

Customer Perception towards On-Line Atmospheric

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Abstract: Customer perception plays a pivotal role in marketing any product. With changes in life style & access to electronic media, online shopping has become the order of the day. The offline stores due to physical availability of the store layouts and design could offer atmospheric elements like touch effect, demo effect, temperature, soothing lights, music & an entertaining environment. Online stores competing with offline retail stores have a different approach to visual merchandising. This paper tries to identify customer perception towards the offline stores.

Keyword: Customer perception, offline Stores, On-Line shopping, store brand, store layout, visual merchandising.

INTRODUCTION

People have become more interested with the growing digital world. Every feasible digital platform against the traditional physical environment is being appreciated by the people. The online shopping or e-shopping is not an exception to that. Online shopping has found a tremendous growth in last 10 years. From shopping electronics, apparels and furniture to ordering foods and booking hotels, everything has become online. These online shopping methods enables the consumers to carry out the purchase activities through internet with the use of a web browser or a mobile app. Like the cherry on the cake, some of the popular search engines in their search results, have started showing the product's availability on different e-retailer sites and comparing the prices in each site along with the coupon details. A typical online store displays the images of the products, product features, prices and the reviews of the customers who have bought the products earlier. They also provide the customers with the various modes of payments such as credit card, debit card, net banking, e-wallets, etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a physical retail store, visual merchandising is one of the most important store attributes. It is the combination of visual and other sensory elements to capture the shopper's attention, awaken their senses and provide a pleasing buying experience to customers. A perfect visual merchandising would result in achieving more sales and improving the store image (Blessa, 2015). Similar to the atmospheric of the physical store, the online retail store should also be equipped with perfect virtual atmospheric to capture the attention of the shoppers. It is evident from previous researches that visual merchandising cognition influences brand salience which in turn affects brand attitude and then purchase intention (Park, Jeon, & Sullivan, 2015). Also, the store atmospheric influence the inferences that customers make about the store's products and service quality (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994).

The effect of the digital environment on consumer behaviour is dynamic in nature. The customers consider themselves interactive in the online store through their product reviews and ratings. Apart from the influences made by the retailers, the customers are also get influenced by the reviews of the other customers. In this case, unlike the physical stores, the customer review plays a major role in influencing the potential buyers (Kannan & Li, 2017). With respect to the shopping perspective, consumer behaviour has evolved significantly in the past decade. It has been evolutionary and the seeds of the evolution have been clearly visible for generations (Kar, 2010).

The interactive nature of online shopping is considered positively influencing the consumer responses, including increasing the desire to browse and purchase online (Jin & Fiore, 2003). It was found

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through research that online store atmospherics influence the shopper's attitude and satisfaction which further translates to approach/avoidance behaviours towards the online retailer, mediated by emotion (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2003). A pleasing online store atmospherics rewards the retailer with higher consumer pleasure and arousal (Eroglu et al., 2003). Also, there is a positive relationship between online store quality and behavioural intentions of the shoppers such as returning to the site and repurchase (Lynch, Kent, & Srinivasan, 2001). In addition, the navigational features of the online stores are positively related to the exploratory behaviour of the visitors of the site. If the online store atmospherics is more pleasing, the shopper would have more desire to stay in the site (Richard, 2005). The longer the shoppers stay in the store, the more they are like to purchase and spend (Donovan, R. Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994). The pleasing shopping experience would have a positive impact on shopping intentions (Swinyard, 1993).

The perfect interface design of the online store has the potential of creating a pleasant sensory and behavioural experience among the consumers similar to what the physical store does. As a result, it influences the consumer involvement with the online shopping and the consumer involvement in turn positively influences the approach responses towards the product (Griffith, F. Krampf, & W. Palmer, 2001). If the shoppers show more involvement with an online store, they will be more willing to search for more information on that store. This will enable the shoppers to explore more stimuli and will result in purchase of more products (Balabanis & Reynolds, 2001; Kwak, Fox, & Zinkhan, 2002; Richard, 2005).

