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IMPACT OF RETAIL ATMOSPHERICS IN ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS: A STUDY OF RETAIL OUTLETS OF LUCKNOW

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ABSTRACT

Atmospherics plays a challenging role in creating an affirmative environment to a retail outlet. The visuals of the retail store (exterior or interior) have a pronounced influence on the modern consumer. The modern consumer is posing a demanding errand for Indian retail. The exploratory framework of this research makes it easier to comprehend the upcoming retailing trends in terms of stores layout, stores design, architectural makeover which leads to knowing buying perception among customers. The intent of this study is to check the dependency of stores atmospherics in luring customers. It emphasizes on the significance of retail atmospherics as a mechanism for increasing sales. The study may be helpful for managers to create and implement customer value strategies in retail setup. The study fortifies that stores atmospherics has considerable role in attracting customers and is dominant factor for creating the brand image of the store.

KEYWORDS

Brand image, Customer value, Retail Atmospherics.

INTRODUCTION

The term atmospherics was coined by Philip Kotler in the year 1973 in the journal named "Journal of Retailing". Retail atmospherics refers to an array of anything inside a retail store that is intended to affect the consumer's attitude and perception towards buying. This comprises the use of colors, designs, decors, lighting or music. The point of all of this is to engage all of the customers' senses to entice them into making a purchase. Retail atmospherics are based upon the psychology of the consumers in terms of using triggers to tell people to make a purchase or to stay in the store. The appearance of the stores holds a considerable importance in tempting customers through the doors. It can be said that atmospherics is an effort to create a positive brand image of the store which leads to the purchases by customers. Atmospherics implies on the physical characteristics of the store that projects on the buying behavior of the consumer.

The atmosphere of the stores includes brand design which continuously throws brand messages that the consumer entails throughout the shopping period. The retail environment is projected in order to create a positive image of the store. The other perceptions related to stores atmospherics communicate that it is not only an attempt to create a positive image or purchases but also makes it differentiated from its competitors and create a n adaptive brand value.

OBJECTIVES OF RETAIL ATMOSPHERICS

- To provide customers a positive and easy environment with proper lighting, music and decors.
- To design store in such a way that customers enjoy shopping.
- To maximize the space of the store through proper layout so that it does not lead to overcrowding.

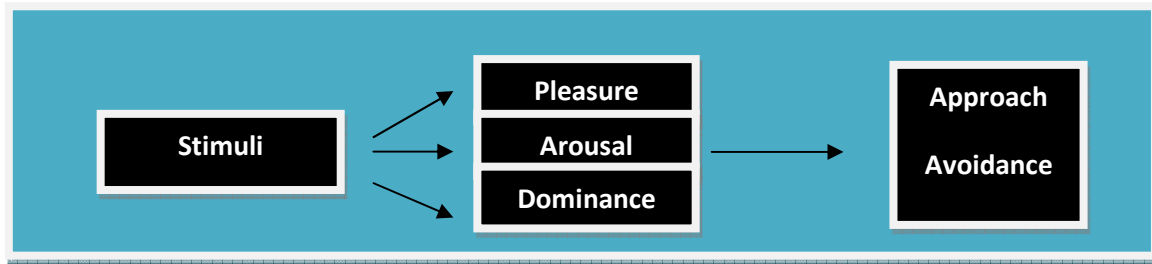
TYPES OF RETAIL ATMOSPHERICS

Retail atmospherics is classified as:

- 1) Exterior Atmospherics: Exterior atmospherics involves all those things which are at the outer side of the store and attracts the customers to enter the doors like marquee, entrance of the store, display windows and parking facilities
- 2) Interior Atmospherics: On the other hand interior atmospherics include the internal elements like decorations, lightning, music, ambience, flooring, internal displays, flooring etc.

