

# Effect of store atmospherics on customer buying behaviour

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■ **ABSTRACT** : The present study investigated the design of an environment via visual communications, lighting, colours, music and scent to stimulate customers' perceptual and emotional response and ultimately affect their purchase behaviour. For the present research work purposive sampling, Interview schedule and convenient sampling methods were used to carry out the research work. The sample size consisted of 140 research scholars from faculty of arts and Sciences of Punjab University, Chandigarh. The major findings showed that store atmospherics bring a psychological feeling in the mind of customers who enters the store. The sight, sound, smell, displays, colour, mannequins in a retail store all contribute to customer perceptions. Almost all the customers get motivated by elegant store fronts, fantasy windows, mannequins, posters which influence their buying behaviour. It was further found out that store atmospherics emphasize on combining visual and other sensory elements that capture customer attention who enter the retail stores, awaken their senses through music, scent, and provides the customer a wonderful buying experience. Different types of displays attract, compel and persuade customer's senses, striking the right chord in him and arising in them an emotion to possess the product in display, thus persuade them to make an impulse purchase.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Store atmospherics, Windows, Displays, Customer senses and Mannequins

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Looking rich and good has always been an integral part of Indian culture. Store atmospherics is the heart of any retail business. It is the combination of all the elements to unravel an image story. The store facade, lavish walkways, colour, themes, window displays, all creates a niche for the emerging brands. Atmospherics tend to tap the six senses of shoppers. The objective was to make customer feel comfortable and spend more time in the store. A prudent visual strategy can enhance brand image, footfall in the critical

season period. Successful global and local brands have delighted their customers with innovative conceptualisation, detailed planning and execution.

Berman and Joel (2007) Atmospherics refer to the store's physical characteristics that project an image and attract customers. It refers to a psychological feeling a customer gets when he enters the store. For a store based retailing perceptive, Atmospherics refers to physical characteristics of the store *i.e.* Store exteriors, general interiors, store layout and displays. For a non store based

firm, atmospherics refer to the physical characteristics of catalogs, vending machines, websites and so forth. The concept of 'atmospherics' was first introduced by Kotler in 1973 where a store's atmosphere was defined as the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance purchase probability. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) specified that a store's environmental stimuli can affect the consumer's emotional states of pleasure and arousal, which further affects approach or avoidance behaviours in purchasing. Pleasure refers to the degree to which the consumers feel good, happy, satisfied and joyful in the store environment. Arousal refers to the degree to which consumers feel in control of, or free to act in, the environment. A store has an emotion inducing capability. A positive emotion inducing store can contribute to a customer's pleasurable shopping experience. A positive store environment helps to foster goal attainment, more consumers achieve their goal and hence a pleasurable shopping experience (Darden and Babin, 1994 and Spies, 1997).

Store atmospherics has three category framework (Baker, 1986):

- Store ambient factor- colour, lighting, size and shape of objects, aural (music) and olfactory (Scent)
- Store design factor
- Store social factor

#### **Store ambient factor :**

The ambient factors includes elements such as colour, temperature, lighting, music and scent. Ward and Russell (1981); Milliman (1982); Wineman (1982) and Yalch and Eric (1990) All of these elements can affect how people feel, think and respond to a particular store establishment.

According to Davidson *et al.* (1988), the ambient factor is felt more than it can be seen and measured. Ambient conditions are especially noticeable to consumers in extreme circumstances. For example, a store where the air conditioning has failed, and the air is hot and stuffy, dissatisfaction may result. Instead of taking more time to shop, consumers who feel uncomfortable may hurry to make the intended purchases and leave the store.

Colour have a physiological and psychological effect on an individual. Red is inherently exciting and physically stimulating to human brain *i.e.* Blood pressure

and respiratory rate may increase. Blue is found to be much more relaxing (Gerard, 1957; Wilson, 1966 and Clynes, 1977).

Research concerns the psychological meanings and associational themes attributed to certain colours. Diamond and Diamond (2007) described different background colours and using appropriate colours caught the eyes of viewers which could create a favourable impact on purchasing decisions.

