

Enhancing Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intentions: Exploring the Influence of Store Atmospherics in Retail Apparel Stores

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ABSTRACT

Changing customer needs and demands has made the retail environment highly competitive. The growing number of organized retail outlets has even made the competition tougher than ever. Nowadays, customer seeks for additional benefits within the shopping environment. Thus, this obligates retailers to formulate such designs to make store atmospherics more attracting, thereby improving customer's satisfaction and build purchase intention. With this background, present study aimed to ascertain the extent of satisfaction of customers with the store atmospherics of selected retail apparel stores of Vadodara city and to find out the influence of store atmospherics on purchase intention of customers. The present study had descriptive research design. The stores were selected using Convenience sampling technique and the customers were selected using Random sampling technique. Customer's responses were obtained using Interview schedule. A total of 385 valid responses were obtained. Customers are more likely to enter a store, make larger purchases, and be happier with both the store and the goods they purchase when they are satisfied with the environment in which they shop. Significant relationship was found between Store Atmospherics Viz. Cleanliness, Music, Scent, Temperature, Lighting, Color, Product display/layout and Employee behavior and extent of Satisfaction. Significant relationship was also found between Store Atmospherics and purchase intention. Thus, the study highlighted the importance of store atmospherics which leads to customer's satisfaction and purchase intention.

Key Words : Store atmospherics, Customer satisfaction, Influence, Retail apparel stores, Purchase intention

INTRODUCTION

The threat of online shopping propels physical store retailers to innovate and design their retail atmosphere to create unforgettable shopping experiences to compete effectively and retain customers (Angula and Zulu, 2021). Several retail outlets offer similar products and services to the consumers. The competition is not only from outside but also from within due to different retail formats. Indian consumers are looking forward to the organized retail. With the passage of time, as organized retail evolves, consumers will have exposure to newer formats new terms will come into play and atmospherics emerged as

the key differentiator. According to Das (2014), store atmosphere is the process of deploying significant perceptual, attitudinal, and emotional impacts on purchasing by enticing customers into the store and keeping them engaged and fascinated. Retailers use this as their positioning strategy, where the created atmosphere interprets the retailer's values, mission, and guiding philosophy. In the process, environmental indications such as color, music, lighting, and cleanliness create the shopping context.

Store Atmospherics :

According to Akram *et al.* (2016) store

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atmospherics incorporates the elements of the physical nature of the retail outlet, elements designed to create a certain appearance for the outlet. The design and look of the outlet are created to attract and delight customers. Several physical factors incorporate store atmosphere, including color, lighting, music, cleanliness, store and merchandise layout, décor, scent, and temperature. Sezgin and Küçükköylü (2014) cited that store atmosphere incorporates a certain look and ambiance produced by the physical features of a retail store in order to attract customers. The overall atmospheric setting of a retail outlet is in which various stimulants are involved. These stimulants may be store decoration, product forms, packaging, colors, lighting, air ventilation, scents, music, and display of products in the store, among others. The appearance, attitude, and demeanour of employees, coupled with how they interact with customers, may also affect store atmosphere. When a customer enters a store, they do not experience the music in isolation, they do not smell the scent without seeing the colors as well, they do not walk on the floor-covering without feeling the ambient temperature. The typical customer experiences degrees of stimuli as an on-going, integrated experience. Moreover, it is important to understand how atmospherics can affect the entire retail process, from the basic dilemma of whether or not to enter a store to the actual purchase decision (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010).

Store Atmospherics and Customer Satisfaction:

Shopping experience, shopping ambience and family shopping are the three main factors determining the customer satisfaction in the large retail outlets/formats (Paul *et al.*, 2016). The product quality and variety influences the purchase decisions the most but strongly followed by the impact of store atmosphere (Mathur and Goswami, 2014). Ambiance, design, and social factors that were believed to have the most significant impact on customers' satisfaction (Ndengane *et al.*, 2021). It has been found that when consumers are satisfied with the environment where they shop, they are more likely to enter the store, buy more and be more satisfied with both the store and the products bought (Baker *et al.*, 2002; Areni and Kim, 1993 and Michon *et al.*, 2005). Shopping satisfaction could be considered as the sum total of subjective judgement of fulfilment resulting from shopping activity, and needless to say that store choice will be based on the shopping satisfaction that a customer is likely to achieve by shopping in a particular store (Paul *et al.*,

