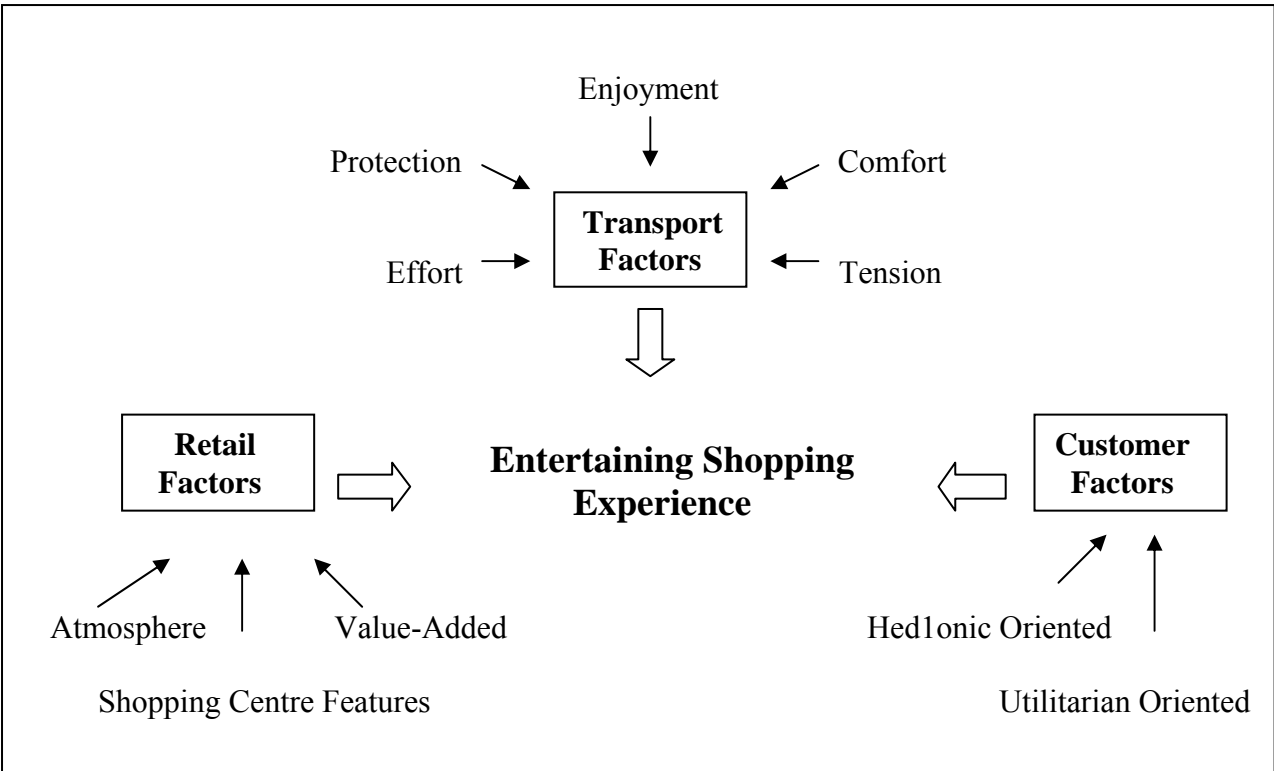


Figure 3 Model of an Entertaining Shopping Experience.

Ibrahim (2002) states that customers view malls as a place not only for shopping but also for other activities, such as entertainment, socializing with friends and browsing with no intention of buying. Travel costs are often considered a contributing decision factor; however the author mentions that travel costs comprise many other factors, which may be more important than the conventional measures, for example: the trip effort, tension, reliability, and trip comfort. The location of the store is important as well as the design of the transportation facilities so that they facilitate an enjoyable shopping experience (ibid).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Our aim with this section is to develop a conceptual framework that will guide us in our study. The framework will be based on models and theories presented earlier in this chapter. The theories used are related to our research questions so the conceptual framework will also serve as the basis of our data collection.

As defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), “a conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables –and the presumed relationship among them” (p18). By doing a conceptual framework we are forced to be selective – to decide which variables are most important, which relationships are likely to be most meaningful, and, as a consequence, what information should be collected and analyzed (ibid).

In our study the first research question describes how the retail environment can be designed to enhance the customer experience; the second research question relates to the factors affecting the customer’s decision to visit IKEA.

2.3.1 Conceptualization of Research Question 1

The literature most relevant to answer the first research question concerning how the factors affecting the customer’s decision to visit IKEA can be described will be presented below. We chose to rely on the two studies presented below because we consider them to be descriptive.

- **Social Cues In the Store Environment and Their Impact on Store Image (Hu & Jasper, 2006)**

This study brings out the experiential value that a store can provide in terms of playfulness and aesthetic appeal, which will enhance the customer value. We chose to use this study because the authors claim that the interaction between customers also might have an impact on consumer perception of store image and the general shopping behaviour. The authors bring out the importance of the social atmosphere in the store. Based on this study we will look into the social motives for customers and how the in-store graphics have an impact on shopping behaviour.

- **Situational, Consumer; and Retailer Factors affecting Internet, Catalogue, and Store Shopping (Gehrt & Yan 2004)**

This study will help us bring out the factors that have an impact on customer’s product and store choice. The authors mention the following formats to have an impact concerning the choice of retail environment:

- Product availability
- Information availability
- Access
- Speed of delivery
- Amount of shopping time required

The authors also claim that stores that use catalogues are regarded as the most efficient in terms of time spent finding a certain product.

2.3.2 Conceptualization of Research Question 2

In order to describe and to get an extensive picture of how the retail environment can be designed to enhance customer experience we have chosen to rely on three authors. These authors are used to allow for more description and detail of possible rationales that will help us view the retail environments as a contribution to the customer experience.

▪ **Customer Experience Management (Schmitt, 2003)**

The theory on the retail environment will primarily be based on the framework developed by Schmitt (2003) as we consider this model to fit our purpose and research question. The model gives a clear picture of how retailers can create a retail environment that provides positive experiences for the customers, and the model is also more recent. The author also presents a model on how to build an Experiential Platform for the customer. The model is based on three stages that help to enhance the importance of a positive customer experience:

- *Experiential Positioning*, which brings out the importance of the brand,
- *Experiential Value Promise*, that explains the importance of customer expectations and,
- *The Overall Implementation Theme*, which summarizes the message that the company will use when creating the Experiential Platform.

▪ **The Importance of Entertainment in the Shopping Centre Experience (Ibrahim, 2002)**

The reason we chose to rely on this study is because it brings up factors that can help us get out information concerning our research question. The author mentions the importance of an entertaining shopping experience and he also gives examples on factors to consider when creating an entertaining shopping experience. These factors, which are mentioned below, will be used to help us find out which features in the retail environment can contribute to an entertaining shopping experience:

- Retail factors, which include atmosphere and shopping centre features
- Transport factors, which include effort, protection, enjoyment, comfort, and tension and,
- Customer factors, which can either, be hedonically or utilitarian oriented.

