

Store Ambience and Consumer Choice of Retail Store Format

Pradeep Kumar Deka

Assistant Professor,
Don Bosco Institute of Management,
Kharghuli, Guwahati,
Email: pradeep.deka@dbim.ac.in

Abstract

The Retail sector of India is changing at a fast pace as consumers are getting more knowledgeable and demanding. The availability and accessibility of vast options of products, service and knowledge are changing consumer preferences and perceptions. Added to that is the cut-throat competition in the retail format space. And to sustain in the market, the retailer has no other option than adapting to the changes occurring in the market.

The mere presence of product and services is no longer enough to give an unforgettable experience to consumers. The retailer must provide additional values to influence the consumer to visit their respective stores. It has been observed through various studies that consumer behavior is influenced by hedonic values in addition to the utilitarian values. Thus, the need is to have a deeper understanding of the consumer behavior, particularly their preference and perceptions about the modern stores. The need is to understand the differentiating factors between the store formats.

This study is done to understand firstly the factors influencing the consumer's desire to shift from traditional store to the modern store formats. Linear multiple regression analysis is used to find the relative weight of the price, quality, store ambience and product availability on influencing consumers for shifting to modern retail stores. The associations between the demographic variables and the desire to shift from traditional stores were also further studied. Store ambience was then further investigated to see its association with the demographic variables. 18 constituents of store ambience were also ranked according to the relative importance assigned by the consumers. The result revealed that store ambience is an important consideration for preferring modern store format. The relationship between the effect of store ambience and the demographic variables is significant. The study was conducted with 177 respondents in the city of Guwahati, Assam.

Keywords: Store Ambience, Consumer Behavior, Store Format Choice, Retail

Introduction

So far, the Indian market has been dominated by the unorganized retail organizations. The consumers mostly shopped at traditional stores, commonly referred to as 'Kirana' stores. But,

with the exposure to developed markets and technological innovations, the consumers now are looking for better value propositions. The value that consumers expect can be broadly divided into utilitarian and hedonic values. The utilitarian values address the variables that provide utility such as quality, price, product variety, customer service, etc. Whereas the hedonic values are more for making the shopping experience a pleasurable one, and includes convenience, ambience, nice environment etc.

The Indian market is now witnessing the introduction of newer store formats (referred in the study as modern store formats), like the Hypermarket, Specialty stores, Department stores etc. These modern stores want to woo away the consumers from the traditional stores by offering a better collection of products, more variety, better convenience, better ambience, and better customer service and so on. They offer much more value to the consumers than the traditional store formats. The traditional store is thus facing stiff competition from these modern stores.

It is; thus, utmost essential retail consumer behavior is understood in more depth. A deeper interest is required to understand the reasons behind the desire to shift from traditional store formats to modern store formats. It is also essential to understand whether the demographic factor influences these changes or not. Various studies have shown that one of the factors that distinguish the traditional store format from the modern store formats is the store ambience. Hence, store ambience needs to be further probed to find its influence on consumer behavior. The study tries to explore the importance of store ambience in influencing customers in shifting from a traditional store environment to a modern store environment. The study also tries to explore the importance of the various constituents of the store ambience for the consumers.

Store Ambience

Store ambience is the retail environment created within the store by visual communication, lighting, music, color etc. to generate a stimulus among the customers. This stimulus in a positive way influences customer perceptions and preferences towards purchasing. One of the factors that differentiates modern or new retail store format from the traditional ones is the store ambience. The difference in experience that is created through store ambience constituents like lightning, music, colors, posters, layouts, designing etc. The main aim of using this store ambience factor is to create a pleasurable and relaxing experience for the consumers. For the consumers, shopping is now much more than mere buying. It is relaxation time, a fun time, an enjoyable experience and much more.

Apart from providing a pleasurable and relaxing experience for the consumers, store ambience is also a significant factor for creating competitive advantage. Because products and brands are now easily available, and, in most places, the stores need to create differentiation based on store factors, and hence store ambience places an important role.

Considering the important role played by store ambience, it is considered as an important area for this study. This study will provide insights into important aspects of store ambience so that retailer can reap benefits out of it.

