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INFLUENCE OF 'GREEN ATMOSPHERICS' ON ECO – FRIENDLY CONSUMERS – A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

In marketing theory and research numerous studies were documented on identifying the factors underlying the pro – environmental behaviour that drive actual green purchases. Though demographic factors, psychological variables, environmental variables, cultural orientations and ethical ideologies influence green buying behaviour (Cheah and phau, 2011), it is observed that green consumers demonstrate stronger approach behaviours to green environments than non – green ones. The deliberate effort of designing retail environments that enhance the probability of immediate purchase intention of green products from an outlet is termed as 'Green atmospherics'. Consumers perceive green environments as physical interpretation of the company' commitment to enhance the well – being of the environment (Kreidler and Joseph Mathews, 2009). Realizing the role of green atmospherics in 'push and pull' of green consumers in pre – purchase decisions, marketers utilize atmospherics to manipulate the physical retail environment with the objective of inducing specific cognitive and effective response behaviours (Batra and Kazoni, 2008). Environmental consciousness may drive consumers towards green products but the green atmospherics of the outlets strengthen their desire and make them relate and rely the shops marketing green products. The present study is an attempt aiming to analyze the role and influence of 'green atmospherics' on consumer's green purchasing intentions.

KEYWORDS

green atmospherics, green design, green retailing environment.

INTRODUCTION

Today, environmental or green marketing, a strategic marketing approach is a recent focus in business endeavours (Ottman, 1998). Increasing focus on environmental issues can be seen as indication that pro – environmental concerns have emerged as a potential strategic concern for businesses (Polonsky and Kilbourne, 2005). Consumers who are concerned with the environment and are knowledgeable about the environmental issues when shopping try to purchase only eco – friendly products (Laroche, Bergeron 2001). In marketing theory and research numerous studies were documented on identifying the factors underlying the pro – environmental behaviour that drive actual green purchases. Though demographic factors, psychological variables, environmental variables, cultural orientations and ethical ideologies influence green buying behaviour (Cheah and Phau, 2011), it is observed that green consumers demonstrate stronger approach behaviours to green environments than non – green ones. The deliberate effort of designing retail environments that enhance the probability of immediate purchase intention of green products from an outlet is termed as 'Green atmospherics'. (Kreidler and Joseph – Mathews, 2009). The physical environment of retail outlets plays a significant role in shaping green purchase behaviour (Tsavenko, Ferrero, Sands and McLeod, 2013). Globally, new retailers started implementing initiatives that include green infrastructure, green operations and green supply chain systems to enhance their green image (Sinha, 2011). From consumers perspective, an ideal retail environment is one that is physically appealing, socially supportive, symbolically welcoming and naturally gratifying (Rosenbauh and Massiah, 2011). Consumers perceive green environments as physical interpretation of the company commitment to enhance the well – being of the environment (Kreidler and Joseph Mathews, 2009). Realizing the role of green atmospherics in 'push and pull' of green consumers in pre – purchase decisions, marketers utilize atmospherics to manipulate the physical retail environment with the objective of inducing specific cognitive and effective response behaviours (Batra and Kazoni, 2008). Environmental consciousness may drive consumers towards green products but the green atmospherics of the outlets strengthen their desire and make them relate and rely the shops marketing green products.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Zeithmal, Bitner and Gremler (2009) identified ambience, design and social factors as the main atmospheric components that influence consumer buying behaviour. Parish and Berry (2008) outlined that in marketing communications, atmospheric – oriented stimuli are regarded as effective in enhancing consumer approach, a quality is more predominant in young consumers. Joseph Kreidler and Mathews (2009) highlighted that in green marketing, the term 'green atmospherics' emanated from the realization that sustainability is more than the development of green products but encompasses the integration of green values into the value mix. Oakes, Patterson et.al (2013) stated that ambience conditions include visual, aesthetic, cleanliness of factory and auditory elements. They are factors complemented by design and layout elements such as the interior and exterior furnishings Kriedler et.al stated that the trend towards green atmospherics resulted in green building design which assures a positive contribution to environment through efficient use of land, water and energy. Joye et.al (2010) found that green store designs tend to mitigate the discomfort, negative mood and stress that are common in retail settings. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) mentioned that consumers who see psychological escape from their everyday lives might also be influenced by the retail outlets natural environment. Ling (2013) stated that green design included architecture, colour and lighting environment. Pareigis et.al (2012) termed the social factors as 'social servicescape' encompass consumer to consumer interaction and interaction with employees. Consumers that seek social value are more likely to respond to a company's socially symbolic servicescape. Kriedler et.al (2009) portray the roles of social factors as 'Directors of First Impression' and Managers of Moments of Truth which employees have to demonstrate that they embrace sustainability values in their daily operations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Green atmospherics as a marketing tool is highly influential in enhancing uptake of green products. Though the green atmospherics is subjective, while designing the environment the marketers have to address the expectations of the target consumers. Realizing its significance retail outlets are more focusing on their environmental design in recent days. In Western countries the trend of green designing their outlets caught up in the last decade and has spread over beyond retail outlets. Even public institutions in the field of education, healthcare, energy etc embraced this trend and demonstrate their environmental credentials. In India, big retail players like Reliance, pothy's in Tamil Nadu had undertaken great initiatives in this regard. The frontal portion of pothy's shop gives the impression of forest – look with bamboo structure decorated with artificial flowers. Pamphlets containing cultivation tips of plants are also given to customers, besides nursery plants. It is being embraced by big retailers in cities in Tamil Nadu and retailers closely watching and measuring the results of green atmospherics in enhancing the

