A study on influence of store ambience on consumers purchase behavior

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ABSTRACT

Store ambience is referred to as a store's physical characteristics, which are used to develop a retail unit image and gaining customers. The project is to study the influence of the store ambience on consumer purchase behavior. It includes factors such as storefront, marquee, entrance, display, flooring, lighting, colors, fragrance, music, fixtures, and so on. Some factors majorly affect consumer purchase behavior they are lighting, fragrance, music, window display, and color co-ordination, product set-up. Therefore by analyzing the already existing ambiance of a retail store, a survey is conducted to know the consumer's preferences on store ambience that affects their purchase and then concluded based on the results obtained.

Keywords: Store ambience factors, store environment, shopping experience, consumer preferences, purchase behavior, consumer satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Store Ambience is a major part of the store design and it is defined as the dominant sensory effect created by the store's design. It also refers to all the physical and non-physical elements of a store that can be controlled to enhance the behavior of its occupants, both customers, and employees. In the past customers tend to focus only on the product attributes, features, and functions. But now due to the inventing of information technology, more exposure, and high educational level the customers not only want to purchase products and services but they want to experience the whole purchasing process, which includes the entertainment part also, and this is what the retail stores are pursuing nowadays. The retail business has grown rapidly in recent years, where the retailers of this century are not providing products and services to the customers but they are offering a whole shopping experience to the customers, which comprises the various components of store ambience. Store ambience is effective and important which is not due to their impact on customers to buy but they induce customers to buy again and again and creates a strong brand image in the mind of the customers. Whereas a large number of consumers have started switching from open bazaars to separate stores since these types of retail outlets offer convenience, comfort, and affordable prices for shopping. In response to changing consumer purchase behavior, retailers are continuously seeking new retail strategies, creating a unique store ambience, and using different marketing tools to ensure that consumers will come back to the store again and again. In this regard, it is important to emphasize the role of store ambience, which directly influences consumer's purchase behavior.

Store ambience is referred to as the physical characteristics of the store. The store's physical characteristics include store layout, window display, flooring, lighting, fragrance, music, color co-ordination, product set-up, fixtures used, etc. The consumer purchase behavior is based on the previous shopping experiences of a store. The sensory reaction they produce within an individual can be considered in terms of sight, smell, and sound. It also refers to all the physical and non-physical elements of a store that can be controlled to enhance the behavior of its occupants, both customers, and employees. These elements present a multitude of possibilities including ambient cues such as color, smell, music, and lighting, texture as well as artifactual and architectural elements.

Consumer's stimuli on purchasing things may be triggered through the store's ambiance such as lighting, fragrance, music, color coordination, and product set-up. Retailers need to understand the impact of in-store characteristics on consumer purchasing behavior. Therefore, this project aims to investigate the influences of the store's ambience on consumer's purchase behavior by surveying consumers visiting the chosen retail outlet. The questionnaire included different types of questions such as demographic, multiple-choice, and Likert scale. These questions were framed based on the store ambience factors that influence the consumer's purchase behavior.

From the results of the survey, it helps to know whether the already existing ambience of the store is influencing consumer purchase behavior and also satisfying them or not.
2. OBJECTIVES

- To explore & enhance the ambiance of the store.
- To examine the impact of store ambiance on consumer purchase behavior.
- To find out & suggest the factors of the store's atmosphere that is preferred by consumers.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Today when our country is orienting by imbibing the globalization trends, there are a lot of things that are changing, one such change is the era in innovation. The shopping experience of the customer, which is considered the most important aspect of the success of a retail store, is completely dependent on innovation. The three elements, which complete the Shopping Experience, are:

- Merchandise
- Customer support
- Store Ambience

The store ambiance is an environment that is created by visual communications, lighting, music, colors, etc., to generate a stimulus among the customer's perceptions & emotions that will affect their purchasing behavior. The store atmosphere is about having a look and an environment that suits the target market & invites consumers for purchase. To create an unparalleled experience with the retail store understanding customer preferences is of prime importance. The store ambiance is to be designed to make shopping easy and also give a comfortable feeling. It enhances the shopping experience by assisting shoppers with what they want from an assortment of products in the store. A good ambiance is also required to facilitate the browsing process for products, which need to be touched & felt before being chosen. A striking store ambiance draws the attention of the customer & enables him to take purchase decisions within the shortest possible time, and thus enhancing the selling process. [1]