2016). Gerstner and Libai (2006) contend that recent reports in the popular media suggest that service quality and customer satisfaction are declining. Poor service results from poor selection of employees, lack of training, service process failures, or misalignment of incentives and, more generally, gaps in organizational knowledge and perceptions. Retail service providers, who apply customer relationship management, view customers as assets. An alternative to increasing customer retention and profits is improving customer satisfaction and improving staff morale which leads to improve staff attitude towards customers. Indeed, achieving customer satisfaction is crucial for any business, especially for those that offer physical products and services. It is essential to understand that customer satisfaction assumes various forms, including the quality of the merchandise, the store layout, employee behaviour, store philosophy and principles. In retail industry, customers expect a seamless and enjoyable shopping experience. From the moment that enter the store, they want to feel welcomed, valued, and appreciated. They expect to find high-quality products that meet their needs and preferences, displayed in an organized and attractive manner. They also expect knowledgeable and courteous employees who can help them what they need and answer any questions they may have.

Moreover, retailers who prioritize their customers' satisfaction must also ensure that their store layout is designed to facilitate a smooth and convenient shopping experience. The layout should be logical and intuitive, allowing customers to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. The store environment should be clean, well lit, and aesthetically pleasing, creating a positive atmosphere that encourages customers to linger and explore.

In conclusion, achieving customer satisfaction requires attention to every detail that affects the customer's experience. Retailers who take the time to understand their customers' needs and preferences and prioritize their satisfaction will ultimately reap the benefits of increased customer loyalty and sales growth. Hence, it became imperative to ascertain the extent of satisfaction of customers with the store atmospherics of retail apparel store.

Influence of Store Atmospherics on Purchase Intention:

Babin *et al.* (2003) found that the combination of

colors and lighting has important role in influencing the consumer purchase intention. Some experimental research proposed that cool-colored in store settings are favored more over warm-colored store settings (Bellizi *et al.*, 1983; Crowley, 1993). Furthermore, in one of the experimental research where hypothetical television purchase suggested there can be decrease in likelihood of postponing the purchase decision in case of blue background as compared to a red background (Bellizi and Hite, 1992). Hence, it is believed that violet/blue interior walls will generate higher level of positive affective tone and increased purchase intentions than compared to darker tone like red/orange. In an independent lighting research, it's suggested that bright fluorescent (soft) lights and warm (cool) colors are more used by discount stores (Baker *et al.*, 1992; Bellizi and Hite, 1992; Schlosser, 1998). Retailers often use various atmospheric stimuli, such as lighting, music, scents and visual displays to create a pleasant and memorable shopping experience for their customers. These stimuli can create a positive emotional response in customer, which can increase their likelihood of making a purchase and returning to the store in the future. Cleanliness, Scent, Lighting and Display/ Layout have significant positive influence on the consumers' purchase intention while music and color have minimal impact on the consumer purchase intention, whereas, the temperature has almost no impact on the consumer while shopping (Hussain and Ali, 2015). The material and color of the shelves, hangers, etc., where the products are placed, affect the customers as much as the lighting conditions in the stores (Ketencioglu, 2021).

Store Atmospheric :

Additionally, when customers stay longer in the store, they may be exposed to more products and promotional offers, which can also influence their purchase decisions. Therefore, it was considered important to find out the influence of store atmospherics on purchase intention of customers.

In today's retail industry, consumers have numerous options to choose from when it comes to purchasing products and services. The competition is not only external but also within retail formats, such as supermarkets, department stores, convenience stores, and online retailers. Consumers have various criteria that influence their decision-making when selecting a store. The distance from the store, the breadth of merchandise, and availability are primary factors that stir their decision to choose one retail outlet over the other. For example, a consumer may choose a store that is closer to their home or workplace, or one that offers a wider selection of products and services that cater to their needs and preferences.

In addition to these primary factors, other factors such as the store's ambience and the extent to which it is patronized by others can also influence consumer behaviour. The ambience of a store, including its décor, lighting, and layout, can create a positive or negative impression on consumer, which can affect their overall shopping experience. Furthermore, consumer may be more likely to visit a store that is frequently patronized by others as they perceive it to be more trustworthy and reputable retailer. In conclusion, retailers must understand the various factors that influence consumer behaviour when choosing a retail outlet. By providing an extensive range of products and services, ensuring availability, maintaining a pleasing and comfortable shopping environment, and creating positive reputation, retailers can attract and retain customers, ultimately leading to increased sales and success in the retail industry. Hence it became vital to find out the influence of store atmospherics on retail apparel store patronage.