Literature Review

Philip Kotler (1973) observed that store atmospherics are an important aspect of the overall merchandising strategy, he defined atmospherics as ‘the effort to design buying environment to product specific emotional effect on the buyer that enhances his purchase probability’. He suggested that when product and the price difference are nominal, atmospherics can be used as a competitive tool to attract and maintain a specific target market.

Bearden (1977) distinguished seven attributes as potentially significant for store patronage, viz., price, quality of merchandise, assortment, atmosphere, location, parking facilities, and friendliness of staff.

Bellizzi, Crowley, and Hasty (1983) observed that color induces sales through their study. Arnold (1997) found significant differences between the demographic profiles (e.g. age, education, etc.) of large format department store shoppers and non-shoppers.

Hasty and Reardon (1997) classified store attributes into three categories viz., accessibility (e.g. location, layout, appearance and knowledgeable staff), facilitation of sales (e.g. low priced specials, promotional offers, and accepted method of payment), and auxiliary attributes (e.g. play areas for children and food court).

Yalch and Spangenberg (2000) in their study observed that music has a significant effect on shopping times and the overall retail setting. It was observed that music played a deep impact on the time, the exploration, the communication and the satisfaction in a retail setting.

Sen, Block and Chandran (2002) in their research advocated that window displays has an influence on store entry and purchase decision. The researchers observed that the window display created an awareness of merchandise type for those who enter. At the same time, it showed how the merchandise is to be presented in the window display which would then influence buying decisions.

Solgaard and Hansen (2003) identified several store attributes that were considered important for the consumer’s evaluation of stores. These attributes include merchandise, assortment, merchandise quality, personnel, store layout, accessibility, cleanliness and atmosphere.

Carpenter and Moore (2006) in context of US grocery shopper’s retail format choice identified the demographic groups who frequently use specific formats and examined the store attributes as drivers of format choice. Their study also examined store attributes (like price competitiveness, product selection, and atmosphere) as drivers of store format choice.

Amit Mittal & Ruchi Mittal (2008), observed that ‘Loyalty drivers and Shopping Experience Enhancers’ needs to be incorporated into the retail format as part of the retailer’s marketing strategy. The loyalty drivers include merchandise mix, sales promotion, price, relationships, whereas shopping experience enhancers include store reputation, temperature, return/ guarantee, and ambient conditions.

S. Mohanty and C. Sikaria, (2011) in their study considered four variables, convenience, quality and retailers (MNC) involvement on the 'tendency of shifting from traditional to modern format'. They also concluded that store ambience is the main influencer in the tendency of shifting from traditional to modern store format. Their study revealed that Display Windows, Store front, and Marquee are prime factors of store ambience.

Syed Md. Faisal Ali Khan & Dr. Devesh Kumar (2016) concluded that the buying behavior of a customer is related to how the product is displayed, the ambience of the store, floor merchandising, promotional strategies employed and the discount signages. These visual effect influences consumers to make a purchase. Also, they observed that time spent on the store is also related to purchases made.

From the literature review four factors namely price, product quality, product availability and store ambience, have been chosen to understand its influence on consumers desire to shift from traditional stores to modern store formats.

In order to analyze store ambience in detail, the following factors were identified as constituents of store ambience, lighting, music, marquee, store front, display window, smell, fixtures, temperature, hygiene, theme setting, posters/signage, store layout, colors, store personnel behavior, cafeteria, billing system, product display and product placement.

Objective of the study

- To understand the factors influencing consumer's desire to shift from traditional stores to modern store formats
- To understand the influence of store ambience on consumer preferences.
- To find out the association between demographic variables like age, income, gender and the desire to move from traditional store to modern store formats.
- To find out the association between demographic variables like age, income, gender and the store ambience.
- To understand the relative importance given by consumers to the various constituents of store ambience.

Research methodologies and Data Collection

In order to collect the data, a questionnaire was designed and distributed (mall intercepted survey) among 200 consumers of modern retail stores in the Guwahati city area. Out of the 200 questionnaires only 177 were found to be eligible for further analysis. The data were collected through convenient sampling and respondents were selected only in the new modern stores. The study was done during the holiday season of December 2018 and that provided a good mixture of different demographic profile of respondents.

After taking the details of the demographic factors, the respondents were asked to rank the effect of quality, price, store ambience and product availability of the store as an influencer in their desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format. In order to identify the relative importance given to different constituents of store ambience, 18 constituents were presented to the respondents to mark importance on a 5-point Likert scale.