Visual merchandising plays an important role in the retail market and also it is a new concept to present the product with light, color, music, interior, exterior, fixtures, and display. Visual merchandising is the way of presenting the store by displaying the products to the customer. Proper visual merchandising helps the store to increase the customer walk-ins and in-turn increases the sales of the product. The factors, which are all in the retail store designs, are interior and exterior store designs, store layout, and visual merchandising. Store ambiance is referred to as a store's physical characteristics, which are used to develop the retail unit image and gaining customers. Factors influencing the store ambiance are store layout, display, exterior, interior, visual merchandising.

- Visual merchandising - The role of VM is to enable sales of the product, to inform and educate the customer about the product, to enable the shopping with ease for the consumer with tools like color, texture, fixtures, signage, window, lighting, and mannequins.
- Store layout - It refers to the arrangement of the department in the interior retail store. This includes giving attention to factors such as space allocated for customers to shop.
- Display - It refers to the allocation of merchandise such as shelves, aisles.
- Exterior store design - It refers to all the characteristics of the physical environment found outside the store. The elements include a storefront, marquee, entrance, display window, and parking facilities.
- Interior store design - It refers to all the characteristics of the physical environment found inside the store. The elements include flooring, lighting, colors, scent, and fixtures. [2]
- Lighting within stores is a factor that consumers typically do not realize. However, this makes an impact on their purchase intentions within stores due to its subtle presence. Lighting is used within stores to highlight particular products and features that companies want consumers' attention to be drawn to.
- Music is a feature that can set the mood within the store because it has feelings and emotions associated with it. By having music that consumers can connect to joyfully and it can encourage a satisfaction that increases purchases desired of customers in-store. Adding features that put customers in a better mood encourages a more relaxed and satisfied shopping experience.
- Store scent - it relates to store ambiance for the fact that a pleasant smell allows customers to feel more comfortable, relaxed, and satisfied. [5] Sway's (2007) study showed that using scent in the store can induce customers' feelings of comfort and induces a pleasant mood, thereby, helping the customers decide whether to buy products offered in the store. Thus, marketers can use the store scent to appeal to their customers. [10]

An impulse buying is induced when a consumer encounters a relevant visual stimulus in the retail environment, or some promotional stimuli (Piron, 2001). Highly stimulating and pleasant store environments lead to enhanced impulse buying (Hoyer and MacInner, 1999). Shopping environment includes the store size, layout and design, color, lighting, cleanliness, aisle space, physical amenities and facilities inside the store or mall presentation of merchandise, fixtures, floor coverings, sounds, odors, and dress and behavior of sales and service personnel. These factors can be categorized as ambiance and Aesthetic factors. The ambient cues include elements such as color, temperature, lighting, music, cleanliness, hygiene, the texture of walls, and scent. According to Davidson et al. (1988), the ambient factor is felt more than it can be seen and measured. All of these elements can affect how people feel, think, and respond to a particular store or mall. The aesthetic cues refer to a store's environment elements like layout, fixtures, displays, interiors, and exteriors of the store. Spatial arrangement; the layout of mechanical equipment, facilities, furniture and furnishings, product grouping, traffic flow, department location, floor space, and the store spatial correlations. [9]

Another important aspect retailers should consider carefully is the allocation of products on shelves. Efficient shelf space allocation management does not only minimize the economic threats of empty product shelves, but it can also lead to higher consumer satisfaction, a better customer relationship, and even more importantly, it can have a significant positive effect on product sales. [3]
In a study Biswal, Sreekumar, and Panda, stressed out the important factors that influenced the store image of the Indian customers. Among those attributes results of the study revealed that cleanliness and tidiness of the store were found to be the most important factor intended for gaining consideration pro holding a positive image about the store by the Indian customers. Followed by the next important factors like store decor, store atmosphere, good quality product, and fashionable merchandise. [4]

On a note of a good quality product, the retail store environment has a major influence on consumer’s inference about it. Results on the effects of color in the retail environment have shown that subjects inferred merchandise in a warm-colored environment to be more up-to-date than merchandise in a cool colored environment. [7]

