STORE ATMOSPHERE AND CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR: WITH REFERENCE TO SELF-SERVING CONVENIENCE STORES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of retail store atmosphere on consumer purchasing behavior at self-serving retail convenience stores in Ampara district. There are four contributing factors of store atmosphere are being identified, which are exterior, interior, design, social cues, while consumer purchasing behavior is a dependent variables. Each of the store atmosphere attributes was tested to determine and measure the relationship with consumer purchasing behavior. The questionnaires were filled by the respondents who already purchase products at self-serving retail stores for this quantitative research, a total of 300 respondents participated in the survey. The participating respondents represented a return rate of 97% after distribute the questionnaire directly to the respondents face to face. AMOS 23.0 and PSS 20.0 were used. Reliability and Validity test, EFA and SEM analysis were performed to test the hypotheses and model fit. As a result, atmospheric design factors has the greatest impact on purchasing behavior followed by exterior and interior while the relationship between social cues and consumer purchasing behavior was not significant. The results from our research are applicable for all self-serving retail stores in Ampara district, Sri Lanka

Key words: Store atmosphere, Self-serving, Convenience store, Consumer purchasing behavior

Introduction

Retail industry grows tremendously with the arrival of giant retail chains in the world leads retailors to face a keen competitive market place where they find it difficult to differentiate their stores on the basis of marketing mix elements. Store atmospheric elements such as store exterior, interior, in store design and other attributes are identified as external stimulus and have always been considered as having immediate effects on the consumer decision making process and purchase behavior. Retailers emphasis on their market offerings to attract customers has moved away from merchandising, towards store environment elements that stimulate the feelings of customers to visit store premises that tend to capture the store image or personality (Sabrina, 2014). According to Sitinjaket al., (2019) careless efforts that the retailers take to create unsophisticated

retail store atmosphere might cause customers to perceive atmospherics as unscrupulous and may not induce them to buy.

In retailing, store atmosphere is a critical factor driving consumer response. Although brick and mortar types of retailer pay considerable attention on store atmosphere in relation to consumer behavior and retailer's overall performance through its influence on information processing of customers, their purchase intentions and customer attitude towards the retail establishment (Griffith, 2005).

Dabholkar et al., (1996) argues that the retail environment is characterized by increasing competition, more enjoyable and demanding customers who have more expectations related to their consumption experiences in the store. Customers' retail store experience embraces more than a non-retail experience in terms of customers selection of their own way through a store, finding the products they want to buy, communicating with many other store personals along the way for additional information, and returning commodities felt not important to buy, all of these cues influence customers evaluations of the retail store.

This study intends to investigate the impact of store atmosphere on consumer purchasing behavior at self-serving retail convenience stores in Ampara District with the purpose of extending the knowledge of the store atmosphere on consumer purchasing behavior.

Few researches regarding to this study were done based on Sri Lanka's retailing industry and the retailing in Ampara district. According to Wanninayake & Pradeep (2007), more studies are necessary to examine the impact of in-store environment on buying behavior within the supermarket outlets and sets the avenue for future research by stating that impact of supermarket location, car-parking facilities, customer services, brand names associated with store choice decisions of customers in Sri Lanka should be studied seperatelly.

Many researchers did their studies using the retailing industries of foreign countries such as India, Malaysia, Australia and United States. Besides, they seldom specify the type of retailing industry they investigated, most of the studies studied the retailing in general perspective. When local retailers apply the results of those studies, sometimes it might be inaccurate and inappropriate to adopt into each particular type of retailing industry in Sri Lanka. Using wrong application on store atmosphere may lead to lower customer purchase intention. Therefore, this research intended to study in depth on this area based on Ampara district's retail industry specifically convenience stores.

Literature Survey and Conceptual Model

The existing literature revealed that the consumer purchasing behavior is influenced by many store atmospheric factors. Baker et al., (2002) considered that the design of business environment could produce unique emotional impacts in the minds of consumers and could increase the possibilities of buying intentions.