Store atmospherics can play a crucial role in shaping customers' perception and behaviours, so understanding how different design elements contribute to customer satisfaction and purchase intentions can be highly valuable for architects, interior designers and students of interior design. By taking into account the factors that influence customers' experiences in a retail store, designers can create environments that are more engaging, comfortable, and memorable. For Example, they may consider the

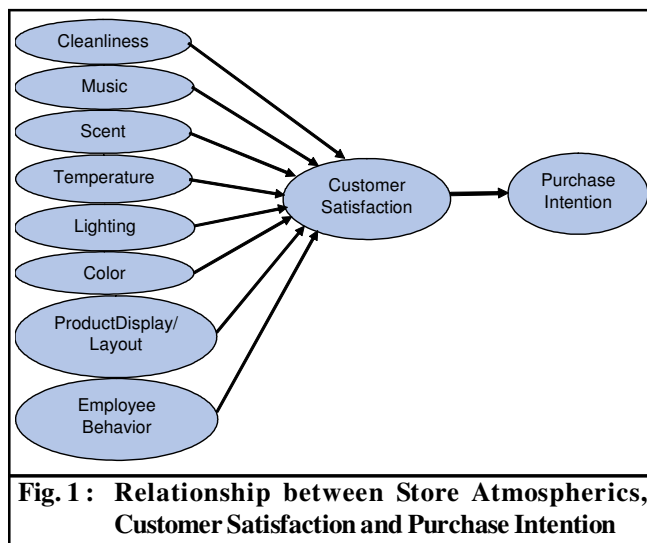


Fig. 1 : Relationship between Store Atmospheric, Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention

lighting, music, scent, color, and layout and other elements that can affect customers' moods, emotions and cognitive processes. Moreover, by understanding how different design strategies can impact customer satisfaction and loyalty, designers can help retailers achieve their business goals, such as increasing sales, improving brand image, and fostering customer's engagement. Overall, the link between store atmospherics and customer satisfaction is a fascinating and important area of research that can benefit various stakeholders in the retail industry.

Statement of the problem:

The present research aims to find out influence of store atmospherics on customer satisfaction, and purchase intention.

Objectives of the study:

1. To ascertain the extent of satisfaction of customers with the store atmospherics of selected retail apparel store of Vadodara city.
2. To find out the influence of store atmospherics on purchase intention of customers.

METHODOLOGY

Study design :

The present study has descriptive research design. Descriptive research design was thought to be most appropriate method to carry out the present research because it gathered the data on demographic details of the respondents and influence of store atmospherics on customer satisfaction and purchase intention.

Study area and Sample:

The locale of the study was Vadodara city. Vadodara has plenty of retail apparel stores in and around the city. It is one of the fastest growing cities in Gujarat. More than 120 apparel stores are located in the areas of Vadodara city viz., Alkapuri, Vadsar and Navapura with lively ambiance and the high-spirited atmosphere with apparels at amazing prices, whether it's clothing material or readymade clothing. Various styles of apparels are available in branded and non-branded stores of Vadodara.^[1] The unit of inquiry were customers of selected retail apparel stores of Vadodara city. Size of the population in this study was 2,233,000. Cochran's sampling theory was applied to determine the sample size using the following equation (Cochran, 1977): $n = \frac{N \cdot Z^2 \cdot \sigma^2}{N + Z^2 \cdot \sigma^2}$ (1) When N and n

demonstrate the population size and volume of the sample, respectively; Z₂ is the desired confidence level (95%), σ^2 is the variance of an attribute in the population (1.06) and e is the desired level of precision (0.05). According to Cochran's formula, the maximum value of e can be chosen equal to 0.05 in order to have the highest level of precision. It was specified that there would be 385 participants in the study. A representative sample of the community was selected based on the community's population. The sample were collected from the selected areas of Vadodara city viz., Vadsar, Navapura and Alkapuri. From each area, several apparel stores were approached in each area. Those who gave permission to collect data, were considered as a sample. Thus, total three retail apparel stores were selected as sample. The data were collected from customers of selected retail apparel stores of Vadodara city. The researcher went to these stores and approached the customers on weekdays and weekends. Through random selection, 385 customers as samples were selected, to determine the influence of store atmospherics on customer satisfaction, experience, purchase intention and store patronage. The consent was taken from the respondents and were asked to co-operate in giving the needed information for the present study.