The Mehrabian Russel is a classic model which is used as a reference by various researchers. The model studies about Stimuli (S) – Organism (O) – Response (R). In Stimuli (S)- Organism (O)- Response (R), it is assumed that stimuli is the combination of various elements of stores which are external to the person (Bagozzi, 1986). Organism refers to the state of internal processes which lies between the stimuli and the responses (Bagozzi, 1986). This concludes that consumer's emotional state can be known by the effect of atmospherics on consumer.

FIGURE 1: MEHRABIAN AND RUSSEL MODEL (1974)



Source: Mehrabian and Russel Model 1974

The three basic domains of this model are: pleasure arousal and dominance. Dominance is considered to have the non significant role on the behavior of the consumer (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Donovan et al., 1994; Russell and Pratt, 1980). Response can be studied on the basis of the approach and avoidance behavior. Approach consists of communication with others, to stay in the store for longer period of time and explore the environment. On the other hand avoidance is the opposite of all this factors (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974). There is a very little distinction between the studies concluded by Mehrabian and russel and the studies carried out by Donovan and Rossiter (1982). In the latter model, the factor of dominance is neglected.

After the Mehrabian and Russel Model, Turley and Miliman presented S-O-R model in the year 2004 which constituted five variables in Atmospheric Stimuli (Stimulus). These five variables include exteriors, interiors, store layout, interior display and human variables which affects the emotional state (Organism) of the employees and the customers resulting in the responsive behavior of the customers (Response).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Martinean (1958) has studied the Store Image way back in the 1950s. He was the first to link store image to the image that a shopper has of oneself. He called Store image 'as personality of the store or its image. According to him, the store is defined in the shoppers 'mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by the quality of its psychological attributes. He lists functional attributes such as location, price ranges, and merchandise selection. He illustrates the psychological attributes leading to the creation of store image as: layout and architecture of the store, symbols (emblems) and colors, advertising, and sales personnel of the stores.

The influence of environmental cues on consumer behaviour has been widely discussed in the scientific literature, since Donovan and Rossiter (1982) introduced the concept of environmental psychology to marketing research. Their basic model assumes a Stimulus-Organism-Response taxonomy, where the environment (stimulus) has an impact on the emotional states of consumers along three dimensions, pleasure, arousal or dominance (organism). These act as mediators on the response, which is a behavior characterized as avoiding or approaching (Mehrabian & Russell 1974, Woodworth 1928).

Grossbart, Hampton, Rammohan, and Lapidus (1990) researched about the customer behavior, predominantly among those with higher stimulus looking for affinity or pleasure-seeking, is reliant on the atmospheric distinctiveness of a shopping area.

Subhashini Kaul, (2006) has examined the various measures of store patronage and its antecedents; store loyalty. On patronage the author concludes that consumers would display greater patronage behavior for furniture as compared to garments, more for garments as compared to grocery etc. In any case, exclusive shopping at a single store is rare. Loyalty is the prime attitudinal objective that every marketer / retailer aims for with his marketing/retail mix elements.

The buying process in a retail environment is triggered when consumers recognize that they have an unsatisfied need. Especially when shopping for fun, the decision to enter a particular store, how much time to spend inside, and to buy or not to buy is heavily influenced by the shopping environment and its effect on customers' emotions. Consequently, a retailer's design their shops so that customers are attracted, locate merchandise easily, motivate unplanned purchases, and offer a satisfying shopping experience (Levy & Weitz 2009).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the significance of atmospherics that affects the consumer's attitude and perception towards buying.
- To study the impact of the stores atmospherics on brand image of the retail outlets.
- To identify the behavior of the consumer in retail outlets.
- To study the relationship between the stores atmospherics and positive image of the retail outlet.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Exploratory Research is carried on for the purpose of knowing the trends in retailing and changes in consumer's perceptions due to exteriors and interiors of the store. Survey method is employed for collection of the data. Survey is conducted in the retail outlets of Lucknow city. A well defined questionnaire was prepared which contained 10 questions including open ended and closed ended questions. The scope of the study is restricted to few selected apparel retail outlets in the city of Lucknow. They are: Globus, Max, Pantaloons and Shoppers Stop.

