

Impact Of Ambient Music And Affability Of Salespersons On Consumer Behavior In A Real Retail Setting With Emphasis On Gender Difference

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ABSTRACT

The Indian retail sector is facing intense competition. Though new stores and malls are coming up every day, but differentiating their retail offerings is a real challenge for all of them. It is difficult for retailers to maintain an advantageous position only from products, price, promotions and the retailing network. With the changing profile of the Indian customers, it is become very challenging for the retailers to allure the customers to their stores. By improving the in- store environment, a store can create an effective consuming condition to stimulate consumers' immediate purchasing action. The present research paper is based on an experiment conducted in Big Bazaar, Bangalore. The experiment was conducted to find the interactive effect of two atmospheric cues - Music and Behaviour of the salespersons on consumer perception and buying behavior. The research is an attempt to understand the difference in behavior patterns due to the difference in gender with respect to the atmospheric stimuli selected for the study. The study shows that the effect of atmospheric stimuli - Music and Affability of the salespersons on perception, emotion and behavior remains the same for both the genders.

Keywords: Store Atmospherics, Customer Experience, Background Music, Behavior of Salesperson, Gender Difference

INTRODUCTION

Indian retailing got revolutionized during the last decade, which can be witnessed by world-class designs, quality, and investment and engaging stakeholders. Developers, retailers, authorities and designers came together for architecting a rich retail landscape. Consistent growth of the economy, rapid urbanization rate, favourable demographics and availability of easy credit has boosted consumerism. The diverse middle class has expanded rapidly with rising income levels, mounting brand consciousness and the increasing focus towards value retailing from low-cost retailing. The demand for a superior shopping experience is very much evident in the metropolitan cities. This surge in the demand side has been aptly complemented with construction of organized retail malls across the landscape. The mall culture is even rapidly penetrating into Tier II and Tier III cities today, with many malls coming up in these areas. As per the study by Kaushal and Medhavi (2011), the Indian shopping mall users can be divided into three categories. Kaushal and Medhavi categorized the first type of customers as 'Quality Conscious Customers', who enjoy shopping at the shopping malls because they think that quality of products and environment are superior in a shopping mall. The second type of customers are 'Time Conscious Customers', who shop at malls as they believe that such a format helps them to save time. While the third type of mall shoppers were identified as 'Price Conscious Customers' - such customers who think that the products in a mall are cheaper than the traditional outlets.

Retail Atmospherics is one of the most important domains for the retailers of today. It is one of the important constructs of customer experience. In an earlier research on store choice behavior in India, the new retail formats did not seem to add sufficient additional value except for novelty (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004). However, it is evident from the growth of organized retailing in India, that the retail scenario is changing. The changed demographic profile of the customers has changed their expectation in terms of learning, comfort and experiential value. The term "Atmospherics" was coined by Philip Kotler (Kotler, 1973-74), which means that consumers interact with the atmospherics during their shopping experiences (Sarel, 1996), which is a matter of concern for the retailers due to intense competition in retailing in India. Evaluating the consumer's perception of atmospheric cues can craft and enhance a retail store's image, increase performance and patronage intention by minimizing cost, time and effort in retaining or attracting new

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customers. Music can be a powerful stimulant within a retail environment. Music can be a powerful primary element in creating or enhancing sensory experiences of shoppers (Schmitt, 1999). Music serves as a powerful connection that can tap into our emotions. According to Chebat, Chebat and Vaillant (2001), what really matters with reference to in-store music is its evocative power memories related to music. Music is versatile; it can relax or excite. Music can have an influence on potential sales by increasing the stay time for both the passive and active shoppers, and slowing down the pace of travel throughout the store (Kellaris and Kent, 1992).

