

CONSUMERS' FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF CONSUMPTION ENVIRONMENTS: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE



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Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo es analizar las diferencias culturales entre los consumidores finlandeses y españoles en lo que respecta a los aspectos visuales de los entornos de consumo. El texto aborda estas cuestiones mediante la ampliación del análisis de la percepción de los consumidores de las claves del entorno al estudio de la experiencia de los entornos de consumo. El objeto de este artículo es, en primer lugar, analizar los generadores de las primeras impresiones visuales en el consumidor y, en segundo lugar, estudiar el mecanismo de aproximación-evitación al evocar la dimensión de los entornos visuales. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas personales en Finlandia y España. Se mostraron seis fotos de interiores de cafés a 200 encuestados de Finlandia y a otros 200 encuestados de España. A los encuestados se les pidió que eligieran el café al que les gustaría y al que no les gustaría ir y después decir por qué lo habían elegido. En el artículo se explica la forma en que los generadores de las primeras impresiones visuales (rasgos distintivos, estilo, atmósfera, funcionalidad y accesibilidad) se relacionan con los cuatro mecanismos de aproximación-evitación al evocar las dimensiones de los entornos visuales (percibir, pensar, sentir y actuar). Los resultados iniciales indican cómo una misma dimensión evaluativa puede producir tanto conductas de aproximación como de evitación. En el documento se señalan y analizan las diferencias culturales en lo que se refiere a las estimaciones de los consumidores y a la interpretación de los entornos visuales.

Palabras clave: *Primera impresión visual, entorno de consumo y cultura.*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze cultural differences between Finnish and Spanish consumers with regard to the visual aspects of consumption environments. The paper approaches these issues by extending the analysis of consumers' perception of environmental cues to the analysis of the experiencing of consumption environments. The objectives of this paper are first to examine what are the creators of consumers' visual first impressions, and second to examine the approach and avoidance evoking dimensions of visual environments. The data was collected with personal interviews in Finland and Spain. Six photos of the interiors of cafés were shown to 200 respondents from Finland and to 200 respondents from Spain. The respondents were asked to select the café where they would like and would not like to go, and then to say why they had chosen them. The paper discusses how the creators of visual first impressions (distinctive features, style, atmosphere, functionality and accessibility) are related to the four approach and avoidance evoking dimensions of visual environments (the sense, think, feel, and act type of experiences). The initial findings indicate how a same dimension of evaluation could evoke both approach and avoidance behavior. The paper points out and discusses the cultural differences in consumers' evaluations and interpretations of visual environments.

Keywords: *Visual first impression, consumption environment, culture.*

1. Introduction

Consumers face often situations in which the decision to select a restaurant, café or shop must be done quickly on the basis of the environmental cues. There might be great quantity of choices, each of them competing to get the attention of potential customers. Only a quick glance from the door might be all that is needed to tell which one of the previously unknown places is suitable and attractive enough to be selected and entered. In this paper we are interested in visual first impressions that are formed in this kind of situations, when consumers either select or reject a place on the basis of its visual environmental cues.

Visual first impressions are influential. For instance the general appearance, visible cues and non-verbal communication are often the key factors that draw most of our attention when we meet a new

person for the first time. People form also impressions of and preferences for places and locations on the basis of the visual cues. These and related phenomena are known in environmental psychology and interpersonal communications (e.g. Kaplan and Kaplan, 1983; Demarais and White, 2005). However, visual first impressions have not been examined in the context of retail and service environments.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze cultural differences between Finnish and Spanish consumers with regard to the visual aspects of consumption environments. The paper has two objectives: first to examine what are the creators of consumers' visual first impressions, and second to examine the approach and avoidance evoking dimensions of visual environments.

In this study we regard consumption environments as built and designed urban

spaces. Examples of these are urban retail and service formats like stores, cafés, restaurants and fast food outlets. In the empirical research we focus on cafés. Cafés are both elements of urban consumption environments and distinctive parts of urban culture. While cafés provide physical and social settings for various consumption activities they are also objects of consumption and sources for consumption experiences.

2. Dimensions and elements of consumption environments

In retail literature consumption environments have been approached mainly normatively like categorizing the physical and visual dimensions of store interiors. The importance of store atmospherics has been recognized and studied since the 1970s (Kumar and Karande, 2000). Consumers perceive environmental cues with their senses of sight, hearing, smell and touch. Studies on visual environments have dominated the literature about atmospherics.

Consumers' experiences of the environment are based on the perception of environmental cues, the elements and stimuli in the physical environment. The internal environmental cues of a store (e.g. visual communication, lightning, colors, background music, and scents) can be created in such a way that they match the preferences of the target customers (e.g. Bellizzi, Crowley and Hasty, 1983; Bellizzi and Hite, 1992; Ward, Bitner and Barnes, 1992; Babin and Attaway, 2000; Morrin and Ratneshwar, 2000; Levy and Weitz, 2004). Moreover, many external environmental cues like outside advertisements, signs and store front designs can be used to increase the attractiveness of a store (Ward, Bitner and Barnes, 1992).

The environmental cues can be classified into three classes: ambient cues, design cues, and social cues (d'Astous, 2000;

Baker *et al.*, 2002; Bitner, 1992). Ambient cues like air quality, background noises and cleanness are perceived as prevailing conditions, that typically remain below the level of awareness. Design cues, the aesthetic and functional elements of the environment, are often the primary visual stimuli. Aesthetic design cues include architecture, colors, scale, forms, shapes, and the style of furniture. Examples of functional design cues are the layout, comfortableness, signs and symbols. Social cues relate to the number and characteristics of other customers and personnel. Consumers use the environmental cues to interpret also the symbolic aspects of the consumption environments. Some cues might carry meanings that are known and understood only by persons of the same reference group (e.g. Rosenbaum, 2005).

