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INFLUENCE OF STORE ATMOSPHERE ON CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR IN INDIAN APPAREL RETAIL"

Dr Aparna Jain
Designation: Associate professor and HOD Department of Business Studies
Affiliation: Dr. Shantilal K Somaiya School of Commerce and Business Studies, Somaiya vidyavihar University
Email ID: aparna.jain@somaiya.edu
Contact-9821648882

Dr. Chetan Kanjibhai Jiwani
Designation: Assistant Professor
Affiliation: Dr. Shantilal K. Somaiya School of Commerce and Business Studies, Somaiya Vidyavihar University
Email ID:
chetan.kj@somaiya.edu
Contact: 9920976769

Ms. Monika Nikesh Kumar Rathod
Designation: Assistant Professor
Affiliation: Dr. Shantilal K. Somaiya School of Commerce and Business Studies, Somaiya Vidyavihar University
Email ID: monika.j@somaiya.edu
Contact 8879180064

Dr. Meera Rajawat
Designation: Assistant Professor
Affiliation: Dr. Shantilal K. Somaiya School of Commerce and Business Studies (Somaiya Vidyavihar University)
Email ID: meera.r@somaiya.edu
Contact 9167360577

Ms. Aafreen Shah
Designation: Assistant professor
Affiliation: Dr Shantilal K Somaiya School of Commerce and Business Studies, somaiya vidyavihar University
Email ID: aafreen@somaiya.edu
Contact- 9022635137

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of store atmospherics on customer buying behavior in Indian apparel stores, addressing a significant research gap in the context of Indian retail. The purpose is to understand how ambient factors such as lighting, layout, music, AC temperature, employee interaction, odor/fragrance, and overall ambiance impact customer satisfaction and purchase decisions. Employing a quantitative methodology, data were collected from 164 respondents outside H&M, Westside, and Zudio stores using a structured questionnaire rated on a Likert scale. The study's conceptual framework guided the analysis, using ordinal logistic regression to assess the relationship between atmospheric variables and customer revisit intentions. Major findings reveal that all atmospheric elements significantly influence buying behavior, with lighting receiving the highest satisfaction rating. The study fills a research gap by providing empirical evidence on the comprehensive impact of store atmospherics in Indian apparel retail, a context previously underexplored. It also addresses the problem of enhancing customer loyalty in the competitive retail landscape by offering practical insights for optimizing store environments. This research underscores the importance of tailored atmospheric strategies to improve the shopping experience, driving customer satisfaction and repeat visits.

Keywords: Store atmospherics, Consumer behaviour, Indian apparel retail, Sensory cues, Customer satisfaction, Empirical evidence.

Introduction

Retail is one of the main pillars of the Indian economy, with a share of almost 10 % of the GDP. India was ranked no. 2 in Global Retail Development Index in the year 2021. Although we are one of the top five retail markets in the world, India's organized retail penetration is found much lower compared with other countries, such as the USA, having a penetration of 85% in an organized retail sector. Surely after the covid pandemic, online retail has taken a front seat. Customers shifted from visiting the store to ordering from home. Offline stores must attract customers in various ways, and store atmospherics is their most crucial component.

Store Atmospherics refer to ambient factors in the store's environment that indirectly affect the customer's shopping experience. The ambient factors affect all five of our senses: the sense of smell, touch, hearing, taste, and sight. Store atmospherics aims to create a positive and memorable experience for customers that encourages them to stay longer, return in the future, and make purchases. For example, a store might use mild lighting and calming music to create an atmosphere that is relaxing in a spa or use bright colors and upbeat music in a clothing store to create an energetic atmosphere that encourages browsing and social interaction. Hence it is essential to note that the store's atmospherics depends on the merchandise. This study is limited to the store atmospherics of apparel stores in India, and the results may vary with the change in merchandise.

