

Raising Crime Awareness through 'Design Thinking' within a High Street Retailer in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Since the 1800's, England became an industrialised country and experienced extensive urban growth, so sales associates chose this location to establish large stores. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the aim was to create the stores to entice customers through space, impressive architecture, interior design and the elegant display of merchandise. At the same time, the display techniques were growing to promote sales. Therefore, more retail equipment manufactured and supplied for displaying products in the stores. This significant variation led the retail industry as that goods could be touched by the customers and they were not accessible only through retail assistant anymore (Whitaker, 2011). Since then due to this new differentiation, retailers have been experiencing a significant change in their customer's behaviour. Now the retailers are trying to give a brilliant shopping experience to their customers with more reason to increase the sale (Ebster, Garaus 2011). However, there are some restrictions to this strategy that afford excellent opportunities for shoplifters and opportunist criminals. Store design can be a fantastic and efficient tool to increase sales. Also, it could significantly increase the chance of retail crime. This paper examines how to minimise criminal activity in retail environments to reduce loss prevention and retail shrinkage by raising awareness through design thinking. Therefore, interviews, observation and exploration were done based on the experience of employees and customers in 'The High Street Retailer'. The research project outcome included as over, a creative retail crime learning package and a digital platform to raise awareness and improve communication.

Keywords: Retail crime, Design against crime, Design thinking, Raising Awareness, Crime Prevention

The focus of this paper is on one of the largest and successful retailers in the United Kingdom. However, due to confidentiality purposes, the name of this retailer remains anonymous and is referred to as 'The High Street Retailer' throughout this paper. Retail crime is one of the most commonly committed crimes in the United Kingdom and because of the promotion of the sale by product accessibility strategy 'The High Street Retailer' is a comfort shopping zone where creates a fantastic target and environment for shoplifters' activities; therefore the aim of this research focuses on how to reduce crime within design thinking through creative solutions. The research approach is the strategy to direct the study; hence the research methodology supports the work and methods and collects data; furthermore, it includes observation, diary and interview that allows for the compilation of

valuable data. Through the collection of this data, it suggests that the core problem is the lack of employee awareness of criminal activity within ‘The High Street Retailer’; as a result, it is important to inspect and establish staff training development (CPD) to introduce the type of retail crime and how to reduce its occurrence. Moreover, this paper illustrates the value of raising awareness through a ‘Retail Crime Learning Package’ and ‘Digital Platform’ in improving retail crime prevention.

Literature review

Retailing in the UK

The United Kingdom retail sector embraces all types of businesses that sell goods to the public that includes large retail chains, department stores, independent stores and virtual stores. Over 3 million people are employed in the retail sector, and the retail industry produces almost 5% of the United Kingdom’s GDP and more than 5% of the value generated by the economy each year and contributes around £17.5 billion in taxes to the country (UK Trade and Investment, 2014). The UK’s global brands are successful retail elements to attract inward investment and London is at the centre of this success as a leading shopping destination. The role of the retail sector is fundamental to the growth of the economy in the country, about 9% of all VAT-registered businesses are related to the retailers, and more than £ 300 billion sales were estimated which were from retail sector (UK Trade and Investment, 2014). By the 1800’s The United Kingdom became one of the industrialised countries where attracts businessmen to establish small or large retails. Also creating stunning stores and giving pleasant shopping experience became the main goal to entice people and promote the sale (Whitaker, 2011). Therefore retailers started experiencing a significant point of their customers’ behaviour. The retailers aim to create their store impressively to increase the sales. However, there are some poorly designed spaces within their sales floors that could provide excellent opportunities for shoplifters and other opportunist criminals (Ebster & Garaus, 2011). Retail crime is one of the most commonly committed crimes in the UK, according to the British Retail Consortium survey 2015, the approximate number of crimes experienced by the UK retail industry was 4,120,395 in 2015, and customer theft was 3,401,948. Shoplifting by organised criminal groups has since developed as a serious issue to leading retailers. The value of products, money or services stolen from stores costs an average of £241 per incident. 750,144 offences were resulting in loss or damage to possessions in 2014-15 but said the real figure is more like 4.1 million. Retailers are facing an increasingly sophisticated criminal, they need more help and support to respond to the threat (British Retail Consortium, 2015).