Light and colour can have such a strong influence on people's attention so as to even physically attract customers toward a retail display and set a tone for the store's atmospherics (Bellizzi *et al.*, 1983).

Lighting is recognized as an important component of store atmospherics, affecting the consumers' visual appraisal of everything in a store, including the merchandise (Gobe, 1990; Rea, 1993 and Lopez, 1995).

Summers and Hebert (2001) investigated the approach – avoidance behaviour of shoppers at two types of retail stores under two types of lighting treatments (ambient lighting and ambient lighting plus supplementary display lighting. They calculated the amount of time at each display, number of items touched and picked under two light treatments. They found that supplemental display lighting treatment produced different effects on consumer behaviour depending on the type of store.

Bruner (1990) measured the effect of different aspects of music on emotions and mood. He found that a faster tempo of music made customers happier than slow music, firm rhythms made the shoppers more serious. High pitched music was more exciting than low pitched music. Louder music suggested animation while slower music suggested tranquillity. Both Bruner and Milliman in their separate studies measured the impact of different music on an individual's behaviour. They found that as volume increased, so the time spent in the store decreased although volume has no direct effect on total time spent in the store and shopper's satisfaction. Music of any tempo was found to increase approach behaviour. Matilia and Wirtz (2001) found that improving the ambient conditions within a retail store can encourage shoppers to engage in impulse buying. In-store music can be a critical element of a stores atmosphere.

Sweeney and Wyber (2002) found that customers who liked the music being played were more likely to

be aroused and highly rated the quality of service and merchandise.

The olfactory dimension relates to the presence of scents in the store environment. Liard (1932) found that women buying silk stockings scented with a pleasant odour believed them to be of higher quality than scented with a more natural odour. Research shows that congruent scents make shoppers more likely to spend more time in the store whereas incongruent scents make shopper more likely to spend less time in the store. The effects on behaviour of scents can be partly explained by the concept of congruity, or the degree to which a given scent is perceived to fit the immediate environment. As an example many shoppers associate the smell of leather with a furniture store, so would see this scent as congruent. Shoppers may not, however, associate the smell of leather with a grocery store, so this scent would be seen as incongruent (Bone and Jantrania, 1992). It was found that 22 out of 35 subjects liked a pair of Nike shoes better in a room with a floral ambient scent than one with no odour (Hirsch, 1990 and Miller, 1991). Pleasant scents have been found to increase alertness and performance. They facilitates recall of pleasant memories, increase presocial behaviour and increase the time spent in store (Baron and Bronfen, 1994).

Spangenberg *et al.* (1996) found that the nature and intensity of the scent was not as important as its presence. Neutral and congruent scents were found to provide the greatest benefits to the retailer with the shopper having an enhanced shopping experience.

#### **Store design factor :**

The design factor refers to a store's environment elements *i.e.* layout, fixtures, displays, interiors and exteriors of the store.

Marans and Spreckelmeyer (1982) These elements can be aesthetic and functional in nature. Functional elements in stores include layout, comfort and privacy. Aesthetic elements include such factors as architecture, materials, colour and merchandise displays. According to Darden *et al.* (1983) the first impressions of the store image is normally created at the façade level, it is seen that window display may influence, at least to some degree, consumers' choice of a store when they do not set out with a specific purpose of visiting a certain store and purchasing a certain item. The initial step is to get

customers into the store.

Hasty and Reardon (1997) interior and exterior design elements contributes to satisfaction of shoppers in the store. These design elements produces an operationally efficient store with desired store image and a central location that effectively displays merchandise. Underhill (1999) states that a good fashion store, is one where the consumer's are exposed to fashion merchandise and consumers are invited in the stores by attractively displaying fashion items in their path and field of vision. Additionally, aisles and fixtures are placed with the intension of guiding the consumer through the store.

Swanson and Judith (2000) suggested that factors such as the accessibility, visibility and attractiveness of the merchandise in combination with the store layout may promote fashion purchases. Spears and Gregoire (2004) argued that by applying a particular store layout and certain visual merchandising techniques as inputs, consumers will automatically be directed through the store.