▪ **The Customer as Co-Producer (Wikström, 1995)**

The reason we chose to use this study is because Wikström (1995) brings out the importance of the relationships between the buyer and the seller and the foundation for the study can be implied on IKEA. The author explains how retailers can create value by letting their customers take a greater part in the process while the supplier has a more supportive role. We are going to use the following two co-production activities that Wikström (1995) claims IKEA to use:

- Design
- Production

2.4 Frame of Reference

Our conceptualization is summarized in the frame of reference below.

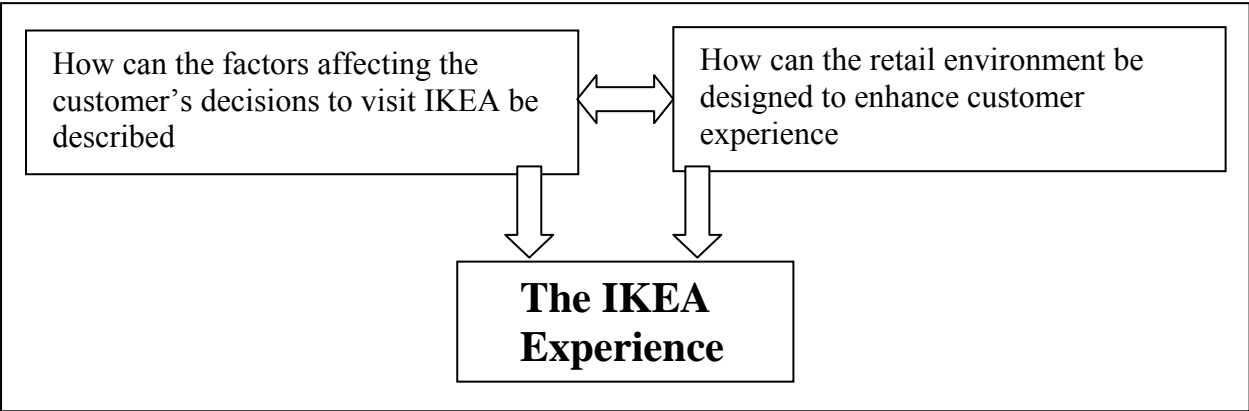


Figure 4 *Frame of reference*

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we will discuss and justify the methodological choices we have made for our research. The figure 5 below provides an over view of the headings of the chapter and how these fit together.

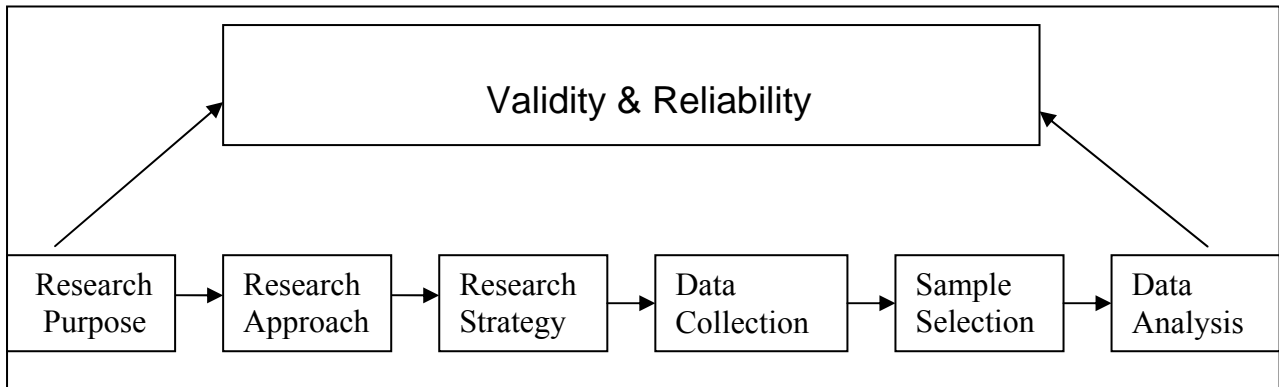


Figure 5 Methodology Overview Source: Adapted from Foster (1998), p.81

3.1 Research Purpose

According to Yin (1994) and Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (1998), research can be classified into one of the following three different purposes: exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research. Furthermore, these classifications can be based on how much knowledge the researcher has in the initial state of the research, in addition to what kind of information that is required in order to deal with the purpose of the thesis. (Reynolds, 1971)

Exploratory research aims to formulate and define a problem. It is useful when the problem is difficult to demarcate, when the perception of which model to use is unclear and what qualities and relations that are important are diffuse. (Wiedersheim-Paul & Eriksson, 1998) Therefore, the purpose of an exploratory study, according to Patel & Tebelius (1987), is to collect as much information as possible about a specific problem. Furthermore, Reynolds (1971) claims that in an exploratory study the researcher gain a better understanding of the research area.

Descriptive research is suitable when the purpose is to correctly describe a phenomenon and when the problem is well structured. The researcher needs to have a clear picture of the phenomenon before the collection of data starts. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000) Moreover, a descriptive research purpose is used when the researcher wants to find out which aspect of a problem that are relevant, and describe these aspects more thoroughly without researching connections between causes and symptoms (Wiedersheim-Paul & Eriksson, 1998). Furthermore, descriptive research is often an extension of, or a forerunner to, an exploratory research (Saunders et al, 2000).

Explanatory research is employed to analyze causes and relationships, explaining which causes produce which relationships (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, this also includes the explanations of a certain purpose, when investigating if one specific factor affects another (Wiedersheim-Paul & Eriksson, 1998).

In this study we primarily describe and explore how IKEA attracts customers by managing factors relating to the retail environment, and how that can enhance customer experience. The purpose of this thesis is exploratory, as no identical research approach has been made before and we want to gain as much information as possible, thus, aiming to gain a better understanding of the research area. The study is primarily descriptive via the empirical data we have collected in order to find patterns in the exploratory study. Finally, our research purpose is somewhat explanatory, as we are beginning to explain the results that we have gained in the two previous stages, by drawing conclusions that are answering our research questions.

3.2 Research approach

The research approach refers to the chosen way of treating and analyzing the selected data and is generally classified as either quantitative or qualitative (Yin, 1994). A qualitative approach draws conclusions from non-quantifiable, such as, attitudes, values, or perception. It gives the possibility to gather information and investigate several variables from a few numbers of entities, thus providing the possibility to gain a deeper understanding of the studied area (ibid)

As a result of this explanation, the emphasis of this study is qualitative, due to the fact that we aim to gain a deeper understanding on how IKEA can enhance customer experience in order for customer to be attracted, which in turn requires a more detailed investigation. Furthermore, we aim to draw conclusions from our findings.