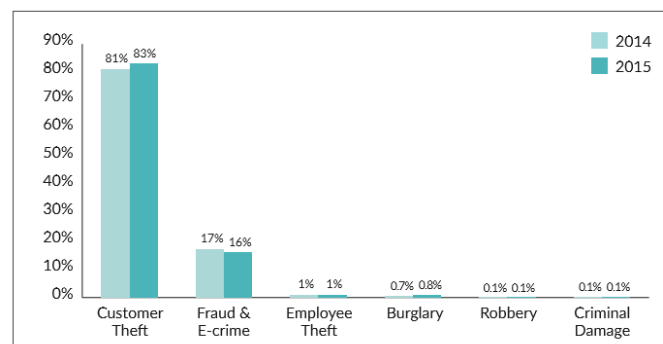


Figure 1: Retail crime, by number of incidents, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 (British Retail Consortium, 2015)

According to Sosa (2015) 'The High Street Retailer' is one of the retailers that have been a significant target for retail criminals.

Retailing strategy in the UK is to satisfy consumer needs, which is happening through promoting sales by attractive store design and layout (Bamfield, 2012).

The eventual aim of 'The High Street Retailer' is customer satisfaction. This is their primary reason, along with low costs; this retailer provides a comfort zone to his customers (Azad, 2016) and this comfort creates a fantastic target and environment for shoplifters' activities. This retailer in the city centre of a major city approaches police more than three times a week to report shoplifting crimes (Sosa, 2015).

The amount of money and stolen items in retail crime is higher than many other types of burglaries. Retailers are confronted with the massive number of retail crime cases (Bamfield, 2012). British retailers are losing over £1 billion worth of products every year. Most of the products are stolen by shoplifters. There are various facets of retail crime in the retail industry, including Shoplifting, Employee theft, Counterfeiting, Supplier fraud, card fraud, cybercrime and criminal damage (Press et al., 2001). This study focuses on shoplifting or customer theft activities particularly related to 'The High Street Retailer'. This issue is considered as the highest problematic issue that is in front of every retailer. Types of shoplifters can be divided into six diverse groups, including Professional, Opportunist, Impoverished, Substance Abuser, Thrill Seeker or Juvenile and Kleptomaniac (Fischer, Halibozek, 2012). Retailers need to be more sensible for loss prevention and work on the issue together. However, they share ideas with other retailers to limit crime, and also they collaborate with the police, government, local government and local crime reduction agencies. Retailers are determined to convince Police and the Home Office to put a greater emphasis on retail crime (Bamfield, 2012). *According to Wootton (2015), £100,050,000 was taken away from the police budget in 2013 which left them with little money and pressure. Their focus is on issues which damage lives, and retail crime is not their priority.* Retailers need to take responsibility and think about their issues directly, and instead of policing and arresting shoplifters, they need to prevent or reduce crime (Ebster, Garaus 2011).

Design against Crime through Design Thinking

Preventing crime is not a problem only for the police to think about and deal with; it also can be addressed through design (Armitage, 2013). Designers need to be focused on people who they design for, as well as people who they are designing against to prevent crime and opportunities (Home office, 2010). *Crime is considerably about opportunity; around 80% of the crimes are opportunistic (Wootton, 2015).*

Crime brings a cost to individuals and retailers; it means anticipation of criminal costs, and the damage of criminal activities to the businesses and responding to crime (Home office, 2010). Designing against crime and criminals' activities reduce the crime and damage of criminal actions through designing a service, education, environment or product that are appropriate for the situation. Design against crime is fairly new; the aim of this discipline is to prevent crime through design which commenced in the United Kingdom in 2000 (Gamman, Thorpe, 2006).

Through design against crime thinking, designers need to consider the prevention at the starting point of a project; therefore, they can prevent crime from happening, or reduce the opportunities for criminal behaviour (Home office, 2010).

Design thinking is fundamentally a human-centred innovation process that underlines the whole practice which includes observation, collaboration, learning, visualisation of ideas, concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis, which eventually encourages creativity and innovation in an organisation (Lockwood, 2009).

Design ‘thinking’ guides the way to how to confront the complexity in an innovative way (Moottee, 2013). Furthermore, businesses will always need to transform and innovate for continues (Cooper & Press, 1995).

Changing a society means changing problems and issues; therefore, it is necessary to think and comprehend the issues differently; to think through something is to understand, to grasp and to figure it out (Lockwood, 2009). To multi-disciplinary design thinking, and another crime science methodologies including crime prevention; design thinking develops and applies a responsive design approach through the user-centred method of the design process. The process addresses miss-users, abusers as well as users, at the heart of a human-centred approach. The process inspects the new approach as well as re-designing existing strategies, connected to user-centred thinking (Gamman, Thorpe, 2006). Moreover, based on the research and former contexts and studies, the approach of this study is to find a solution within “design against crime thinking”.

