



ATMOSPHERICS AND STORE ATTRACTIVENESS: REVISITING RETAIL BASICS

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Abstract

Retail store visuals have the capacity to cross the boundary between the outside world and the inside world of customers. In the contemporary world, retail atmospherics has emerged as a strategic tool. However, limited literature is available to depict how customers differ in their opinion regarding the relative importance of various components of retail atmospherics. This study seeks to highlight such differences in perceptions as held by male and female retail customers. The study has been conducted in the National Capital Region of Delhi, with 239 respondents in the sample. Reliability of the data so- collected has been ascertained by using Cronbach's alpha, following which regression analysis has been applied to the data. It is brought out by the study that while the display of apparel and inputs received from store employees and fellow customers attract male customers to retail stores, female customers look forward to stores which offer pleasant aesthetics and welcoming exterior. The study may be helpful for managers to understand the onus which needs to be placed on atmospherics, with specific reference to gender. Stores catering to specialty lines for only males and only females may also stand to benefit.

Keywords: Atmospherics, Retail Store Attractiveness, Apparel Stores, Competitive Advantage.

Introduction

According to Philip Kotler (1973) retail includes "all the activities involved in selling goods or services to the final consumers for personal, non-business use". The major drivers of retail have been technological inventions, political change (and upheaval), dynamic demographic composition and rising disposable incomes. It has been forecasted that the retail market will cross the \$20,000 billion mark in 2017 with a CAGR of 3.9% over the six years from 2012 to 2017 (Lucintel, 2012). The global recession of 2008- '09 had an adverse impact on the retail sector, as it was felt by all parts of the world economy. Revenues of the world's top 10 retailers grew only modestly by 2.9 % from 2013 to 2014 (Deloitte, 2014). However, recovery in the sector has taken place at a reasonable pace, especially in Asia and Latin America. Retailers are eager to capitalize upon a growing middle class and the youth- driven population of shoppers in Latin America, Asia, Africa/Middle East, and Central Europe. And India has always been a lucrative market in Asia.

The Indian retail industry has come up as one of the most dynamic and fast- growing industries as many players have entered the market. Over the past few years, the retail sector has been contributing 30-35% to the country's GDP, surpassing even USA where this contribution is around 20% (Sikri and Wadhwa, 2012). It is also the major employer of human resource, second only to agriculture. In 2013, the Indian retail sector was estimated at US\$ 520 billion and was among the largest employers in the country (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2014). Favourable demographics, increasing urbanization, nuclearization of families, rising affluence of consumers, growing preference for branded products and higher aspirations are other factors that have driven retail consumption in India. The huge Indian market holds further promise for retailers as most of the retail market is still dominated by unorganized retail formats and uncaptured by organized formats. The age- old kirana and mom- and- pop stores, catering to local inhabitants of towns and cities alike, have been around for years together. As per the FICCI- PWC report "The Indian Kaleidoscope: Emerging Trends in Retail (2012)", the retail industry has some mammoth players. These are large business conglomerates which entered into the business in the 1990's such as the Future Group, the Aditya Birla Group, Reliance Retail, the K Raheja Group etc. Each of these players has expansion plans involving new store opening or investments between US\$ 50- 100 million in the next 5 years (Naukri Hub, 2014).

Retail Atmospherics

A customer's overall retail experience consists of in- store activities, but begins even before he enters the store. Machleit and Eroglu (2000) find that the more time a customer spends in a store, higher is the likelihood of his satisfaction with the store. Essentially, the retail store needs to build an image of acceptance among the customers. Atmospherics has emerged as a relevant marketing tool for rescue of retailers as compared to manufacturers and wholesalers. The word 'atmospherics' was coined by none other than Kotler (1973), defining it as "the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability". One of the initial mentions of retail atmospherics was



