Exploring retail atmospherics: Can background music influence employee creativity in solving problems?

The concept of retail atmospherics refers to sensations caused by sight, sound, scent, and touch in retail stores. These factors are given considerable weight by retailers when deciding how best to market and present products and services to consumers. Yet, retailers seldom examine these atmospheric variables from the perspective of employees. The purpose of this research is to examine whether music can be manipulated as a retail store atmospheric factor to improve employee mood levels and reduce stress, thereby enhancing creativity in solving business problems. The study design involves a $3 \times 2$ experiment. The music variable has three conditions: (1) mood-inducing music (2) non-mood-inducing music and (3) no music. The second variable, time pressure, also has two conditions: (1) high time pressure (9 minutes) and (2) low time pressure (18 minutes). The time frame variable is introduced to recreate the time pressure that retail employees sometimes experience in the work environment. The type of music to be played in the main study will be selected on the basis of a pretest where mood measures will be obtained for different types of music. Subjects in the main study will be given three different problem scenarios that simulate actual situations they might encounter while working for a retail store. They will be asked to devise as many solutions to the problems that they can think of within the allotted time frame. Participants will then fill out a short questionnaire designed to assess their mood and arousal levels, their perception of the music (if exposed to the music condition), and other factors that may influence their performance. The creativity of respondents’ answers will be assessed on two dimensions: novelty and appropriateness of the solutions (Gardner 1993, Sternberg and Lubart 1999). The results of this research will contribute to our knowledge of the relationship between music, mood levels, and creativity and ultimately help retailers devise more productive work environments.