The data, thus collected, was then analyzed using SPSS 20.0 for further understanding and achieving the objectives. The regression Analysis technique was used to find out the relative weight of the dependent variable (namely, price, quality, store ambience, and product availability) on the dependent variable (desire to move from traditional store format to modern store format). Chi-square statistics was used to analyze the association of the demographic variables with the desire to move from traditional to modern store format and the effect of store ambience. A simple ranking method was used to rank the constituent factors of store ambience to understand the importance given to them by the consumers.

Following hypothesis were designed to understand the association of demographic variable and other variables.

Hypotheses

i) For Gender wise analysis the hypothesis of our interest is

H₀: The relationship between gender and the desire to move from traditional store to modern store format is not significant.

H₀: The relationship between gender and the effect of the ambience of the store is not significant

ii) For income wise analysis the hypothesis of our interest is

H₀: The relationship between the income and the desire to move from traditional store to modern store format is not significant.

H₀: The relationship between income and the effect of the ambience of the store is not significant.

iii) The hypothesis of our interest for an age wise analysis is

H₀: The relationship between the age group and the desire to move from traditional store to modern store format is not significant.

H₀: The relationship between age group and the effect of the ambience of the store is not significant.

Analysis and Interpretation

1) Factors influencing desire to shift from traditional to modern format

The desire of shifting from traditional store format to modern format is correlated with price, quality, store ambience, and product availability. The intention is to observe the weightage of the independent variable on the dependent variable. This will give an insight to understand the influence made by the independent variables like price, quality, product availability and store ambience on the consumer's choice to shift from traditional store to modern store format.

Let Y be the dependent variable

- Y = The desire to shift from traditional to modern store format (var 0001)
- B = the coefficient of determinant (a constant value)
- X₁ = Price (var 00002)
- X₂ = Store ambience (var 00003)
- X₃ = Quality (var 00004)
- X₄ = Product availability (var 00005)

Thus, we can frame a regression equation like

$$Y = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3X_3 + B_4X_4$$

SPSS 20.0 was used to analysis the data for the multiple regression using the ‘ENTER’ method. The table below shows the Model summary table

Table 1: Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	prdavail, ambience, price, quality ^b		. Enter

- a. Dependent Variable: VAR00001 (Desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format)
- b. All requested variables entered.

Table 1 shows the order in which the variables were entered and removed from the suggested model. Four variables were added to the model sequentially and none was removed to calculate the effect of the independent variables (product availability, store ambience, price and quality) on the dependent variable (desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format).

Table 2: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.622 ^a	.487	.373	1.04714

- a. Predictors: (Constant), prdavail, ambience, price, quality
- b. Dependent Variable: VAR00001 (Desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format)

The adjusted R square value shows that the model is 49% accurate in explaining the variance in the data. And hence can be considered as a moderate model to represent the variations in the variables.

Table 3: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	118.972	4	29.743	27.125	.000 ^b
	Residual	188.599	172	1.097		

	Total	307.571	176		
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- a. Dependent Variable: VAR00001
- b. Predictors: (Constant), prdavail, ambience, price, quality

The ANOVA table 3 above represents the overall significance of the model. The model is significant (p-value less than 0.05 at 4 degree of freedom)

Table 4: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.229	.295		4.169	.000
	price	-.063	.059	-.065	-1.057	.292
	quality	.112	.058	.118	1.930	.055
	ambience	.531	.053	.612	10.108	.000
	prdavail	.032	.061	.031	.517	.606

- a. Dependent Variable: VAR00001 (Desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format)

The standard Beta Coefficients give a measure of the contribution of each variable to the model. The ‘t’ and ‘p’ value give a rough estimation of the effect of each predictor variable.

Store ambience has the highest beta value of 0.531, Quality has the next highest value with value 0.112, and Product availability with 0.032, Price has a negative beta value of -0.063. Sample t-test correlates desire to shift from the traditional store to modern store format positively with quality, store ambience and product availability and negatively with a price. However, only the t-test value with store ambience is significant as p-value < 0.05.

The multiple regression equation can be formed as

$$Y = 1.229 + (- 0.063) X_1 + 0.112 X_2 + 0.531 X_3 + 0.032 X_4$$

Interpretation: The respondents have given more importance to store ambience then to quality and product availability, as observed from the beta coefficients, with less importance is given to price, in their desire to shift from traditional store to modern store formats.