made by Gardner and Siomkos in 1986. They identified store atmospherics as a non- product factor including lighting, aisles, counters, racks, flooring, background music, mannequins, salespersons, and trial rooms in a store. As the field of atmospherics increased in scope, research in this gained momentum. Summers and Hebert (2001) defined store atmospherics as ‘the special sensory qualities of retail space that are often designed to evoke particular consumer responses’. Pan, Su and Chiang (2008) have defined store atmosphere as “designing retail space to affect consumer emotions and accordingly to appeal to consumer purchasing behavior”. The authors have divided the atmosphere into two elements- tangible (those which may be touched and seen), and intangible (those which may only be felt, not touched or seen). Further, Pan et al. (2008) have divided store atmospherics into five categories: Exterior- signs and signals, building, neighbourhood; Interior: general layout, internal route design, colouring, music, lighting, scent and temperature; Location and design; Display of goods: freebies for promotion, in- shop signs., logos, slogans, instructions, labeling; Interaction between customers and employees- personal characteristics of employees and customers. The factors pertaining to store interiors have been emphasized as being the most important for store atmospherics.

It is said to be capable of even modifying in- store behavior of customers (Michon, Chebat and Turley, 2005). As other marketing tools become neutralized in the competitive battle, atmospherics is likely to play a growing role in the unending search of firms for differential strategic advantage. Turley and Milliman (2000) have provided a framework for study and classification of the atmospherics of a retail store. Store atmospherics are divided into five factors: -

Table No. 1: Factors of Retail Atmospherics

Factors	Constituents
Exterior factors	The area encountered by the customer before entering the store, such as parking area, lawns and landscaping, sign boards, size and architecture of the building etc.
Interior factors	Include those aspects which the customer encounters after entering the store such as the colour scheme, illumination, cleanliness, store temperature, music, décor, scents and fragrances, fixtures etc.
Design factors	Refers to layout and spatial arrangements inside the store, such as utilization of space, systematic arrangement of items, availability of trial rooms, rest rooms, waiting lounges, kids play area etc.
Display factors	Refers to the way in which merchandise are displayed in the store, and includes point- of- purchase displays as well. It may include availability of price and scheme- related information, and promotional information.
Participant factors	Refers to the employees and fellow customers in a store, their appearance, behaviour, nature and knowledge about merchandise.

Source: Turley and Milliman (2000)

Retail store attractiveness

Attractive design simply means to capture attention. It has been discussed mostly as a multi- dimensional construct. An attractive store is one which has the capability of inviting or pulling customers into it, engaging them in activities for a prolonged stay in the store leading to purchase, moreover making them feel the need to return to the store again and again. Teller and Elms (2010) identify satisfaction, retention proneness and patronage as the determinants of store attractiveness. It has also been said that the atmosphere of a store has an impact on the perception regarding its attractiveness (Abghari & Hanzaee, 2011). This implies that attractiveness needs to be built into every aspect of store atmospherics as well. Wherever a potential customer may interact with the store’s atmosphere, he/ she should feel attracted towards it. This means that the attractiveness of a store needs to be considered from outside to inside the store, across various areas such as billing, merchandise display, waiting areas, recreation areas etc.

Review of Literature

The extensive literature on retail store atmospherics, has been augmented by Baker, Levy and Grewal (1992). They provide an experimental method that can be utilized by retailers to examine various aspects of store atmospherics and their influence on the retail patronage decision. Specifically, they conclude that effects of two retail atmospherics- ambient cues and social cues may lead to respondents’ pleasure, arousal, and willingness to buy.

In a study carried out in 2010, Kumar, Garg and Rahman equate the retail store as a theatre or museum with environmental and human factors used for entertainment. These factors are- music, lighting, colour, design and store layout. Some studies



have been conducted to measure the influence of atmospheric factors on in- store experiences and store attractiveness. Morin, Dube and Chebat (2006) undertake two studies at different levels in service- oriented companies to provide evidence that background music may have an affect on the attitude of service providers, thus leading to better experiences for consumers in the presence of music, rather than in its absence. However, the overall impact of music on store and the experience which takes place within the store, is evaluated from the mood of customers, and not from factors like wait-length evaluation etc. (Cameron, Baker, Peterson, Braunsberg, 2001).