3.3 Research Strategy

We find case studies to be the most appropriate research strategy for our study since the type of research questions of our study are formulated as “why” and “how” questions furthermore, our study deals with contemporary events, and we do not have control over behavioural events. These facts, according to Yin (1998) fall under the category of survey or case study. However, a survey is not relevant, as it does not correspond to our qualitative research (ibid). Furthermore, Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (1997), state that a case study involves the investigation of few entities with many variables, with the aim to increase the understanding of subject and not a generalization. This is also in our agreement with our aim to gain in-depth understanding of why customers choose IKEA and how they perceive the shopping experience.

According to Yin (1994) a single case-study provides the opportunity to investigate one entity in the form of one industry, company, or district, in depth. In this study we use a single-case study, one company is investigated which will enable us to gain as deeper understanding of our chosen research area.

3.4 Data Collection

According to Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (1997), two categories exists when collecting data, secondary and primary. Secondary data is data that has already been collected for another purpose, whereas data collected for a specific purpose is known as primary data (ibid)

In addition, as argued by the authors, there are three methods to rely on when collecting data for case studies: documentation, interviews, and observations. According to Yin (1994), the

most significant sources of case study information are interviews due to their strength of focusing directly on the case study topic. Furthermore, interviews are insightful as they provide perceived casual inference. Holme and Solvang (1991) further argue that interviews are suitable when in-depth information is desired as it concentrates directly on the case study topic.

Therefore, the interview was chosen as our primary data collection method, due to its strength to focus directly on the topic of the case studies, thus allowing the collection of in-depth information. Based on the level of formality and structure, interviews are often categorized into: open-ended, focused and structured. For this study, focused interviews were the most appropriate methods for the collection of data. An interview guide (Provided in appendices A-B) was used in order to discuss a limited number of issues connected to the conceptual framework in chapter two. This allowed the respondents to respond with flexibility, and to confirm or dismiss certain facts in a conversational matter.

In general, focused interviews can, according to Lundahl and Skärvad (1992), be conducted by telephone or in person. Telephone interviews are less costly and time consuming, which makes them useful when contacting a distant respondent. However, visual cues will be absent, and other disadvantages such as difficulties recording data, less ability to control the pace of the interview, and difficulties developing complex questions may follow. On the other hand, face-to-face interviews can be carried out longer than telephone interviews and include questions that are more complex, allowing a better feedback from the respondent (ibid). We chose to conduct two of the interview in person and two of them by phone. The interviews by telephone were due to reasons of distance and limited resources for travelling.

Yin (1994) states that Documentary information is likely to be relevant in every case study and can take many forms, such as letters, written reports, memoranda; articles presented in the mass media and internal documents. In this study, we used documentation as a secondary source of information when collecting recent information written on the topic of retail environment and customer experience that could be in special relation to IKEA.

Documents possess the quality of being stable as it is possible to re-examine them. However, they are unobtrusive, meaning they are not made for the case in question, although they can contain accurate names and other details (ibid).

Yin (1994) further proposes that triangulation, gathering different sources of data, provides a strength that makes the study more reliable. The sources of evidence applied for our data collection are documentation and interviews.

3.5 Sample Selection

According to Holme & Solvang (1991), it is of great importance that the selected cases are relevant to the purpose of the study, and that the respondents have abundant information on the studied phenomenon when performing the case studies. We have followed the advice of Holme and Solvang and selected one case study as our sample, as we chose to conduct a single-case study. Due to the purpose of this study to investigate how the retail environment of IKEA is designed to enhance customer experience in order to attract customers, we started to list several people that we knew had extensive experience in visiting IKEA and that we perceive have a clear definition of why they visit IKEA, and the factors that they feel contribute to any positive or negative sentiments, in their shopping experience.

The case study company of interest is IKEA since it is one of the largest retailers in the world with a unique concept that provides customer with an extensive shopping experience. We also felt that IKEA with its strong position in the world market and its continuous growing expansion is an interesting company to study. The amount of informational material written on IKEA was also a reason for the choice of company. In addition we managed to set up interviews with two persons that have an extensive history of visits and purchases from IKEA.

3.5.1 Choice of Respondents

After telephone calls made to the people in question, we settled for two persons that we felt best could provide us with valuable insight to which factors in IKEA's retail environment affected customers choose to visit its stores. The respondents consist of one male age 27 and one female age 25. Both are close friends of ours and therefore we had knowledge of their previous shopping habits concerning IKEA. We were well aware that there was a possibility that our choice of respondents could affect the results of the interview but we considered the benefits of choosing respondents that we knew could provide us with extensive data that could contribute to achieve the purpose of our research. The aspect of the respondents being available made it easier for us to organize our research process time wise.

3.6 Data Analysis

According to Yin (1994), research projects should begin with a general analytic strategy providing the researcher with a system by which he or she can set priorities for what to study and why. Two general analytical strategies are available when performing a case study, namely relying on theoretical propositions and developing a case description (ibid)

Relying on theoretical propositions is the favoured strategy, and also the strategy used in this study. Using this strategy, the data collection is based on the research questions taken from previous studies. The findings of the research will then be compared with the findings from previous studies. The second strategy, *developing a case description*, should preferably be done only when little previous research has been done (ibid).

Miles and Huberman (1994) further state that the process of analysing data consists of three activities: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. *Data reduction* is viewed as the process of selecting, simplifying and transforming the data in an arranged way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified. *Data display* refers to the presentation of the reduced data in an organised way in order to simplify the process of drawing conclusions. *Conclusion drawing/verification* is the ultimate analytical where the researcher evaluates the significance of the findings by noting regularities, explanations, patterns, casual flows and propositions (ibid).

The three steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were followed when analyzing the data. Firstly, relevant data for our research was reduced via our within-case analysis and then compared with our theories covered in our conceptualization. Secondly, in the single-case analysis the data was displayed in a feasible way, following the structure of our research questions, to find similarities and differences. Thirdly, conclusions based on the findings of the study were drawn in the final chapter.

3.7 Quality standards- Validity and Reliability

Yin (1994) suggests four different tests a researcher can use to test the quality of a study, namely construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. In our research we chose to use the three tests explained below.

Construct validity refers to the establishment of correct operational measures for the concepts being studied, by using tactics such as multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having the draft study reviewed by key informants. In order to increase construct validity, both interviews and documentation were used as sources of evidence. A chain of evidence is established by referring to used secondary data, by presenting the primary data, linking together the purpose, research questions, frame of reference, interview guide, and findings, and by referring to methodological procedures (Yin 1994).

External validity deals with the problem of knowing if it is possible to draw general conclusions from the findings of the case study. Multiple-case studies are generally a stronger basis for generalization than a single-case study, and as case studies rely on analytical generalizations, meaning to attempt to generalize findings with theory, the external validity might not be quite so high (Yin 1994).

In this study multiple interviews were applied to increase validity in the forms of being able to compare the results which will hopefully lead to a better analysis.