Instrument:

For the present study, Interview schedule as data collection tool was developed based on the information gathered through review of related literature, interaction with experts in the field and guidance of the experts, interview schedule was prepared. A care was taken to include all the questions that would elicit the information needed to attain the objectives of the study. The interview schedule comprised of four sections where Section I contained background information of the respondent, such as name, age (in years), gender, educational qualification, occupation, personal monthly income (in rupee), type of family, size of family and family monthly income (in rupee). Section II contained the statements related to extent of satisfaction of customers with the store atmospherics. The dimensions of store atmospherics considered were cleanliness, music, scent, temperature, lighting, color, product display, layout and employee behavior. This was assessed through a summated rating scale where the customers were asked to state the extent of satisfaction with the Store Atmospherics. The responses were "Highly Satisfied", "Satisfied", "Neutral", "Dissatisfied" and "Highly Dissatisfied" which were

scored 5 through 1 respectively to these responses. High scores reflected high extent of satisfaction of customers of selected retail apparel stores. Section III contained the statements related to influence of store atmospherics on purchase intention of customers of selected retail apparel stores. The dimensions of store atmospherics considered were cleanliness, music, scent, temperature, lighting, color, product display and layout. This was assessed through a summated rating scale where the customers were asked to state to whether the dimensions of store atmospherics influence their purchase intention. The responses were “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” which were scored 5 through 1 respectively to these responses. High scores reflected high intention of purchase of the customers in the selected retail apparel stores. The tool prepared by the researcher for the present study were given to the panel of total 5 judges, who were from Department of Family and Community Resources Management, Faculty of Family and Community Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara. A consensus of 80% among the judges was taken as yardstick for the final tool. The reliability for the scales prepared by the researcher were established through pretesting and reliability of the scales.

For pretesting a pilot study was conducted to find out the feasibility and clarity of the scales developed. Therefore, the developed scales were pretested on the sample of 30 customers of apparel store who visited the selected retail apparel stores. The reliability of the scales was established through split-half method of establishing reliability. For this method the scales were divided in two using odd even method. The co-efficient of correlation was found between the two halves. In “Extent of Satisfaction of Customer with Store Atmospherics of the Retail Apparel Store” scale total 8 items were framed. In “Influence of Store Atmospherics on Purchase Intention” scale total 33 statements were listed. Cronbach’s alpha formula was applied to estimate the reliability co-efficient for all the scales. The Cronbach’s alpha was estimated using following formula:

$$\rho_T = \frac{k^2 \overline{\sigma_{ij}}}{\sigma^2_X}$$

Where, ρ_T is the tau-equivalent reliability, k is number of items, σ_{ij} was covariance between Xi and Xj and σ^2_X is item variances and inter-itemcovariance’s[3]. In order to get the overview of each of the scale used in

present study, there liability coefficient are given in Table 1. There liability values were found to be high for all the scales as reported below:

Overview of the scales with reliability values:

Sr. No.	Scales	Values
1.	Extent of Satisfaction of Customer with Store Atmospherics of the Retail Apparel Store	0.729
2.	Influence of Store Atmospherics on Purchase Intention	0.952

Data Collection:

The interview schedule was used for data collection. The purpose of research was explained and rapport was built so as to get the true responses. The researcher personally interviewed the customers by visiting the selected retail apparel store. Consent was taken from the respondents who visited the selected retail apparel store and the owner and managers of the selected retail apparel store. The data was collected only by those respondents who enthusiastically and willingly gave the needed information for the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any time without any penalty. The data were collected from the participants by face to face interview through the door to door survey. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the door of the houses in order to collect data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profile of participants:

Demographic profile of participants includes their age, gender, educational qualification, occupation and personal monthly income. It was found that little less than three-fourth of the respondents were in the age group of 21-34 years. Little more than one-half of the respondents were females. It was found that little less than one-half of the respondents were graduate. More than one-half of the respondents were doing part time job. Majority of the respondents were having income below and equal to Rs. 25000 with the mean of Rs. 28472(Fig.2).