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the perception of the online retail consumers on the online store atmospherics.
- To analyse customers' perceptions on each of the online atmospheric cues
- To study the customers' perceptions about some of the online retailers with respect to the online store atmospherics are also being studied.

RESERACH METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive and the data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The sampling method used in this study is convenient sampling method. The responses from 60 respondents were collected and were used in the data analysis. The average age of the respondents is 27.5 years with the standard deviation of 8.953.

DATA ANALYSIS

Pleasant Online Store

As discussed earlier, the online retailers tend to provide a pleasant shopping experience to the customers, in order to make them stay in their sites for a long time. The table shows the customers expectation on the pleasant online store environment.

Table 1: Need Pleasant Online Store Environment

Need Pleasant Store	Count	Percent
Yes	57	95
Not Required	3	5
Total	60	100

Out of the 60 respondents, three respondents say that the online store environment is not strictly required to be pleasant.

Average Time Spent

The average time spent on the websites or apps while making the purchases denotes the willingness of the customers to spend the time voluntarily in online shopping. It is imperative that this amount of time can be increased by making a pleasant shopping experience. Out of the 60 respondents, 11 respondents say that they spend only 15 minutes or less each time they shop online. Another 11 respondents say they spend more than 1 hour each time they shop online.

Table 2: Average Hours Spent

Hours Spent	Count	Percent %
Less Than 15 Min.	11	18.3
15 Min. - 30 Min.	22	36.7
30 Min. - 1 Hr.	16	26.7
More than 1 Hr.	11	18.3
Total	60	100

22 respondents which are 36.7% of the total spend an average time between 15 minutes and 30 minutes each time they shop online. Also, 16 respondents (26.7%) spend between 30 minutes and one hour. This is shown graphically in Figure 1.

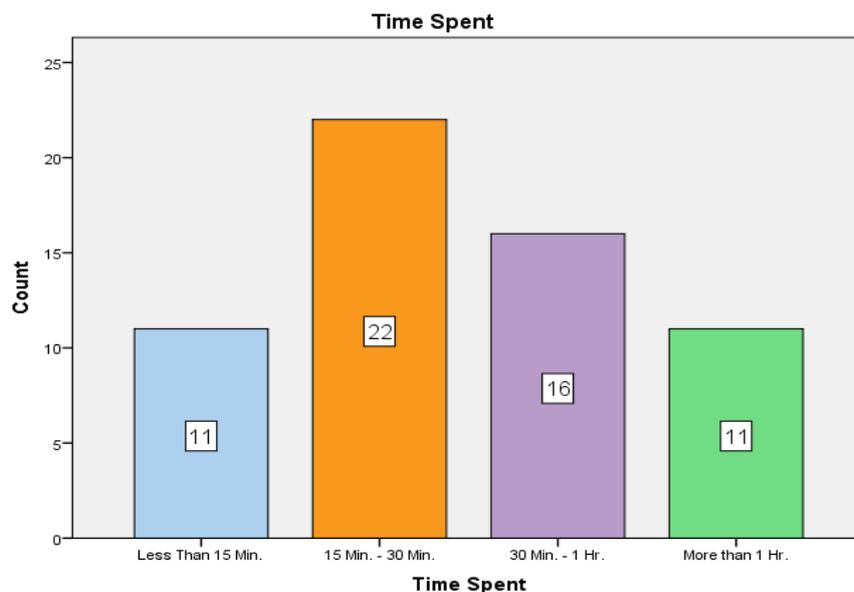


Figure 1: Average Time Spent
Atmospheric Cues

The atmospheric cues are the drives of the customers shopping experiences. When it comes to the online shopping, the atmospheric cues such as colour, layout, page loading time, personalised recommendations and product preview features construct an online store environment. The respondents were asked to select the cues which they consider important for the better online shopping experience. They were given the freedom to choose multiple factors.