Effective store atmospherics can also help to differentiate a store from its competitors and communicate its brand values and personality to customers. Creating a unique and engaging retail

environment can enhance the overall customer experience and drive sales. We as humans tend to respond differently to different smells; some kinds of smell can be attractive to us, while some will be repellent. Similarly, the right type of lighting, temperature, and music can positively impact a customer's purchase experience.

Retailers have understood the need for good atmospherics; they make minute changes within the store's environment to ensure that customers return and maintain their relationship; customers need a pleasant experience while shopping. Retailers also can add different flavors by adding their marketing strategy, which is the core of shopper marketing. Cafes famous for their coffee might roast some coffee beans and spread the aroma in the shop to make the taste
buds active. Luxury brands play with the store's lighting a lot to gather customers' focus on the product. Shopper marketing uses the philosophy of store atmospherics to make customers feel a certain way and influence their buying decisions.

This study aims to understand these factors influencing customers' five senses and how retailers can make optimal use of these factors. Although there have been numerous studies about store atmospherics and their effects on customer satisfaction and buying behavior, there has been no study that directly studies the impact of atmospheric variables such as lighting, store layout, music, AC temperature, employee interaction, odor/ fragrance, the overall ambiance on customer buying behavior in India. The existing established literature work was studied and then used for the primary research for the different apparel stores in India.

According to Hatzithomas et al. (2018) climatic elements like the physical surroundings and sensory signals have a big impact on WOM for products with short life-cycle like movies. In particular, the authors discover that favorable atmospherics, like comfortable seating and a nice aroma in the theatre, raise the likelihood of positive WOM, whereas unfavourable atmospherics, like uncomfortable seating and subpar lighting, reduce the likelihood of positive WOM.

Through the study, the author brings out: "The mediating role of positive emotions evoked by atmospherics in the relationship between movie theatre atmospherics and attitude toward the movie" and "The mediating role of the attitude toward the movie in the relationship between emotions evoked by atmospherics and WOM about the movie" and based on the analysis, it is demonstrated that physical factors and facilitative elements influence viewers' attitudes towards a film through the positive emotions that are evoked by atmospherics and that viewers' attitudes towards a filmed act as a mediator in the relationship between positive emotions and word-of-mouth (WOM). Trialability often has a positive impact on the minds of customers, they feel satisfied that the product they are buying is worth buying, Roggeveen et al. (2020) also mention that the important touchpoints that influence the consumer experience, such as store design, music, lighting, aroma, social contact, and trialability and examine how these touchpoints affect the consumer experience. Roggeveen et al. (2020) highlight the importance of ambient factors that influence our five senses and how their combination can affect the decision-making of customers, the scent, music played in the store, and visual appeal of the store too has an immense impact on customers' decision-making,

Pinto et al. (2020) states visually appealing and innovative store atmosphere and having sufficient and knowledgeable staff can trigger impulsive buying among females. The study also mentions that personal interaction significantly influences female shoppers. According to Kim et al. (2020) digitalization is taking over a lot of retail stores. Using digital tools like digital displays and developing an in-store technological atmosphere will positively impact the customer's interest in the products. So, using digital tools and technologies can promote customer footfall within the store.Ndengane et al. (2021) explain that the store atmosphere has an impact on consumer satisfaction, and ambient elements in the business, such as lighting, music, and smell, have a favorable impact on customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the store's social factors, such as employee behaviour, communication, and store layout, also have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. By creating an appealing store atmosphere, retailers can enhance customer satisfaction and increase their sales. According to Choudhary et al. (2022), today, when internet-based shopping is very common, retailers having brick-and-mortar stores are responding by taking advantage of atmospherics, which is not possible in online stores. In-store atmospherics are the numerous sensory and environmental components that can be found in a retail establishment and have the potential to affect customer behaviour and suggest that store layout and design affect the store's reputation at large.

Choudhary et al. (2022) also highlight that quality-conscious customers always prefer to purchase through physical stores, and atmospheric cues result in impulse purchases by customers, Visual merchandising plays an important role in the apparel industry as many customers can make impulse buying decisions on the first look of the apparel.