Family Profile of the Participants:

Family profile of the participants includes their type of family, size of family and family monthly income. Less than three-fourth of the respondents belonged to nuclear

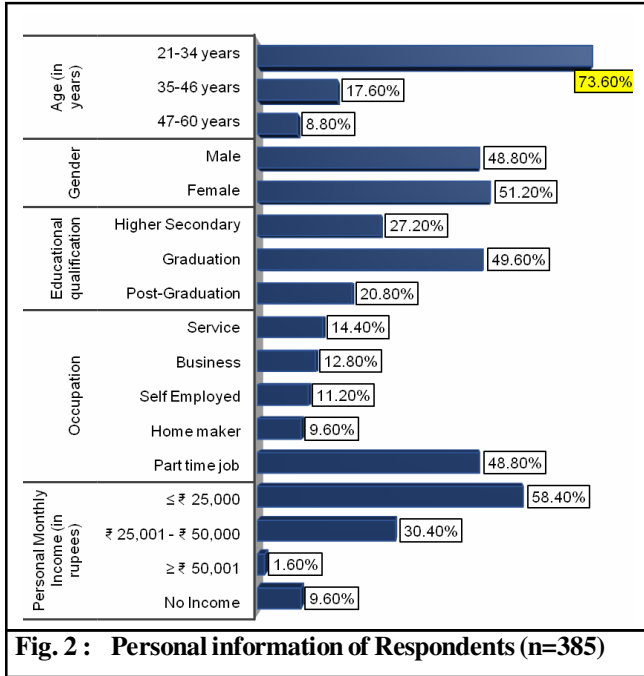


Fig. 2 : Personal information of Respondents (n=385)

family. Two-third of the respondents had small size of family with two to four family members and less than one-half of the respondents had family monthly income equal to and above Rs. 1,00,001 with the mean of Rs. 1,43,544 (Fig. 3).

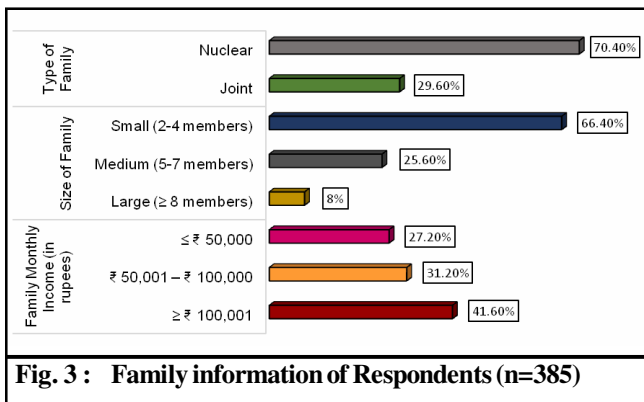


Fig. 3 : Family information of Respondents (n=385)

Satisfaction with the store atmospherics:

There are several factors that contribute to store atmospherics, including the lighting, layout, music, scent, and overall ambiance. Each of these factors can influence customer satisfaction in different ways. The respondents were highly satisfied with the employee behavior and product display/layout of the selected retail apparel stores. The mean weighted scores calculated supported the findings. The average weighted mean for entire scale was 4.04 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 : Satisfaction of Customer with Store Atmospherics of the Retail Apparel Store (n=385)

The weighted mean for each section of the satisfaction of the respondents with dimensions of store atmospherics of the selected retail apparel stores was found (Fig. 4). The computed weighted mean for each section for dimensions of the store atmospherics revealed that scores for “Employee behavior” and “Product display/layout” were the highest among all sub sections. The scores for “Temperature” and “Scent” were the lowest among all sub sections. The average weighted mean on entire scale was 4.04.

Majority of the respondents were satisfied to high extent (72%) with the store atmospherics. More than one-fourth of the respondents were satisfied to moderate extent (28%) with the store atmospherics (Table 1).

Sr. No.	Extent of satisfaction with the dimensions of store atmospherics of the selected retail apparel stores	Range	Respondents (n=385)	
			f	%
1.	High Extent	(30-40)	90	72
2.	Moderate Extent	(19-29)	35	28

Influence of store atmospherics on Purchase intention

Store atmospherics can have a significant impact on purchase intention, as it can influence how customers perceive and interact with products, as well as their overall shopping experience.

Majority of the respondents were influenced to a high extent with cleanliness, employee behavior, product display/layout and temperature. More than one-half of the respondents were satisfied to high extent with lighting, scent, color and music. Majority of the respondents were

influenced to a high extent with all the dimensions of store atmospherics of selected retail apparel stores (Fig. 5).

Relationship between store atmospherics, customer satisfaction and purchase intention:

Co-efficient of correlation was computed to find out relationship between the extent of satisfaction of customers and dimensions of store atmospherics.