In a one of its kind study set in India, Kumar et al. (2010) conclude that retail customers give greater value to olfactory and tactile factors such as air conditioning facility, ambient scent, and soothing atmospheric, as compared to design factors such as window dressing, shelf arrangements and displays, architecture, etc. The likelihood of returning to a store increases in the presence of pleasing olfactory and tactile factors. Spangenberg, Grohmann and Sprott (2004) suggest that both ambient music and scents should be complimentary to other atmospheric cues, in order to lead to positive perceptions of store image, purchase decisions and probability of repeat visits. Shaari, Nordin and Fong (2011) have recognized employees as one of the determining factors for an organization's success. They specifically advise employees for imbuing qualities such as individual customer attention, understanding special needs and catering to special requests.

While research has been talking about the factors which contribute to positive perceptions and image, d'Astous (2000) draws attention towards the possible irritants in the retail atmosphere. He suggests that environmental irritants should be identified, followed by the type of irritation caused by them, and understanding the type of trouble caused to different consumer groups (on the basis of age and gender). In this study, ambient and social factors were seen as causing maximum irritation to customers. Too many irritants or intense irritants will lead to customers switching to other stores.

Retail-related factors and the atmosphere influence attractiveness most significantly. In a study of more than 2000 respondents, Teller and Reutterer (2008) identify the tenant mix and the atmosphere of retail agglomerations to be responsible for their attractiveness. They shift focus from parking and accessibility as distinct dimensions of perceived attractiveness. Teller and Elms (2010) improve upon the preceding study. They conclude that for retail agglomerations to be attractive, they should provide to their customers, facilities based on: accessibility; parking conditions; tenant mix; product range, merchandise value and sales personnel; atmosphere; and, orientation and infrastructural facilities. According to Reinartz and Kumar (1999), the attractiveness of a store is indicated by the merchandise available at the store (whether it is related to or is unrelated to the store's main business), newness of the store, the number of hours for which the store operates and promotional offers available. Interestingly, if a store includes all these factors, even the effects of an unfavourable location may be overcome. If customers hold positive attitudes towards a store, it goes to say that they are attracted towards the store as well. Yoo, Park and MacInnis (1998) have identified five factors which contribute to the attractiveness of a store. These are: product assortment, salespersons' service, store location, facilities and atmosphere. Mattila and Wirtz (2006) lament that an intrinsically attractive store environment can be perceived as unpleasant if it fails to match the consumer's desired level of stimulation. A study conducted by El Adly (2006) provides insights for managers of shopping malls, as well as store managers within the mall. The study revealed six mall attractiveness factors from the shoppers' perspective. These factors are- comfort, entertainment, diversity, mall essence, convenience, and luxury. Further, the study revealed that different groups of shoppers in the mall (demanding shoppers, pragmatic shoppers and relaxed shoppers, exhibited varying preference for the mall attractiveness factors. Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleberg (2000) go beyond the discussion on store environment. They talk about the concept of self- congruity, which may be leveraged by retail stores to attract customers. Guenzi, Johnson and Castaldo (2009) talk about the trust which customers place on retail stores, and salespersons thereof. Comparing two retail stores, the authors conclude that trust in the salesperson and trust in store branded products have positive effects on overall store trust. This in turn has a positive effect on perceived value and loyalty intentions. The salesperson's role in developing perceived quality during customer interactions has been highlighted by Sweeney, Soutar and Johnson (1999).

It emerges from the review of pertinent literature that retail atmospheric are regarded as important influential factors for attractiveness of retail stores. It is observed that though there have been studies relating to different constituents of retail store atmospheric, the studies have not looked into the relationship of these aspects or constituents with store attractiveness.

Objectives

The present day business scenario is moving towards customization. Product and service marketers are providing tailor-made offerings to consumers, thus leading to solution- selling and concept- selling. These developments necessitate in- depth



understanding of the different constituents of retail mix and how these can be incline in the favour of retailers. Specifically, the present study makes an attempt to understand the relationship between atmospherics and attractiveness. Moreover, the study has been carried out to see how the relationship of atmospherics and store attractiveness changes for male and female customers.

In the light of the above discussion, the following objective has been identified for the present study: -

- To study the effect of retail atmospherics i.e. exterior, interior, design, display and participant factors on retail store attractiveness across gender.