The authors highlight the relevance of the physical atmosphere in retail settings after reviewing earlier studies on the subject of retail atmospherics. They contend that by evoking a favourable emotional response in customers, in-store atmospheres can boost client loyalty and repeat business. The authors propose an **S-O-R** (Stimulus, Organism, Response) model; **Stimulus** consists of atmospheric elements such as Odor, Temperature, Lighting, etc., which stimulate the customers and create a positive impact on customers. **Organism** refers to the Store's Image, which is affected by the Stimulus. **Response** refers to the reaction we expect from the customers: Customer loyalty towards the store or Patronage Intentions. The authors aim to propose a comprehensive model to examine the effect of store atmospherics on patronage intentions that fit the Indian Retail Environment.

Through the study, the authors address two main questions:

RQ1: There is a positive relationship between store atmospherics and store image,

RQ2: Store atmospherics and patronage intention relationship is mediated by store image.

For this, they distributed 600 questionnaires; out of 516 responses, 492 were used for analysis.

Both hypotheses were tested and were supported by data. The study concluded that Store Atmospherics is one of the factors influencing store patronage intentions in Indian retail; the study also contributes to existing literature and suggests strategies for retailers to attract and retain customers.

With lesser interaction due to the availability of items online, it is becoming hard for retailers to connect with customers; to keep the emotional connection, a sensory branding strategy can be utilized. Wörfel et al. (2022) As we trigger the senses of the customers, it gives them a sense of confidence and helps retailers to establish a connection with the customers.

Research Gap and Research Problem:

The study on the "Influence of Store Atmosphere on Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Indian Apparel Retail" addresses several research gaps and identifies key research problems within the context of Indian apparel retail.

Research Gap Filled:

Limited Understanding of Store Atmosphere Impact: Previous literature lacked a comprehensive understanding of how store atmospherics specifically influence consumer purchasing behaviour in the Indian apparel retail sector.

Scarcity of Indian Retail Studies: There was a gap in the literature regarding empirical studies focusing on Indian retail atmospherics and their effects on consumer behaviour

Need for Comprehensive Analysis: Prior research often examined only a subset of atmospheric elements, neglecting the holistic impact of all sensory cues on consumer behaviour in the Indian apparel retail setting

Research Problems Identified:

Inadequate Attention to Indian Context: The study identified a need to explore the unique dynamics of the Indian apparel retail market, considering cultural, economic, and demographic factors that may influence consumer behaviour.

Limited Understanding of Store Atmospherics: Before this study, there was insufficient understanding of the specific atmospheric elements (e.g., lighting, layout, music, scent) that significantly impact consumer purchasing decisions in Indian apparel stores.

Lack of Empirical Evidence: The absence of empirical evidence on the relationship between store atmospherics and consumer behaviour in Indian apparel retail prompted the need for a quantitative study to fill this gap

Importance of Customer Satisfaction: Understanding the role of store atmospherics in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty was identified as a critical research problem, given its potential implications for long-term business success.

By addressing these gaps and research problems, the study provides valuable insights into the influence of store atmospherics on consumer behaviour in the Indian apparel retail sector. It contributes to the existing literature by offering empirical evidence, highlighting the significance of sensory cues, and suggesting practical strategies for retailers to improve their store environments and enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Objectives of the Study:

1. Assess the impact of store atmospherics on customer buying behaviour in Indian apparel stores.

2. Evaluate the effectiveness of store atmospheric tactics in enhancing the shopping experience.
3. Contribute to the literature by addressing the gap in research on atmospheric stimuli in Indian apparel stores.