Berman & Evans (2009) summarized store atmospheric factors into four categories including the exterior of the store, the general interior, the store layout, and the point-of-purchase and decoration variables. While it was extended by Turley & Milliman (2000) by adding Social variables, dividing the whole atmospheric stimulus variables into 5 categories: (1) External variables, including exterior signs, entrance, exterior display window, architectural style including height, size and color of the building and surrounding area; (2) General interior variables, including flooring and carpeting, lighting, scents, music, temperature, cleanliness, wall composition, color schemes and merchandize; (3) Layout and design variables, including space design and allocation,

placement and grouping of merchandise, Work station placement, waiting rooms, waiting ques and furniture; (4) Point-of purchase and decoration variables, including products displays, point-of-purchase displays, signs and cards, artwork, and price displays, usage instructions, and price displays; (5) Human variables, including employee characteristics, employee uniforms, crowding, customer characteristics and privacy. From these categories, researcher of this study concentrates on four factors such as Exterior, Interior, Design and Human / Social factors.

Customer are more satisfied with exterior atmospheric factors of the store among the store atmospheric factors (Feng et al., 2008). The store exterior atmosphere includes the storefront, entrances, display windows, physical characteristics of the building (e.g. height and size), surrounding area, and parking (Berman & Evans, 2005). When exterior retail environment meets the expectations of customers, they experience higher pleasure and arousal, which increase purchase intentions (Sitinjak et al., 2019). Retailers can give shoppers a unique shopping experience that starts with the store exterior (Kim et al.,2012). External atmospheric elements like landscaping generates positive emotional reactions and evaluations of retail store settings. It is found that consumers reacted positively to the presence of aesthetic environment around the retail store. When stores exterior were well designed, consumers are more likely to visit stores and were even willing to visit again in the future by travelling long distance (Shahzad & Musarrat.,2019).

Retailers use interior atmosphere to achieve optimal levels of motivation that will lead to more favorable consumer response and these atmospheric elements attracting customers to spend more time in the store to buy (Feng et al., 2008). A stimulating in store atmosphere including tangible and intangible elements such as lighting, ambient music, odor and temperature can induce specific emotional outcomes among consumers regarding the store and the merchandizes sold (Roux, 2015). Consumers' stimuli to buy goods impulsively are produced through the interior of the store which present aesthetic nature (Ishar et al.,2017)

It is found that store design is one of the important factors affecting consumer purchasing behavior and a critical determinant towards the creation of retail store image. Well-designed layouts are extremely important in retailing because they strongly influence in-store traffic patterns in the store, store atmosphere, purchasing operational efficiency, and behavior (Vrechopoulos *et al*., 2004). (Baker *et al*., 2002) argues that information that the customer obtains from store layout of a retail setting influence consumers' perceptions of service providers and helps consumers to categorize service firms accordingly. Design refers to the way in which shopping carts, products, the size and shape of those items, the spatial relationships among them and how aisles are arranged (Baker et al., 2002).

Social factors refer to the people such as other shoppers and salespeople (Baker et al., 2002). Social dimensions defined as those factors that link people to each other, to their community, to their society. Three main themes relating to the social dimensions of the retail environment emerged: The social connection factor, a sense of community, and cultivating commercial friendships (Micael & Denise, 2008).

People often have different motives for going shopping, from role-playing and self-gratification to seeking social experiences outside the home (Lee & Controy, 2008). Two social factors jointly influence consumers' unplanned purchases. (Anna & Jochen Wirtz, 2008). Consumers used to have positive attitude toward goods, service quality and felt more pleased with a store where more social cues were present to have network relations (Haiyan et el., 2006). Factors such as store environment, services provided and tenant variety contributed to customers pleasurable shopping experiences perceived, similarly, the social dimensions fulfill the customers' social needs of belongingness. Indeed, for some customers, the social connection, whether it was

direct or indirect, was more or equally important to their perceived pleasurable shopping experiences, as it contributed to whether they perceived the shopping experience to be pleasurable or not (Lee & Controy, 2008).

Consumer buying behavior is the sum total of a consumers' attitudes, preferences, intentions and decisions about the behavior of consumers in the marketplace when purchasing a goods and services. Consumer buying behavior refers to the buying behavior of the final consumers (Kotler et al., 2013). Schiffmen (2013) argues that the consumer behavior is the study of how people buy, what they buy, when they buy and why they buy. It attempts to understand the buyer decision making process, both individually and in groups. It studies characteristics of individual consumers such as demographics, psychographics, and behavioral variables in an attempt to understand customer's wants. It also tries to measure the influences of social factors or groups such as family, friends, reference groups, and society in general on consumer.