Yin (1994) also states that *Reliability* aims to eliminate errors and biases in a study in order to make the research methods and techniques for collecting data more reliable and accurate. High reliability exists if the investigator reaches the same findings when repeating the case study by following exactly the same procedures. A prerequisite for this repetition is documentation of procedures followed in case studies (ibid). Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (1991) also claim that the respondent's lack of sufficient knowledge can affect the reliability in a negative way. In order to increase the reliability we made an effort in to ensure that the respondents had sufficient knowledge, and sent the interview guides in advance to allow respondents to prepare answers. Furthermore, we aimed to be completely objective both in the formulation of questions and in the actual conduction of the interview, in order to not to influence the respondents' answers. However, bias may occur as the interviews were conducted in Swedish and thereafter translated to English, which includes the risk of translation errors. Another possible negative influence could be that we during the telephone interviews could not pick up visible cues (Yin, 1994). When conducting interviews, personal biases may to some extent be present. Therefore, the influence of the respondents' as well as our own attitudes and values, and also our relation with the respondents' can always be questioned.

4. EMPIRICAL DATA

In order to answer the research questions regarding the IKEA experience we will in this chapter present the data that was gained from our primary research. IKEA is one of world's largest retailers with over 200 stores in more than 30 countries. The IKEA store is large in order to offer a wide and deep range of products that people can take home immediately and enjoy the same day. Another reason for the size of the store is to inspire people in realistic room settings and real-life homes. We conducted two separate interviews with two students at Luleå University of Technology. The respondents consisted of one female age 25 and one male age 23, and the data gained from each of the interviews will be presented separately. The interviews will follow the order of the Conceptual Framework. The topics in the interview guide will be used as sub-headings in this chapter, in order to present the results of the interview and make it easy for the reader to identify with the study.

The interviews were conducted over a cup of coffee in order to create a relaxed atmosphere. Before any questions were to be asked we made it clear for the respondents that the aim of the interview was to gain a deeper knowledge of their individual experiences and opinions, and that they could feel free to comment or add anything to the questions.

4.1 Factors influencing customer's choice to visit IKEA

In order for us to find out what factors influence customers decision to shop at IKEA we asked our respondents eleven questions. The questions were based on the seven different types of factors stated in the conceptual framework. The factors were discussed in the same order as in the conceptual framework; social motives, in-store graphic, product availability, information availability, access, speed of delivery, amount of shopping time required.

Regarding *social motives for the customer* the size of the company the respondents usually bring with them when visiting IKEA both the respondents could state that they never been to IKEA by themselves, but the size of their company varied between them The female respondents usually go in the company of four, whereas the male respondents never been to IKEA with more than one person accompanying him. The female respondent motivated her answer by adding that due to fact that the closest IKEA retailer is located at a great distance, it is not a usual shop-visit but also sort of a trip. The male respondent on the other hand lived much closer to an IKEA retailer. On the question whether their visit to IKEA was planned or something that was done in spontaneous matter the male respondent answered that it is usually something that is planned because of the location of IKEA retailers and due to the reason that IKEA visits is something that you have to make time for since the visits usually is quite time consuming. The other respondents stated that half of her trips to IKEA have been planned due to the distance from her hometown; the other store visits had not been planned ahead since she happened to be close to an IKEA retailer.

When it comes to *in store graphics* the availability of food and beverage and a baby-sitting service is something that IKEA offers its customers. On whether the respondents visited IKEA's café or restaurant during their visits, the female respondent said that she usually visits the restaurant because she finds it comfortable while shopping there. The male respondents stated that he at least always buys a hot dog at IKEA because he finds himself craving one while being there and because it is cheap. Neither of the respondents has been to IKEA with a child in company so on the question if they ever have taken advantage of the store's baby-sitting services they both answered no. Both of the respondents had opinions on the overall

design of the IKEA store. The male respondent found the store design to be very sporadic, even a little dull. He thought that it should be easier to find the product you are looking for because there are not many store-clerks to turn to for help. He added that the design of the store is all based on the special “route” that is designed for customers to follow. The female respondents like the way the store is designed with everything being divided and the specific show-rooms that she feels brings inspirations and ideas. She however feels that the necessity to take the “route” in order to get to where you want to go in the store is taking up time.

When asking the respondents on *product availability* both respondents had the exact same opinion on the matter. According to the respondents it is easy to get confused when trying to find the products you are looking for. Both the male and the female respondents felt that most of the times that they shopped at IKEA they expected the product in question to be in a specific part of the store but then found that it was stored someplace else. The male respondent also felt that product-displays follow an illogical order, where it is hard to determine exactly where to look for a specific type of product. On the question on whether the respondents felt that it was easy to find the products they were looking for when they visited IKEA both respondents said no.

On the matter of *information availability* both respondent felt that any information about the product was easily obtained on the tags that were attached to the product. The male respondent also stated that he finds it easy to find information on-line about a certain product of IKEA.

Regarding the topic of *access* both respondents agreed that opening-hours at IKEA are good because they are open late during weekdays and also always open on weekends and therefore it is easy to be able to visit them.

When asking about *speed of delivery* both respondents felt that by the self-service system IKEA offers, where the customers are able to by themselves go and pick up the products, they are able to get access to the product in conjunction with the purchase.

When asking the respondents on the *amount of shopping time required* both respondents felt that shopping at IKEA for the most part took more time than they expected. The female respondent felt that the reason for the shopping experience at IKEA being so time consuming is that there are so many products available at display and that the general design of the store decreases the chances of making the shopping visit shorter. The male respondent felt that the specially designed “route” increases the amount of time spent at IKEA. He said that the design of the store makes it very hard to just consider buying a product while walking on to the next part of the store because once you decided to buy that product you will have to go all the way back to find it. Which he added contributed to him buying more than he planned on because the store is designed so that that you see the entire product range and therefore it is easy to find something you did not consider buying before you came to IKEA.

When it comes to the usage of the IKEA catalogue the answers from the respondents varied. The female respondents said that she always used the catalogue to plan her purchase in advance. Which she felt led to her buying the product she had seen in the catalogue once she went to the actual store. But she also felt that she bought products that she did not intent to buy before the visit, according to her just because she had seen them in the catalogue. The male respondents stated that he never uses the catalogue of IKEA before visiting the store instead he chooses to go on-line to view the products. He stated that he does not plan his purchases to a large extent and that he can visit IKEA in the intention of just scoping out their

products. He also stated that he thinks of the catalogue as “something that applies to women more since they appear to plan more how to design and furniture their home.

4.2 The design of the retail environment in order to enhance customer experience

For us to be able to find out the importance of the design of the retail environment of IKEA and how that contributes to enhancing the experience for the customer, we asked ten questions based on six factors stated in the conceptual framework; Experiential positioning, experiential value promise, retail factors, transport factors, customer factors, design and production.

Regarding *experiential positioning* which brings out the importance of the brand, both the respondents had similar answers to give when asking them whether they chose IKEA because the company is known to have cost advantage compared to other furniture stores. The female respondents said that she chose IKEA because they are generally cheaper than other furniture retailers. The male respondents said that because the IKEA products are cheap you can get a lot for less money.