Research Methodology:

Formulation of Strategic Framework

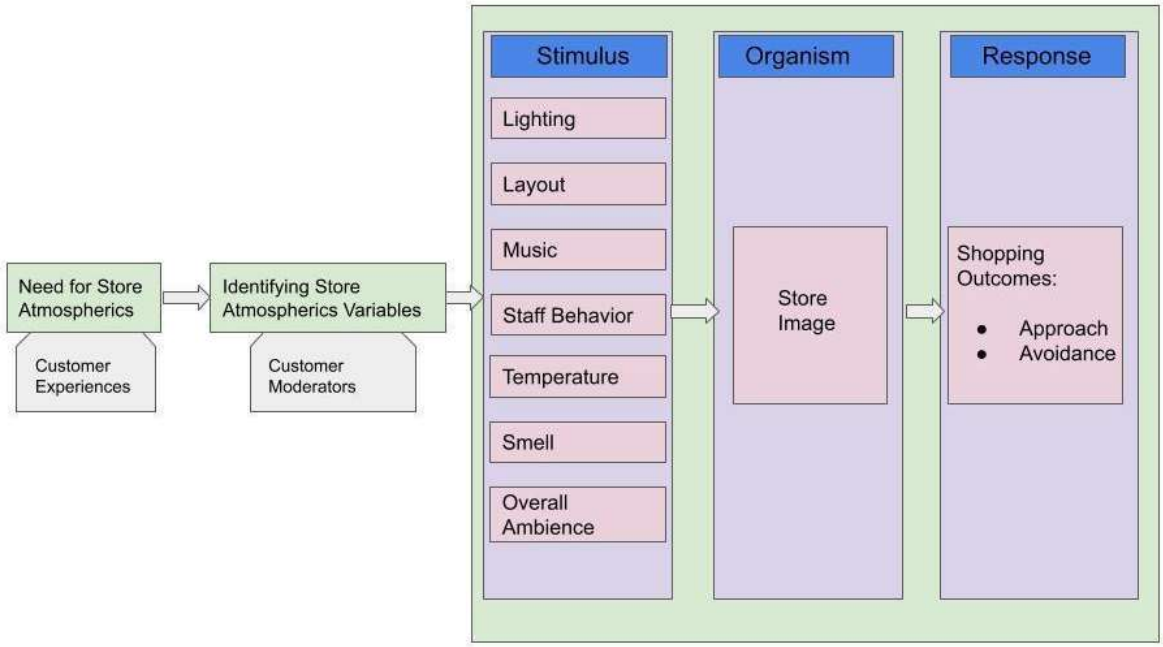

Diagram I: Conceptual Framework

The study uses a quantitative approach. Based on the literature research, we have created a new framework to assess how store atmosphere affects the buying behaviour of customers as shown in diagram I. According to the initial literature review, customer buying behaviour is selected as the dependent variable, and the independent store atmospheric variables are Lighting, layout, music, staff behavior, AC temperature, odor/ fragrance, and overall ambiance. Based on the framework, the following hypotheses were made;

H1: Lighting significantly influences customer buying behaviour
H2: Store layout significantly impacts customer buying behaviour
H3: Music has a significant effect on customer buying behaviour
H4: Employee interaction significantly influences customer buying behaviour
H5: AC temperature has a significant effect on customer buying behaviour
H6: Odor/fragrance significantly impacts customer buying behaviour
H7: Overall ambience significantly influences customer buying behaviour

This will help us to find out whether the customers' decision to buy the merchandise is influenced by the store's atmospherics. The reliability of the framework was further investigated through data analysis which is discussed further.

Respondents and population sampling

For the data collection, a questionnaire was made consisting of demographic characteristics like age, gender, family annual income, marital status, the city they belong to, and the store atmospheric variables such as lighting, store layout, music, AC temperature, employee interaction, odor/ fragrance, the overall ambience. The questionnaire consisted of questions where customers had to give their ratings on the Likert scale from 1 to 6, 1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest.
The respondents were chosen randomly from outside the apparel stores H&M, Westside, and Zudio on different days and times for realistic responses. The total number of responses gathered was 164.

