

Holiday shopping? Why does rubbing elbows turn consumers off?

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Although holiday sales and events try to drive as many customers to retail stores as possible, a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* shows that the crowding may drive them away as well.

The issue arises when crowding results in people actually touching one another.

"For managers, a stranger's touch in the store means the money walks out of the store," writes Brett A. S. Martin (Queensland University of Technology). He conducted a series of [field experiments](#) in stores in southern England.

While in a store, half the consumers were briefly brushed lightly by a fellow customer as they walked out of the aisle. The other half had a fellow customer stand near them but not touch them. The "fellow customers" were relatively attractive people in their 30s. When the customers left the store, their time in the store was recorded, and they completed a [questionnaire](#) on what they thought of the store and the item they were looking at when they were touched.

The belief that men like being touched by women they don't know is not true, Martin finds. His experiments found that customers, men and women, who were touched by male or female strangers while looking at a product quickly left the store and did so with a negative view of the product they were looking at.

"Rather than cramming a store with goods and having narrow aisles, managers should think about giving people space to consider products without the risk of being bumped into by strangers," says Martin.

"For the brand manager of the product, it is vital that how products are displayed by retailers is considered in a brand's [marketing strategy](#). It is not just about grabbing a customer's attention in-store with a good display or price promotion," Martin writes. "Brands that want to increase sales need to find ways to let customers view a product without being touched by others. If they are touched, they don't buy, and they leave store with a bad impression of your brand."

More information: Brett A. S. Martin. "A Stranger's Touch: Effects of Accidental Interpersonal Touch on Consumer Evaluations and Shopping Time." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2012 (published online September 12, 2011).

Provided by University of Chicago

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