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ENHANCING LAYOUT EFFECTIVENESS: ANALYZING IN-STORE EXPERIENCE IN SPORTS RETAIL

[Muhammad Syahir bin Zulkifli¹, Muhammad Faizal bin Kutip², Adam Afif Mohamad Azmi³, Muhammad Zakwan Rusydi Suhaimi⁴, Fazli Hisam Mohd Zainol Abidin⁵, Mohd Jazimin bin Ahmad⁶]

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty Sport Science and Recreation, UiTM Shah Alam

⁵Customer Service Department, Decathlon Bandar Sri Damansara, fazlihisam.zainolabidin@decathlon.com

⁶Sports and Recreation Department, Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Bangi, jazimin@gapps.kptm.edu.my

Corresponding author: 2022946673@student.uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

[The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the sports retail landscape, compelling brands to adapt their in-store experiences to sustain customer satisfaction. This study examines the effectiveness of in-store experiences and layout strategies at Decathlon Bandar Sri Damansara, focusing on customer flow, signage, verticalization, and implementation logic. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured survey with random sampling. Multiple regression analysis showed that customer flow ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$) and signage ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$) had the strongest positive impact, followed by verticalization ($\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.01$) and implantation logic ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.05$). The model explained 67.4% of the variance in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.674$, $p < 0.001$). This research provides recommendations for Decathlon and similar retailers, emphasizing strategic layout planning, digital transformation, and sustainability. Addressing these factors can enhance customer engagement, strengthen competitive positioning, and ensure long-term business success.]

[**Keywords:** Layout effectiveness, Customer satisfaction, Sports retail, In-store experience, Marketing]

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1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped Malaysia's sporting landscape, as evidenced by the 2021 Malaysian Sports Index. Prime et al. (2020) highlight the pandemic's profound social and economic impacts, including disruptions to family dynamics, financial instability, and mental health challenges. These changes extended to the sports industry, where restrictions on physical activities and the closure of sporting venues led to a decline in community-based sports engagement. Simultaneously, the retail sector, particularly sporting goods, faced unprecedented challenges as consumers shifted to online shopping, accelerating digital transformation (Prime et al., 2021). Despite this shift, in-person experiences remain critical for consumer engagement, especially in sectors where sensory and interactive elements influence purchasing decisions. Former Minister of Youth and Sports, YB Reezal Merican Naina Merican, acknowledged these challenges, emphasizing the industry's rapid adaptation to digital platforms. Retailers invested in e-commerce, mobile optimization, and social media to sustain customer engagement and drive sales (Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, 2021).

The effectiveness of the retail layout is a critical factor influencing customer satisfaction and overall business performance in the retail sector. Retail layout optimizes customer experience and operational efficiency by strategically arranging products, aisles, displays, and service areas (Vrechopoulos et al., 2004). This research investigates the layout effectiveness of Decathlon, a prominent global sports retailer, by analyzing how its store design impacts customer behavior, satisfaction, and sales performance. Well-designed store layouts improve customer satisfaction by improving navigation and product visibility (Levy & Weitz, 2007) and can significantly impact consumer purchasing behavior and sales outcomes (Baker et al., 2002). As a result, the design of the layout is one of the variables that may contribute to the satisfaction of customers and convince them to return to the retail store in the future.

However, traditional stores continue to offer unique sensory experiences that online platforms cannot replicate. This study explores customer satisfaction in concept stores, focusing on industry leaders Nike, Adidas, and Decathlon, and examines how the unique attributes of sports products—high emotional involvement, community building, and evolving preferences—shape consumer experiences (Mullin et al., 2007). The rise of athleisure trends, which generated \$44 billion in sales in the US in 2015 (Eurostat, 2019), further underscores the importance of understanding customer satisfaction in retail sports. In summary, there is a need to conduct this study, which is focused on the effectiveness of in-store experiences towards customer satisfaction at Decathlon Bandar Sri Damansara,

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Layout Effectiveness Concept

Beyond the literal meaning of physical store design, layout effectiveness refers to a broader strategy focused on building long-term customer relationships using a "satisfied customer family" by Decathlon. This approach goes beyond simply creating a functional and visually appealing space; it prioritizes key elements that foster deep customer loyalty and maximize satisfaction, resulting in a comprehensive and engaging customer experience. This strategy is built around five key components: personalized service, high-quality products, active feedback mechanisms, robust after-sales support, and community engagement. Personalized service is essential, as tailored interactions, as Kumar, Pozza, and Ganesh (2013) emphasize, foster a sense of recognition and value among customers. This personalization increases customer satisfaction and encourages repeat business by making them feel seen and appreciated. By integrating these elements, Decathlon moves beyond traditional store layout effectiveness, creating a holistic retail experience that strengthens customer loyalty and long-term engagement.

Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) emphasized that product reliability and suitability play a key role in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty. An effective store layout supports this by showcasing products in a way that aligns with customer expectations, strengthening the retailer's reputation for dependability and trustworthiness. Additionally, Jones and Patel (2019) highlight the importance of active customer feedback mechanisms, which allow retailers to continuously refine their offerings based on consumer insights, further enhancing the shopping experience.

By actively seeking and responding to customer feedback, retailers can better align their services with customer expectations and continuously improve service quality. This shows customers that their opinions are valued, resulting in increased satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, excellent after-sales service, such as easy returns and exchanges,

significantly increases customer confidence and loyalty. Research by Garcia and Martinez (2020) indicates that comprehensive after-sales support makes customers feel secure in their purchases, knowing that the retailer stands behind their products, fostering a sense of trust and reliability. Finally, community engagement through events and activities helps to strengthen the relationship between customers and retailers. According to Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig (2007), such initiatives create a sense of belonging and community among customers, converting them into loyal brand advocates. These elements—personalized service, high-quality products, active feedback, robust after-sales support, and community engagement—form the foundation of the "Satisfied Customer Family" approach, ultimately increasing customer satisfaction and fostering long-term loyalty, demonstrating that layout effectiveness extends far beyond the physical space to include a comprehensive strategy of relationship building and customer care.

2.2 Layout Performance

Layout performance in sports retail refers to the spatial arrangement of products within a store aimed at enhancing customer experience and maximizing sales. Research in this area highlights the importance of factors such as product placement, aisle design, and store layout in influencing consumer behavior and purchase decisions. A study by Kim, Fiore, and Niehm (2010) investigated the impact of store layout on consumer perceptions and purchase intentions in the context of sporting goods retail. The researchers found that a well-designed store layout, including clear signage, wide aisles, and strategic product placement, positively influenced consumers' perceptions of the store's atmosphere and their likelihood to make purchases. Similarly, Grewal, Baker, Levy, and Voss (2003) emphasized the importance of spatial design in retail environments, noting that factors such as store layout, aisle width, and product placement significantly influence shoppers' browsing behavior and purchase decisions. For instance, organizing products logically and making popular items easily accessible can encourage impulse purchases and increase overall sales performance.

Recent studies confirm that store layout significantly influences consumer movement, buying behavior, and preferences (Vidani, 2016). The qualitative and quantitative aspects of retail store layouts, including the benefits of verticalization in sports retail, have been extensively studied. Verticalization, which organizes products by their intended use or category, enhances customer experience by simplifying decision-making and increasing cross-selling opportunities (Jones et al., 2020). Physical stores offer unique advantages, such as the ability to inspect products for quality and immediate product possession, which online stores cannot replicate (Bloomberg, 2018). Retail literature has identified several metrics related to rack layouts, including sales productivity, shrinkage, shopper time spent in the store, shopper satisfaction or frustration, the number of unplanned purchases, and product exposure (Dunne et al., 1995; Turley and Milliman, 2000; Lu and Seo, 2015). Among these, product exposure on racks is particularly critical, as it serves as a sales stimulus (Cairns, 1962; Cairns, 1963; Anderson, 1979; Dreze et al., 1994; D'Astous, 2000). Given that approximately 80% of all purchase decisions are made in-store, including planned, unplanned, and substitute purchases (Point of Purchase Advertising International, 2014), it is evident that shoppers are more likely to buy what they see (Ebster and Garaus, 2015). The systematic visual representation of a layout allows for an assessable comparison of various locations within one layout and across multiple physical arrangements (Pradhan, Tshogay, & Vidani, 2016). For example, a study conducted in a bookstore demonstrated that products with high exposure from key pathways, where shoppers had additional visual contact, experienced increased product interaction (Modi, Harkani, Radadiya, & Vidani, 2016). These findings underscore the importance of strategic store layout and product placement in enhancing customer satisfaction and driving sales.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative research, whereby collecting and analyzing the data on customer preferences and behaviors will help sports retailers identify the trends and patterns that inform strategic decisions. Overall, quantitative research offers a rigorous and systematic approach to generating empirical data, enhancing our understanding of consumer behavior in sports retail, and supporting evidence-based decision-making to improve business outcomes (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, a cross-sectional survey was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data from participants. The questionnaire included a series of closed-ended questions and questions with a scale to measure the opinions of respondents designed to measure various aspects of customer satisfaction and layout effectiveness at Decathlon Bandar Sri Damansara, ensuring the collection of quantifiable data for statistical analysis.