Environmental cues can be used to manage the degree of elaborateness (i.e. the complexity and order) of physical environments (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000; Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003). Lean environments are visually simple and logically organized as they include only few visual elements, physical spaces or forms. In lean environments (e.g. in self-service cafés and fast-food restaurants), customers can easily perceive the key elements of the place and the stages of the self-service process. Elaborate environments are multifaceted places consisting of many visual elements, forms, details and other cues. A consumer might not easily make sense of the place as a functional entity. This can make the place more difficult to approach. On the other hand the multitude of environmental cues and some degree of disorganization (as in flea markets and antique shops) can increase customers' interest towards the place and activate a consumer at the level of thinking, behavior and emotions.

3. From perception to experience

When approaching environmental cues from the consumer viewpoint studies have mainly asked how consumers perceive environmental cues and what kind of reactions these cues bring about. The perception process turns the environmental cues into a subjective reality (e.g. Solomon, 2006). However, the interaction between a consumer and an environment cannot be viewed simply as being a consumer's reaction to environmental cues or to situational factors (e.g. Belk, 1975; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The interaction between a consumer and an environment has also dynamic, social, and symbolic aspects. Studies based on dynamic reciprocal interaction approach to consumer behavior (e.g. Laaksonen, 1994) emphasize the reciprocal nature of the interaction between a consumer and an environment. The interaction is also social since consumers are not isolated individuals but social beings that seek social-identity experiences and relations with other persons in the environments (e.g. Schmitt, 1999). The consumer environment interaction is also symbolic, since consumers exist also in a symbolic environment where they assign for instance culturally shared meanings to situations and products by interpreting the various symbols (e.g. Solomon, 1983, 2006).

When a consumption event is viewed as being constructed on reciprocal interaction the perception process may turn out to be too limited. The environment extends to beyond the perception of environmental cues and the interpretation of those cues. A consumer not only interprets but also constructs and creates the consumption environment. It is not just a question of perception, it is also experiencing. In this way the environment as a place becomes a subjective space (e.g. Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; MaLaran and Brown, 2005).

In the experience process the environment as a place turns into the environment as a space.

To give an emphasis on the experiencing of the environment broadens the traditional views in consumer behavior literature concerning feeling, thinking, and acting (e.g. Holbrook, 2000). The experiencing involves the sensing and intuiting of the environment, the thinking and imagining of the environment, and the behaving and acting (not just reacting) in the environment (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Elliott, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). The sensing is not only limited to a consumer's perceptions of the environment with the senses of sight, hearing, smell and touch. It includes also a consumer's feelings and emotions about the environment. The thinking involves not only cognitive processing, analyzing and reasoning, but also imagining (e.g. MacInnis and Price, 1987). The behavior refers to a consumer's physical actions and behavioral reactions like approach and avoidance behaviors.

To experience the environment means that the environmental cues evoke a state, a kind of impression, in consumer. This state determines how a physical place turns into a subjectively experienced space. There are no studies that had explicitly analyzed this state or impression. However, it has been referred in a number of earlier studies (e.g. Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Belk, 1980). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) maintain for instance that the environmental stimuli produce emotional states. Besides, it can be argued that the states evoked by the visual environmental cues can also be less affective. The visual first impression is an entity that contains consumer's cognitive evaluations as well as emotional and behavioral reactions (compare Bitner, 1992). The intensity of the emotional states may vary so that there can be emotionally weak, neutral, and strong visual first impressions.

First impressions can be based on all types of environmental stimuli that consumers obtain with their senses of sight, hearing, smell, and touch. Visual environmental cues are often the primary stimuli that are perceived by the consumers. Because the perception is selective, subjective, and relative (e.g. Solomon, 2006) visual first impressions are not based on the perception of all environmental cues in environment. Only a part of the cues are perceived while the rest remains unobserved. In that sense the visual first impressions are based on incomplete information of the environment. However, studies in the field of environmental psychology (e.g. Herzog, Kaplan and Kaplan, 1982) have shown that even a short viewing time is enough for the perception of the most dominant features and elements of the environment.

The experiencing of the visual environmental cues turns into visual first impressions that can go beyond the mere perception and evaluation of specific environmental cues. The visual impressions can be also be a result of an experience that involves intuiting and imagining (e.g. Zajonc, 1980; Gladwell, 2005). This kind of holistic experience cannot necessarily be reduced to the perception of individual environmental cues or elements in the environment (e.g. Ritterfeld and Cupchik, 1996).

The interpretations of the environments are also based on a consumer's prior information and experiences of similar environments (compare Bianchi-Berthouze, 2002). Certain types of combinations of environmental cues act as memory rules, mnemonics (e.g. Bitner, 1992), that assist the decision making and help the consumer to distinguish and classify different types of consumption environment such as cafés. This kind of prior information is stored in the form of cognitive maps in the mind of consumer (e.g. Kaplan and Kaplan, 1983).

Visual first impressions have an effect on the behavior of consumers. This can be seen in the Mehrabian-Russell environmental psychology model that, although it does not explicitly deal with first impressions but emotional states, maintains that all responses to an environment are either approach or avoidance behaviors (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Kenhove and Desrumaux, 1997; Tai and Fung, 1997). According to the model the environmental stimuli produce three dimensions of emotional states: pleasure –displeasure, arousal– nonarousal, and dominance–submissiveness (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Pleasure and arousal can be regarded as the foremost emotional states from the approach and avoidance point of view. However, it can be assumed that the created state needs not to be strongly emotional in order to produce either approach or avoidance reactions.

4. Empirical analysis

4.1. Research setting and methodology

In our research setting a person is selecting a place to go on the basis of its internal environmental cues (the photos of the interiors of the cafés). The photos represent the vision that appears to the consumer from the entrance of the café. This vision simulates the short instant when the visual first impression is formed. The six photos were selected so that the A3 size photo card would contain different environmental cues as well as lean and elaborate environments. All too visible brand names, logos and other such cues that would enable respondents to recognize the cafés were removed from photos. Also social cues were minimized by selecting photos where there were none or only few customers or personnel. By doing this we took away many cues that carried meanings but in order to

simplify the research setting we wanted to have environments with minimal meanings.