A large number of researchers have clearly established that right music brings positive returns to marketing efforts in terms of sales, purchase intentions, satisfaction, duration of stay, perceived waiting time, and store image (Areni and Kim, 1993; Areni, 2003; Bruner, 1990; Herrington and Capella, 1994, 1996; Milliman, 1982, 1986; Morin et al., 2007; Oakes, 2000; Oakes and North, 2008; Soars, 2009; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990). Social factor is another important component of retail atmospherics. Retailers of all types are paying more attention to customer service as a method of establishing a differential advantage. The number, appearance and behavior of store employees may help shape a customer's perception of the service level within a retail store (Baker, 1986). According to Baker, Grewal and Levy (1992), high social environment store (number and behavior of the salesperson) will increase feelings of arousal. An environment that creates a high level of arousal is likely to be more interesting to the customers. Thus, they may stay longer in the store. Retailers may benefit when customers stay longer because they may purchase more (Milliman, 1986).

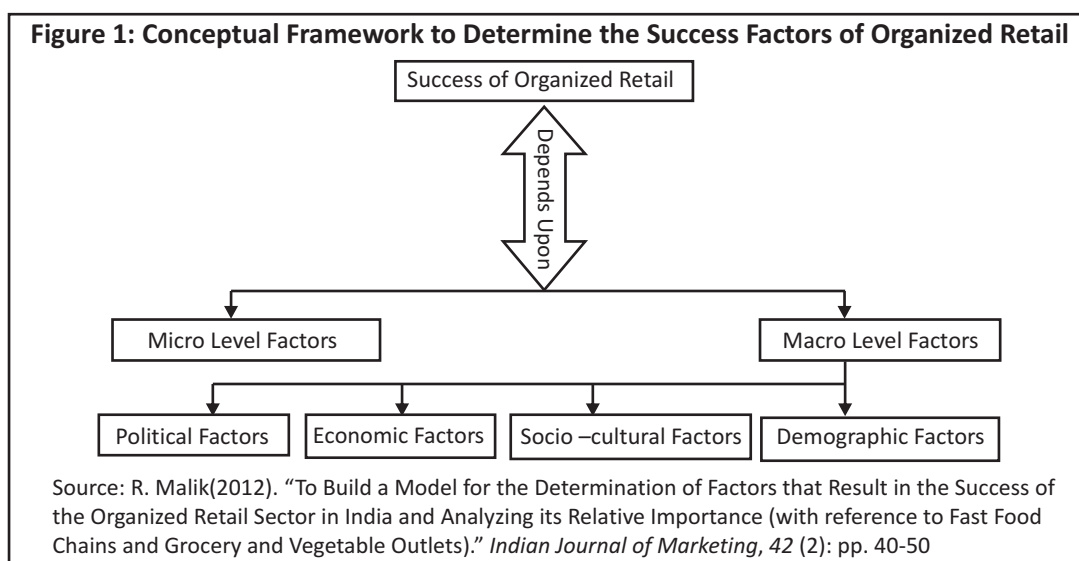
The present study is based on an experiment conducted in the real retail setting. It is an attempt to understand the effect of two atmospheric cues - Ambient music and Behaviour of Salespersons - on the consumer behavior with an emphasis on the difference in perception because of gender difference. The effect of two stimuli was measured by manipulating the stimuli and keeping the other factors constant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various experimental and descriptive research studies available on factors affecting customer experience in the retail setting and the effect of good customer experience on perception and buying behavior of customers. Khare and Rakesh (2010) in their study categorized certain factors responsible for mall traffic -which are entertainment facilities, services, ambience and mall management.

Malik (2012) proposed a conceptual model to analyze the factors which determine the success of the organized retailers as shown in the Figure 1. They have been identified as micro and macro factors. Under micro factors, Malik listed some perceptual factors, which according to her, are controllable factors. These perceptual factors are:

Product Offering, Store Personnel, Price Level, In-store Services, Store Experience, Place, Demographics of Shoppers, and Trust and Relationship.



Malik further stated that the more tailored and personalized the experience the retailers create for their customers, the greater the differentiation from their competitors and ultimately, the greater the success. One of the perceptual factors listed by Malik - Store personnel - is one of the stimuli for the present experimental study. The author had not given the detail of the other factors like store ambience, and maybe, she considered it as the overall ambience of a store. The other stimulus of the present experimental study is Music, which is listed in ambience factors by some authors namely Baker (1986) and Bitner (1992).