The concept of *experiential value promise* explains the importance of customer expectations and when asking the respondents on whether they will visit IKEA based on their latest experience the female respondents stated that she will definitely chose to shop at IKEA again because her previous shopping experience was positive. She feels that she is content with her experiences with the company and its product and also mentions that the assortment of products is always on the update. There are always new products coming in and that, she said always makes her curious. She also stated that even though she would be dissatisfied with IKEA and their product that would not affects her decision to visit IKEA again due to the company always coming out with new products. The male respondent said that he will most certain visit IKEA again because of their wide range of products and because he feels that there are no other retailer that can be compare to IKEA in terms of their products and how they are designed.

And based on their previous shopping experience we asked the respondents if they would consider recommending IKEA to others. Both of the respondents said that they would definitively recommend IKEA to others; the female respondents said that she would particularly recommend the company to young people that move out for the first time since IKEA is so cheap. The respondent added that she would probably not chose IKEA’s products when she reaches a higher income, according to her she would prefer to design her house in the future with products of better quality than those offered at IKEA.

The respondents were asked on the topic of *retail factors* which included atmosphere and shopping centre features. On the matter of IKEA being comfortable to shop at the answered were different between the two respondents. The female respondent felt that it was comfortable to shop at IKEA, the male respondents did not feel that it was comfortable to shop at IKEA because you have to assemble the products yourself and that the store was crowded. On the question whether the design of the IKEA store makes it possible to save time when shopping the male respondent felt that the design of the store did not contribute to the customer saving time but he stated that the way the check-out is designed with many cash-registers that could be a possible time-saving element. The female respondent did not feel that the way the store was designed made it possible to save time but she added that if you look at it from another perspective IKEA has everything for your home under one ceiling and that makes you save time because you do not have to visit more than one retailer.

Regarding *transport factors* the respondents had various experiences. The male respondent did not have to travel far to be able to visit IKEA while the female respondent had to travel over sixty Swedish miles to visit the closest IKEA retailer. The female respondent said she usually goes to IKEA over the weekend and stays at a hotel and tries to combine a little vacation out of her IKEA visits. On the matter of the parking spaces and facilities offered at IKEA in terms of security and availability both the female and male respondent felt that IKEA offers plenty of parking space with the male respondent adding that he never needs to worry about finding a parking space when going to IKEA. The female respondent thought that it was good that the parking spaces were close to the entrance in combination with IKEA providing carts to help transport the purchased goods from the warehouse to the car.

Regarding *customer factors* the respondents were asked whether they were attracted to visit IKEA for the sake of the shopping experience or for the products itself. The male respondent is mostly attracted to the entire shopping experience and not specific products, the respondents added that the price and the varying product assortment also contributed to him deciding to visit IKEA. The female respondent said that the products were the ultimate reason to why she decided to visit IKEA since she would never have gone to the city where IKEA is located if it was not for the store. The respondent added that she chooses IKEA because they offer so many different products and because IKEA gives her the opportunity to plan everything in advance before her visit. She also adds that the price is an important underlying reason to her IKEA visits.

Concerning the *product and design* factors the respondents were asked about their opinion on the concept of self-service that IKEA applies to its customer in regard to locating and picking up the products in warehouse as well as assembling the products yourself. The female respondent felt that the self-service makes it pretty easy but sometimes it can be more difficult when the products are heavier. The male respondent did not mind self-service, he felt that it was worth the trouble if you can get the products cheaper.

On the question regarding assembling the products yourself both respondents had previous experience with those types of products from IKEA. The male respondent also told us that he had to assemble the products once he got home and he mentioned that he sometimes had to return to the store because the product lacked certain pieces. He did not view this as a serious problem because the store was not far away and that the staffs were really helpful in those circumstances. The respondent adds that for example missing parts is an obvious risk that you take when shopping products that you need to assemble yourself. He also states that he does not think that one bad experience with IKEA would prevent him from shopping there again.

The female respondent felt that by having to assemble the product at home was a good thing because IKEA also offers home delivery of products and due to the fact that they are in pieces that make the delivery more easily.

Finally the respondents were asked if they had anything to add to the interview in relation to the topic of what makes customers choose IKEA and what IKEA can do to improve the experience for their customers. The female respondent stated that she was discontent with the policies of IKEA regarding product delivery, according to her, certain products that you expected possible for home-delivery turned out not to be. The respondents says that it is not something that will prevent her for shopping IKEA products but she will have that in mind next time she goes through their catalogue in order to plan what to buy. The price is what foremost attracts her to buy from IKEA and she said she visits them with the conviction that

their products are something that one uses during a certain period in your life, the respondent adds that she later on in life would like to buy furniture of better quality than IKEA. According to the respondent she knows that in the future her preferences and expectations about the products she buys will be higher since she will spend more on them.

The male respondents wanted to add that he finds it distressing that IKEA is not more developed in the sense of offering technical help in the form of computers in their retail environment. According to the respondents this would do more for him than having to go search in the catalogue when visiting the store. The respondent also added that he appreciates the freedom that IKEA offers in connection to the customers being able to freely move in the store and experiencing the products first handed. He states that it feels like you can be yourself at IKEA and that the store-clerks do not stress you or make you feel that they are superior to their customers. According to the respondent IKEA makes you feel like you are accepted for who you are.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter the data we have collected will be analysed with the help of a within case analysis, which signifies that we will go within our findings and compare them to the theories we earlier presented in our Conceptual Framework. Throughout this analysis the female respondent will be referred to as respondent number one and the male respondent will be referred to as respondent number two.

5.1 Factors affecting the customer's decision to visit IKEA

Social Cues

According to Hu and Jasper (2006) stores nowadays are serving as a place for socializing and not only for purchasing goods. The authors claim that customers seek to satisfy a social need when shopping; the visits are often planned in advance and done accompanied by friends or family.

When visiting IKEA, both respondents did it accompanied with someone. Respondent number one went in a company that consisted of four persons while respondent number two went with one family member. Both respondents had planned their trips because of the distance and because of the time it usually takes to visit an IKEA store.

Hu and Jasper (2006) also state that the stores have to be able to make the shopping experience personal and introduce social cues to satisfy the customers. The interaction between customers might also have an impact on consumer perception of store image and the general shopping behaviour. Stores should have shopping environments that are more personal to the customers by being relevant to their lifestyles and values. This can be achieved by personalized customer services. IKEA offers food and baby-sitting services for their customers in order to offer a comfortable shopping experience.

Neither one of our respondents had children with them during their visits and therefore could not use this service. Respondent number one chose to visit the IKEA restaurant during her shopping because she found it to be very comfortable while respondent number two chose to buy a hot dog on his way out from the store because it was accessible and cheap.

According to Hu and Jasper (2006) the in-store graphics also affect the customer's shopping experience.

Respondent number one told us she was not very satisfied with the design of the IKEA store because you had to walk around the entire store. However she mentioned that she liked the way the products were placed in the store because you could get inspiration, especially from the already furnished rooms.