The data was collected by personal interviews, as a part of a larger study, among persons that were randomly selected from quotas regarding the gender and age of respondents, the time of the visit to café, the type of cafés, and the location of café inside the city. The data consists of answers from 200 Finnish and 200 Spanish consumers. The interviewer presented the photo card to the respondent and asked him to choose one café where he would like to go (selection; approach behavior), and where he would not like to go (rejection; avoidance behavior). Moreover, the respondent was asked to tell why he chose it.

The respondents' answers, the number of the photo selected and rejected, and the reasons given for the selection and rejection were coded and the codes inputted into the SPSS data base. The variance analysis (chi-square test) was used to find out the key differences between the Finnish and Spanish samples. The analysis and interpretation of the

dimensions of attractiveness and avoidance were done with the help of visualizations that were created with correspondence analysis, which allows to understand the relationships among several categorical dependent variables (Greenacre and Jörg, 1994).

4.2. Selected and rejected cafés

There are significant differences how people in Finland and Spain selected the café where they would like to go (chi-squared= 33,521; p=0.000) (Table 1). Two cafes, the café number 2 and 5 are especially worth pointing out here. In Finland the most attractive café is the café number 2, a sophisticated, modern and stylish café, while in Spain the most popular café is the café represented by photo number 5. The café number 2 is the most chosen as the second option in Spain as is the café number 5 the one chosen as the second option in Finland. Besides, in Finland the second option is distributed between the café presented in photo 5 and the ones presented in photos 4 and 6.

Table 1
 Cafés selected to go

	Finland	Spain	Test χ^2
Photo 1	7 3.5 %	19 9.5%	$\chi^2 = 33.521$ $p = 0.000$
Photo 2	79 39.5%	40 20.0%	
Photo 3	22 11.0%	15 7.5%	
Photo 4	30 15.0%	24 12.0%	
Photo 5	32 16.0%	68 34.0%	
Photo 6	30 15.0%	34 17.0%	

Vertical percentages.

When the Finnish respondents selected the café number 2, they described it with the words like nice (a significant difference), atmosphere (a significant difference), decoration, quiet and peaceful, clean (a significant difference), colors and trendy. This café was selected also for instance because of its good service, and functionality. In Spain, however, the most often mentioned reason was decoration (a significant difference). The Spanish people selected it also due to its friendliness (a significant difference), its ability to give something more than just a coffee (a significant difference), its style and because it is a modern café. In Spain it was described also being elegant, intimate, different (a significant difference), and relaxed.

In Finland the café number 5 was selected because of its spaciousness (a significant difference), atmosphere, quietness and peacefulness. Other reasons mentioned were nice and dark (both significant differences), reasons not expressed in big percentage in Spain. The main reason pointed out in Spain to select this café

was luminosity (a significant difference). The Spanish respondents selected this café also because of its quietness and peacefulness, and because the café was friendly (a reason that was not mentioned by the Finnish people interviewed). Also the decoration, to get more than just a coffee and the atmosphere were also mentioned. Besides, also terrace that was seen in the photo was valued in Spain.

There are also significant differences between Finland and Spain concerning the cafés where respondents would never go (Table 2). In both countries the café number 3 was most often selected as the café to be avoided. However, the Finnish respondents rejected it more often than Spanish respondents. Also in the second option there are differences, as the Finnish people selected café number 4 as a café where they would never go to, while Spanish respondents selected the café number 1. The biggest difference in percentage between the countries concern the café number 1, that was rejected more in Spain than in Finland.

Table 2
Cafés selected to never go

	Finland	Spain	Test χ^2
Photo 1	16 8.0%	46 23.0%	$\chi^2 = 20.949$ $p = 0.001$
Photo 2	14 7.0%	21 10.5%	
Photo 3	94 47.0%	71 35.5%	
Photo 4	40 20.0%	33 16.5%	
Photo 5	17 8.5%	16 8.0%	
Photo 6	19 9.5%	13 6.5%	

Vertical percentages.

In Finland the most often mentioned reasons for the rejection of the café number 3 concerned the noisiness and restless of place, the cold atmosphere of the café, and the café's style that referred to a commercial centre. It was also described as being dark (a significant difference), too open (a significant difference), and having bad chairs and being sterile (a significant difference). The two foremost reasons for the rejection this café in Spain were the café's style that is similar than the cafes in the commercial centers, and the character of exhibition (a significant difference) concerning the placement of the tables and chairs in the open place. The Spanish people rejected it also because they did not like the decoration (a significant difference) and because they felt the atmosphere as cold.

4.3. Creators of visual first impression

When the different reasons were coded, we found out that a same environmental cue, such as decoration, color or illumination, could be used, by different respondents, both as a reason for selecting and for rejecting a same café. This finding lead us to look for (1) the distinct classes of reasons and (2) the higher level dimensions of visual first impressions (see 4.4.) that would be the same in relation to both approach and avoidance behavior.

Here the following analysis our focus is not anymore on the customers' description in relation to particular environments, but on the analysis of the distinct classes of factors (i.e. the creators of visual first impressions) that emerge beyond the attribute level, and on the analysis of the differences between the Finnish and Spanish samples from the view point of the classes.

The analysis was carried out so that first a list of different reasons (showing the total

sample, as well as Finnish and Spanish samples) were formed and then the reason were classified into the following four classes:

1. Distinctive features
2. Style
3. Atmosphere
4. Functionality and accessibility

The above classification is based on the findings of the pilot study (Laaksonen, Laaksonen y Huuhka, 2006) that was conducted, with a similar research setting and data collection method, among Finnish consumers (43 respondents).