The Journal of the American Medical Association recognized the influence of the right sound. As per their findings, “music has long been recognized as a powerful communicative force that affects attitude, mood, emotions and behaviour”. Music can influence the disposition of shoppers and manifest itself in choice of store, propensity to purchase, basket size and intent to repatronage. The empirical evidence of the study of Sweeney and Wyber (2002) shows that liking of music and musical characteristics both had a significant effect on consumers' emotional and cognitive evaluations, and that in turn had a significant effect on the desired intended approach and affiliation behaviours. Morrison (2002) had done a multi-case study to understand the power of in-store music and its influence on international retail brands and shopper behavior. Morrison, Dubelaar and Oppewal (2010) investigated how music (volume) and aroma (presence) affect shoppers' emotional states and subsequently influences real shoppers' behavior in a real retail setting. Their study showed that the arousal induced by music and aroma results in increased pleasure levels, which in turn positively influences shoppers' behavior, including time and money.

A study by Jain and Bagdare (2010) also reported that music influences consumption experience (in retail experience) at cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels, specifically with regard to attitudes and perceptions, time and money spent, and moods and feelings. The retail salesperson and personal selling play a key role in communicating the brand and store image to the consumer. Baker, Levy and Grewal (1992) studied the impact of social factors on the perception of customers regarding the store image. The social factor in their study was operationalized in terms of the number and affability of retail salespeople. As per their study, the high social store environment (more employees on the floor and friendly employees) initiated greater feelings of arousal in respondents than did the low social store environment (one employee and ignoring customers). Well trained store personnel can be one of the strengths for any retail setting in terms of influencing and persuading the consumer purchase decision.

Sharma and Stafford (2000) through their study suggested that store ambience and design positively affected customers' persuasion as well as customers' perceptions of salespeople. They further stated that in “prestige ambience” stores, a reduction in the number of salespeople does not significantly affect customers' buying intentions vice versa in “discount ambience” stores. In another study conducted by Malik (2012) on the relationship between customer satisfaction and the service quality of organized retailers in Haryana, she found that the dimensions of service quality (product aspects, price, physical aspects, promotional schemes, personnel interaction and after-sales service) were positively related with customer satisfaction, but differed in importance. Malik (2012) found significant differences in the physical aspects, promotional schemes, personnel interaction and after-sales service, when respondents were grouped according to age and income. She further explained that except for price, there was no significant gender bias in dimensions of service quality.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To analyze the gender difference as a predictor for Perception of merchandise quality.
- 2) To analyze gender difference as a predictor for the Perception of overall environment.
- 3) To analyze gender difference as a predictor for Emotions (Pleasure/ Arousal).
- 4) To analyze gender difference as a predictor for Behaviour (Approach/ Avoidance).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

❖ **An Experimental Setting :** In order to evaluate the impact of atmospheric cues, i.e. music and behavior of the salesperson on shoppers' cognitive responses and expenditures, field experimentation was chosen. The experiment was conducted in Big Bazaar, Hebbal, Bangalore.

The study was conducted only in one store so that the atmospheric elements other than the variables under study remained uniform throughout the experiment. Additional consideration was given in the selection of the store to

ensure that it would be a neutral environment (i.e. outside of a downtown area etc.).

❖ **Experimental Design :** In order to verify the specified research objectives, a 2x2 factorial design containing two environmental factors (Music and Salespersons) and four modalities (Presence / Absence of music, Presence/Absence of affability of the salesperson) was done. Data gathering began with the control condition, which was characterized by slight modifications to the usual components of the store atmosphere. The background music was silenced, and salespersons were present, but would assist only when approached. During the second phase of data collection (Condition 1), salespersons' behavior was the same as the control condition, but the background music was switched on. In the third phase (Condition 2), the music was again silenced, but the behavior of the salesperson was manipulated. They were greeting the customers and were prompt in assisting the customer. Finally, both the stimuli were introduced in the environment in the final stage of the operationalization process (Condition 3).