Further, the following alternate hypotheses have been formulated: -

- H₁ _ For males, retail atmospheric factors i.e. exterior; interior; design; display; and participant factors will effect the retail store attractiveness.
- H₂ _ For females, retail atmospheric factors i.e. exterior; interior; design; display; and participant factors will effect the retail store attractiveness.
- H₃ _ Retail atmospheric factors i.e. exterior; interior; design; display; and participant factors will effect the retail store attractiveness, irrespective of gender.

Methodology

The study is based on primary data. The study has been conducted in the National Capital Region (New Delhi, Faridabad, Gurgaon and Noida). The purpose of the field survey was to capture customers' perception of store atmospherics and store attractiveness as they experience it. A structured questionnaire has been used to gather the information from the respondents. Items for retail atmospherics (exterior, interior, design, display and participant) and retail store attractiveness have been included in the study. The statements for the questionnaire have been taken from various research studies, as indicated in table no.2. Responses are elicited on a Likert- type five point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Questionnaires were administered to respondents at their shopping destination (during the shopping activity, or soon after it). A total of 250 respondents who regularly shop in organized retail apparel stores were selected. 11 respondents had returned incomplete questionnaires and hence were discarded. Among remaining 239 respondents, 143 (59.8%) were male and 96 (40.2%) were female respondents.

Table No. 2: Sources of Items for Questionnaire

Variable	Factors	Source	
Retail Atmospherics	Exterior	Turley& Milliman (2000) Pan, Su & Chiang (2008)	Grayson& McNeill (2007) Singh& Jha (2012)
	Interior	Turley& Milliman (2000) Pan, Su & Chiang (2008)	Grayson& McNeill (2007) Singh& Jha (2012)
	Design	Dhabolkar, Thorpe& Rentz (1996) El- Adly (2006) Pan, Su & Chiang (2008)	Turley& Milliman (2000) Grayson& McNeill (2007) Singh& Jha (2012)
	Display	Turley& Milliman (2000) Pan, Su & Chiang (2008)	Grayson& McNeill (2007) Guenzi, Johnson& Castaldo (2009) Singh& Jha (2012)
	Participant factors	Parasuraman, Zeithaml& Berry (1988) Sweeney, Soutar& Johnson (1999) Pan, Su & Chiang (2008)	Dhabolkar, Thorpe& Rentz (1996) Turley& Milliman (2000) Guenzi, Johnson& Castaldo (2009)
Retail Store Attractiveness	-	Parasuraman, Zeithaml& Berry (1996) Teller& Elms (2010)	Teller& Reuterer (2008)

The data collected has been coded and tabulated, keeping it in context with the objective of study. Descriptives including Mean and Standard Deviation have been calculated. Multiple Regression analysis is applied in order to achieve the objective. Here, attractiveness has been treated as dependent variable and atmospheric factors i.e. exterior, interior, design, display and participant as independent variables. The data have been analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 for Windows.



Reliability of data thus collected was checked using Cronbach’s alpha (values are given in the table no. 3 below). It is imperative to know that higher value of Cronbach’s alpha shows high internal consistency which is considered as the best method of examining reliability.

Table No. 3: Cronbach’s Alpha for Factors in the Questionnaire (N= 239)

Variable	Factors	No. of statements	Cronbach’s Alpha
Retail Atmospherics	Exterior	9	0.798
	Interior	9	0.858
	Design	13	0.867
	Display	8	0.865
	Participant	9	0.890
Retail Store ttractiveness	-	19	0.933

Source: Primary data

The values for Cronbach’s Alpha have been found to be more than 0.70 for all factors of store atmospherics, as well as for store attractiveness, thus confirming that the data exhibit internal consistency.

Results

In an attempt to describe the data obtained from the field survey, descriptive statistics have been calculated. This enables a basic understanding of the tendency of the data.

