Role of Retail Store Atmosphere on shopping behavior: A study of Organized Retailing

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Introduction

India is sometimes referred to as the nation of shopkeepers. The country has the highest destiny of retail outlet-over 15 million – in this world Retailing is the largest industry in India and second largest employer after agriculture. Store atmosphere in retailing focuses on customer expectation. The ability of the retail organization to identify these expectations and fulfill them will determine whether consumers enter the shop again and again. If retailers provide good atmosphere, then customers are obviously attracted to retail stores. Retail Sector is the most booming sector in the Indian economy. Some of the biggest players of the world are going to enter the industry soon. It is on the threshold of bringing the next big revolution after the IT sector.

In today's competitive environments, the relationship of store atmosphere and Impulse Buying Behavior (IBB) is well acknowledged by marketers and researchers all around the world. The store atmosphere and impulse buying both relate to consumer buying behavior and persuade the consumer buying patterns. It is recognized that while making buying decisions, the consumers respond more to the core products and services being offered. So the buying environment, more specifically the store atmosphere is more important in buying decisions than the product itself. For the same rationality, today more emphasis is given to the store design, texture, layout, architecture, and interior design.

"Atmosphere is a term that is used to explain our feelings towards the shopping experience which can not be seen" (Milliman, 1986). Kotler (1973-74) describes the atmosphere as "the design of the of retail chain outlet that produces specific emotional effects on the buyer that enhances his purchasing probability". The environment has a huge impact on the consumers' emotion and satisfaction. The impressive atmosphere of the retail chain outlets enhances the customer satisfaction level and purchase experience (Silva & Giraldi, 2010). The   attractive and impressive atmosphere of retail chain outlets creates an enjoyable experience among the consumers, which directly affects consumers' purchase intention and their decision making process (Srinivasan & Srivastava, 2010).

Wakefield & Baker (1998) proved that the probability of customers staying longer in store increases due to atmospheric stimulus. When a consumer feels satisfied from the retail environment of the store, he spends more time in a particular store and buys more because of pleasant environmental stimuli (Bohl, 2012). Several researchers have identified the effect of atmosphere on the behavior of consumers in the store (Russell & Mehrabian, 1978), but still empirical research on the impact of store atmosphere on the behavior of consumers is limited (Zeynep & Nilgun, 2011). The scope of consumer studies is narrow in the previous researches (Areni & Kim, 1994; Bitner, 1992). Many researches were conducted, but they focused on one atmospheric variable at a time and left others. Though in reality consumer behavior is affected by several atmospheric cues collectively (Zeynep & Nilgun, 2011).

Therefore, this study has been designed to investigate the collective impact of all major atmospheric variables such as cleanliness, music, temperature, lighting, color, display/layout, and scent or fragrance at one point in time.

Literature Review

The term atmosphere comes from the surrounding air sphere and being introduced by Kotler (1973), one of the spearheads in the use of this term as a marketing tool. He also defines the term as a form of aware area to produce a particular emotional impact on shoppers in order to enhance the likelihood of buying. Atmospherics can be captured through the five basic human senses, namely sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. Besides Kotler (1973), Bitner (1992) has acknowledged ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality and signs, symbols, and artifacts as a measurement for atmospherics or what she called the SERVICESCAPE. Ambient conditions discuss the nature of surroundings, such as temperature, lighting, noise, music and smell. Space layout and functionality visualize ways in which aisles, chairs, hallways and walkways, foodservice lines, toilets, and the entrance and exits are designed and organized in service settings. Signs, symbols, and artifacts consist of signage, personal artifacts, decoration, and other physical features that work as signals that connect with users.

When looking at the relationship between store atmospherics and perceived value, Liu and Jang (2009) discovered that there is a partial significant relationship between store atmospherics and perceived value. Zooming deeper into the result revealed that interior design and employee factors had direct effects on perceived value, whereas ambience and spatial layout did not influence perceived value significantly.