Data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. The store manager did not want that the questionnaire should require more than 10 minutes to be filled. This request constrained the questionnaire's potential length. The total sample size taken for the study was 300, 75 for each condition (one control condition and three experimental conditions). Respondents were selected randomly for data collection. The duration of data collection was three months as per the convenience of the store operators .The data was collected in year 2010 from March to May 2010 because during that period, the environment in the store was neutral, and there were not any promotional schemes running , since it was the prerequisite for conducting the experiment. As the environment in the store was neutral, the footfall was also average.

❖ **Scale Reliability Test :** Cronbach's alpha tests were performed to ensure reliability and internal consistency of the scale used for the data collection. As can be observed from the Table 1, all multi- item measures exhibited Cronbach's alpha coefficient higher than the acceptable score of > 0.70 (Whitley, 2002). Intra Class Correlation score is also observed to be high. Hence, it can be concluded that the scale used was highly reliable and consistent.

Table 1: Intra-Class Correlation (ICC) and Cronbach Alpha (Consistency) Coefficient Based on Pilot Study		
Construct	Cronbach Alpha	ICC
Perception of merchandise quality	0.725	0.713
Perception of overall environment	0.932	0.928
Emotion (Pleasure/ Arousal)	0.886	0.882
Behaviour (Approach /Avoidance)	0.915	0.909
Source : Primary Data		

Table 2: Analysis of Different Interventional Conditions To Predict Consumer Behaviour				
Conditions	Perception of Merchandise Quality	Perception of Overall Environment	Emotion (Pleasure/Arousal)	Behaviour (Approach /Avoidance)
Control Group	Reference condition			
Condition1	0.640	7.347	5.253	4.413
	(0.255)	(<0.001**)	(<0.001**)	(0.065+)
Condition2	2.733	14.227	3.888	8.360
	(<0.001**)	(<0.001**)	(0.002**)	(0.001**)
Condition3	2.720	14.720	4.573	11.973
	(<0.001**)	(<0.001**)	(<0.001**)	(<0.001**)
R ²	41.4%	41.6%	56.7%	58.7%
Source : Primary Data				

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Regression analysis was performed to find out the impact of atmospheric stimuli - music and salesperson behavior - on the Perception of merchandise quality, Perception of overall environment, Emotion and Behaviour.

Table 3: Predictors of Perception of Merchandise Quality								
Predictors	Condition 3		Condition 2		Condition 1		Control Condition	
	β -value	P value	β -value	P value	β -value	P value	β -value	P value
Female	0.095	0.450	0.004	0.975	0.034	0.762	-0.216	0.074+
Source : Primary Data								

Table 4: Predictors of Perception of Overall Environment								
Predictors	Condition 3		Condition 2		Condition 1		Control Condition	
	β -value	P value	β -value	P value	β -value	P value	β -value	P value
Female	0.154	0.246	0.120	0.362	0.024	0.823	-0.036	0.770
Source : Primary Data								

As observed from the Table 2, all the variables had the highest value in Condition 3. The researchers also got $R^2 > 40\%$ for all the variables. Thus, it can be interpreted that there was a positive correlation between the interaction of ambient music and the behavior of salesperson on Perception of merchandise quality and Perception of overall environment. Results show that the two stimuli together also created positive emotion in the customers. Since the respondents showed a positive emotion, they exhibited approach behavior in the presence of both the stimuli together. The results of the Table 2 show that the consumers showed positive emotion in Condition 1 when only music was present. It can be inferred from here that music creates a pleasant environment, which generates positive emotion in the shoppers. Mean value is comparatively low for emotion in Condition 2, where only affability of the salesperson was present, but the value again rises when both the stimuli were present i.e. in Condition 3. Thus, it can be interpreted that salespersons alone can't affect the emotion of the shoppers, but both - music and salesperson together can evoke pleasant emotions in shoppers. As far as the outcome of positive emotion is concerned i.e. the approach behaviour of shoppers, the results of Table 2 show that music alone was able to elicit approach behavior in shoppers. However, affability of the salesperson was more effective for the approach behavior in customers. Salespersons can assist and persuade the shoppers to explore the merchandise further, and encourage them to buy products from the store. The behavior of the salesperson exhibited during the experimental period was very effective in carrying out this task. However, both the stimuli together had a combined effect in eliciting approach behavior among the shoppers.