Respondent number two also mentioned that it could be a bit time consuming to walk around the store and that he would like it to be easier to get to the products he was searching after. He also found the design of the store to be very sporadic when considering the fact that there are not a lot of personnel to turn to if you has any questions.

Situational consumer and retailer factors affecting store shopping

Gehrt and Yan (2004) claim that there are important differences among the formats in terms of availability of product information, ability to compare products, degree of human intermediation, access, speed of delivery, and amount of shopping time required.

Respondent number one stated during the interview that she could find the majority of the products she wanted to buy at IKEA but that she sometimes could be a bit confused because she expected certain products to be placed at one department of the store although they could be found in a whole different section. Respondent number two said that he usually was able to find all the products he wanted but that he found the placement of certain products to be placed illogically.

Gerth and Yan (2004) also state that the amount of time it takes to shop is important to consider. And that in terms of time spent finding a certain product stores that offer catalogues were regarded as the most efficient.

Both respondents liked the fact that IKEA has long opening hours because it relieved the stress factor of the shopping experience. Both respondents also said that the visit to IKEA took a longer time than they had expected in the first place. They both also thought that this was due to a combination of the store design and the amount of products available.

Both respondents also said that it was easy to find information about the products in the store. One of the respondents also said that she found it tiresome and time consuming that she had to go back all the way if there was a product she wanted to think about before buying. The both respondents agreed though that this led to the fact that they bought more products.

Before her visit one of the respondents used the IKEA catalogue in order to plan what she wanted to buy. This made her shopping experience easier and she could also recognize the products from the catalogue in the store.

Our male respondent did not use the IKEA catalogue because he prefers to use the Internet to search for products at IKEA's website. Here the respondent added that he thinks that women are more likely to use the catalogue because they plan their interior design in a different way and that a lot of men prefer to go to IKEA and just "investigate" the products.

| Factors that the respondents were affected by: | Respondent no 1 | Respondent no 2 |
|---|--|--|
| Social | Went to IKEA in a company of 4 people | Went to IKEA in a company of 2 people |
| Planning | Planned the shopping experience in advance | Planned the shopping experience in advance |
| Food services | Visited the restaurant | Bought fast food |
| Design of the store | Sees the design as time consuming | Sees the design as time consuming |
| Placement of products | Got inspired by the way the products were placed | Thinks that the products were placed in a way that made it difficult to find them. |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Opening hours | Satisfied with the opening hours | Satisfied with the opening hours |
| Information about products | Found that it was easy to obtain information | Found that it was easy to obtain information |
| Catalogue usage | Used the IKEA catalogue for inspiration and planning | Did not use the IKEA catalogue |

Table 1 A summarized version of which factors that affected the respondents or which activities they took part in when they visited the IKEA store.

5.2 The customer experience and the design of the retail environment

The experiential platform

Schmitt (2003) states that a company needs to build an experiential platform which shows how the company wants customers to perceive the organization, the brand and its products. IKEA wants its customers to see them as an affordable alternative when furnishing their homes.

Both our respondents said that the reason they choose to visit IKEA is because of the fact that are known for offering low prices and because they knew that they could get affordable products. Our male respondent stated that he will without doubt visit IKEA again because there is no other store that can be compared to IKEA and the wide range of products that they can offer. Our female respondent also said that she will visit IKEA again because she is satisfied with her experiences there and because there are always new products arriving in the store. She also added that if she believes that a bad experience at IKEA would not prevent her from going back, this thought was based on her curiosity of the constant arrival of new products.

Both respondents said that they definitely would recommend IKEA to others. Here the female respondent added that her recommendation would primarily go to young people that move away from home for the first time because of the quality and price of the products.

Entertainment in the retail environment

Ibrahim (2002) claims that shopping malls are viewed as a place for entertainment and not only for shopping, and that a customers positive mood can result from three broad attributes which are retail, customer and transport/travel attributes. He also mentions cost to be an important factor for customers when deciding where to shop, which also includes transportation costs. The author also says that the locations of the store and transportation facilities are important and contribute to an enjoyable shopping experience.

When our respondents were asked if it was comfortable to shop at IKEA the answered varied. Respondent number one answered that she found it to be comfortable while respondent number two chose to compare shopping at IKEA with shopping at other stores and therefore concluded that it was not particularly comfortable and that it was pretty crowded.

When discussing the store design with our respondents they both said that it did not contribute to any time saving. Although they both brought up another aspect to this opinion, which was that even though the shopping took time you could find the majority of the products you need

for your home at one place. They stated that the aspect of the time effort was seen to be worth it considering the fact that they necessarily did not need to visit several retailers to get the products they wanted.

Respondent number one had to travel approximately six hours with car to visit IKEA and she combined her visit to the store with a weekend holiday. Respondent number two did not need plan his trip as much because it only took approximately fifteen minutes by car.

Both respondents were satisfied with IKEA’s parking facilities. There were a lot of parking spaces available and the parking was very close to the store. These factors made it easier to take the products out to the car.

Respondent number one was mainly attracted to the store because of the products. She also said that she thinks that she never would have visited the city that IKEA was located in if IKEA were not situated there. The most important reasons for the visit were, according to the respondent, the wide range of products along with the low prices.

Respondent number two claims that he was mainly attracted by the unique shopping environment that IKEA offers and not a product in particular. Although he also added that the low prices and the wide range of products contributed to his decision to visit the store.

The customer as co-producer

Wikström (1995) states that a way by letting the customer take a greater part in the process the relationships will between the customers and retailers will be longer and create value in several ways. The author mentions IKEA’s flat packages and self assembled furniture as examples of how this can be implemented.

The respondents of this study had shared opinions concerning the self services at IKEA where you go to the stockrooms and get your own products. They both agreed that it was worth the effort for getting a cheaper product.

Both respondents had also bought products that they had to put together in their home environment. Respondent number one liked this feature that IKEA offers because of the fact that she had to ship the majority of the products she had bought. She also said that the way the products were packed made the whole process easier.

Respondent number two had experienced that there were certain parts missing and then had to go back to the store. His trip was not very long and therefore he did not mind to go back. When he arrived to IKEA he was well met by the personnel. The also commented this by saying that this is a risk that you take every time you take something to assemble it yourself at home. He preferred the way IKEA products are packaged as well. He also said that he does not think that a negative experience caused by one product would lead to him stop visiting IKEA.

| Factors of the retail environment | Respondent no. 1 | Respondent no. 2 |
|--|--|---|
| Expectation of the brand | The brand was what she expected it to be | The brand was what he expected it to be |
| Return to IKEA | Is sure that she will return to | Is sure that he will return to |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| | the store | the store |
| Recommendations to others | Would recommend the store to others | Would recommend the store to others |
| Comfort ability | Thinks that it is comfortable to shop at IKEA | Does not see the shopping experience at IKEA as comfortable |
| Time spent at IKEA | The shopping experience was time consuming but the respondent did not mind that factor. | The shopping experience was time consuming but the respondent did not mind that factor. |
| Parking facilities | Satisfied with the parking facilities of the store | Satisfied with the parking facilities of the store |
| Range of products | Very satisfied | Very satisfied |
| Self service | Satisfied because it contributes to the low prices | Satisfied because it contributes to the low prices |
| Self assembled products | Satisfied because it contributes to the low prices | Satisfied because it contributes to the low prices |
| Packaging of products | Satisfied | Satisfied |

Table 2 A summarized version of what the respondents thought of different factors of the retail environment.