Table No. 4: Descriptive Statistics

Variable(s)	Factors	Male (N= 143)		Female (N= 96)		Total (N= 239)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Retail Atmospherics	Exterior	3.67	0.62	3.66	0.67	3.67	0.64
	Interior	3.75	0.66	3.85	0.66	3.79	0.66
	Design	3.51	0.62	3.54	0.69	3.52	0.65
	Display	3.70	0.69	3.74	0.72	3.71	0.70
	Participant factors	3.66	0.74	3.60	0.78	3.64	0.75
Retail Store Attractiveness	-	3.72	0.55	3.74	0.72	3.73	0.62

Source: Primary data

It may be seen from table no. 4, both male and female respondents have exhibited a high level of agreeability for the importance of the interiors of retail stores, as compared to the other components of store atmospherics. Looking at the other mean figures (ranging from 3.51 to 3.75 for males; and, from 3.54 to 3.85 for females, respectively), it can be inferred that as per the calibrations of the 5- point Likert scale that has been used for the study, most respondents exhibit agreeability/ liking towards the methods used by the store for atmospherics. However, the highest values for standard deviation may be observed in the case of Participant factors (0.74 for males and, 0.78 for females), depicting the intra- group differences in opinions about participant factors among males and females.

As may be seen from table no. 5, the positive values for Pearson’s correlation co- efficient (*r*) indicate that all components of retail atmospherics are positively associated with the attractiveness of the store.

Variables	Exterior	Interior	Design	Display	Participant factors	Attractiveness
Exterior	1	.653**	.592**	.558**	.538**	.476**
Interior		1	.623**	.664**	.615**	.492**
Design			1	.707**	.711**	.622**
Display				1	.772**	.694**
Participant factors					1	.671**
Retail Store Attractiveness						1

Table No. 5: Correlation among the factors of atmospherics and attractiveness

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary data



The strongest association may be seen between display and participant factors ($r= 0.772$), followed by the association between design and participant factors ($r= 0.711$); and between display and design ($r= 0.707$). Among all constituents of atmospherics, the strongest relationship with store attractiveness is that of display ($r= 0.694$). On the other hand, store exteriors seem to have the least association (though positive), with store attractiveness ($r= 0.476$). In fact, results show that store exteriors and store interiors are strongly related ($r= 0.653$), as compared to the relationship of exteriors with any other component of atmospherics.

In order to have a deeper understanding of the relationship among atmospherics and attractiveness, regression is applied. Table No. 6 summarizes the results of the multiple regression analysis applied to these variables. Retail store attractiveness has been considered as the dependent variable. The independent variables are the five factors of retail store atmospherics, viz., exterior, interior, design, display and participant factors. The attractiveness of a retail store is found to be dependent on few of the components of retail atmospherics. The results vary across gender groups.

Table No. 6: Regression Models

Model	Dependent variable	Significant Independent Variables		t value	R ²
Model-1 (Males)	Attractiveness	Participant factors Display	0.432 0.355	4.86 4.00	0.542
Model-2 (Females)	Attractiveness	Display Exterior Design	0.331 0.273 0.259	3.08 2.78 2.41	0.604
Model-3 (Total)	Attractiveness	Display Participant factors Design	0.368 0.262 0.176	4.94 3.50 2.61	0.535

Note: t values are found to be significant at 0.01 level

Source: Primary data

Model 1 brings out the factors of store atmospherics which are significant in predicting values of store attractiveness for male customers. Participant factors is the main predictor variable with a β value of 0.432, followed by display factors, having a value of 0.355. High values of β show a strong linear relationship between these two factors and store attractiveness. This is confirmed by the high value of R² (0.542), depicting that 54.2% of the variation in store attractiveness for male customers is explained by participant factors and display taken together. Hence the alternate hypothesis H₁ is partially accepted. The results confirm that for males, retail atmospheric factors- participant factors and display will affect retail store attractiveness.

Explaining model 1 further, it may be inferred that male customers are attracted towards a retail store on the basis of its participant factors and display factors. The availability of supportive and friendly store staff, who are well- dressed and knowledgeable is important for male customers. Fellow- customers at a store are also a part of the participants. Thus, male customers place importance on the neat and clean appearance and courteous behaviour of fellow customers. This is also a determinant of the store's attractiveness for them. The other significant determinant of attractiveness for male customers is display. This explains that male respondents look forward to availability of information and display of apparel. This includes details pertaining to price, promotional schemes and discounts, product quality, product specifications etc. Male respondents also seek systematically arranged array of items to enable them to easily find what they are looking for. Thus, display factors including the point of purchase and decoration variables are important determinants of store attractiveness for male respondents.