Music as a major, recurring, and common variable induces mood, takes place at a subliminal level and creates a positive impact on impulse buying. (Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990 & Morrin and Chebat, 2005) argue that customers react psychologically and behaviorally towards music. According to another study, the up-beat music particularly triggers impulse buying (Smith, 1989). Similarly elegant lighting boosts a retailer's interior, generates an atmosphere of thrill, and encourages optimistic influence. The store image additionally has positive impact on impulse buying behavior. Some shops display distinct appearances whereas others are more of a kind that blends into the crowd. The shop image is the sum of different features together with location, merchandise suitability, and the knowledge and congeniality of the sales personnel (Solomon, 2006).

Cleanliness can improve store atmosphere (Gajanayake, Gajanayake & Surangi, 2011). Cleanliness of a store creates positive impression among consumers and makes them stay longer in the store. Product display and Cleanliness are very important for the outlet selection (Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007 Impact of loudness on musical preference is moderated by gender, with females reacting more adversely than males to louder music (Kellaris, James & Ronald, 1993). Music generally influences positively while fast tempo music mediates influence on the shopper's perception of the mall (Michon & Chebat, 2004). Music has a constructive impact on the customers' sum of time and money spent due to good environment (Herrington, 1996).

Scent has a major effect on how consumer evaluates the merchandise (Spangenberg, Sprott, Grohmann, & Tracy, 2006) Customers spend more time in shopping when the environment contains good music and scent (Yalch, Richard, Eric, & Spangenberg, 2000). Temperature at retail outlet is among those atmospheric variables that greatly impact the consumer purchase intention. Extreme temperature—very low or very high—creates negative feelings among customers; it leads to dissatisfaction among the customers and consequently, customers spend less time in outlet and produce negative word of mouth (Lam, 2001).

Stores with proper lighting, music, color, scent and displays will motivate the customers to visit the store again in the future (Yoo, Park, & MacInnis, 1998). The main purpose of using brighter lighting in retail outlets is to grab the customers' attention so that they start purchasing from the outlets due to their comfort.

Objectives of the study
1. To study the impact of retail store atmosphere on consumers.
2. To examine the different retail store's atmosphere design factors which impact customers' purchase intentions.
3. To examine the effect of atmosphere factors on buyer's/shopper's satisfaction.

Research Methodology

As the objective of the study was to find out the impact of Atmoshere on buying intentions of consumers', so the current study is based on primary data. Primary data has been collected by survey through a structured questionnaire that was well designed and non-disguised in nature. The present study has clarified the thoughts, opinions and shopping intentions of the consumers' of NCR (Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Noida, Ghaziabad). A sample of 107 respondents has been taken. The data has been analyzed on SPSS software using frequency and mean.

Data Analysis & Results:

A.   Impact of Retail Store Atmosphere on consumers':

Table: Retail Store Atmosphere

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The stores provides safe and nearby parking services.	5	6	34	39	23
2. It's easy for you to arrive at the store.	2	4	34	52	16
3. The stores have scenic landscaping of lawns and gardens.	2	13	30	47	15
4. The stores have attractive colours and designed building (structure).	2	10	32	45	19
5. Different Additional facilities are available at the stores. (Like ATM, credit card facility).	1	8	14	38	47

Interpretation: As per the results, majority of the respondents were found satisfy regarding the safe parking services and easy arrival at the store. Alongwith this majority of the respondent were found agreed on the matter of the stores have scenic landscaping of lawns and gardens. Consumers wer found agreed that the stores have attractive colours and designed building (structure) and that the Different Additional facilities are available at the stores. (Like ATM, credit card facility). This clearly shows that consumers' attitude towards atmosphere is positive.