Research Methods

Aims

The research focuses on ‘The High Street Retailer’ to identifying retail crime, including customer theft, damage, counterfeiting and fraud to reduce opportunistic crime through design thinking techniques.

Objectives

- To identify the process of retail crime and the nature of the crime in the store.
- To identify opportunities for retail crime and to explore what factors create opportunities for criminals to commit the crime.
- To identify what kinds of products are attracting criminals; this research illustrates what type of products are the main target for criminals.

Methods

As the aim of the research is to analyse specific issues within the boundaries of a particular environment or organisation, case studies method has been identified as the most appropriate method to explore the issues. Due to the large scale of the research investigation, the different departments and sections will be observed step by step, concerning layout and design to see how they function based on security aspects, staff activities and customer serving. Also, how staff adhere to security procedures and how the customer behaves during their shopping process. Three categories are collected for research, included shop floor, fitting rooms and till banks. The rationale underpinning this research area is based on empirical evidence; in the first stage, empirical method of the research investigation enable this study to achieve invaluable knowledge with observation and diary for the efficient recording of the environment, people, behaviours and relations. In the next stage, the research method uses a qualitative study approach to identify the core issues, through focus interviews in ‘The High Street Retailer’ to have direct interaction with contributors, to collect their opinions based on their experience and knowledge. Prototyping is conducted to participate in design through personal and group engagement (Hanington, Martin, 2012).

Limitation/Implication

The present study investigates different departments within 'The High Street Retailer' to identify retail crime in a different situation and environment, and it is a starting-point for further research and action in other branches within the stores.

Discussion

Three categories have been collected for research, included 1) shop floor, 2) fitting rooms 3) till banks. The observations were undertaken within different sections and at several times of trading hours within the store in weekdays and weekend.

The Framework for Implementation

Due to the large scale of retail crime in retailers including 'The High Street Retailer', the top crime prevention issues have been selected based on observations and interviews as over,

- **Fitting Room**
 - Counting and controlling hangers and items (Checking In/Out)
 - Controlling customer's grooming
 - Making sure the returned items are new and not from other shops
- **Till Bank**
 - Keeping the shopping bags behind the counter until the end of the transaction
 - Comparing the prices of the system and checking the price tickets and descriptions
 - Checking the bags and luggage and pockets of items
- **Shop Floor**
 - Being aware of blind spots and the areas with mirrors
 - Being aware of organised criminal activities
 - Being aware of products, brands and offers
- **Goods and Recovery**
 - Keep the fixtures and shelves organised and tidy
 - Pick up the products from the floor

Raising Awareness

The policy of the company is that before new employees start working on the sales floor, they are required to attend an induction session which takes place for about 5 hours on their first working day, as such raising design against crime through design thinking could be incorporated within this induction process. At the moment this core issue does not have a place in the company's induction outline and programme of activities. The question is how to hold this session to ensure the best outcomes.

Having team briefing sessions between staff, management and security is another way to ensure staff are vigilant in understanding how to prevent crime through a few simple activities, such as good customer service or keeping the store tidy and reporting unusual activities. However this is another core issue which does not exist seriously and regularly. By investigating data and information, it is clear that core problems are a lack of communication and employee awareness. Therefore, it is critical to review staff training development (CPD) to introduce the type of retail crimes and impacts and how to reduce

them. Design against crime awareness is an effective method to make employees conscious about retail crime and to learn how to work and collaborate besides each other to reduce crime and make a safe and pleasant workplace.

Learning Methods

Several interviews and surveys have been undertaken at 'The High Street Retailer' to find out how people would prefer to update their knowledge at work. The survey results explored that 45% of participants would prefer to listen to the experts to learn the new knowledge and 34% of people would prefer videos and role playing activities. As a result, listening and watching are two popular learning methods. Furthermore, by using visual thinking and learning methods, learners understand and retain information. Some stated that they need to see data to learn and recall it subsequently.

Recommendation and Initial Concepts to Raise Awareness

Based on this current research, two concepts are suggested for the result of the project, which are the development of a 'Digital Platform' and running an effective 'learning package'. The process of retail crime is cumulative, and although unwanted costs are likely to be incurred through shoplifting activities over time; running a visual and dynamic learning package and digital platform as a main communication channel within the store will greatly improve crime reduction activities.