4.3.1. *Reasons for the selection*

There were several statistically significant differences between Finnish and Spanish samples concerning the reasons for the selection of the cafés (Table 3). Most of these reasons concerned atmosphere and style related factors. When selecting the cafés the Finnish respondents talked e.g. about the cleanness of the café, the people that would be there, and the products of the cafés (all significant differences, and reasons that were not used by the Spanish respondents). Moreover, more Finnish people than Spanish people referred to the nice atmosphere or just overall atmosphere when selecting the café (all significant differences). One of the reasons that was mentioned by the Spanish respondents, but not by the Finnish respondents, was that the café is friendly (a significant difference). In Spain the cafés were also more often selected because they were considered to be happy, comfortable, modern and young (all significant differences). Besides, distinctive features like luminosity and the decoration of the café (all significant differences) were mentioned more often in Spain than in Finland.

Table 3
Reasons for the selection of cafés

	Class	Total sample		Finland	Spain	Test χ^2	
Friendly	atmosphere	32	8.0	0.0	100.0	0.000	***
Nice	atmosphere	61	15.3	93.4	6.6	0.000	***
Happy	atmosphere	8	2.0	12.5	87.5	0.032	*
Something more	style	34	8.5	32.4	67.6	0.031	*
Atmosphere	atmosphere	53	13.3	66.0	34.0	0.012	
Beautiful	style	8	2.0	50.0	50.0	1.000	
Warm	atmosphere	14	3.5	64.3	35.7	0.276	
Similar to the one I use to go	style	7	1.8	14.3	85.7	0.057	
Comfortable	style	32	8.0	18.8	81.3	0.000	***
Complete	style	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Stylish	style	21	5.3	47.6	52.4	0.823	
With my style	style	10	2.5	20.0	80.0	0.055	
A passing through café	functionality	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Decoration	dist. features	77	19.3	35.1	64.9	0.004	**
Spacious	functionality	51	12.8	49.0	51.0	0.881	
Formal	atmosphere	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Young	style	8	2.0	12.5	87.5	0.032	*
Luminous	dist. features	74	18.5	37.8	62.2	0.020	*
Modern	style	19	4.8	26.3	73.7	0.034	*
Normal	style	5	1.3	40.0	60.0	0.653	
Dark	dist. features	6	1.5	66.7	33.3	0.411	
Traditional	style	16	4.0	37.5	62.5	0.307	
Quiet Peaceful	atmosphere	57	14.3	49.1	50.9	0.886	
Terrace	dist. features	11	2.8	36.4	63.6	0.359	
Big	functionality	2	0.5	50.0	50.0	1.000	
Glass	dist. features	8	2.0	50.0	50.0	1.000	
Different	style	6	1.5	50.0	50.0	1.000	
Distribution	functionality	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Intimate	atmosphere	13	3.3	69.2	30.8	0.159	
Simple	functionality	10	2.5	80.0	20.0	0.055	
Sophisticated	atmosphere	3	0.8	66.7	33.3	0.562	
Personal treatment	functionality	1	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.317	
Good service	functionality	3	0.8	66.7	33.3	0.562	
Original	style	1	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.317	
Functional	functionality	3	0.8	100.0	0.0	0.082	
Talk	atmosphere	1	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.317	
Couple	style	1	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.317	
Elegant	style	3	0.8	0.0	100.0	0.082	
Amusing	style	1	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.317	
Like me	style	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Clean	style	20	5.0	100.0	0.0	0.000	***
People	atmosphere	9	2.3	100.0	0.0	0.002	**
Internationality	style	3	0.8	100.0	0.0	0.082	
Trendy	style	10	2.5	100.0	0.0	0.001	**
Relaxed	atmosphere	4	1.0	50.0	50.0	1.000	

Masculine	style	1	0.3	100.0	0.0	0.317	
Colours	dist. features	43	10.8	58.1	41.9	0.258	
Products of café	functionality	4	1.0	100.0	0.0	0.044	*
Others		4	1.0	100.0	0.0	0.044	*

Horizontal percentages; *** p< 0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

The list of 49 different reasons in Table 3 was created by coding each respondent's answer with up to five different reason codes. The data (the total sample) contains a total of 768 reasons. In the

total sample the frequencies and the percentages of the five different classes (of the creators of visual first impressions) are as follows:

Distinctive features	219	29%
Style	210	27%
Atmosphere	257	34%
Functionality and accessibility	78	10%
Other	4	< 1%

The above findings seem to indicate that the majority of the reasons for the concerning the selection of the cafés are related to the atmosphere of the café. In the selection of the café to go people in general pay attention also to the distinctive features, and the style of the cafes.

4.3.2. *Reasons for the rejection*

Many statistically significant differences between the two samples were found also in the analysis of the reasons for the rejection of the cafés (Table 4). In Finland much more than in Spain the café was rejected because of the functionality related reasons (such as messy or too open layouts, a passing through character) (all significant differences). Also reasons referring to the atmosphere (dull, cold, noisy and restless) and to distinctive

features (dark, bad colors) and style (sterile, a smoking style of café) was mentioned more often in Finland than in Spain (all significant differences). Reasons referring to the style of café like too traditional style, franchise or standing up style and the serious atmosphere of the café (all significant differences) were mentioned by the Spanish but not by the Finnish respondents. In Spain the cafés were rejected more often due to the reasons that the respondents did not like the decoration of the café, they considered it being uncomfortable or too open in its display (exhibition) (all significant differences).

The total sample in Table 4 contains a total of 647 reasons that we coded into 52 reasons. The frequencies and the percentages of the five classes (of the creators of visual first impressions) are as follows:

Distinctive features	161	25%
Style	229	35%
Atmosphere	153	24%
Functionality and accessibility	104	16%

The findings seem to suggest that the rejection of the café is most often based on the style related reasons, whereas the selection of the café, as was shown earlier, was based on the atmosphere

related reasons. It seems also that reasons concerning the functionality and accessibility have a bigger role in the rejection than in the selection of the cafés.