2) Relation of the store ambience with the demographic factors

Further analysis was done to understand the relation of the demographic factors with the preference for store ambience.

The following table represents the demographic details of the respondents

Table 5: Demographic data of respondents

Demographic factor	Variables	No. of respondents
Gender	Male	127
	Female	50

Age Group	15-25 yrs.	39
	26-35 yrs.	41
	36-45 yrs.	47
	> 46 yrs.	50
Income	< 1 lakh	40
	1 lakh – 3 lakhs	58
	3 lakh – 5 lakhs	47
	> 5 lakhs	32

2.1 a) Relation between Gender and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format

- H₀: The relationship between the age and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format is no significant.
- H₁: There is a significant relationship between age and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format.

Table 6: VAR00001 * Gender Cross tabulation

			Gender		Total
			1.00	2.00	
VAR00001	1.00	Count	16	8	24
		Expected Count	17.2	6.8	24.0
	2.00	Count	58	14	72
		Expected Count	51.7	20.3	72.0
	3.00	Count	10	10	20
		Expected Count	14.4	5.6	20.0
	4.00	Count	23	10	33
		Expected Count	23.7	9.3	33.0
	5.00	Count	20	8	28
		Expected Count	20.1	7.9	28.0
	Total	Count	127	50	177
		Expected Count	127.0	50.0	177.0

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.798 ^a	4	.099
Likelihood Ratio	7.530	4	.110
Linear-by-Linear Association	.361	1	.548
N of Valid Cases	177		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.65.

Since the p-value (0.099) is higher than 0.05 (at 95% accuracy), thus we fail to reject the Null Hypothesis. Hence, conclude that gender has no significant relationship with the desire to move from traditional stores to modern store formats.

2.1 b) Relation between Gender and the Effect of store ambience

H₀: The relationship between the Gender and the effect of store ambience is no significant.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between Gender and the effect of store ambience

Table 8: ambience * Gender Cross tabulation

			Gender		Total
			1.00	2.00	
Ambience	1.00	Count	36	16	52
		Expected Count	37.3	14.7	52.0
	2.00	Count	46	12	58
		Expected Count	41.6	16.4	58.0
	3.00	Count	7	3	10
		Expected Count	7.2	2.8	10.0
	4.00	Count	15	5	20
		Expected Count	14.4	5.6	20.0
	5.00	Count	23	14	37
		Expected Count	26.5	10.5	37.0
	Total	Count	127	50	177
		Expected Count	127.0	50.0	177.0

Table 9: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.596 ^a	4	.463
Likelihood Ratio	3.607	4	.462
Linear-by-Linear Association	.811	1	.368
N of Valid Cases	177		

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.82.

Since the p-value (0.463) is higher than 0.05 (at 95% accuracy), thus we fail to reject the Null Hypothesis and so reject the alternate hypothesis. Hence, conclude that gender has no significant relationship with the store ambience

2.2 a) Relation between Income and the desire to move from traditional store to modern store format

H₀: The relationship between the Income and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format is not significant.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between Income and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format.

Table 10: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.723 ^a	12	.160
Likelihood Ratio	21.061	12	.049
Linear-by-Linear Association	.096	1	.756
N of Valid Cases	177		

a. 2 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.41.

Since the p-value (0.160) is higher than 0.05 (at 95% accuracy), thus we fail to reject the Null Hypothesis and so reject the alternate hypothesis. Hence, conclude that Income has no significant relationship with the desire to shift from traditional to modern store formats.

2.2 b) Relation between Income and the effect of store ambience

H₀: The relationship between Income and the effect of store ambience is no significant.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between Income and the effect of store ambience

Table 11: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.715 ^a	12	.055
Likelihood Ratio	21.328	12	.046
Linear-by-Linear Association	.012	1	.912
N of Valid Cases	177		

a. 6 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.20.

The chi-square assumption is violated in this case, the expected count is 30%, hence the values of likelihood ratio are considered. And since the p-value (0.046) is less than 0.05 (at 95% accuracy), we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Hence, conclude that Income has a significant relationship with the effect of store ambience.

2.3 a) Relation between Age group and desire to move from traditional store to modern store format

H₀: The relationship between the Age group and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format is no significant.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between the age group and the desire to shift from traditional store to modern store format.