SAMPLE SIZE

The sample of study is 200 respondents.

PERIOD OF STUDY

The study was carried out during the period Oct 2014 to Dec 2014.

TOOLS USED

The method of correlation is applied to calculate the dependability among variables. Further t-test is applied to check the hypothesis statistically.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Marketers comprehend that atmospherics of a store is a chief attribute of the shopping experience that can easily effect consumers decision to visit the store (Kotler 1973-1974). The cues of the stores atmosphere such as color, music, lighting, smell, crowding, windows display and storefront reflects an essential role in shoppers' perception and evaluation of the store. Stores with pleasant and moderately arousing atmospheres are likely to contribute to the overall favorableness of the store and effect buyer behavior in a positive way. (Chebat and Sirgy, 2010)

In this study, interior environment has been found to have a remarkable impact on the consumer's attitude. As seen in a number of previous studies, including those of Kotler (1973-1974), Yalch and Spangenberg (1990), Crawley (1993) and Babin and Darden (1996), store atmospherics has become an important tool to uplift the mood of the shoppers urging them to purchase more. These studies have spotted various factors that can contribute to store ambience like decorations, lighting, color, music etc.

Decorations: Decorations create a beauty and communicate the image of the store. Decorations of a store should be such that it can attract customers and give a pleasant environment to the buyers. It can give uniqueness to the store and thus communicates the value of the store.

TABLE 1: DECORATIONS IN THE STORE		
Response	Number of Respondents	%
Very Important	79	39.5
Important	91	45.5
Less important	30	15
Total	200	100

Interpretation: 39.5% of the people admit that decorations in the store are as important as other things while 15% agree that it is not a considerable factor. Without proper decoration and arrangement, a customer cannot be lured towards the stores.

Lightning: Lightning is an effective component to enhance the design of the store. Proper lightning of a store propels the consumer to buy more as it highlights the products and makes them noticeable. On the other hand, it creates a positive store image leading customers inside the store. Customers feel proper lightning can lead to more enjoyable experiences in shopping.

TABLE 2: LIGHTNING IN THE STORE		
Response	Number of Respondents	%
Very Important	65	32.5
Important	98	49
Less Important	37	18.5
Total	200	100

Interpretation: Among 200 people surveyed across 4 retail outlets, 32.5% respondents feel proper lightning in the store compels them to purchase more and create a positive brand image of the store while 18.5% of the customers did not appreciate the lighting as a significant component.

Color: According to a color marketing group, the reason for customers to buy one product after another is based on the attractiveness that a color can create. A customer does not confine himself only to the color of the merchandise but also by the colors of the surroundings which highly affect the consumer's mood while purchasing.

TABLE 3: COLOR IN THE STORE		
Response	Number of Respondents	%
Very Important	89	44.5
Important	76	38
Less Important	35	17.5
Total	200	100