A significant relationship was found between extent of satisfaction of customers and dimensions of store atmospherics. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected (Table 2). Therefore, it can be conjectured that the store atmospherics plays an important role in satisfying the customers.

Co-efficient of correlation was computed to find out relationship between purchase intention of customers and dimensions of store atmospherics.

A significant relationship was found between purchase intention of customers and dimensions of store atmospherics. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected (Table 3). Therefore, it can be concluded that store atmospherics have influence on purchase intention of the

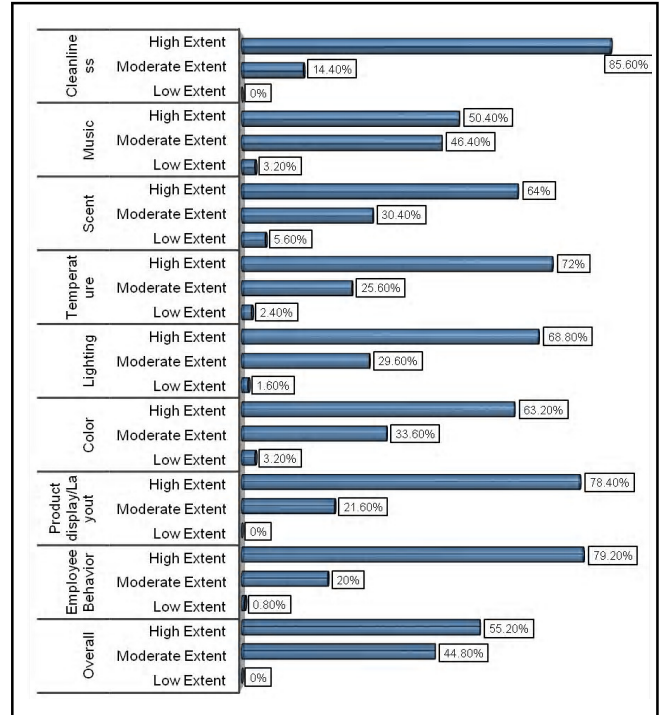


Fig. 5 : Extent of influences of store Atmospherics on Purchase Intention (n=385)

Sr. No.	Dimensions of Store Atmospherics	Customer Satisfaction		
		n	r-value	Level of significance
1.	Cleanliness	385	0.712	0.01
2.	Music		0.620	
3.	Scent		0.660	
4.	Temperature		0.670	
5.	Lighting		0.694	
6.	Color		0.681	
7.	Product display/layout		0.701	
8.	Employee behavior		0.715	

Sr. No.	Dimensions of Store Atmospherics	Purchase Intention		
		n	r-value	Level of significance
1.	Cleanliness	385	0.478	0.01
2.	Music		0.483	
3.	Scent		0.514	
4.	Temperature		0.310	
5.	Lighting		0.411	
6.	Color		0.352	
7.	Product display/layout		0.491	
8.	Employee behavior		0.514	

customers.

Conclusion:

The retail environment is highly competitive, mainly because of the rise of online shopping, leaving physical retailers with challenges of increasing in-store traffic. In a physical store environment, certain elements play a crucial role in keeping customers in-store longer and, more importantly, keeping them coming back. This study investigated store atmospherics that can affect customer satisfaction and purchase intention.

The results showed that the respondents were satisfied with the employee behavior and product display/layout of the selected retail apparel stores. Majority of the respondents were influenced with all the dimensions of store atmospherics of selected retail apparel stores. Results of statistical analysis showed that store atmospherics has an impact on customer satisfaction and purchase intention of the customers. Therefore, retailers and designers must consider these factors during mapping out the customer journey for retail apparel stores. Future studies can replicate the proposed model within rural areas. Future studies could also be done on other retail stores and not just apparel. A comparative study between stores can also be studied in future. A layout design of the store can be proposed incorporating store atmospherics. A similar research can be conducted on a larger sample size.

Limitations :

There were certain limitations of the study which should be taken into account in future researches. Getting the primary data is not easy. Many store owners approached were not interested in participating. Therefore, it is possible that store owners don't allow to collect data from their stores.

Ethical approval:

The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee for human research (IECHR), Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara with the ethical approval number IECHR/FCSc/MSc/2022/03.

Author contribution:

Conception and design of study: SS & DJ; Acquisition of data: DJ; Analysis and/or interpretation of data: SS & DJ; Drafting the manuscript: SS & DJ; revising

the manuscript critically for important intellectual content: SS.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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