Table 5: Predictors of Emotion (Pleasure/ Arousal)								
Predictors	Condition 3		Condition 2		Condition 1		Control Condition	
	β -value	P value	β -value	P value	β -value	P value	β -value	P value
Female	0.185	0.159	0.009	0.946	0.011	0.927	-0.152	0.241
Source : Primary Data								

The results of the regression analysis of Table 3 show that in control condition, when both the stimuli were absent, women were negatively correlated with the Perception of merchandise quality as against the male respondents. However, as atmospheric stimuli was introduced, the value became positive. Thus, it can be interpreted that with the both the stimuli together, there was no difference in the perception of merchandise quality between the genders. In other words, the perception of merchandise quality was similar for both the genders in the presence of both the stimuli. Again, the impact of gender difference was studied on the perception of the overall environment. The results of the Table 4 show that in the absence of stimuli, female customers were negatively correlated with the perception of overall environment as compared to male customers, but as the stimuli were introduced, both were positively correlated with the perception of the overall environment. Hereby, it can be concluded that in the presence of atmospheric stimuli -

music and salesperson behavior - the perception of the overall environment remains the same for both the genders. Therefore, gender difference does not have any impact on the perception of overall environment in the presence of stimuli. So, the atmospheric stimuli had a similar effect on the perception of the overall environment, irrespective of difference in gender. According to Mehrabian and Russell's PAD (Pleasure, Arousal, Dominance) model (1974), atmospheric stimuli in a retail setting stimulates emotion (pleasure/arousal) in the customers. Pleasant emotions will lead to approach behavior and unpleasant emotions will lead to avoidance behavior. From the Table 5, it can be inferred that was no significant difference between the two genders as far as their pleasant emotional state was concerned in the presence of both the stimuli. Hereby, it can be concluded that the two atmospheric stimuli affected the emotions of both the genders similarly.

Table 6: Predictors of Behaviour (Approach /Avoidance)								
Predictors	Condition 3		Condition 2		Condition 1		Control Condition	
	β-value	P value	β-value	P value	β-value	P value	β-value	P value
Female	0.080	0.554	0.028	0.838	0.033	0.772	0.046	0.719
Source : Primary Data								

Since the emotional state remains pleasant for both the genders in the presence of stimuli, therefore, they also exhibited approach behavior in the presence of stimuli, which can be interpreted from the results of the Table 6. Thus, the researchers could conclude that both the genders showed similar behavior in the presence of two stimuli - Music and Affability of the salesperson.

CONCLUSION

The present study is based on an experiment conducted in a real retail setting. The very purpose of the study was to study consumer behavior in terms of four dimensions, that is, Perception of merchandise quality, Perception of overall environment, Emotion and Approach behavior when two atmospheric stimuli - Music and Behavior of salesperson was manipulated. It was found that the two stimuli do have a positive impact on consumer behavior. The level of impact does not vary with gender difference. The effect of atmospheric stimuli - music and affability of salesperson on perception, emotion and behavior remained the same for both the genders. This has practical implications because the retailers can maintain the same level of stimuli to elicit the desired behavior from the customers without considering gender differences. The particular study can be generalized for other similar retail settings as well.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was conducted in only one store to ensure that the other atmospheric cues remained constant during the experimental period. On the other hand, robustness of the findings will have to be tested in different environments. Since the present study was done in one city, the study can be repeated in other places to evaluate the differences in consumer behaviour in retail settings due to cultural differences. The interactive effect of two atmospheric stimuli - Ambient music and Behavior of the salesperson - on consumer behavior was studied. However, similar studies can be repeated with other atmospheric stimuli like light, aroma, display, colour etc.

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