Clark (2007) discusses that mannequin industry is crucial to any retail/visual merchandising. It has undergone drastic changes with the mannequins being realistic before, abstract then, headless later and now switching back to the realistic concept, associated with the human touch. Dawes (2008) states window display industry is now a big business, window displays portray your brand and business, and they attract customs and promote products. Research undertaken by Ti (2009) with a group of college students, illustrated the fact that "the context setting of a window display had a significant effect on consumer's mental imagery and arousal response." Textual style (signage and graphic) does not only convey a message but also enhances window display's sophistication.

#### **Store social factor:**

The social factor involves people who are present in the store environment. According to Crosby and Cowles (1986) inadequate salespeople can make consumers feel annoyed when they are required to wait. Salespeople's performance can also greatly affect consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Consumers will evaluate salesperson on the basis of their personal expectation that they bring to service encounters. Good salesperson service is about providing the consumer with

an efficient, positive and enjoyable purchasing experience (Baker, 1986). Research undertaken by Lovelock (1991) indicates, front line employees are presumed to be not only salespeople, but also consultants by customers.

Studies done by Harris *et al.* (1995); McGrath and Otnes (1995) say that conversation between salespeople and consumers frequently occur in the retail environment and in the clothing store. Consumers may ask salespeople for suggestions on merchandise selection. Livingstone (1997) states attractive appearance and pleasant behaviour of salespeople can greatly enhance the service experience.

### Objectives :

The study aims to find out the motivational factors that attract customers to go inside a store and check on products. In addition, the objective of this study is to examine the influence emerged from store atmospheric cues and impact of different types of displays on consumer's store choice and buying behaviour.

### RESEARCH METHODS

It was not feasible to study and interview all the female students in the Panjab University so for the present research work purposive sampling, Interview schedule and convenient sampling methods were used to carry out the research work. The sample size consisted of 140 research scholars from faculty of arts and Sciences of Panjab University, Chandigarh. Both qualitative and quantitative indicators were used to analyze the data. A visit to various retailers was undertaken to arrive at inclusive understanding of the subject being studied. In-depth interviews were conducted from research scholars of various departments of Sciences mainly Anthropology, Physics, Botany, Chemistry, Zoology, Geology and Nanoscience), Arts mainly History, Psychology, Geography, Economics, Political science and Education were interviewed in university campus to gain insight into their behaviour and to know their perception about the effects of Store atmospheric cues during shopping in the retail stores. Pictures were shown to the respondents to have a more clear psychological understanding of visual tactics adopted by retailers. Additionally, secondary data was also utilized through textbooks, articles of journals and web sites etc.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The motivation factor that motivates a customer to enter a store is presented in Table 1. The result showed that window display (38.46%) was the most influential factor that attracted a customer. Store front (30.76 %) was the second most influential factor, whereas a major percentage of customers considered Mannequins (23.84%) equally important motivating factor. However sales sign (20%) and Posters (14%) was preferred by very small percentage of customers. Crowd (8.4%) was the least motivating factor. The figures showed that store exteriors play a major attractive part in influencing customer to enter a store and make a purchase.

**Table 1 : Motivating factors that motivates a customer to go inside a store and check on products**

Motivating factor	Preferences by customers (%)
Store front and inside look of a store	30.76
You like the window display	38.46
You like the mannequins	23.84
You like the sale signs	20
You like the look and story on posters	14.6
The crowd inside	8.4

Store atmospheric plays an emotional and psychological feeling in motivating customers who enters the store. The concept of atmospheric is presented in Table 2. 51.5 per cent of the customers feels that Colour have a physiological and psychological effect on an individual. Temperature (30%) and lightning (28.4%) plays a major appealing factor in customers who enter the stores. However, 23.7 per cent of the customers feel that scents are found to provide shoppers a enhanced shopping experience. Though 16.9 per cent of the customers consider music as an exciting factor. Theme and story of collection (14.6) was considered the minimal factor among other store atmospheric factors, respectively.