Data Analysis & Results:

Parameter	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage%
Store	H&M	60	36.59
	Zudio	38	23.17
	Westside	66	40.24
Gender	Male	114	69.51
	Female	48	29.27
	Prefer not to say	2	1.22
Age	18 and below	4	2.44
	19 to 25	90	54.88
	26 to 35	60	36.59
	36 to 45	0	0.00
	46 and above	10	6.10
Marital status	Married	14	8.54
	Unmarried	150	91.46
City you belong	Tier 1	112	68.29
	Tier 2	36	21.95
	Tier 3	16	9.76
Family annual income	5 lac and below	20	12.20
	6 to 10 lac	48	29.27
	11 to 15 lac	60	36.59
	16 lac and above	36	21.95

Table I: Demographic data of respondents

A standard questionnaire with close-ended responses was provided to the respondents. Of the total 164 responses, almost 70% were males, and 30% were females. The majority of the respondents were from Tier 1 cities, with 68.29% of the total respondents. 91.46% were unmarried. The demographic profile is provided in table I. The responses from many of the demographics were less, which is the major limitation of our study.

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
How would you rate the lighting of the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.78	0.914	0.071
How would you rate the layout of the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.63	1.021	0.080
How would you rate the music used in the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.18	1.174	0.092
How would you rate employee engagement in the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.21	1.138	0.089
How would you rate temperature within the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.70	0.936	0.073
How would you rate odor/ fragrance within the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.77	0.994	0.078
How would you rate the overall ambience of the store? (1 being lowest rated and 6 being highest rated) *image is just for the representation	164	4.77	0.944	0.074
How likely are you to visit this store again.(1 being least likelt, and 6 being most likely)	164	4.99	0.775	0.061

Table II: 1- sample statistics

Responses were taken on a Likert scale of 1 to 6, 1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest. Looking at table II, we can tell that the mean rating that is given to all the seven store atmospheric variables is more than 4. This means all the customers were satisfied with the store atmospherics of the three stores. Out of all the variables, store lighting has the highest mean rating of 4.78, and

music has the lowest mean rating of 4.18. As mentioned earlier, store atmospherics work differently on different merchandise. Hence we may get different results in some other scenarios.

Results and Discussion

To find out if there is a relationship between the independent variable, i.e., if the customer will visit the store again (Revisit) and dependent variables (Lighting, Layout, Music, Employee Engagement, Temperature, Odor, Overall Ambience, Gender, Age, Tier of the City, and Family annual income) we have used Ordinal logistic regression analysis. The findings for the same are as follows:(All the Hypothesis are supporting)

H1: Lighting significantly influences customer buying behaviour
H2: Store layout significantly impacts customer buying behaviour
H3: Music has a significant effect on customer buying behaviour
H4: Employee interaction significantly influences customer buying behaviour
H5: AC temperature has a significant effect on customer buying behaviour
H6: Odor/fragrance significantly impacts customer buying behaviour
H7: Overall ambience significantly influences customer buying behaviour

Case Processing Summary			
		N	Marginal Percentage
Revisit	3	4	2.4%
	4	38	23.2%
	5	78	47.6%
	6	44	26.8%
Lightng	3	18	11.0%
	4	36	22.0%
	5	74	45.1%
	6	36	22.0%
Layout	2	4	2.4%
	3	20	12.2%
	4	42	25.6%
	5	64	39.0%
	6	34	20.7%
Music	2	14	8.5%
	3	34	20.7%
	4	48	29.3%
	5	44	26.8%
	6	24	14.6%
Employee Engagement	2	16	9.8%
	3	26	15.9%
	4	48	29.3%
	5	56	34.1%
	6	18	11.0%
Temperature	2	2	1.2%
	3	16	9.8%
	4	44	26.8%
	5	70	42.7%
	6	32	19.5%
Odor	2	4	2.4%
	3	16	9.8%
	4	32	19.5%
	5	74	45.1%
	6	38	23.2%
Overall Ambience	2	2	1.2%
	3	18	11.0%
	4	30	18.3%
	5	80	48.8%
	6	34	20.7%
Gender	Female	48	29.3%
	Male	114	69.5%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.2%