Kotler, highlighted some important sensory channels, including sight, sound, scent, and touch. Further, in their article, analyzed the effects of atmospherics on consumers’ buying behavior and suggested that the marketing professionals prioritize the practice of creating influential atmospheres for a better exchange environment. In the model influence of retail atmospherics, discussed three important aspects related to atmospheric stimuli, consumers’ evaluations, and behaviors. [6]

The store environment is a very important factor that will affect impulsive buying. The Size of the store, ambiance, design, and in-store marketing activities are examples of the store environment. The in-store background music, lighting, store display, scent, store promotion, and prices can create a unique experience for customers to enjoy. [8]

Favorable perceptions of store environmental cues lead to customer approach as a behavioral response where customers have a desire to stay or explore the store. On the other hand, unfavorable perceptions of store environmental cues lead to customer avoidance as a behavioral response where customers have unpleasant feelings towards the store. [6]

4. METHODOLOGY
4.1. Research type
The study is described as descriptive studies attempt to determine the frequency with which something occurs or the relationship between two phenomena. As descriptive research, the study deals with the variables affecting the customer preference process via visual merchandising.

4.2. Sampling size
The Sampling size is 120, where the targeted customers are those visiting fabindia, racecourse in Coimbatore city.

4.3. Sources of data (Primary data)
The primary data for the study is collected through a survey with a well-structured questionnaire to know the responses of the respondents who are shoppers. The data sought helps to describe the attitudinal behavior of the respondents for their respective purchasing patterns. The instrument would be directed methodically to the shoppers outside the store immediately after their experience and interaction with the visual merchandising elements on random days. Shoppers would be asked to cooperate by providing a complete response to the questions so that more accurate outcomes can be attained.

4.4. Sampling type
Self-selection sampling is a non-probability technique, which is based on the judgment of the researcher. This is a useful tool for the research, in which respondents who are interested to participate (or volunteer) as part of a study on their own accord after they have been requested from the researcher. In this type of sampling, the respondents are most likely to take part in the study and have a greater willingness to provide meaningful insights.

4.5. Pilot-testing of the Instrument
The questionnaire is being pilot-tested on 8 to 10 respondents (approximately 5 percent of the main survey sample size) belonging to different age groups, educational qualifications, household income levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. Based on their responses, the required modifications would be made in the instrument. Then the revised questionnaire would be used for further study.

4.6. Data collection tool
In this study hypotheses are developed to investigate the relationship between consumer’s tendency in the change of their purchasing behavior on preference analysis of visual merchandising elements such as window display, lighting, fragrance, music played in the store, color co-ordination and the way merchandises are presented. A questionnaire is developed, prepared in Google forms and the data are collected from the consumers visiting the particular retail outlet (fabindia).

4.7. Data analysis
Data collected is analyzed using SPSS software. The statistical tool used for finding results is correlation and ANOVA. Then data is tabulated and graphically represented through pie-charts, bar graphs, etc. Based on the response obtained through the questionnaire, major research findings are presented and suitable recommendations are made to improve the consumer's shopping experience.

5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND RESULTS
5.1. Comparison of window display and consumer purchase behavior
H0: There is no significant relationship between the consumer's purchasing behavior and the window display of the store.
H1: There is a significant relationship between the consumer's purchasing behavior and the window display of the store.
The hypotheses are tested using ANOVA. This analysis is performed to assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between the independent and dependent variables or not. Thus, the objectives of the study can be achieved.

**Table 1: Comparison of window display and consumer purchase behavior using ANOVA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer purchase behavior</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>11,596</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11,596</td>
<td>2.246</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>537,008</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>5.164</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>548,604</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the comparison between the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) window display. The results of the test revealed that the window display doesn't have a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior. The p (probability) value of consumer purchase behavior and window display is 0.137 which is not less than the level of significance 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis is been accepted and the alternative hypothesis is been rejected. From the above analysis observed, I hereby conclude that the result indicates that the window display doesn't influence consumer-purchasing behavior.

**5.2. Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and lighting**

**H02:** There is no relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the lighting used in the store.

**H12:** There is a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the lighting used in the store.

The hypotheses are tested using correlation. This analysis is performed to assess whether the relationship of the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) lighting is significantly correlated or not. Moreover, the same analysis shows whether the relationships are positive or negative with the values of the Pearson correlation coefficients. Thus, the objectives of the study can be achieved.