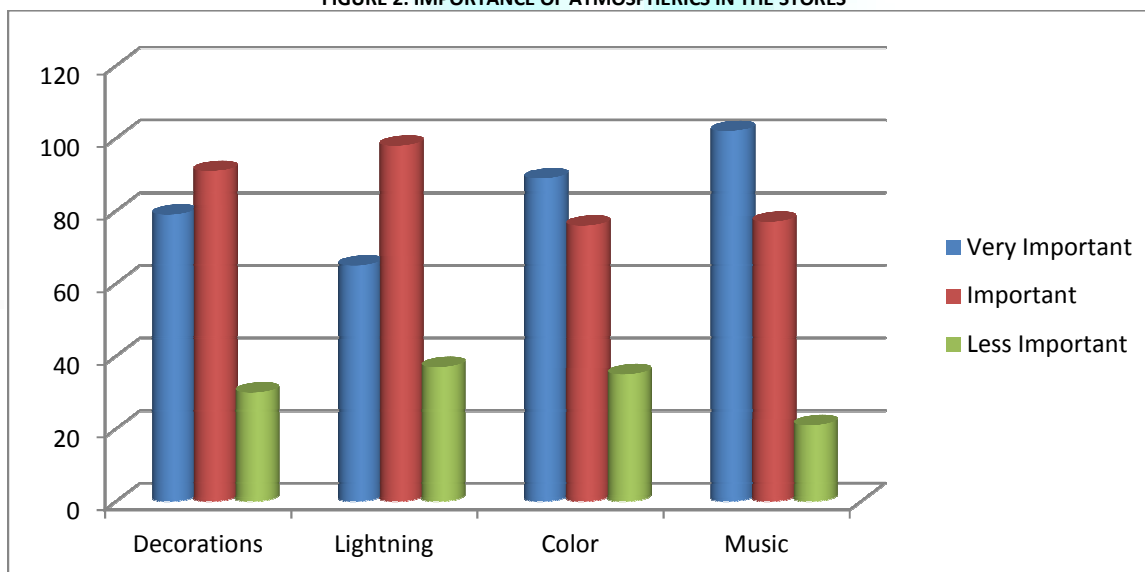
Interpretation: Previous studies have inferred that combination of lightning and color can create eagerness among the customers to purchase more. From the above table it is deduced that only 17.5% of the customers did not consider the color of the outlet and rest 82.5% appreciates it. Attractive interior atmospherics can entice the customer to purchase.

Music: Music is not only a mood enhancer but has the power to influence the behavior of the consumer. Previous researchers have concluded that background music in a retail store makes the shoppers stay for long and purchase more. The important thing is that the music should be appropriate and according to the needs of the customers.

TABLE 4: MUSIC IN THE STORE		
Response	Number of Respondents	%
Very Important	102	51
Important	77	38.5
Less Important	21	10.5
Total	200	100

Interpretation: From the above table, it is interpreted that 51% of the people consider music as the essential attribute of the atmospherics which motivates the customers to purchase while 21% of respondents feel that music cannot inculcate them to make purchases.

FIGURE 2: IMPORTANCE OF ATMOSPHERICS IN THE STORES



The above figure shows the percentage of decorations, lightning color and music in the terms of importance It can be inferred that music in the store has a great impact on customers while purchasing. Decorations are the other important factor which is considerable in attracting customers. Thirdly, lightning has got the lesser percentage in terms of significance.

TABLE 5: COMPARISON OF ATMOSPHERICS ACROSS SIX RETAILERS

Stores/Response	Excellent		Good		Poor		Total	
	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%
Globus	32	64	12	24	6	12	50	100
Max	14	28	28	56	8	16	50	100
Pantaloons	36	72	10	20	4	8	50	100
Shoppers Stop	31	62	18	36	1	2	50	100