The population for this study is 73,591 customers, according to Decathlon Bandar Sri Damansara data of customers in 2022. In this case, customers who have purchased items from the football departments are randomly chosen because their experiences directly relate to the study's focus on layout effectiveness and customer satisfaction; therefore, this population

helps the researcher achieve research objectives. This method ensures a systematic and representative selection of participants from this targeted group. In summary, the selection of 150 respondents for this study is well-justified and surpasses the minimum sample size requirements for simple regression analysis. According to Hair et al. (2019), simple regression analysis typically necessitates a minimum of 50 samples, with 100 samples being the preferred choice in most research scenarios. Therefore, the sample size of 150 selected not only satisfies but also exceeds these recommendations, thereby improving the reliability and validity of the study's results.

The questionnaire includes three sections: Section A: demographic information; Section B: layout effectiveness (customer flow, signage, verticalization, implantation logic, and facing); and Section C: customer satisfaction. Questions are designed using a Likert scale to quantify participants' perceptions. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed using multiple regression analysis to achieve this study objective. Upon finalizing the questionnaire, data collection was conducted following the predetermined timeline, ensuring consistency and accuracy to uphold data reliability and integrity. Following data collection, a comprehensive data analysis plan must be developed, detailing the statistical techniques and methodologies. This plan must encompass descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, along with any necessary data transformations or adjustments to ensure robust and meaningful findings.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The multiple regression analysis assesses the impact of layout effectiveness and customer satisfaction on overall customer satisfaction. The model summary reveals an R-value of 0.690, indicating a strong positive relationship between independent and dependent variables. The R² value of 0.475 shows that 47.5% of the variation in overall customer satisfaction is explained by layout effectiveness and customer satisfaction, while the remaining 52.5% is attributed to other factors not included in the model. The Adjusted R² of 0.457 accounts for the number of predictors, affirming that the model is a good fit.

Table 1. Multiple regression
Enhancing layout effectiveness: Analyzing in-store experience and customer satisfaction model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.690 ^a	0.475	0.457	1.5562

The ANOVA table below further supports the model's statistical significance, with a regression sum of squares of 303.833 and a residual sum of squares of 335.16. The F statistics (26.108) and its significance level ($p < 0.001$) indicate that the regression model is statistically significant in predicting overall customer satisfaction.

Table 2. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1					
Regression	303.833	5	50.767	26.108	<.001b
Residual	335.16	144	2.328		
Total	638.993	149			

a Dependent Variable: Customer_satisfaction

Signage and verticalization significantly affect customer satisfaction, while implantation logic and customer flow do not. The most significant predictors are verticalization ($B = 0.294$, $p < .001$) and signage ($B = 0.131$, $p = 0.03$). However, implantation logic ($B = 0.079$, $p = 0.321$) and customer flow ($B = 0.039$, $p = 0.528$) do not predict customer satisfaction

because their p-values exceed 0.05. This suggests that while signage and verticalization are important for customer satisfaction, implantation logic, and customer flow may need more research or contextual factors.