**Table 2: Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and lighting using Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer purchase behavior</th>
<th>Lighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.204*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The above table shows the correlation between the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) lighting. The result of Pearson’s correlation revealed that the lighting has a relationship with consumer’s purchasing behavior. The p (probability) value of consumer purchase behavior and lighting is 0.036 which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis is been rejected and the alternative hypothesis is been accepted. Besides, the relationship between consumer's purchase behavior and lighting shows a positive result, with the Pearson coefficient of 0.204. Thus the variables which show statistically significant seem to be positively correlated. From the above analysis observed, I hereby conclude that the result indicates that the lighting does influences consumer purchasing behavior.

**5.3. Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and fragrance**

**H03:** There is no relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the fragrance used in the store.

**H13:** There is a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the fragrance used in the store.

The hypotheses are tested using correlation. This analysis is performed to assess whether the relationship of the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) fragrance are significantly correlated or not. Moreover, the same analysis shows whether the relationships are positive or negative with the values of the Pearson correlation coefficients. Thus, the objectives of the study can be achieved.

**Table 3: Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and fragrance using Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer purchase behavior</th>
<th>Fragrance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.246*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

The above table shows the correlation between the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) fragrance. The result of Pearson's correlation revealed that the fragrance has a relationship with consumer's purchasing behavior. The p (probability) value of consumer purchase behavior and the fragrance is 0.011 which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis is been rejected and the alternative hypothesis is been accepted. Besides, the relationship between
consumer's purchase behavior and lighting shows a positive result, with the Pearson coefficient of 0.246. Thus the variables, which show statistically significant, seem to be positively correlated. From the above analysis observed, I hereby conclude that the result indicates that the fragrance does influence consumer-purchasing behavior.

5.4. Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and music

H₄: There is no relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the music played in the store.

H₁₄: There is a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the music played in the store.

The hypotheses are tested using correlation. This analysis is performed to assess whether the relationship of the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) music is significantly correlated or not. Moreover, the same analysis will shows whether the relationships are positive or negative with the values of the Pearson correlation coefficients. Thus, the objectives of the study can be achieved.

| Table 4: Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and music using Correlations |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Consumer purchase behavior                      | Consumer purchase behavior | Fragrance |
| Pearson correlation                              | 1                | .208*     |
| Sig. (2-tailed)                                  |                  | .033      |
| N                                                | 106              | 106       |
| Fragrance                                        |                  |           |
| Pearson correlation                              | .208*            |           |
| Sig. (2-tailed)                                  | .033             |           |
| N                                                | 106              | 106       |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The above table shows the correlation between the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) music. The result of Pearson’s correlation revealed that the music has a relationship with consumer’s purchasing behavior. The p (probability) value of consumer purchase behavior and music is 0.033, which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis is been rejected and the alternative hypothesis is been accepted. Besides, the relationship between consumer's purchase behavior and music shows a positive result, with the Pearson coefficient of 0.208. Thus the variables, which show statistically significant, seem to be positively correlated. From the above analysis observed, I hereby conclude that the result indicates that music does influence consumer-purchasing behavior.

5.5. Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and color

H₀₅: There is no relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the color co-ordination used in the store.

H₁₅: There is a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the color co-ordination used in the store.

The hypotheses are tested using correlation. This analysis is performed to assess whether the relationship of the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) color is significantly correlated or not. Moreover, the same analysis shows whether the relationships are positive or negative with the values of the Pearson correlation coefficients. Thus, the objectives of the study can be achieved.

| Table 5: Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and color using Correlations |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Consumer purchase behavior                      | Consumer purchase behavior | Fragrance |
| Pearson correlation                              | 1                | .218*     |
| Sig. (2-tailed)                                  |                  | .025      |
| N                                                | 106              | 106       |
| Fragrance                                        |                  |           |
| Pearson correlation                              | .218*            |           |
| Sig. (2-tailed)                                  | .025             |           |
| N                                                | 106              | 106       |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The above table shows the correlation between the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) color. The result of Pearson's correlation revealed that the color has a relationship with consumer's purchasing behavior. The p (probability) value of consumer purchase behavior and the color is 0.025 which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis is been rejected and the alternative hypothesis is been accepted. Besides, the relationship between consumer's purchase behavior and color shows a positive result, with the Pearson coefficient of 0.218. Thus the variables which show statistically significant seem to be positively correlated. From the above analysis observed, I hereby conclude that the result indicates that the color does influence consumer purchasing behavior.