Table 4
Reasons for the rejection of cafés

	Class	Total sample		Finland	Spain	Test χ^2	
Messy	functionality	25	6.3	76.0	24.0	0.007	**
Atmosphere	atmosphere	12	3.0	75.0	25.0	0.079	
Noisy Restless	atmosphere	46	11.5	69.6	30.4	0.005	**
Commercial centre	style	40	10.0	47.5	52.5	0.739	
Quarter	style	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Exhibition	functionality	22	5.5	4.5	95.5	0.000	***
Passing through	functionality	17	4.3	76.5	23.5	0.026	*
Much light	dist. Features	7	1.8	42.9	57.1	0.703	
Much modern	style	10	2.5	30.0	70.0	0.200	
Much typical	style	6	1.5	66.7	33.3	0.411	
Much traditional	style	8	2.0	0.0	100.0	0.004	**
Lifeless	atmosphere	6	1.5	33.3	66.7	0.411	
Antiquated	style	3	0.8	33.3	66.7	0.562	
Untidy	style	8	2.0	50.0	50.0	1.000	
Distribution	functionality	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	
Franchise	style	4	1.0	0.0	100.0	0.044	*
Cold	atmosphere	35	8.8	71.4	28.6	0.008	**
Impersonal	style	7	1.8	57.1	42.9	0.703	
Uncomfortable	style	30	7.5	6.7	93.3	0.000	***
Creeps	atmosphere	6	1.5	66.7	33.3	0.411	
Bad service	functionality	3	0.8	66.7	33.3	0.562	
Not my style	style	14	3.5	42.9	57.1	0.586	
No like decoration	dist. features	55	13.8	14.5	85.5	0.000	***
No seems café	style	29	7.3	58.6	41.4	0.335	
Dark	dist. features	49	12.3	69.4	30.6	0.004	**
Standing up	style	9	2.3	0.0	100.0	0.002	**
Young people	style	9	2.3	44.4	55.6	0.736	
Old people	style	4	1.0	25.0	75.0	0.315	
Small	functionality	4	1.0	25.0	75.0	0.315	
Posh	atmosphere	3	0.8	33.3	66.7	0.562	
Little intimacy	atmosphere	3	0.8	66.7	33.3	0.562	
Little Not cosy	atmosphere	16	4.0	56.3	43.8	0.610	
Self service	functionality	3	0.8	0.0	100.0	0.082	
Serious	atmosphere	6	1.5	0.0	100.0	0.014	*
Sophisticated	atmosphere	3	0.8	33.3	66.7	0.562	
Dirty	style	3	0.8	33.3	66.7	0.562	
Sad	atmosphere	2	0.5	0.0	100.0	0.156	

Dull	atmosphere	12	3.0	91.7	8.3	0.003	**
Snack	functionality	3	0.8	0.0	100.0	0.082	
Too big	functionality	2	0.5	50.0	50.0	1.000	
Odd	style	2	0.5	50.0	50.0	1.000	
No close treatment	functionality	1	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.317	
Bad colours	dist. features	30	7.5	70.0	30.0	0.023	*
Too open	functionality	18	4.5	100.0	0.0	0.000	***
Bad chairs tables	dist. features	20	5.0	70.0	30.0	0.066	
No people	atmosphere	3	0.8	100.0	0.0	0.082	
Sterile	style	11	2.8	100.0	0.0	0.001	**
Ugly	style	24	6.0	58.3	41.7	0.400	
Difficult move	functionality	1	0.3	100.0	0.0	0.317	
Without style	style	2	0.5	100.0	0.0	0.156	
Too simple	functionality	3	0.8	100.0	0.0	0.082	
Smoking	style	4	1.0	100.0	0.0	0.044	*

Horizontal percentages; *** p< 0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

4.4. Approach and avoidance evoking dimensions of visual environments

The creators of the visual first impressions (distinctive features, style, atmosphere, functionality and accessibility) have a

connection to the five different types of experiences proposed by Schmitt (1999) (sense, think, feel, act, and relate) as follows:

SENSE	what I see there are in the place	Distinctive features
THINK	what I think about the place	Style
FEEL	what I feel about the place	Atmosphere
ACT	what I could do in the place	Functionality and accessibility
RELATE	who could go there	

The distinctive features are visual environmental cues that the consumers merely perceive with their sense of sight. The consumer simply observes and registers what there are in the environment. The perception does not involve any evaluations of what is seen. Moreover, when sensing the environment, the person regards the environment as a space. Consumers' evaluations of the style of the café, involve thinking and cognitive processing of the visual environmental cues. When making style

related evaluations the person is not in the role of observer. He actively thinks and tries to figure out how the place looks like. The evaluations of the atmosphere of the café involve emotional reactions: the person is feeling the place. In this kind of affective experiences the person is experiencing the place as a mental space. The evaluations concerning the functionality and accessibility of the café are the act type of experiences: the person imagines how the place functions and what could be done in there. In the evaluations involving the think, feel, act and relate

type of experiences the person might not only use the environmental cues that are visible in the place but also her prior experiences and mental recollections of similar type of places. When the perception of the visual environments (sensing the place) turns into the experiencing of the visual environments (thinking, feeling, acting, and relating the space), the visual first impression contains also holistic evaluations that are based on intuiting and imagining.

The aim of the following analysis is to find out how the reasons indicated by the respondents (the creators of the visual first impressions) organize themselves in relation to each other, and how the resulted constellation of reasons could be interpreted from the viewpoint of the different types of experience (sense, think, feel, and act). We discuss what type of experiences would seem to be more related to the selection of the café (dimensions of approach) and what type of experiences to the rejection of café (dimensions of avoidance).