Figure 2: Suggested retail crime prevention cycle (Authors own)

Concept 1 - Retail Crime Learning Package

The survey results identified that employees would prefer to listen to experts; however, the second favourite option is watching videos and role plays. Therefore one of the suggested concepts is to combine two methods of learning, including an auditory and visual technique to make it more motivating and engaging. The suggested learning session concept is based on the flash cards including question cards and visual answer cards in two different boxes. The concept has been tested through several workshops with over 20 members of staff, and the results showed that this method made the staff get engaged in a relaxing atmosphere. At the end of the session, it was clear that employees had a better understanding about retail crime and what they need to do to prevent crime.

Table 1: Retail crime workshop, 'The High Street Retailer' induction room (Authors own)

	The questions are written on the board and also the same questions are in the “Question Box” as cards. Individual groups need to pick them up to read. The cards are numbered.
	The members of each groups need to read the question together and have a group discussion. They need to go through the “Answer Box” and find the correct visual answer.
	The groups need to make a decision about the final answer based on their discussion and visual cards, then write it down on a sticky note.
	The groups stick their answers on the board. Now they are ready to go through the answers to find the right answers out over a discussion between the groups.
	When the groups answer all questions, their trainer will show the right answer by using the flash cards and illustrates and clarifies the process with more details. In the end the trainer answers staff questions.

Concept 2 - Digital Platform

According to the observation and interview research, 'The High Street Retailer' lacks a platform regarding communication and connection between staff and the senior management team. The only existing channel of communication is a platform for booking holidays and staff boards displayed throughout the corridors.

The suggestion is to use this opportunity to establish a digital platform for the employees for two purposes; first embedding 'retail crime visual learning session' into it to allow staff to become more engaged and share their experiences with members of staff. Secondly, this platform can be used for other channels such as health and safety compliance and other company procedures. By logging in and using the website for different purposes, staff will be

indicated to watch the retail crime pictures and processes constantly, where are situated on the home page.



Figure 3: Retail crime digital platform, 'The High Street Retailer' (Authors own)

Conclusions

This paper has raised a range of concerns regarding retail crime, specifically shoplifting issue and predominant costs of retail crime activities in British retailers. The study illustrates that retailers suffer from a large amount of shrinkage loss, and there are several reasons why it is not simple and economical to resolve the issues in a short period; the study argues that one of the most effective solutions is to embed a new culture to the business through design thinking. By exploring key findings of core issue related to retail crime, this study emphasises that lack of collaboration and awareness in the retail store causes business shrinkage loss which can be resolved through the effective and innovative learning channels. This study introduced a creative and effective learning package and digital platform to raise design against crime awareness through design thinking. Furthermore, adding the visual and dynamic learning package to the training sessions and running the digital platform as a main communication channel within the store, will greatly improve crime reduction in the future. This can happen through design thinking, as the designed learning package encourages staff to challenge and think about what the issues are, what is the best approach to confront it based on policies, how they can deal with the challenging situations and what is the best tactic to meet the store crime prevention requirement and how implement the new strategy to make it happen. However, the training sessions have commenced recently, and over 50 employees have already received training, and positive impression and commitment showed by them; only five employees had a good knowledge of retail crime and security procedures. The result of the training will be measured between two stock takings which are every six months to explore the effectiveness of training content.

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Author Biography

Author Name: Meg Parivar

I attained a first-class honour degree in product design from the University of Salford and achieved a master's degree with distinction in design management from Lancaster University. Currently, I am the first-year PhD design research candidate at Lancaster University, and my research interest is 'design against crime to reduce shrinkage in the retail sector through design thinking'.

As I am working in one of the largest High-Street retailers in the United Kingdom, I always intend to blend my design thinking skills and experience within the workplace by bringing my projects and research into the business to solve the problems, as the design is about issues and solutions.

I have been allocating my experience in two broad areas as over,

- Design against crime - Retail Crime

One of the research project was "Raising awareness through design thinking to reduce criminal activity within the retailers in the UK." The outcomes include two developed and validated concepts which are a learning package and a digital platform.

- Health and Safety in Retail

I have designed a trolley for replenishment, integrating four functions to reduce the accidents in the workplace and promoting the sale. Using the concept as a trolley as well as rail, folding table and a cage reduces the amount of equipment on the shop floor and accidents.