5.6. Comparison of consumer purchase behavior and product

H₆: There is no relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the merchandise arranged in the store.

H₁₆: There is a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior because of the merchandise arranged in the store.

The hypotheses are tested using correlation. This analysis is performed to assess whether the relationship of the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) product are significantly correlated or not. Moreover, the same analysis shows whether the relationships are positive or negative with the values of the Pearson correlation coefficients. Thus, the objectives of the study can be achieved.
The above table shows the correlation between the (dependent variable) consumer purchase behavior and (independent variable) product. The result of Pearson’s correlation revealed that the product has a relationship with the consumer's purchasing behavior. The p (probability) value of consumer purchase behavior and the product is 0.025 which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis is been rejected and the alternative hypothesis is been accepted. Besides, the relationship between consumer's purchase behavior and product shows a positive result, with the Pearson coefficient of 0.218. Thus the variables, which show statistically significant, seem to be positively correlated. From the above analysis observed, I hereby conclude that the result indicates that the product does influence consumer-purchasing behavior.

**6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The objective of this paper is to study whether the ambiance of the store influences the customer's purchase behavior or not. Window display, lighting, fragrance, music, color coordination, and product set-up are the visual merchandising factors carried throughout this study. The findings of this study are crucial especially when the current market is more competitive than ever before. Thus, retailers have to be innovative in designing unique store ambiance to gain a competitive advantage over their business rivals. Digital technology has well integrated into the current market and customers can purchase via the Internet without leaving the comfort of their home. This has become a challenge for physical store retailers, but fortunately, issues such as products not matching the pictures, delivery issues, and payment security leave a significant number of consumers more comfortable with physically purchasing products instead of doing everything online. Some customers still prefer physical stores to online shopping as this allows them to see and touch the product. Besides, most of the customers are to be said for the experience one gets when you step into a well-designed store and there is nothing quite as therapeutic as walking into and browsing a dozen shops in a single day. This is the reason that I insist the store ambiance may change the customer's purchase behavior of a retail store. Retailers should offer customers the best ambiance to maximize the customer’s convenience and experience at the store. The store environment (window display, lighting, fragrance, music, color coordination, and product set-up) can provide customers a comfortable environment in which they willingly want to spend time. Once customers feel comfortable in the store, they are more likely to spend time in the shop, which gives them more time to peruse the items available.

Based on the findings throughout, this conducted study proved that the importance of what customers perceive of the store's ambiance is a major driving force in their intention to make purchases within them. Customer's perception of stores can be utilized by enhancing physical store characteristics like that of a signature fragrance, trendy music that reflects the genre of the store, lighting that is used to highlight their merchandise, and the way the merchandise is arranged. Retailers can use this information to enhance their stores to better meet the needs of their customers while at the same time increasing customer purchases.

**7. CONCLUSION**

In this competitive era, market retailers have to create diverse forms of strategy to attract customers from all walks of life. These different strategies like a window display, lighting, fragrance, music, color coordination, and product set-up will attract curious customers to the retail store who are seeking a more innovative and attractive store environment. A unique store environment allows customers to have a completely exclusive shopping experience as well as improving the customer's satisfaction. Besides, strategic product arrangement in stores is necessary to induce customer's purchase. Nowadays, working life has become more stressful, and women especially like to shop to de-stress and relax after trying periods in their life. A unique store environment may make customers feel special and comfortable. As retailers, it is important to acknowledge the various factors contributing to consumer's purchase behavior and to work on the factors that can influence such as through the improvement of one's current stores to achieve a wider appeal. The main findings of this study were that the store ambiance influences consumer purchase behavior. Results proved that consumer-purchasing behavior is significantly influenced by the store's environment such as window display, lighting, fragrance, music, color coordination, and product set-up. The study further revealed that some factors such as lighting, fragrance, music, color coordination, and product set-up are positively contributing to consumer purchasing behavior. Whereas the window display is negatively contributing to consumer purchasing behavior.

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