4.4.1. Dimensions of approach

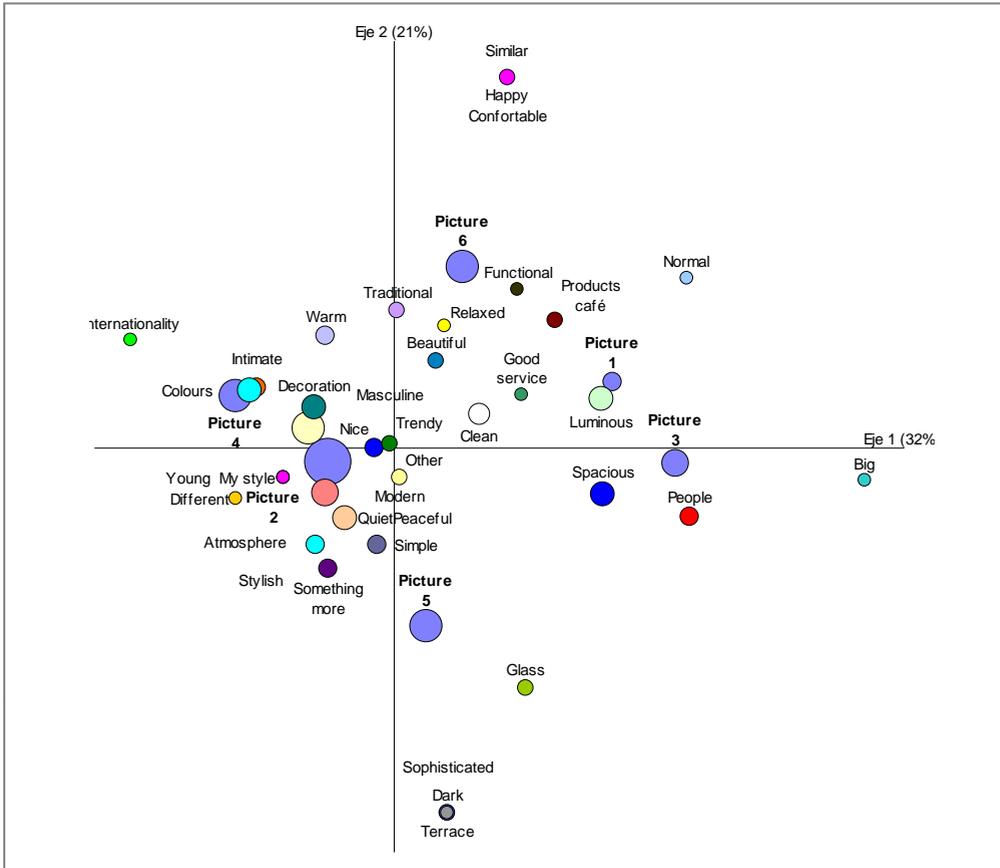
Finnish sample

In the Finnish sample the vertical axis refers to the FEEL and the SENSE type of visual experiences (Figure 1). On upper part of the axis there are respondents' evaluations of the atmosphere of the place (warm, relaxed) and of the style of the place (traditional, normal, comfortable). The evaluations of the atmosphere are the FEEL type of experiences that have similarities with the evaluations that a person does when a person actually is

present there in the café and experiences its atmosphere. The evaluations located on the lower side of axis are related to the distinctive features of the place (terrace, glass). These kind of evaluation are the SENSE type of experiences (i.e. the perceptions of the place). In these evaluations the respondents have just stated what they have seen that there are in the place without experiencing how the place feels. The vertical axis can also be interpreted as being a continuum referring to "place that distant from myself" (down side of the axis) "close to myself" (top side of the axis). If interpreted in the above-mentioned way, then this axis concerns also the degree of a person's imagined presence in the place.

In the Finnish sample the horizontal axis can be interpreted as being related to the ACT and THINK type of experiences. On the right side there are evaluations that concern the functionality of the café (big, spacious, products of the café). These are the ACT type of experiences of visual environments, that refer to the experiencing the spatial dimensions of the place and imagining the place through actions or through things that could be done there (e.g. eating the products served in the café). On the left side of the axis there are respondents' evaluations of the style of the cafés (my style, internationality). These evaluations are based on the THINK type of experiencing of the visual environments. The farther we move from the from the left to the right the more the evaluations detach from the functionality of the cafes and are replaced by the style and aesthetic related evaluations.

Figure 1
 Reasons to select a café: Finnish sample



Spanish sample

In the Spanish sample the reasons are much more concentrated than in the Finnish sample (Figure 2). Most of the reasons for the selection the cafés are organized and aligned in the direction of the vertical axis. This main axis can be interpreted to refer to the THINK and the SENSE type of visual experiences. On the down side of the vertical axis there are respondents' evaluations of the style of the cafés (sophisticated, modern, elegant). These are the THINK type of visual experiences. On the top side of the vertical axis there are evaluations concerning the

distinctive features of the café (big, spacious). These are respondents' evaluations of how the cafe is perceived as a place, and they belong to the SENSE type of visual experiences (perceptions of the place).

In the Spanish sample there are not any such wide dispersion of functionality and style related factors as was seen in the Finnish sample. However, there are far on the right side of the horizontal axis evaluations of the functionality of the cafés (a passing through café, personal treatment). These are the ACT type of visual experiences. This initial findings

4.4.2. *Dimensions of avoidance*

Finnish vs. Spanish comparisons

Same dimensions of approach could be identified both in the Finnish and Spanish samples. However, there are cultural differences of how the different types of visual experiences dominate the visual first impression on which the selection of place to go was based on. The analysis seem to suggest that in Finland people base their evaluations of the visual environments more on the SENSE and the ACT type of visual experiences, than the FEEL and the THINK type of experiences. However in the Finnish sample the FEEL and THINK type of experiences were not in such a dominating role than in the Spanish sample. Thus it seems that when selecting the café to go the Finnish people seem to put emphasis on the distinctive features and functionality of the cafes. The atmosphere and style of the café have also a role in the selection of place to go but from the visual first impression point of view the FEEL and the THINK type of experiences seem to remain in the secondary role. The key finding is also that the emotional FEEL type of visual experiences seem to have a much more dominating role in Spain than in Finland. In Spain there is an emphasis also on the THINK type of experiences concerning the style of the cafés. Besides, in Spain the selection of the café to go is done on mainly on emotional centered reasons and on the social aspects of the café. The findings suggest that in Spain people are more attracted to café if they evaluate it to be "a café for us" rather than "my style of café". This kind of dominance of social aspects in the selection of the café to go was not seen in the Finnish sample. In Finland cafés were selected more on the basis of individualistic reasons, and the visual first impressions contained evalua-

