

## **“A Study to Know the Ambience Variables Which Small and Medium Apparel Retail Outlets Consider Important”**

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### **Abstract**

In today's competitive Business Environment importance of Store Ambience in promoting small and medium apparel retail outlets cannot be overlooked. Atmospheric involves a conscious designing of store space to affect customer's sensory experience. Therefore it is essential for the owners of small and medium apparel retail outlets to critically analyse the various variables of store ambience and make a perfect combinations of them which will help in attracting and retaining customers. Store ambiances not only help in retaining customers for a longer period of time but also persuade them for unplanned purchases which results in additional sales and profit. Store ambience attributes plays an important role in making choice of shopping store. Owners of apparel retail outlets are focussing on various ways of altering store ambience factors so as to provide customers a unique shopping experience and investing little time and effort on physical environment will definitely increase sales, affect customer purchase intention and make a world of difference

Retailers, Researchers and academicians have recognised that store ambience plays an important role in the success of a Business. The main focus of this paper is to provide a systematic overview of the concept of store atmosphere and to explore and identify the various factors of store atmosphere by reviewing existing literature available and also conducting an empirical research to know the store ambience variables which owners of small and medium apparel retail outlets consider important.

**Key Words:** - Store Ambience, factors of Store Ambience.

### **Introduction**

In Apparel sector the level of competition is very high. In order to survive in this challenging business era, owner of Apparel retail outlets should focus on customers preferences and critically analyse the factors which attracts the customers towards their shops and influences their purchasing decisions. Owners of apparel outlets has realised that in addition to Price and Quality of a products being offered, the Store ambience of the shop also plays a prominent role in attracting and retaining customers. Singh Priyanka, Katiyar Neha, Verma Gaurav,(2014)in their research suggested that store ambience attributes affects the image of the store. Ambience Planning is a complex task as main objective is to maximise sales and minimize cost. It affects the customer's perception of a store. Kotler defines atmospheric as “the effort to design buying environment to produce specific emotional effect in the buyer that enhance his

purchase probability” Kotler(1973)suggested that use of atmospheric can be used as competitive tool to attract and maintain a specific target market especially where product and price differences are nominal. Faldu Rajesh(2012)in their research paper concluded that Lifestyle in India is changing from soberness to hedonism due to dual-income nuclear family unit, a steady shift towards an ambition of a global lifestyle. A consumer of today spends to attain the “feel good” factor. Shopping therefore has developed from a need based activity to a spare-time entertainment. In the Indian context, a study was done on store choice behaviour indicated Indian shoppers on an overall basis give importance to proximity of the store, merchandise and service provided by the store and stores dealing in apparels are also chosen based on ambience. Daniel P.,Dr. Narayana M.S. ,Prof. Kumar P. Vijay,(2016)concluded that retailers faces a more knowledgeable and demanding consumer and since business exists to satisfy the needs of the consumers, the demands and expectations of the consumers often have forced retail organizations to change their formats and product offerings. Store atmospherics includes store's physical characteristics such as music, scent, temperature, lighting, colour and much more that are used to develop an image and draw customers. Kotler (1973) recommended that along with the trends toward retail innovation and evolution, retailers and store managers now interested in how shoppers get experience while they come to the store. It has long been recognized that consumers respond not only based on the product or service quality itself but they also take much attention on the store environment. It is because; besides product and services, the atmosphere of the store is also one of the influential factors in the purchase experience.

#### Review of Literature

Singh Priyanka, Katiyar Neha, Verma Gaurav (2014) concluded that owners of apparel shops has claimed that they have influenced customer's buying behaviour by manipulating store atmospheric via layout, colour, lighting and music. Donovan, Robert and John Rossiter (1982)found that pleasant environments encouraged consumer to stay longer in the selling environment and to make unplanned purchase. Store atmospheric attributes such as colour, lighting, interior decoration or music form the overall context within which shoppers make store selection and patronage decisions, and are likely to have a significant impact on store image. Selection of a specific retail outlet involves a comparison of the available alternative outlets on the evaluative criteria of a consumer. Donovan R. J., & Rossiter J. R., Marcoolyn G., & Nesdale A.(1994)said that in our competitive era, an attractive store ambience is essential in encouraging customers to buy products. A considerable number of studies have been performed based on the proposition of the environment of the store on satisfaction level and purchase behaviour of the consumer. Prasad Y.Ramakrishna (2012)concluded that apparel retailing is considered as one of the fast moving consumer goods retailing (FMCG). Hence the goods should be moved or sold faster than we expect, otherwise the retailers should face problems in selling. Terblanché and Boshoff (2006) affirmed that the store's décor is an essential element in the store's overall outlook, and can be designed to enhance customer

satisfaction. Doyle and Fenwick (1974) note, different socioeconomic groups perceive stores differently and store image perception may be related to age and other demographic factors. The various demographic factors considered included: gender, age, education, occupation, and income. Martineau's(1958) has identified layout and architecture; symbols and color; advertising; and sales personnel as the four core attributes of store image. Leszczyc Peter TLP, Timmermans HJP(1997)Research conducted processing of store attributes by means of which consumers decide which will be their primary store. It is empirically examined that retail store attributes affect store choice and purchases. Leung J W K and Taylor G (2002)in a study on fashion buying criteria of X generation consumers in Hong Kong found that X-ers are attracted by a good interior store layout; and feel good service is essential when buying fashionable clothing. Kaur Amandeep (2013) Store Ambience includes everything the customer sees, that create a positive image of a business and results in attention, interest, desire and action on the part of the customer. It helps in attracting customers.