Based on the extracts of literature review the following conceptual framework was developed. The consumer buying / purchasing behavior as dependent variable, and the exterior, interior, design and social store atmospherics as independent variables.
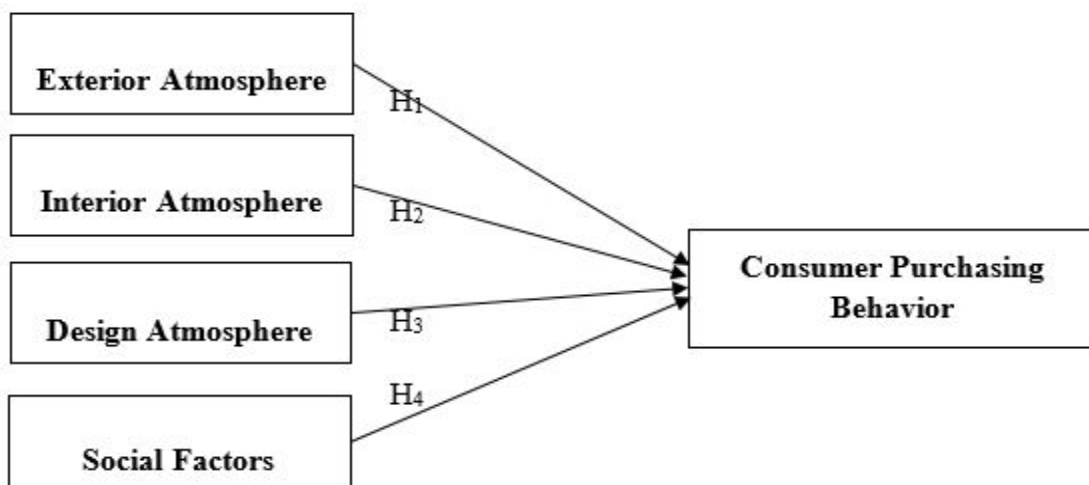

Figure: 3.1 Schematic Diagram of the Conceptual Framework

Relationship between Store Atmosphere and Consumer Purchasing Behavior

Atmosphere of a store is the key element in the purchasing attitude of consumers in their decision process. In other words, unique store atmospheric cues induce positive influences on the consumption context, which, in turn, create favorable customer perception towards the store and the products displayed in the store, eventually affecting the purchasing intention, and actual buying actions (Pan *et al.*, 2008).

According to Feng *et al.*, (2008) store atmosphere is about designing the retail store environment in a way to affect customers' feelings and, in turn, to appeal to consumer buying behavior. This view includes physical products on display in the store, sales procedures, after sales services, and most importantly the aggregate atmosphere of this space. Important store attributes

that predicted consumers' shopping enjoyment included store atmosphere, price of goods, leisure, design, and services offered (Kim et al.,2015).

Store atmospherics induce impulse buying through positive affect and urge in the minds of consumers (Geetha et al., 2013). Retailers in unorganized markets and industries dealing with different categories should emphasize on different store attributes depending upon the type of customers they deal with (Surabhi & Mishra, 2013). Atmospheres lead to favorable quality perception, greater price perception and increase purchase intention among female customers (Adilson et al., 2013). Based on these literatures, the following hypotheses are developed,

H_1: There is a positive relationship between retail stores' exterior atmosphere and consumer purchasing behavior.

H_2: There is a positive relationship between retail stores' interior atmosphere and consumer purchasing behavior.

H_3: There is a positive relationship between retail stores' atmospheric design and consumer purchasing behavior.

H_4: There is a positive relationship between social cues in the store atmosphere and consumer purchasing behavior.

Research Methodology

The research instrument was adapted from Kim et al.,(2014); Hassan, (2014). Thus, a self-administered questionnaire was developed. The assessing in terms of exterior, interior, layout / design, social / participants. The next section comprised the response measures, namely five-item constructs for consumer purchasing behavior. These measures were evaluated via five-point Likert scales, which ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

In this research the total population of the ampara district was considered as population. who had previously used to purchase from the self-serving retail stores? The researcher convenience sampling was used whereby a non-statistical approach was used primarily because it is easy to collect data. This approach is practiced because everybody is a retail store customer nowadays, and samples are easier to setup, cheaper in financial terms, and are adequate in their representativeness within the scope of the defined research. Sample size is defined as the number of elements to be included in a study. In this case the sample size was 300 respondents as they were considered to provide sufficient input to ascertain findings. The questionnaires were distributed via online and paper means to collect the data and were self- administered. statistical software called AMOS 23 and SPSS 20.0 were used to analyze the data collected to test hypothesis and model fit using Structural Equation Modelling.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Factors
The research focused on some background variables of respondents such as gender, age, marital status, employment status, and monthly to get some insights of the sample in terms of this research. Out of the 291 respondents, almost 64% of the customers were females and 36% of

customers were males. Majority of the customers' average age was in between 31-40 years counting of 30.2% of total and 35% of home makers while the remaining 24% from government and 12% working in private sectors. Further, 47% of sample has no income, 11% of the people income falls in between Rs. 25,000 - Rs. 35,000. The following tables illustrate on these observations.