Table 3. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Content)	6.149	1.602		2.839	<.001
	Signage	0.131	0,06	0.205	2.191	<.001
	Verticalization	0.294	0.087	0.306	3.367	<.001
	Implantation logic	0.079	0.079	0.087	0.995	0.321
	Customer flow	0.039	0.062	0.06	0.632	0.528

Discussions

The analysis demonstrates that verticalization, facing, and signage significantly contribute to customer satisfaction, with verticalization exhibiting the strongest positive influence. The model explains 47.5% of the variance in customer satisfaction. The remaining 52.5% is probably the result of other elements like pricing, product quality, or customer service. Consequently, it is advised to take a comprehensive approach that incorporates these layout components with more general customer experience tactics. Consequently, it is advised to take a comprehensive approach that incorporates these layout components with more general customer experience tactics. Future studies could concentrate on creating a thorough model that incorporates all pertinent elements and how they interact, or they could carry out longitudinal research to monitor the long-term effects of integrated layout strategies on business outcomes and customer satisfaction.

Signage significantly contributes to customer satisfaction. Foxall (1992) and Johnson and Smith (2019) highlight the importance of clear, consistent signage. The significant coefficient for signage confirms its positive influence on customer satisfaction. However, Smithson & Garcia (2020) emphasize the need for inclusivity in signage strategies. This contributes by empirically demonstrating the positive impact of signage on satisfaction within Decathlon. It also underscores the importance of inclusive considerations. In addition, the verticalization also contributes to customer satisfaction. It is a vital component as it contributes to customer satisfaction through product visibility and encourages cross-selling (Patel et al., 2020; Evren Gul, 2022). The regression analysis shows that verticalization has the strongest positive contribution. However, Garcia & Martinez (2020) warn about potential limitations to consumer choice due to narrow categorization. This contributes by quantifying the strong positive impact of verticalization on customer satisfaction within Decathlon. It also acknowledges the potential for negative consequences related to limiting choice.

However, the implantation logic and customer flow, while slightly positive, do not show a statistically significant influence on customer satisfaction. Product organization plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions. Consequently, customer unfamiliarity with store layouts may reduce reliance on implantation strategies. According to Castro et al. (2013), consumers are more likely to buy products when they are organized and completely provided than when they have been disorganized and just one product is left. This phenomenon can be determined by perceived product value, shopping convenience, and psychological comfort, all of which influence consumer confidence and readiness to buy. Similarly, customer flow shows an insignificant influence on customer satisfaction. Consumers may appreciate an unobstructed, easy-to-navigate layout, but they often place greater emphasis on factors such as product quality, pricing, and promotional offers when forming overall satisfaction judgments (Gauri et al., 2021).

The study highlights the significant impact of verticalization, facing, and signage on customer satisfaction, with verticalization having the strongest influence. These elements improve product visibility, enhance organization, and encourage cross-selling, reinforcing findings from previous research. Signage, in particular, plays a crucial role in guiding customers and improving their shopping experience. However, implantation logic and customer flow do not show a statistically significant effect on satisfaction, suggesting that factors such as pricing, product quality, and promotions may

have a stronger influence on consumer perceptions. While an efficient store layout contributes to convenience, customers tend to prioritize product availability and value over navigation ease.

5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this analysis has shown that strategic store layout and design have a significant impact on customer experience and business performance at Decathlon Bandar Sri Damansara. Although product-facing and verticalization are significant factors that influence customer satisfaction, their impact is greatest when applied comprehensively. To prevent traffic jams and improve the overall shopping experience, this entails giving priority to clear and consistent signage for effective wayfinding, optimizing product placement through strategic cross-merchandising and engaging experiential zones, and skillfully managing customer flow. By giving this integrated approach top priority, Decathlon can produce a more user-friendly, interesting, and fulfilling experience that increases customer loyalty and boosts sales. Future research should concentrate on creating a thorough model that incorporates customer flow, signage, verticalization, product placement, and product facing to precisely predict their combined influence on key performance indicators. This will help to ensure ongoing improvement and adaptation in the constantly changing retail landscape. Contextual elements like store size, location, and target demographics should be considered by this model. To maximize their physical spaces and provide genuinely customer-centric experiences, retailers will find great value in longitudinal studies that monitor the long-term effects of integrated layout strategies on metrics like sales, customer satisfaction, repeat business, and brand advocacy. Decathlon's continued dedication to research and data-driven decision making will enable it to stay at the forefront of retail innovation and continuously satisfy its customers' evolving needs.

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