Simple, innovative and creative displays are more

**Table 2 : Store atmospheric features that attract you most when you enter the store**

Features	Preferences by customers (%)
Attractive colour scheme	51.5
Good lightning.	28.4
Music	16.9
Temperature/ airconditioning	30
Theme and story of the collections	14.6
Scents	23.7

attractive to customers. Displays range from window/ exterior displays to interior displays including form, floor, wall, seasonal, theme as well as promotional signage. Different types of displays are presented in Table 3. Open displays were preferred by almost (33.7%) of customer visiting the stores. Whereas festive (25.38%) and interior displays (23.7%) were preferred by almost an equal amount of customers. Although lifestyle displays attracted a small chunk of shoppers *i.e.* 20 per cent. Promotional, theme and seasonal attracted the eyes of approximately 13 per cent of customers.

**Table 3 : Types of displays that caught your eyes**

Types of displays	Preferences by customers (%)
Open displays	33.7
Festive displays	25.38
Interior displays	23.7
Lifestyle displays	20
Promotional displays	13.84
Theme/ Situational displays	13.7
Seasonal window displays	12.3

### Conclusion:

The results of the study revealed that atmospherics refers to store's physical characteristics that project an image and draw customers. A retailer's sights, sounds, smells and other physical attributes all contribute to customer perception. A retailer's atmosphere may influence people's shopping enjoyment as well as time spent browsing, willingness to converse, tendency to spend more than actually planned, and likelihood of future patronage (Berman and Joel, 2009). Store front has a powerful impact on customers, it is the total physical exterior of the store. A store is often judged by its exteriors. People generally form impression of a retailer before entering its facilities by having a look at the store front (Fig. 1), window display (Fig. 2) and mannequin display (Fig. 3). Various pictures showing different atmospheric dimensions were viewed by all the respondents interviewed. Windows play a very significant role and act as a critical medium to communicate between the store and the customer. The magic of displays is delivered with the spectacular effect and innovative use of forms, Graphics, mannequins and digital media. Sale sign (Fig. 4) itself entice the customers to visit the store and make a purchase. Visuals / posters (Fig. 5) are initiated by almost all the brands to create sparkling feeling in the customers and to create



**Fig. 1 : Store front**



**Fig. 2 : Window display with floral pring season theme**



**Fig. 3 : Mannequins**

high scale image and class of that brand. The atmospheric dimensions colour (Fig. 6), lighting levels (Fig. 7), appearance of objects (size and shape), volume, pitch tempo and style of sounds; nature and intensity of scent play an important role in affecting the mood of a customer in a store. Display is simply the method by which a retailer's assortment is presented to the shopper. The primary goal is to gain shoppers' attention and fulfil shoppers demand. Open displays (Fig. 8) were considered to be the most popular form of display as they don't have a back wall thus presenting and

stimulating the shoppers to have an entire view of the store. Festive (Fig. 9), Interior (Fig. 10) and Lifestyle (Fig. 11) were rated almost equally by the respondents. Festive displays is the transformation of widows with the use of colours, textures and form with greater dramatic effect. Interior displays tend to form a story



Fig. 4 : Sale sign



Fig. 6 : Colour scheme



Fig. 7 : Lighting with Jars used for pickle



Fig. 5 : Visuals/ Posters



Fig. 8 : Open Display



Fig. 9 : Festive display



Fig. 10 : Interior display



Fig. 11 : Lifestyle display

inside the store. Lifestyle displays use videos, music, sounds and other electronic format to capture shopper attention. Promotional (Fig. 12), theme (Fig. 13) and seasonal display (Fig. 14) were the least preferred by the shoppers. Store atmospherics is the overall aesthetic and emotional effect created by the store's physical environment. Shoppers regardless of their shopping motives are more attracted by safe, attractive and



Fig. 12 : Promotional display



Fig. 13 : Theme display depicting the launch of Kid's collection



Fig. 14 : Seasonal spring- summer display

comfortable shopping environments. Since more store design are being “tailored” for this new generation of shoppers, continuous investigation into consumer’s needs in the store environment is required.

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