Measurement model

The measurement model evaluation requires the four things: outer loadings, composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The threshold value of composite reliability for a given construct is 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The measure of convergent validity is the Average Variance Extracted for which the threshold value is above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1: CFA Results and Internal Reliability Test

Constructs	Measurement Items	Standard Loading	Cronbach alpha's (C-α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Exterior Atmosphere	EA1	.894	.920	.951	.664
	EA2	.875			
	EA3	.775			
	EA4	.720			
	EA5	.718			
Interior Atmosphere	IA1	.689	.915	.924	.867
	IA2	.982			
	IA3	.761			
	IA4	.864			
	IA5	.667			
Atmospheric Design	AD1	.961	.835	.873	.837
	AD2	.768			
	AD3	.933			
	AD4	.877			
	AD5	.931			
Social Factors	SF1	.796	.814	.927	.649
	SF2	.753			
	SF3	.669			
	SF4	.645			
	SF5	.846			
Consumer Purchasing Behavior	CPB1	.896	.894	.821	.851
	CPB2	.934			
	CPB3	.835			
	CPB4	.879			
	CPB5	.586			

Reliability and Validity of Instrument

Using the Cronbach's alpha procedure, the reliability of the data was verified. The closer the Cronbach's alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency reliability. The alpha coefficients for this study were all above 0.8 and, thus, they were considered to be highly reliable (Table 1). Content validity was verified during pilot study, with the dimensions for the independent variable and dependent variables, namely EA, IA, AD, SF and CPB.

Convergent validity assessed as suggested by Hair et al. effect (2012) factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted. The recommended and acceptable values for factor loadings are set at > 0.5, the average variance extracted (AVE) should be > 0.5 and the composite reliability (CR) should be > 0.7. Table 1 indicates that the results of the measurement model exceed the recommended values thus indicating sufficient convergence validity. Hence, all items for given constructs have been remained in the model for further analysis as the factor loadings of all the items used to measure the constructs are > 0.5.

Discriminant validity has been assessed using the Fornell & Larcker (1981) method. This study uses the method of comparing the square root of the AVE with the correlations. It can be seen that the values in the diagonals are greater than the values in their respective row and column thus indicating the measures used in this study are distinct. Thus, the results presented in Tables 2 demonstrate adequate discriminant validity.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Construct	Exterior	Interior	Design	Social	Consumer PB
Exterior	**0.847**				
Interior	0.532***	**0.799**			
Design	0.687***	0.648***	**0.833**		
Social	0.510***	0.667***	0.596***	**0.834**	
Consumer PB	0.644***	0.474***	0.656***	0.610***	**0.781**

Note: Diagonal values represent the square root of the AVE while the off-diagonal values represent the correlations.

Structural model

To test the relationships between the different variables, this study first evaluated the structural model and then, conducted an SEM analysis of the latent variables. With the evaluation of the overall measurement model, the analysis of the effects began and then bootstrapping techniques used as the testing method. The structural equation modelling of this study was based on covariance analysis. The model fit index is shown in Table 3, and the results of the structural model are shown in Table 4.

Evaluation thee model fit indices

The following table 3 provides the information about goodness of fit indexes selected for this study and their cut-off values for model evaluation, guided by the scholars. Based on the above findings, the model shows an overall good fit as it meets the required conditions. The confirmatory factor analysis showed an acceptable model fit and hence, the theorized model fit well with the observed data. It can be concluded that the hypothesized CFA model fits the sample data very well and the model is fit to be used in the analysis. The measurement model's integrity of fit was

measured with Chi-square/Df ≤ 3, GFI > 0.9, AGFI > 0.9, CFI > 0.9, RMSEA ≤ .06 values (Hair et al., 2010)

Table 3: Goodness of Fit Index and their Rule of Thumb

Index	Shorthand	Rule Thumb	Value Obtained	Conclusion
Chi-square / Degree of Freedom	χ2 / df	≤ 3	1.327	Good Fit
Goodness-of-fit Index	GFI	> 0.90	0.931	Good Fit
Comparative Fit Index	CFI	> 0.90	0.916	Good Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	RMSEA	≤ .06; good	0.034	Good Fit