Table 12: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.964 ^a	12	.038
Likelihood Ratio	27.462	12	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	.218	1	.640
N of Valid Cases	177		

a. 3 cells (15.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.62.

Since the p-value (0.038) is less than 0.05 (at 95% accuracy), thus we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Hence, conclude that Age group has a significant relationship with the desire to shift from traditional to modern store formats.

2.3 b) Relation between Age group and the effect of store ambience

H₀: The relationship between the Age group and the effect of store ambience is not significant.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between Age group and the effect of store ambience

Table 13: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.878 ^a	12	.011
Likelihood Ratio	26.198	12	.010
Linear-by-Linear Association	.042	1	.837
N of Valid Cases	177		

a. 6 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.81.

Since the chi-square test is violated here with an expected count rising above 20%, we consider the values of the likelihood ratio. And since the p-value (0.010) is lower than 0.05 (at 95% accuracy), thus we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Hence, conclude that Age group has a significant relationship with the effect of the Store ambience.

3) Importance of different constituents of Store Ambience

The store ambience is one of the important factors that influences the customer is choosing a retail store. However, store ambience is not a singular factor and encompasses a mixture of many factors that goes on to provide the hedonic value to the consumer. The customer choice of modern store format is influenced by the presence of such factors in the modern retail stores.

In order to analyze the importance given by the customer to such factors, a list was prepared as part of the survey. Eighteen factors were chosen to understand the influence of such factors in store ambience. The statements were measured on a Likert scale of 1-5 according to the

importance given by the customers (rank 5 – highly important; rank 4 – important; rank 3 – neutral; rank 2 – not important; rank 1 – least important)

Table 14: Data shows the relative importance given by customers to store ambience constituents

Factors	Rank cum weightage w.r.t to importance given to factors					Rank Sum	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Lighting	13	26	31	51	56	642	2
2. Music	18	31	27	63	38	603	10
3. Marquee	13	19	58	43	44	617	7
4. Store Front	12	22	31	64	48	645	1
5. Display Window	19	19	31	49	59	641	3
6. Scent (smell)	12	29	26	64	46	634	5
7. Fixtures	29	33	37	47	31	549	15
8. Temperature	16	13	44	56	48	638	4
9. Hygiene	8	26	53	47	43	622	6
10. Theme setting	31	53	29	32	32	512	18
11. Posters, Signage	25	32	60	36	24	533	16
12. Store Layout	20	24	48	46	39	591	11
13. Colors used	15	31	65	45	21	557	12
14. Store Personnel Behavior	12	31	40	56	38	608	9
15. Availability of Cafeteria	12	24	86	41	14	552	14
16. Efficiency of Billing system	13	16	95	38	15	557	13
17. Product Display	19	26	30	56	46	615	8
18. Product Placement	19	27	88	26	17	526	17

Interpretation: From the above analysis, we observed that the attributes, Store Front, Lighting, Display Windows, Temperature, Scent, Hygiene have the highest rank sum, i.e. customers are assigning highest importance to these items as far as their preference is concerned. The least importance is given to Theme Setting, Product placement, Posters, and Fixture used.

Conclusion

With the increasing competition in the retail space, the product quality and price are not the only criterion to bring in customers. The concept of shopping is changing with the changing times. As studies have shown, consumer’s now look for hedonic and utilitarian values as far as shopping is concerned. Thus, retailers must consider the ‘experience part’ of shopping. This experience of shopping must be pleasurable and memorable so that consumers becoming willing to visit the store again.

The study investigated some of the major factors influencing consumer’s preferences for a retail store. The study investigated the reasons for which a consumer prefers a modern store format instead of an old format. It was observed through the data that quality is still one of the main

criteria that a customer look for when they do shopping. Apart from the quality, store ambience is also an important factor in consideration while selecting a store. In this study, additional importance was given to store ambience and to find out its importance and influence on store choice.

The correlation analysis showed that the choice of a new store format is significantly correlated to the gender and age group and has no correlation to the income of the customers. Eighteen factors covering the aspect of store ambience were taken to understand the relative importance given by the customers to them. It was observed that the customer gives highest importance to store front, lighting, display windows, temperature, scent, hygiene and Marquee. And low importance was given to factors like Store Theme, Product placement etc.

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