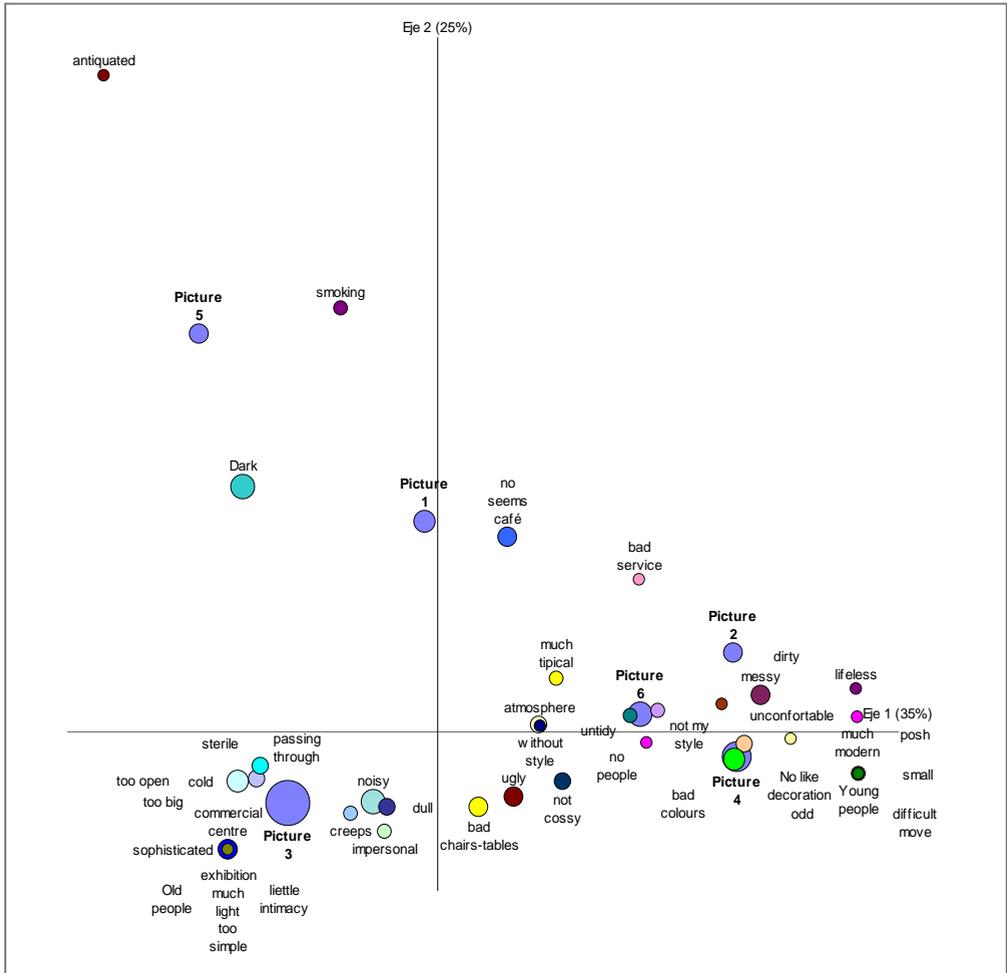
tions of the café as "a café for me" vs. "a café for the others".

Finnish sample

In the Finnish sample most of the respondents' evaluations are aligned horizontally (Figure 3). The horizontal axis is the primary one from the viewpoint of the dimensions of avoidance. This axis refers to the SENSE and especially to the FEEL type of experiences. Starting from the left side there are respondents' evaluations of the distinctive features (dark) as well as the evaluations of the style of cafes (sterile, commercial centre). The THINK type of experiences (the evaluations of the style; without style, much typical) are found especially near the middle of the horizontal axis, whereas the FEEL type of experiences (the evaluations of the atmosphere; lifeless, posh) are located far on the right side. Here the emotional evaluations are not anymore as concentrated as they were when the evaluations concerned the environments were the people wanted to go.

The upper side of the vertical axis can be interpreted to be related to the respondents' evaluations of the functionality (difficult to move). The lower side of the axis refers more to the style (impersonal). This axis can be interpreted to contain both the ACT and the FEEL type of visual experiences. However, there are not any clear concentrations of these evaluations. The findings seem to indicate that when rejecting the café on the basis of the visual first impressions, the respondents have imagined the place to have some functional features (bad service) and therefore the place is regarded as unattractive and not worth going.

Figure 3
Reasons to reject a café: Finnish sample



Spanish sample

In the Spanish sample (Figure 4) the vertical axis refers to the SENSE and FEEL type of visual experiences. The respondents' evaluations of what there is in the environment (distinctive features; much light, dark) are mostly located on the upper half of the figure. These can be interpreted to be the SENSE type of experiences. The evaluations based on the FEEL type of experiences of the atmosphere are mostly located on the lower side