Table 3: Atmospheric Cues

Cues	Count	Percent
Colour	16	26.7%
Layout	51	85.0%
Loading Time	34	56.7%
Personalised Recommendations	31	51.7%
Product Preview	46	76.7%

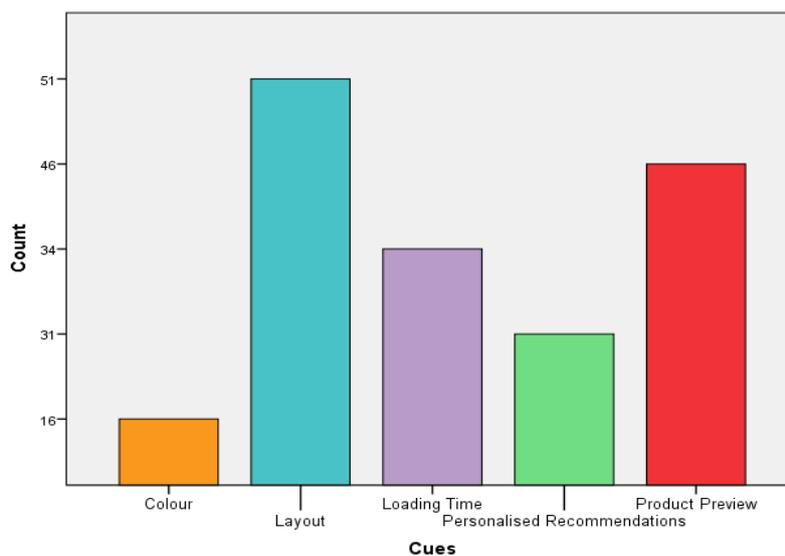


Figure 2: Atmospheric Cues

The table shows 51 respondents (85%) think that the online store layout is the important feature that could define the online store atmospherics. This is followed by product preview features with the preference of 46 respondents (76.7%). The colour was considered important by only 16 respondents. The graphical representation is shown in Figure 2.

Atmospheric Cues and Online Retailers

The respondents were asked to select the online retailer which they consider the best in using each of the atmospheric cues effectively to increase the online store environment. For example, if a respondent considers Amazon India using the best layout than the other retailers, he/she will select Amazon against Layout. Similarly, the respondents were asked to select the retailers for all the cues. The summary of the responses against each of the atmospheric cues is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Atmospheric Cues and Online Retailers

	Colour		Layout		Loading Time		Product Preview	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Amazon India	28	46.67	30	50.00	30	50.00	34	56.67
Flipkart	23	38.33	22	36.67	24	40.00	17	28.33
Snapdeal	2	3.33	0	0.00	2	3.33	1	1.67
eBay India	0	0.00	1	1.67	2	3.33	2	3.33
Paytm Mall	0	0.00	1	1.67	0	0.00	2	3.33
Jabong	3	5.00	3	5.00	2	3.33	3	5.00
Pepperfry	2	3.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Homeshop18	1	1.67	1	1.67	0	0.00	0	0.00
Myntra	1	1.67	2	3.33	0	0.00	1	1.67
Total	60	100	60	100	60	100	60	100

From the table, it is evident that Amazon India is considered by 28 respondents as using the better colour in their website and mobile app followed by Flipkart with 23 respondents. Similarly in layout perspective, 30 respondents think that Amazon India is having the better layout and 22 respondents think that Flipkart is having better layout. It is found that the Amazon India is leading in the better utilisation of all the atmospheric cues and is followed by Flipkart.

Table 5: Overall Atmospherics

	Overall	
	Count	Percent
Amazon India	34	56.67
Flipkart	17	28.33
Snapdeal	2	3.33
eBay India	0	0.00
Paytm Mall	1	1.67
Jabong	5	8.33
Pepperfry	0	0.00
Homeshop18	0	0.00
Myntra	1	1.67
Total	60	100

Table 5 shows the number of respondents considering the online retailers on better utilization of the overall online store atmospheric cues. 34 respondents find Amazon India showcasing better overall online store atmospherics. While 17 respondents find Flipkart showcasing the better overall online store atmospherics.