Path Analysis

To evaluate the structural models' predictive power, R squares (R^2) were calculated which indicates the amount of variance explained by the exogenous variables (Barclay et al., 1995). All four variables together explained 63.4% of the variance in customer purchasing behavior. Using a bootstrapping technique with a re-sampling of 2000, the path estimates and t-statistics were calculated for the hypothesized relationships. From the analysis it was found that all the hypotheses showing the direct relationship between the constructs are supported. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing – Direct Relationship

Hypotheses	Beta	SE	t-value	P – Value	Results
There is a positive relationship between retail stores' exterior atmosphere and consumer purchasing behavior	0.133	0.046	2.216	0.028	Accepted
There is a positive relationship between retail stores' interior atmosphere and consumer purchasing behavior.	0.190	0.067	3.530	0.001	Accepted
There is a positive relationship between retail stores' atmospheric design and consumer purchasing behavior	0.196	0.083	3.070	0.000	Accepted
There is a positive relationship between social cues in the store atmosphere and consumer purchasing behavior.	0.382	0. 051	0.942	0.697	Rejected

The results of direct effects show that not all the relationships are significant. Exterior atmosphere (β= 0.133 and p = 0.028), interior atmosphere (β= 0.196 and p = 0.001), Atmospheric design (β= 0.190 and p = 0.000) have significant relationship with consumer purchasing behavior. Thus, H1a, H1b and H1c were accepted while the relationship between social cues and consumer purchasing behavior is rejected (β= 0.382 and p = 0.697)

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, exterior atmosphere, interior atmosphere, atmospheric design in general have significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior at self-serving retail convenience stores in Ampara district. However, there cannot be one particular atmospheric that work best in every circumstance. The self-serving stores have to find out the best mix of atmospheric factors/cues that increases the intention to spend more time and money, purchase more items and the repeat purchase intention.

Four hypotheses were proposed to investigate the impact of store atmosphere on consumer purchasing behavior, and the results of the hypotheses tests supported three hypotheses and one was rejected. These results provided valuable insights for understanding the stimulus of consumer purchasing behavior at self-serving retail convenience stores. This finding was supported by Priyanka et al., (2014); Kim et al., (2014).

According to Priyanka et al., (2014), customer approach behavior is affected by all store atmospheric factors and have significant impact on it. According to the extent of impact which can be ordered from high to low, the factors are design factors, interior factors, image of service personnel, visual stimulus and image of other customers. This reveals that the in-store design factor of a store is the major atmospheric factor that affects customer approach behaviors; it is found that its power of influence on customer impulse buying decision as well as planned decision and interpretation are significantly higher than other factors. Customers pay special attention to the designing in a store, including whether the layout and overall structure is reasonable, how is the interior decoration, whether the signs and marks are clear, whether the display of commodities in corridor space, commodity information and classification is complete and convenient. Intangible factors and image of service personnel, music, temperature, clothing and attitude of service personnel etc. are also considered by customers as critical factors that will influence their behaviors. This research confirmed the validity of such general points in the case of retail industry in Ampara district. Accordingly, it can be concluded that strong retail store atmosphere provides confidence, recognition, familiarity, and other associations to customers that make it convenience for them to make purchasing decisions in the self-serving convenience store.

Limitations and Future Research

From a larger retail industry, the self-serving convenience stores type and the location of study is Ampara District area being selected for this research. Further, the customer base of the study limits to the end user consumer of self-serving convenience stores which mainly sell food items not a fashion or the customers of other retail types. Population consist only the customers who shop at self-serving retail convenience stores who are customers of one or many self-serving retail stores in Ampara District and those selected conveniently to administer questionnaires. Furthermore, the customers' responses are not comparatively studied based on different players in the industry. Finally, the variables restricted only to a specific construct of four independent variables but there are many other motivators are not taken to the study. All these should be considered in the future researches.

When limitations arise, it will create issues that are need to be resolved. So, the future researcher needs to put more effort and being more discipline in order to produce a valid result and good research. To achieve more accurate research finding, the researcher must choose more reliable sample, future researcher can use random sampling techniques for this purpose. At the

same time, future research should consider the impact of atmospheric variable comparing all the different outlets to see how it is really affected. Future research also can study other store atmosphere from different retail industries like fashion retail, electronic, restaurants, pharmacies and so on

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