green purchase intentions of consumers. An investigation into the impact of this green initiative of retailers in Tamil Nadu, would assume significance and relevance in the current retailing environment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To know the influence of green atmospherics across selected profile variables of consumers.
2. To analyse and rank the variables constitute the major elements of green atmospherics namely ambience, store design and social factors.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

In virtual digital markets, retailers use the internet to create a visual atmosphere by incorporating graphics, colours, layout, content and interactivity. Attempt in the physical stores, based on green approach is of recent phenomenon in retailing environment. Study aiming at understanding the influence of green atmospherics on green consumers would provide valuable information to retailers to have the knowledge of how these individual elements constituting the atmospherics is being viewed and impacted consumers. The results of the study would be of immense help in formulating future strategy relating to the design of physical environment of retail stores.

METHODOLOGY

120 green consumers were chosen from the 12 corporations cities of Tamil Nadu, representing 10 each by following simple convenient random sampling technique. 24 retail stores, representing two each from these cities were also selected based on the judgment of the researcher. Those stores which made considerable attempts on green atmospherics were only considered. The respondents were contacted in front of the stores during evenings. Well structured interview schedule was prepared and administered. 5 – Point Likert Type Scaling procedure was adopted in the schedule which contained 21 statements. To analyse and rank the attributes, mean, standard deviation and co efficient of variation were used. Based on the CV scores, ranks were assigned. Green consumers who were consented to participate in the study were only considered for the study. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study.

RESULT OF DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 depicts the opinion of respondents on the influence of green atmospherics across their selected profile variable.

TABLE 1: OPINION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE INFLUENCE OF GREEN ATMOSPHERICS OF RETAIL STORES IN TAMIL NADU

S. No	Profile variable	Sub – category	Opinion					Total
			SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	
1.	Gender	Male	21 (38.30)	14 (11.60)	12 (10.0)	8 (6.60)	-	86
		Female	-	17 (14.10)	17 (14.10)	-	-	34
Total							120	
2.	Education	Degree	31 (25.80)	22 (18.30)	07 (5.80)	15 (12.50)	01 (0.80)	76
		Professional	33 (27.50)	11 (9.20)	-	-	-	44
Total							120	
3.	Marital status	Married	21 (17.50)	38 (31.60)	16 (13.30)	5 (4.20)	-	80
		Unmarried	37 (30.80)	03 (2.50)	-	-	-	40
Total							120	
4.	Occupation	Govt -employed	30 (25.0)	10 (8.30)	8 (6.70)	-	-	48
		Self –employed	43 (35.80)	18 (15.0)	11 (9.20)	-	-	72
Total							120	
5.	Monthly Income	Upto Rs.50,000	17 (14.10)	27 (22.50)	22 (18.30)	17 (14.10)	-	67
		Above Rs. 50,000	28 (23.30)	21 (17.50)	04 (3.30)	-	-	53
Total							120	
6.	Place of Residence	Rural	07 (5.80)	08 (6.70)	29 (24.20)	09 (7.50)	-	53
		Urban	27 (22.50)	38 (31.70)	02 (1.70)	-	-	67
Total							120	

Source: Primary data

(SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO – No Opinion, DA – Disagree and SDA – Strongly Disagree)

Table 2 Depicts the Ranks of Statements Expressing the Three Major Elements of Green Atmospherics Based on Respondents Preference.