Online Store Atmospheric Cues and Satisfaction

Customers may consider some of the online stores to be having more pleasant atmospherics. Irrespective any particular online retailer, the customers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the

engagement of each atmospheric cues in their favourite online stores in a scale of between 1 and 5, while 1 being highly dissatisfied and 5 being highly satisfied. The summary of the ratings is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Satisfaction with Online Store Atmospheric Cues

	Count	Average Satisfaction	Std. Deviation
Colour	60	3.67	1.13
Layout	60	3.67	1.10
Product Preview	60	3.70	1.08
Search Options	60	3.60	1.01
Personalised Recommendations	60	3.45	1.00
Loading Time	60	3.52	1.02

Among the six features, the facility to preview the product is having the high average satisfaction of 3.70 with the standard deviation of 1.08. This implies that the respondents are more satisfied with the features that enable them to preview the product before making the order. At the same time, colour and layout are found to be having the average satisfaction of 3.67. However, the standard deviation of colour is 1.13 and layout is 1.10. The factor which gives least satisfaction among all is personalised recommendation. This implies that the online retailers should focus more on personalising the product recommendations for each individual.

FINDINGS& DISCUSSION

It is found from this study that almost 95% of the respondents think that the online stores need to be pleasant for a better shopping experience. This makes clear that the retailer need to maintain a pleasant environment for their customers to stay in their websites and apps for a longer time. The Average time that the customers are willing to pay depend on how well the retailer maintains the online store atmospherics. From this study it is found that 18.3% of the respondents are willing to spend up to 15 minutes for every purchase they do online. Also, 36.7% of the respondents are willing to spend between 15 mins and 30 minutes. If the online retailers enhance their online store atmospherics, these customers could spend more time in their online stores. As mentioned earlier, the more the customer spends the time in the online store, the more will be the amount of purchase they make. Also for catering the needs of the customers who spend more time in online stores, the retailers should make sure that the product information and other product related details are well furnished.

The site layout is considered the most important feature that drives the online store environment. The second most important feature is the product preview. The online retailer is required to focus more and keeps on updating the layouts and product preview for a pleasant shopping experience. Page loading time is another important factor which the customers consider the third most important feature. The webpages and apps should be well optimised in such a way that the pages load faster enough to avoid the customers waiting at every stages of the shopping, from product search to payment page. Else, the customers would get agitated by the unwanted delay and fear of transaction failure.

With respect to the utilization of the online store atmospherics such as colour, layout, page loading time and product preview, it is found that Amazon India is considered better by 56.67% of the online consumers. In the same way, Flipkart is considered better by 28.33% of the online shoppers. The two retailers alone capture the attention of 85% of the online shoppers with their online store atmospherics. In the entire online shopping space, the customers are satisfied more with the product preview feature, followed by layout and colour. It shows that the online retailers are currently equipped with the better technology to preview product, layout, and colour scheme in order to provide the customers with better online shopping experience. However, as the technology gets updated, the retailers are bound to retain their positions and to have competitive advantage in terms of online store atmospherics.

CONCLUSION

This paper was aimed at understanding consumers' perception on the online store atmospherics. It is important for the retailers to know how well their consumers perceive the virtual atmospheric cues. This study found out that the consumers perceive the online store atmospherics as important factor for a pleasant online shopping experience. Also, the online store consumers have stated to experience and differentiate each of the atmospheric cues and are able to compare the atmospherics of one retailer with that of the other. This gives the online retailers the opportunity to attain a competitive advantage in terms of online store atmospherics. Although this paper speaks about the atmospheric cues to some extent, the

thorough study on the online store atmospherics are not covered. Also, the demographic based analyses were not conducted. For researchers, it is advisable to conduct extensive and demographic based analysis for better understanding of perception and impact of the online store atmospherics.

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