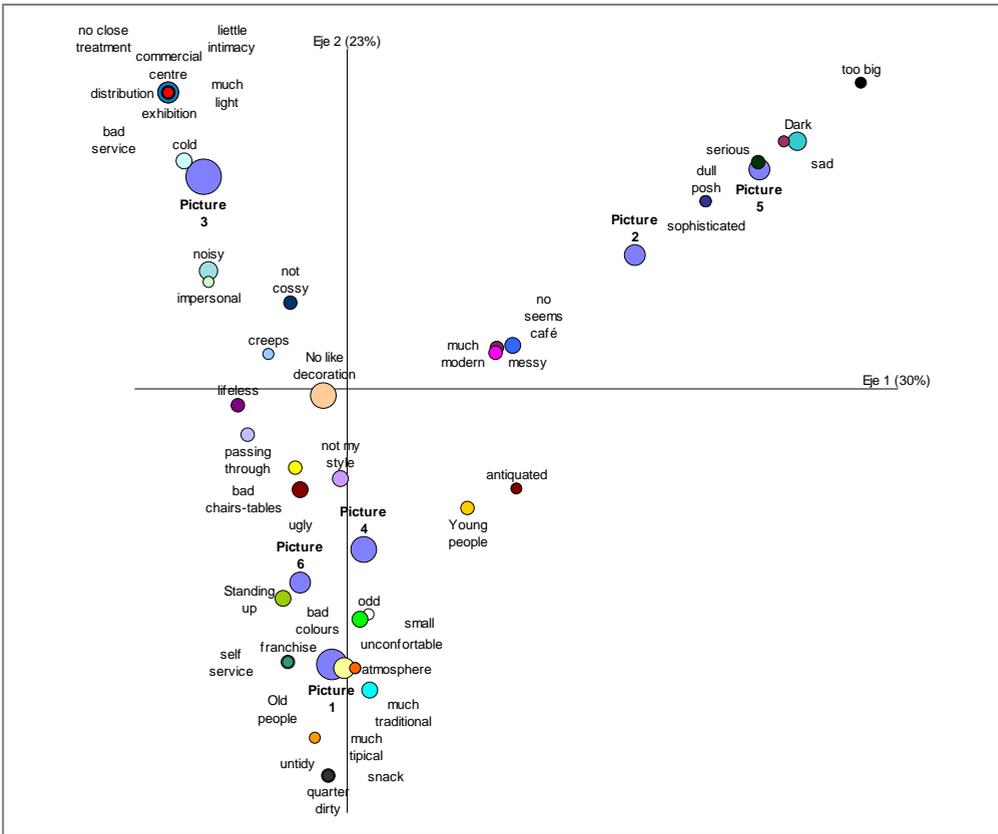
of the vertical axis. It seems that the FEEL type of visual experiences are highly dominating from the viewpoint of the dimensions of the avoidance.

The horizontal axis can be interpreted to refer to the functional (too big, dark) and style related evaluations (commercial centre) of the visual environments. The ACT type of experiences of the functionality of the café are mainly located on the left side of the axis. The THINK type of evaluation of the atmosphere of the café

can be found mainly around the middle axis. There is also on the far right side of the axis a diagonally aligned cluster containing mainly evaluations of the distinctive features and the atmosphere of

the cafés. It seems that this cluster refers to particular types of visual environments (distinct types of cafés) that are rejected due to the negative feelings that they evoke.

Figure 4
 Reasons to reject a café: Spanish sample



Finnish vs. Spanish comparisons

Both in Finland and in Spain the visual environments were rejected on the basis of same dimensions of avoidance. The interpretation of the Figures 3 and 4 showed that there exists in the both samples a dominant SENSE vs. FEEL axis. In Finland this was the horizontal axis, and in Spain the vertical axis. In both countries (however, especially in Spain) the majority

of the respondents evaluations aligned themselves along the SENSE-FEEL continuum. It seem also that in both countries the rejection of the visual environment was somewhat more based on the FEEL type than the SENSE type of experiences. The main difference in the dimensions of avoidance concerned the ACT and THINK type of experiences. The ACT type of visual experiences (concerning the functionality of the cafés) seemed to

be in a more central role in the Finland than in Spain. In Spain, however, the rejection of the café seem to involve more evaluations of the style of the cafes. Thus the THINK type of visual experience seem to be more dominant in Spain than in Finland.

5. Conclusions

This study aims to bridge the gap between perception and experience processes. The purpose is to extend the analysis of consumers' perception of environmental cues to the analysis of the experiencing of consumption environments. The study is based on the view of the reciprocal interaction between a consumer and an environment. The view proposed in this study broadens the traditional views of consumer behavior concerning feeling, thinking and acting, by highlighting the role of intuiting, imagining, and holistic experiencing in the consumer environment interactions, and in the formation of visual first impressions.

The experiencing of the environment means that the visual environmental cues evoke a state in consumer. This holistic state, the visual first impression, cannot necessarily be reduced to the perception of individual environmental cues or the elements of visual environment. The states evoked by visual environments may vary in their emotional intensity. The visual first impression is an entity containing consumers' cognitive evaluations, and emotional and behavioral reactions.

The empirical analysis showed how the multitude of different reasons for the selection and rejection of visual environments were related to the four classes of the creators of visual first impressions: distinctive features, style, atmosphere, functionality and accessibility. The analysis pointed out the highly context specific nature of the visual first

impression phenomenon. It showed how the specific content of the each classes and their application varied greatly both across respondents and cultures. A same environmental cue could evoke both approach and avoidance. However, the difference lay often in that when connected to avoidance the dimension of evaluation or interpretation contained an extra qualifier "too much" (e.g. the café is too dark, too trendy, too open).

The interpretive analysis of the approach and avoidance evoking dimensions of visual environments showed how the aforementioned creators of visual first impressions are related to the four approach and avoidance evoking dimensions of visual environments (the sense, think, feel, and act type of experiences). A same dimension of experience could evoke both approach and avoidance. Moreover, the same approach and avoidance evoking dimensions were found both in the Finnish and Spanish samples. There were however cultural differences concerning which type of the experiences were dominant in the visual first impressions. In Finland cafés were mostly selected on the basis of the sense and the act type experiences. In Spain the selection was more based on the feel and the think type of experiences. Besides, in Spain there were also social aspects involved in the evaluations of the visual environments. In Finland the rejection of the café was mostly based on the act type of experiences whereas in Spain essentially on the think type of experiences.

The standardized cafés and coffee shops are introduced all over the world (e.g. Thompson and Arsel, 2004). The initial results of this study make us to assume that the standardization of consumption environments do not produce standardized interpretations. There exist cultural differences on how the visual environments are interpreted and experienced.

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