Model 2 depicted in table no. 6 shows the cause and effect relationship between factors of store atmospherics and store attractiveness for female customers. As per the model, attractiveness of a store for female respondents, depends on display, exterior and design factors of atmospherics. The t value for display (t= 3.08), exterior (t= 2.78) and design factor (t= 2.41) is found to be significant at 0.01 level. Display is the leading predictor variable, with a β value of 0.331. This is followed by exterior factors with a β value of 0.273 and design, having a β value of 0.259. These three independent variables together explain 60.4% of the variance in store attractiveness for female customers. This confirms the strength of association between



the dependent and independent variables in this model. For females the alternate hypothesis H_2 is partially accepted in case of display, exterior and design factors affecting the retail store attractiveness.

To elaborate further, each of the independent variables may be looked at one by one. The main predictor variable is display, indicating that females consider the store attractive if apparel and accessories are displayed systematically and can be located easily. The information regarding merchandize and promotional signage should also be available to customers. Apart from design, female customers tend to get attracted to a store due to its exterior also. This factor is found to be missing for male customers. Here, it is important that the store is at a convenient location for female customers, which is easily accessible. Once at the store, safe parking facilities should be available. The store should have a spacious entrance, and welcoming colours and architectural style. Moreover, in today's time, female respondents get attracted towards apparel stores which provide ancillary facilities such as ATMs, credit cards etc. Thus, convenience is also required for a store to be attractive. Female customers may also look forward to scenic landscaping, for an aesthetic sense in the store's exterior. Finally, the design factor is found to be a significant determinant of store attractiveness for female customers. This means that female customers look for friendly store layout in which all sections are easily accessible. Availability of waiting lounge, kids play area, trial room, rest room and drinking water facility is welcomed by them. They are also particular about availability of sufficient number of queues for billing, as well as enough number of counters for billing. Thus, it may be concluded that for female respondents, attractiveness of a store depends on layout, exterior and point of purchase variables.

Table no. 6 finally presents Model 3, which depicts the association between store attractiveness and store atmospherics irrespective of the gender. Display is found to be the strongest variable predicting store attractiveness ($\beta = 0.368$), followed by participant factors ($\beta = 0.262$), and design ($\beta = 0.176$). This implies that customers ascertain maximum importance to the arrangement of merchandise and availability of information regarding products and services, followed by the courtesy and knowledge of store employees and fellow customers, as well as layout factors. Together, these three variables account for 53.5% of the variance in Model 3 ($R^2 = 0.535$). The third hypothesis H_3 is also partially accepted. Irrespective of gender, it is found that display, participant and design factors influence the retail store attractiveness.

To conclude, it may be said that for males, display and participant factors of a store have an influential effect in determining attractiveness of the store; and, for females, display, exterior and design of a store have an influential effect in determining attractiveness of the store. Put together for all respondents, results show that display, participant factors and design of a store have an influential effect in determining attractiveness of the store.

Conclusion

The study shows that in case of males, attractiveness of apparel stores is influenced by display and participant factors. Hence the retailers, in order to attract more males into their stores will have to focus on display and participant. Male customers would want the retailers to have easy access to apparels and discounts thereof. Also, the male customers would prefer the staff of store to be participative in deciding about the purchases. They keep an eye on the other people in the store. As far as females are concerned, exterior factors play a significant role in making a store attractive. Location of store, easy parking and outdoor landscaping will definitely attract the female customers towards the apparel store. Secondly, design which includes layout – easy access to different sections, rest room, trial room, kids area, drinking water availability, sufficient billing counters for fast billing- become important for females and make a store attractive for them. Overall, it may be said that display, exterior and participant factors emerge as the most influential factors determining the attractiveness of apparel stores.

Future Research Directions

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 multi-disciplinary 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. Apart from apparel, the study of atmospherics may be taken up for other product classes, such as food and grocery, food service, jewelry, 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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