#### Objectives of The Study

1. To study the various variables of store ambience.
2. To know the important variable of store ambience according to the perception of owners of small and medium apparel retail outlet.

#### Research Design

This study was conducted among the owners of small and medium Apparel retail outlet of Ajmer city, For collecting primary data, a structured questionnaire was prepared which was filled by 50 small and medium Apparel retail outlet owners. The first part consists of background information's like age, gender, education etc. The second part is the main survey questionnaire which has been used to know the perception of owners towards the importance of individual variable in overall store ambience Convenience sampling method was used to reach the respondents. Owners responded on 5 point Likert scales wherein they gave their preferences for store ambience variable which plays a prominent role in overall ambience of the store.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### Part I - Demographic Profile has been analyzed by using SPSS software

##### 1.1 Frequency Distribution and percentage of Gender of owner

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	41	82
Female	9	18
Total	50	100

Out of the total sample 82% of respondents were Male and 18% were female

## 1.2. Frequency Distribution and percentage of Marital status of owner

<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Unmarried	8	16
Married	39	78
Divorced/widow	3	6
Total	50	100

Out of the total sample 78 % of the Respondents were married and only 6% of them are divorced/widow

## 1.3. Frequency Distribution and percentage of Age of owner

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than 20	0	0
20 – 30	11	22
30 - 40	28	56
40 – 50	9	18
Above 50	2	4
Total	50	100

Majority of the respondents (56%) belongs to the age group of 30 – 40 and only (4%) are above 50

## 1.4. Frequency Distribution and percentage of Qualification of owner

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
UG	5	10
Graduate	24	48
PG	19	38
Higher than post graduate	2	4
Total	50	100

Majority of the respondents (48%) were Graduate and only (4%) are having qualification higher than post graduate

**PART II**

Objective 1- To study the various variables of Store Ambience.

2.1 Through review of literature and discussion with owners of small and medium apparel retail outlets various variables of Store Ambience has been explored such as lighting,



cleanliness, music, odour, colour, layout, furniture and fixture, flooring, free space, window display, mannequins, signage, interior decoration, festive display, temperature, trial room, front, employee behavior, crowd, billing counter, credit card, etc.

**TABLE A**

Year	Author	Factors of store Ambience
2001	Lam Shun Yin	1. Ambient factor - temperature, lighting, music etc. 2. Design factor - architecture, colour etc. 3. Social factor - number, type and behaviour of customers and employees.
2000	D'Astous	1. Irritant ambient factors; 2. Irritant design factors; 3. irritant social factors
2000	Turley & Milliman	1. General exterior; 2. General interior; 3. Layout and design; 4. Point of purchase and decoration; 5. human variables (It includes the human variables and is the most complete one.)
1998	Yoo Park & MacInnis	1. Design, 2, lighting, 3. Air quality, 4. Interior decoration 5. Music
1995 (Essays, UK., November 2013)	Berman and Evans	1. Exterior – storefront which include marquee, entrances, windows, lighting, and construction materials; 2. General interior – flooring, bright, colour, scents, sounds, store fixtures, wall textures, dressing facilities; 3. Store layout – allocation of floor space (selling space, merchandise space, personnel space, customer space), classification of store origins, determination of a traffic -flow pattern, mapping out in - store locations, arrangement of individual products; 4. Interior (Point - Of-Purchase) Displays – the principal type of displays are: assortment display, theme -setting display, ensemble display, rack display, a cute case. (This framework does not include human component)
1994	Baker Julie	1. Ambient factors – music, lighting, smell; 2 Design factors – floor covering, wall covering, display/fixtures, colour, cleanliness, dressing room, aisles, layout, signs; 3.Social factors – salespeople. (This typology takes into account the social dimension, but does not include the facility exterior-exterior design of the retail store)
1992	Bitner Mary J.,	1. Ambient conditions - temperature, air quality, noise, music, odour; 2.Space/Function - layout, equipment, furnishings, 3.Signs, Symbols & Artifacts – signage, personal artifacts, style of decor (This conceptual framework is the most complete one. Nevertheless, research on the employee side is rare)
1991	Steenkamp Jan-Benedict E. M. & Wedel Michael	1. Product assortment and variety, 2. Value of the merchandise given its price, 3. Service, 4. Location, 5. Facilities, 6. store atmosphere

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1974	Kotler	Four dimensions: 1. Visual (sight) dimensions – colour, brightness, size and shape; 2 Aural (sound) dimensions – volume, pitch, tempo; 3.Olfactory (smell) dimensions – scent and freshness; 4. Tactile (touch) dimensions – softness, smoothness and temperature (This is the most early typology about dimensions of a tmosphere and does not include the crowd and the employee dimensions)
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Objective 2 - The important variable of store ambience according to the perception of Apparel retail outlet owners.