Age	18 and below	4	2.4%
	19 to 25	90	54.9%
	26 to 35	60	36.6%
	46 and above	10	6.1%
City you belong	Tier 1 (eg: Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, etc.)	112	68.3%
	Tier 2 (eg: Bhopal, Nagpur, Lucknow, etc.)	36	22.0%
	Tier 3 (eg: Roorkee, Gandhinagar, etc.)	16	9.8%
Family annual income	11 to 15 Lac	60	36.6%
	16 Lac and above	36	22.0%
	5 Lac and below	20	12.2%
	6 to 10 Lac	48	29.3%
Valid		164	100.0%
Missing		0	
Total		164	

Table I: Case processing summary

Model Fitting Information				
Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	368.971			
Final	193.102	175.868	36	0.000
Link function: Logit.				

Table II: Model Fitting Information

The model is significant, as shown by Table II ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the model is demonstrating a good fit and there has been a considerable improvement in fit compared to the null model. When there are no predictors, the model is called a null model. The data are sufficiently described by the model provided.

Goodness-of-Fit			
	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	217.630	201	0.200
Deviance	191.140	201	0.680
Link function: Logit.			

If the significance value is lower than 0.05, the goodness of fit indicates a poor fit. In this case, the model correctly predicts the data ($p > 0.05$). The observed data and the fitted model do not differ significantly.

Pseudo R-Square	
Cox and Snell	0.658
Nagelkerke	0.733
McFadden	0.472
Link function: Logit.	

As McFadden's pseudo R-Square value of 0.472, The forecast of Revisit based on the predictors has changed by 47.2% in comparison to the model when there are no predictors

Parameter Estimates								
			Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		Estimate					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Revisit = 3]	-33.038	2.327	201.540	1	0.000	-37.600	-28.477
	[Revisit = 4]	-26.770	1.661	259.821	1	0.000	-30.025	-23.515
	[Revisit = 5]	-22.164	1.512	214.777	1	0.000	-25.128	-19.200
Location	[Lighting=3]	-6.996	1.596	19.209	1	0.000	-10.124	-3.867
	[Lighting=4]	-2.828	0.795	12.650	1	0.000	-4.386	-1.270
	[Lighting=5]	-1.114	0.656	2.880	1	0.090	-2.400	0.173
	[Lighting=6]	0[a]			0			
	[Layout=2]	5.924	2.676	4.901	1	0.027	0.679	11.168
	[Layout=3]	2.752	1.388	3.932	1	0.047	0.032	5.472
	[Layout=4]	1.819	0.885	4.227	1	0.040	0.085	3.554
	[Layout=5]	0.391	0.769	0.259	1	0.611	-1.115	1.898
	[Layout=6]	0[a]			0			
	[Music=2]	1.189	1.389	0.733	1	0.392	-1.533	3.910
	[Music=3]	-0.182	0.982	0.035	1	0.853	-2.107	1.742
	[Music=4]	0.826	0.998	0.685	1	0.408	-1.130	2.781
	[Music=5]	1.448	0.912	2.520	1	0.112	-0.340	3.235
	[Music=6]	0[a]			0			
	[EmployeeEngagement=2]	-0.509	1.257	0.164	1	0.686	-2.973	1.955
	[EmployeeEngagement=3]	0.782	1.114	0.493	1	0.483	-1.401	2.965
	[EmployeeEngagement=4]	1.136	0.968	1.376	1	0.241	-0.761	3.033
	[EmployeeEngagement=5]	0.612	0.963	0.404	1	0.525	-1.275	2.499
	[EmployeeEngagement=6]	0[a]			0			
	[Temperature=2]	3.763	3.096	1.477	1	0.224	-2.305	9.830
	[Temperature=3]	-2.185	1.232	3.146	1	0.076	-4.600	0.230
	[Temperature=4]	-3.587	0.995	13.008	1	0.000	-5.537	-1.638
	[Temperature=5]	-3.134	0.844	13.781	1	0.000	-4.789	-1.479
	[Temperature=6]	0[a]			0			
	[Odor=2]	-2.981	3.367	0.784	1	0.376	-9.579	3.618
	[Odor=3]	1.023	1.144	0.799	1	0.371	-1.220	3.266
	[Odor=4]	0.716	0.785	0.832	1	0.362	-0.822	2.254
	[Odor=5]	0.199	0.658	0.092	1	0.762	-1.091	1.489
	[Odor=6]	0[a]			0			
	[OverallAmbience=2]	-47.277	5544.115	0.000	1	0.993	-10913.543	10818.988
	[OverallAmbience=3]	-5.384	1.439	14.005	1	0.000	-8.204	-2.564
	[OverallAmbience=4]	-4.163	1.115	13.951	1	0.000	-6.348	-1.979
	[OverallAmbience=5]	-2.402	0.785	9.364	1	0.002	-3.940	-0.864
	[OverallAmbience=6]	0[a]			0			
	[Gender=Female]	-0.577	0.501	1.330	1	0.249	-1.559	0.404
	[Gender=Male]	0[a]			0			
	[Gender=Prefer not to say]	0[a]			0			
	[Age=18 and below]	-20.010	1.540	168.920	1	0.000	-23.028	-16.993
	[Age=19 to 25]	-19.914	0.564	1248.724	1	0.000	-21.018	-18.809
	[Age=26 to 35]	-19.055	0.000		1		-19.055	-19.055
	[Age=46 and above]	0[a]			0			
	[Cityyoubelong=Tier 1 (eg: Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, etc.)]	-0.777	0.951	0.668	1	0.414	-2.641	1.087
	[Cityyoubelong=Tier 2 (eg: Bhopal, Nagpur, Lucknow, etc.)]	-0.036	0.940	0.001	1	0.969	-1.878	1.806
	[Cityyoubelong=Tier 3 (eg: Roorkee, Gandhinagar, etc.)]	0[a]			0			
	[Familyannualincome=11 to 15 Lac]	-0.484	0.651	0.552	1	0.457	-1.760	0.792
	[Familyannualincome=16 Lac and above]	1.350	0.727	3.449	1	0.063	-0.075	2.774
	[Familyannualincome=5 Lac and below]	-1.874	0.889	4.439	1	0.035	-3.617	-0.131
	[Familyannualincome=6 to 10 Lac]	0[a]			0			
Link function: Logit.								
a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.								