TABLE 2: RANKS OF STATEMENTS EXPRESSING THE THREE MAJOR ELEMENTS OF GREEN ATMOSPHERICS BASED ON RESPONDENTS PREFERENCE

Elements	Statement	Mean	SD	CV	Overall value	Overall Rank
1. Ambience	1. Energy star ratings	4.21	0.77	18.2 (1)	505	1
	2. Clean and neat environment	3.63	0.76	20.87 (2)	435	4
	3. Remind me of being eco – friendly	3.96	0.87	22.07 (3)	475	7
	4. Visuals are pleasing	3.68	0.92	24.98 (4)	441	10
	5. Biodegradable cleaning agents	3.03	0.99	32.77 (5)	363	13
	6. Efficient use of energy	2.96	1.16	39.29 (6)	355	16
	7. Free from dust and noise	2.71	1.39	51.42 (7)	325	19
2.Green Design	1. Responsible use of materials	4.04	0.79	19.62 (1)	485	2
	2. More use of recycled content	3.7	0.78	21.2 (2)	444	5
	3. Relating me to ‘mother nature’	4.15	0.96	22.93 (3)	498	8
	4. Making me more comfort	3.65	0.93	25.53 (4)	438	11
	5. Colours reminding environment	3.09	1.03	33.53 (5)	370	14
	6. Unique building design	2.6	1.31	50.21 (6)	312	17
	7.Lighting by renewable energy sources	2.66	1.5	56.35 (7)	319	20
3.Social Factors	1. Promoting green culture in the environment	4.07	0.82	20.09 (1)	488	3
	2. Employees well aware of green issues			21.48 (2)	474	6
	3. Employees effective in promoting green communication	3.95	0.85	24.53 (3)	435	9
	4. Demonstrating their social responsibility in every action	3.63	0.89	32.32 (4)	380	12
	5. Eco – friendly approach found in every interaction with employees	3.17	1.02	38.62 (5)	358	15
	6. Walking stretches reduces footprints	2.98	1.15	51.42 (6)	358	18
	7. Interaction with employees yielding green information	2.47	1.4	56.82 (7)	296	21

Source: Computed data

- Numbers in brackets indicate their ranks in the respective sub – category

INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is understood from Table 1 that a majority of respondents belonging to the male category (38.3 percent) of ‘gender’, professional category of (27.5 percent) ‘education’, unmarried category of (30.8 percent) of ‘marital status’, self employed category (35.8 percent) of ‘occupation’, above Rs. 50,000 category (23.3 percent) of ‘income’ and urban category (31.7 percent) of ‘place of residence’ opined that the green atmospherics of the retail outlets influenced them to a great extent. From the overall observation it was inferred that major chunk of respondents irrespective of their categories acknowledged that they were being influenced by the efforts of green atmospherics of retailers. Only a little percentage of respondents in each category marked their responses under ‘Disagree’ and almost the column ‘Strongly agree’ was blank.

From Table 2, the statements (1) ‘the energy ratings’, ‘the responsible use of materials’ and ‘promoting green culture in the environment’ had overall rank of one, two and three as their CV scores stood at 18.2,19.62 and 20.09 respectively. Under the sub – category of elements the statement ‘energy star rating’ was ranked first in respect of ambience, followed by ‘clean and neat environment and remind me of being eco – friendly’ and in respect of green design, the statement, ‘the responsible use of materials’, was ranked first, followed by ‘more use of recycled content’ and ‘relating me to Mother Nature’. In respect of social factors, the statement ‘promoting green culture in the environment’ was ranked first, followed by ‘employees well aware of green issues’, and ‘employees effective in promoting green communication’.

It is finally understood from the analysis that the ‘green atmospherics’ of retail stores strongly influencing the green purchasing intention of consumers. As far as the study is concerned, the result showed that the most influencing attributes of green atmospherics were, energy star ratings, responsible use of materials and promoting green culture to the environment.

Green atmospherics as an effective marketing tool can act as a strong stimuli on green consumers. Only big players in retailing invested on green atmospherics, the trend is yet to catch up other players in the field. While implementing green atmospherics, care must be taken to ensure reduction in carbon footprint, energy conservation, improvement in customer relationships and interaction, and tuning entire organization into adopting green culture. Attaining environmental sustainability being the major objective of eco – friendly companies, ‘green atmospheric’ by its influential role occupied a centre stage in the future strategy of ‘green retailing’.

CONCLUSION

As the present study, by and large has demonstrated the influence of ‘green atmospherics’ on consumers green pushing intentions in Tamil Nadu. Barring few big retail players, others in the field by considering the cost element involved, did not pay much attention the green atmospherics deserved. The results of the present study in Tamil Nadu would be an eye opener to all retailers who are making, every effort to present themselves as ‘green retailers’.

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