2.2. The main focus of this research paper is to explore the various variables of store ambience and identify the individual variable considered most important by owners of small and medium apparel retail outlet in designing overall store Ambience. Researcher has included 20 factors under study and data has been collected on Likert scale of 5 point where 1 indicates strongly disagrees and 5 strongly agree. The individual variable has been valued by using weighted average method and then ranked accordingly on the basis of the respondents answer. It is clear from this study that individual variable of store ambience vary in respect of its importance in overall store ambience. The total weighted rank of individual variable are as follows, Lighting (R1 -230), Cleanliness (R2 - 229), Employee Behavior (R3 -229), billing counter (R4 - 226), credit card (R5 - 223), trial room (R6 - 220), window display (R7 - 219), front (R8 - 211), signage (R9 - 210), mannequins (R10 - 210), layout (R11 - 208), temperature (R12 - 208), flooring and free space (R13 - 205), festive display (R14 - 190), furniture (R15 - 169), music (R16 - 160), interior decoration (R17 - 156), fragrance (R18 - 150), crowd (R19 - 148), colour (R20 - 138), Through research it can be observed that Lighting, Cleanliness, Employee Behavior, billing counter, credit card etc are prime variables of store ambience followed by other variables whereas the least preference goes to crowd and colour.

**TABLE B**

Weighting →	1	2	3	4	5	Weighted Rank					Sum of Weighted Rank ( F+G+H+I+J)	Final Rank
	A	B	C	D	E	F (A*1)	G (B*2)	H (C*3)	I (D*4)	J (E*5)		
Lightning ↓	0	0	1	18	31	0	0	3	72	155	230	1
Cleanliness	0	0	2	17	31	0	0	6	68	155	229	2
Employee behaviour	0	0	2	17	31	0	0	6	68	155	229	3
Billing Counter	0	0	3	18	29	0	0	9	72	145	226	4
Credit Card	0	0	2	23	25	0	0	6	92	125	223	5
Trial Room	0	1	3	21	25	0	2	9	84	125	220	6

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Window Display	0	0	0	26	23	0	0	0	104	115	219	7
Front	1	2	3	23	21	1	4	9	92	105	211	8
Signage	1	1	4	25	19	1	2	12	100	95	210	9
Mannequins	2	1	2	25	20	2	2	6	100	100	210	10
Layout	0	0	11	20	19	0	0	33	80	95	208	11
Temp	0	0	2	38	10	0	0	6	152	50	208	12
Flooring & free space	0	0	3	39	8	0	0	9	156	40	205	13
Festive Display	3	2	7	28	10	3	4	21	112	50	190	14
Furniture	0	4	24	21	1	0	8	72	84	5	169	15
Music	0	13	14	23	0	0	26	42	92	0	160	16
Interior Decoration	1	14	13	22	0	1	28	39	88	0	156	17
Fragrance	0	11	28	11	0	0	22	84	44	0	165	18
Crowd	11	6	13	14	6	11	12	39	56	30	148	19
Colour	5	14	20	10	1	5	28	60	40	5	138	20

## Conclusion

The main motto of owners of small and medium apparel retail outlets is to provide a superior shopping experience to its customer. In an environment of cut throat competition they have realized the importance of store ambience as a factor of success which helps in differentiating themselves from others. In this research it has been concluded that Lighting, cleanliness, employee behavior etc are prime variables of store ambience followed by other variables whereas the least preference goes to crowd and colour. Apparel retail outlets are using Store Ambience as a strategic marketing tool and are working on identifying the right combinations of various variables of Store Ambient which may benefit them by attracting and retaining customer in long run.

## Recommendations

The paper recommends that Store Ambience plays an important role in the success of the Business. This has been neglected as far as the Indian Retail sector is considered but now apparel sector has realised its importance as a successful marketing technique for converting footfalls into sales resulting in increasing profits. They should devote time and resources in creating an appealing and comfortable shopping environment for the customer. Creating an exciting Shopping Environment is a challenging task and they should be careful while using the various combinations of store ambience variables as improper combinations may create problems for the customers resulting negative shop image.

## Limitations

1. The results of the study could not be generalized as study confines to the small and medium apparel retail outlets of Ajmer city.
2. Due to lack of time, convenience sampling was used, which again could be considered as a limitation.

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