6 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we will try to answer our research questions and thereby reaching the overall purpose of our thesis which was to provide a deeper understanding of the “IKEA experience”.

6.1 How can the factors affecting the customer’s decision to visit IKEA be described?

When performing this study we noticed that the following motives were decisive for the customer concerning their decision to visit IKEA; The most apparent reasons for people choosing to shop at IKEA is a combination of the store being perceived as offering a major cost-advantage with their products being relatively cheap in comparison to other retailers and that the product assortment is wide and constantly changing.

People do not tend to visit IKEA by themselves and women in particular like to have a few people accompanying them when going to IKEA. The access to restaurants and coffee-shops provides the customer with social activities in combination with the shopping experience, it also makes it very convenient for the customer to know that even a basic need like having to eat can be satisfied at the same place they shop at. By visiting a retailer like IKEA, with a large number of customers shopping at the same time the chance of social interaction between customers increases. IKEA follows the concept of self-service where the contact between customer and store-clerks is not very extensive and therefore customer’s looks to other customers for help or questions.

The location of IKEA retailers makes it possible for customers to add something extra to their shopping visit by having to plan it ahead and for some people having to spend a night away, which makes the shopping trip as a sort of vacation or get-away.

Due to the wide product assortment being offered at IKEA a visit to a retailer is subject to careful planning since the visit is more time-consuming than most shopping experiences. But because the customer spends a long time at the store it provides a great chance for customers to discover and get acquaintance with many products. The many various products also make IKEA more personal since it appeals to various tastes and preferences.

Customers do not tend to have any difficulties finding information about IKEA’s products. The catalogue that IKEA sends out to almost every household in Sweden helps to create interest among customers and makes it easy for them to attain information about the products. The catalogue also functions as pre-purchase planning tool, especially for women, where a customer can decide what they need and want to purchase from IKEA, before seeing the actual products. Another way for customer to get information about products being offered at IKEA is by visiting the company’s official website. Furthermore the IKEA store itself is a great source of information since tags, describing the product and how to use it, are attached to all products. Because IKEA have extensive opening hours with their stores being open both on weekdays as well as weekends it is easy for all types of customers to be able to find time to visit them.

The delivery concept of IKEA helps customers gain immediate access to the majority of products and the home-delivery option reduces the problem for customers to transport certain products home.

We have concluded that the following specific factors affect customer's decision to visit IKEA;

- The prices along with the wide-ranging product assortment are the foremost important reason for people choosing IKEA.
- IKEA offers their customers opportunities to combine their shopping experience with social activities both with the people accompanying them to the store as well as other customers.
- Despite whether the IKEA visit is a short or long, the visit is always planned ahead.
- It is easy for both potential and existing customers to attain information on IKEA and its products through their website or extensively distributed catalogue.
- Due to a unique delivery concept of self-service at check-out, IKEA can manage to keep their delivery-time down for its customers.

6.2 How can the retail environment be designed to enhance customer experience?

During the process of writing our thesis we have discovered that there are a number of factors in IKEA's design of the retail environment that can enhance customer experience. First of all our study found that the way the IKEA brand is perceived by its customer in accordance with the company's way of marketing themselves and in consequence customer view IKEA as a retailer that offers a large number of products in various designs, to a low price. IKEA is also perceived as very unique, with their customers feeling that there are no other retailers that can provide the same type of customer experience. Customers are in general satisfied with their experience at IKEA and because of that they tend to re-visit the store and even though customers might have a bad experience with IKEA they claim that would not influence a future decision to visit IKEA. Customers also tend to be very positive to recommending IKEA to others.

Different customers perceive comfort in the retail environment differently, customers who seek a broad variety of products do not mind to spend a lot of time finding them in the extensively large IKEA stores. On the other hand, customers who compare IKEA to other retailers find it less comfortable to visit IKEA since IKEA stores are substantially larger than other stores. IKEA also has unique pre-designed shopping route for customers to follow and therefore the customers who come to IKEA to buy one or a few specific products find it very stressing that you have to make your way through the entire product selection when visiting an IKEA store. IKEA provides baby-sitting services in order to try to enhance the level of comfort for people that bring their children with them when visiting IKEA, since the size of the store with its many different departments might contribute to parents spending time to look for their children because children risk getting lost in the large store.

Customers explain that any disadvantage regarding the time-consuming shopping experience when visiting IKEA is compensated by the benefits of finding the majority of products you need in just one place. Due to IKEA stores being placed at the outskirts of large cities, the distance for the customers to the stores varies and customers usually have to travel by car or other means of transport to get to IKEA. The parking facilities offered at IKEA satisfies the customers by enabling them to transport their purchases in an easy way along with IKEA providing functioning carts that the customer can use to transport the product to their cars.

Some customers are mainly attracted to the store because of the products IKEA offers while others are attracted to the unique shopping environment.

Customer states that even though IKEA self-service system can be complicated at times it is worth the effort in order for them to buy cheaper products. Customers also state that they like how the products are packaged because it makes the shopping experience more comfortable. Most customers have bought products that they had to assemble at home. Customers prefer this feature because it makes it easier to ship and transport the products. Customers also say that the disadvantage of this feature is that there can be parts missing sometimes. In this case the customers usually do not mind going back to the store with the product if the distance to the store is relatively short. Customers that do go back to the store in order to return the product state that they are well met by the personnel.

Our studies have shown that customers are affected by the following factors in the retail environment while shopping at IKEA;

- IKEA customers find the design of the IKEA store as very time consuming because different sections of the store is not well defined with products many times not located where customers expect them to be. But customers are willing to overlook the not so clearly sorted product assortment in order to buy the product to lower prices.
- Customers say that there is no store that can be compared to IKEA in terms of the size of the store, their extensive assortment of products and the visits being considered as something that allows for planning in advance. .
- Customers in general are satisfied with their experiences at IKEA and therefore they tend to re-visit the store.
- Customers claim that although they would have a bad experience at IKEA they believe that they would visit the store again because they feel that there are no other retailers that can be compared to IKEA.
- IKEA customers are very willing to recommend IKEA to others.

6.3 Implications for theory

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a better understanding of the “IKEA experience”. In order to do so we have explored customer’s thoughts on IKEA through interviews as well as described through investigating why customers choose IKEA and how the retail environment affects customer experience. Finally, we have begun to explain while answering our research questions.

However many of these phenomenon should have future research considerations.

6.4 Implications for practitioners

This section will serve as suggestions to management based on data attained during the research process. The following implications are based on the empirical data, analysis and conclusions conducted during this study.