Table V: Parameter estimates

The estimates in the table above illustrate the likelihood that a case will fall outside of a particular category on the dependent variable.

For example: if we look at 'Lighting=3', the estimated value is -6.996, which means that if a customer gives 3 rating to the lighting is less likely to visit the store again as compared to a person who gives it a rating of 6 as the estimated value of 'Lighting=6' is 0.

Test of Parallel Lines[a]				
Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	193.102			
General	.000[b]	193.102	72	0.000
The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.				
a. Link function: Logit.				
b. The log-likelihood value is practically zero. There may be a complete separation in the data. The maximum likelihood estimates do not exist.				

Table VI: Test of Parallel Lines

The presumption behind the test of parallel lines is that the predictors' effects are constant regardless of the dependent variable's level. This means that the odds of falling into a higher category are the same as those falling into a lower category if the significance value is more than 0.05. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, The dependent variables for the predictors do not differ between categories in terms of the likelihood of moving into a higher category. Since the assumption is not fulfilled ($p<0.05$), we have to use Multinomial Logistic Regression.

Practical Implications:

The study underscores the practical implications of enhancing store atmospherics, such as lighting, layout, music, and employee engagement, to drive customer loyalty and patronage intentions in Indian retail. By understanding the significant impact of these factors on the overall shopping experience, retailers can strategically design store environments that appeal to diverse customer preferences and demographics. This investment in creating a positive sensory experience not only fosters customer satisfaction but also increases the likelihood of repeat visits and boosts business performance. Additionally, considering demographic factors such as gender, age, and city tier is essential for tailoring store atmospherics to effectively meet the needs and preferences of specific customer segments, thereby maximizing the potential for long-term success in the competitive retail landscape.

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