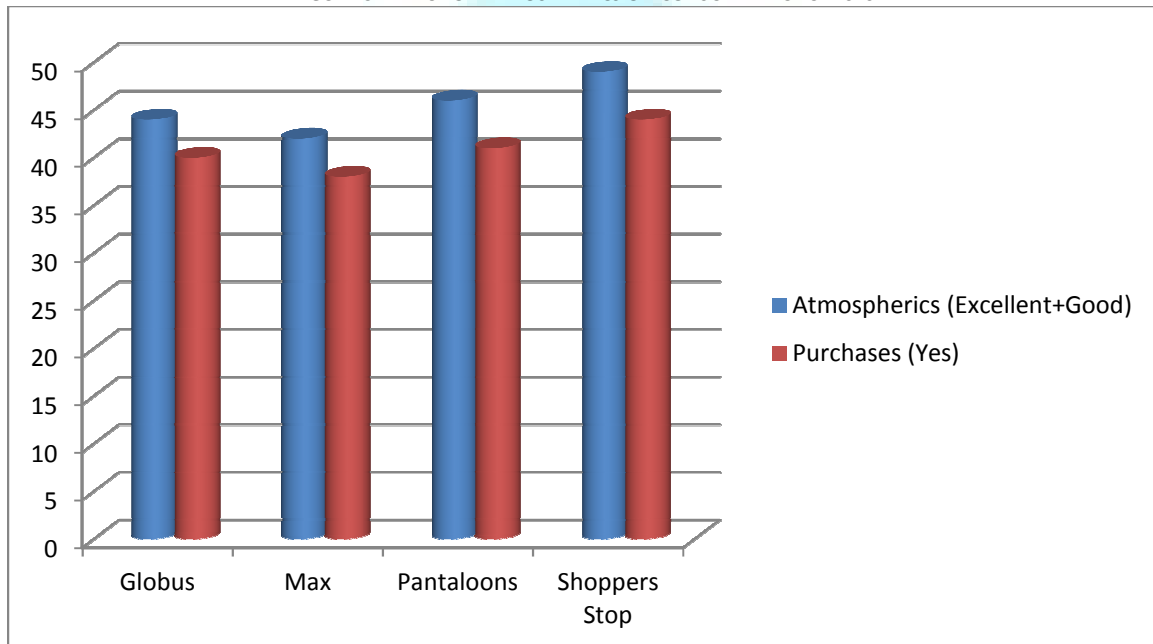
The above table shows the comparison among the retail outlets in terms of atmospherics. It is inferred from the table that Pantaloons gains the highest percentage (72) among all whereas people are less attracted by atmospherics in the retail outlet of max. On the other hand it is also noticed that max has the highest percentage (8) in terms of poor atmospherics and shoppers top with the lower percentage. After Pantaloons, Globus is considered to have the excellent atmospherics.

TABLE 6: PURCHASES MADE BY CUSTOMERS

Stores/Response	Yes		No		Total	
	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%
Globus	40	80	10	20	50	100
Max	38	76	12	24	50	100
Pantaloons	41	82	9	18	50	100
Shoppers Stop	44	88	6	12	50	100

Table 6 shows the actual purchases made by customers due to the proper atmospherics. Many of the customers do agree that atmospherics of the store are very much liable for the customer to purchase from a particular outlet. It is not only the brand image of the store but the interior and exterior environment do play a major role.

FIGURE 3: EFFECT OF ATMOSPHERICS ON CONSUMER PURCHASES



The above figure shows a consolidated data of atmospherics (Excellent + Good) and purchases made by consumers (Yes). It is concluded that the better the atmospherics of a store, the more will be the purchases. Shoppers Stop is considered to have the best atmospherics and so the purchases made by the customers are all high. On the other hand Max lacks behind and so the purchases made are also less.

FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESIS

H₀: Atmospherics does not affect the consumer purchases.

H₁: Atmospherics affect the consumer purchases.

Through above research it is inferred, the customers purchasing in retail outlets acknowledge that atmospherics do play a dominant role in attracting customers. From the above hypotheses, two variables are obtained: Atmospherics and Consumer Purchases. The responses for this parameter are taken in terms of —Good for Atmospherics (The sum of response Excellent and good is taken) and yes for Consumer Purchases (Table: 6). The Karl Pearson’s coefficient of correlation at + 0.993 establishes an almost perfectly positive correlation between atmospherics and Consumer Purchases of the store. It can be answered that the more attractive the atmospherics in a store the more purchases made by consumers. Further t-test is applied to test the hypothesis. The calculated t-value at 14.03 is greater than the table value at 95% confidence level i.e., 12.706. Therefore, the hypothesis: Atmospherics affects the consumer purchases of the store is accepted.

CONCLUSION

Globalization and Westernization is the success of key for any retailer. The research paper concludes that proper environment of a store leads to increase in sales. The outer or the inner atmosphere of the store is the only way to target customers. The needs and the style of the consumers are increasing day by day so the retailers need to emphasize on the atmospherics of the store to meet the challenging roles of a competitors and even customers. It is clearly understood by the research conducted in Lucknow city that atmospherics do have a valued role in influencing customers. Atmospherics of the store should be consistently improved at all the levels so that it may give a defined structure to the retail outlets. In turn it will lead to the satisfaction of the customer.

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