- IKEA should enhance the clarity in information regarding policies related to home delivery since many customers visiting IKEA are in need of that type of service to be able to bring their purchases home.
- The design of the store should contain more categorized sections enabling the customer to know where to look for a certain product.
- Since our research discovered that price is the most important reason why customers buy IKEA products we find it crucial that the company continues to offer it customers “much for less money”
- IKEA need to preserve their ability to constantly up-date and re-invent their product assortment since our study revealed that dissatisfied customers are willing to overlook previous bad-experience mainly because IKEA always tend to offer new and appealing products.
- The offering of restaurants and other facilities not directly affiliated with their products makes IKEA more than just a shopping experience and therefore we feel that it important for management to constantly work towards developing that part of the retail environment.
- Thanks to the technological development in recent years especially with regards to the Internet, customers are becoming more and more use to obtaining information quickly and easily. IKEA is with its website following that trend but the company might need to consider applying more technical means of help in their actual store environment to enable customers to find what they look for.
- Finally we would like to recommend IKEA to maintain their concept of being a company for all types of people, because our research discovered that people choose IKEA partly due to the company allowing people to come as they are and to enjoy freedom as a customer.

6.5 Implications for future research

While conducting our research we have discovered areas that were not within the range of the study. We feel like many of these make interesting propositions for other researches and therefore they have been included as implications for future research.

- Differences in male and female preferences regarding the choice of retailer.
- If the same factors in the retail environment affect customers from different countries and cultures.

- Differences between genders concerning shopping behaviour.
- The effect of a bad customer experience on the decision to re-visit the retailer.
- The male and female view on desired comfort in the retail environment.
- The importance of location regarding the ability to attract customers.
- The impact on customer experience when it comes to customers serving as co-producers.
- The importance for retailers to provide social activities in combination with the shopping experience.
- The affect on customer experience in the retail environment regarding retailers offering a broad product assortment.
- The importance of social responsibility within the retail industry.

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Appendix A

Interview guide IKEA (English version)

Basic info

Age _____

Gender _____

RQ1

In order to describe and to get an extensive picture of how the factors affecting the customer's decision to visit IKEA can be described we have chose to form our interview based on the questions described below.

In order to study customer's social motives and how they were affected by the in-store graphics the following questions will be asked:

- Did you visit IKEA by yourself or with someone?
- Was the visit to IKEA planned or something you did spontaneously?
- Did you visit the IKEA café or restaurant?
- Did you, or anyone accompanying you, use IKEA's baby-sitting services?
- What did you think about the way the IKEA store was designed?

In order to study the situational, consumer, and retailer factors affecting store shopping the following questions will be asked:

- Did you find the products you were looking for when you visited IKEA?
- Were the products you wanted to buy easy to find?
- Was it easy to gain information about the products?
- What did you think of IKEA's opening hours?
- Did the shopping experience take the amount of time you expected it to take?
- Did you use the IKEA catalogue before or during your visit?

RQ2

In order to describe and to get an extensive picture of how the retail environment can be designed to enhance customer experience we have chosen to form our interview based on the questions described below.

In order to study the importance of the brand and customer expectations the following questions will be asked:

- Did you choose to go to IKEA because of the cost advantage that IKEA claims to have compared with other furniture stores?
- Based on your latest experience, will you visit IKEA again?
- Would you recommend IKEA to other people?

In order to study the importance of entertainment in the shopping environment the following questions will be asked:

- Was it comfortable to shop at IKEA?
- Do you think that the design of the shopping environment at IKEA gives you possibility to save time?
- How far did you have to travel to visit IKEA?
- What do you think of IKEA's parking facilities, concerning safety and availability?
- Did the IKEA experience attract you to visit the store as much as the products did?

In order to study how costumers are affected by IKEA's self-service and co-production activities the following questions will be asked:

- What do you think of the self-service at IKEA where you go to the large stockrooms and get your own products?
- Did you buy any product at IKEA that you had to assemble yourself?

Other questions:

- *Is there anything else on your mind that you would like to add to this interview?*

Appendix B

Intervju guide IKEA (svensk version)

Grundläggande information

Ålder _____

Kön _____

Forskningsfråga 1

För att kunna beskriva och erhålla en mer utförlig uppfattning om hur faktorer som påverkar kundernas att besöka IKEA kan beskrivas har vi valt att basera vår intervju på frågorna som presenteras nedan.

För att kunna studera kundernas sociala motiv och hur de blev påverkade av detaljhandelns miljö kommer följande frågor att ställas:

- Besökte du IKEA själv eller i sällskap med någon?
- Var besöket på IKEA planerat eller någonting som du gjorde spontant?
- Besökte du IKEAs kafé eller restaurang under ditt besök?
- Utnyttjade du, eller någon i ditt sällskap, IKEAs barnvakt tjänster?
- Vad tyckte du om hur IKEA butiken var designad?

För att kunna studera läges-, konsument-, och återförsäljarfaktorerna som påverkar butik shopping kommer följande frågor att ställas:

- Hittade du produkterna som du sökte efter då du besökte IKEA?
- Var produkterna som du ville köpa lätta att hitta?
- Var det lätt att finna information om produkterna?
- Vad tyckte du om öppettiderna på IKEA?
- Tog köp upplevelsen den tid du förväntade dig att den skulle ta?
- Använde du IKEA katalogen före eller under ditt besök på IKEA?

Forskningsfråga 2

För att kunna beskriva och erhålla en mer utförlig uppfattning om hur detaljhandels miljö kan designas för att ge större intensitet åt kund upplevelsen har vi valt att basera vår intervju på frågorna som beskrivs nedan.

För att kunna studera vikten av varumärket och förväntningar hos kunden kommer följande frågor att ställas:

- Valde du att besöka IKEA på grund av att IKEA är känd för att erbjuda kostnads förmåner jämfört med andra möbel affärer?
- Baserat på din senaste upplevelse; kommer du att besöka IKEA igen?
- Skulle du rekommendera IKEA till andra?

För att kunna studera vikten av underhållning i detaljhandels miljö kommer följande frågor att ställas:

- Var det bekvämt att handla på IKEA?
- Tycker du att designen på IKEA butiken ger dig möjlighet att spara tid då du ska handla?
- Hur långt var du tvungen att resa för att besöka IKEA?
- Vad anser du om IKEAs parkerings utrymmen, då det gäller säkerhet och tillgänglighet?
- Blev du lockad att besöka IKEA på grund av den annorlunda köp upplevelsen som IKEA erbjuder lika mycket som du lockades av produkterna?

För att kunna studera hur kunder påverkas av IKEAs självbetjäningstjänster och självmonterings aktiviteter kommer följande frågor att ställas:

- Vad tycker du om självbetjäningen på IKEA där du går till lagret och hämtar dina varor själv?
- Köpte du någon vara på IKEA som du var tvungen att montera själv?

Övriga frågor:

- Är det någonting annat du skulle vill lägga denna intervju?