B.   INTERIOR:

Table: Interior design

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The colour format of the stores is eye-catching.	2	7	31	51	17
2. Cleanliness and hygiene of stores is attractive.	1	6	23	55	20
3. Lightening in the stores is adequate.	0	5	28	49	24
4.Temperature of the stores is gentle.	0	7	27	43	30
5.The Background music is pleasant in the stores.	6	5	37	37	21

C.   DESIGN (LAYOUT & DESIGN VARIABLES):

Table: Retail stores' design factors

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The design of the stores is idea based.	2	4	31	53	17
2. The place is efficiently used in the stores.	2	8	29	46	22
3. There is organized location For different stores.	2	5	19	57	22
4. The stores provide the waiting couch/sitting provision.	2	10	29	38	28
5. There is availability of trail rooms in the stores.	4	8	21	28	46
6. The stores have adequate Kids play section.	3	7	32	45	21
7. In the stores pure drinking water is available.	3	6	30	49	19
8. The queue space at the billing counter is ample.	1	6	17	53	30

Interpretation: Above table shows various design & layout factors of the retail stores which impact customers' purchase intentions. Consumers prefer the idea based stores design and they believe that hey found it in the stores. They agreed that the place is efficiently used in the stores and there is organized location for different stores. Consumers found the stores provided with the waiting couch/sitting provision. There is availability of trial rooms in the stores. The stores have adequate Kids play section. In the stores pure drinking water is available. The queue space at the billing counter is ample.

D.   INTERIOR:

Table: Interior design

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The colour format of the stores is eye-catching.	2	7	31	51	17
2. Cleanliness and hygiene of stores is attractive.	1	6	23	55	20
3. Lightening in the stores is adequate.	0	5	28	49	24
4. Temperature of the stores is gentle.	0	7	27	43	30
5.The Background music is pleasant in the stores.	6	5	37	37	21

Interpretation: Table describing the interior Atmosphere's affect on customers, the respondent's responses showing that:

- Agree on colour formats
- Agree on cleanliness and hygiene of the stores.
- Agree on adequate lightening & temperature in the stores.
- And on the background music they are agree and neutral both.

E.   Retail Store Attractiveness:

Table: Retail store attractiveness

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. You are happy with the stores for buying products.	3	2	18	57	27
2. The stores meet all your expectations.	0	4	28	50	25
4. You always remain willing to stay at store as long as possible.	1	11	30	43	22
4. You always enjoy spending time at store.	0	11	35	43	18
5. You always say positive things about the stores.	1	8	35	39	23
6.The store offers suitable buying hours	1	9	31	60	17
7.The store provides pleasant environment for shopping.	2	5	21	53	26
8. You feel safe while doing transaction with store.	0	3	26	55	23
9. You don't feel cheated at the store	1	11	34	39	22

Interpretation: Table shows that all factors that the buyers considers when they buys from a retail store and for all factors the respondents give response in favour of Agree option rather than others.

Conclusion

The study on the role of atmosphere of retail stores in buying behaviour reveals that the factors of atmosphere like exterior design; interior design of the store affects the buying behaviour of the customers.

The study is showing that mostly people concern about the price. The lower prices more attract them. The stores have to make the different – 2 pricing strategies so that they can attract more people. The Retail sector accounts for over 10% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and around 8% of the employment. India is the world's fifth – largest global destination in retail space.

This is also finding out that the people/ respondents are neutral about the water facility, so the retailers should improve this facility and give the surety to their customers. Customers are having switching behaviour, so if any particular retail store wants that the customers never switch their brands/ products then they have to add some unique features in their products.

Suggestions

Retail atmospherics is coming up as a salient area of study in itself. In- depth research is required to understand the impact of each of the components of atmospherics, with inputs from other areas such as psychology, anthropology etc. Only a multidisciplinary approach will help in fully discovering the influence of atmospherics. Also, this influence may vary for various types of stores, merchandise, store locations and customer groups. These methodological factors may also be considered for future research. The study of atmospherics may be taken up for other product classes, such as food and grocery, food service, jewellery, mobile and telecom, consumer electronics etc. The study may even be conducted separately

For single- brand and multi- brand retail stores. Similarly, the study may be extended to study the role of atmospherics in Indian retail stores, as compared to international brands available in India.

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