THE IMPACT OF RETAIL STORE ATMOSPHERIC EFFECTS ON CUSTOMER PURCHASE INTENTION: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF GENDER. (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SUPERMARKET IN THE WESTERN PROVINCE)

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior has shifted from focusing solely on fulfilling basic needs to seeking additional benefits and services. This change has notably boosted the supermarket industry in contrast to traditional retail. Nevertheless, supermarkets grapple with the task of adapting to the ever-evolving demands of consumers.

Understanding and enhancing the store atmosphere has become crucial for retailers to attract and retain customers. As defined by Kotler (1973-74), store atmosphere refers to the design of a retail store that produces specific emotional effects on shoppers, enhancing their likelihood of making a purchase. It involves external elements (e.g., window displays, location, parking, nearby stores) and interior variables (e.g., lighting, music, scent, staff, cleanliness, and product displays). Retailers strategically design their stores to attract customers, motivate unplanned purchases, and provide a satisfying shopping experience.

Consumer behavior and store atmospherics have been extensively studied across regions and industries. Notable researchers like Hussain and Ali (2015), Mower et al. (2012), and Akram et al. (2016) have highlighted the substantial influence of atmospheric elements on consumer purchase intention. Aspects like cleanliness, music, scent, lighting, color, display/layout, and temperature have been identified as factors that affect consumers' emotions and behaviors in retail settings.

Cleanliness, music, pleasant scents, temperature, store layout, lighting, and color selection influence customers' impressions, emotions, and attitudes. These elements collectively impact the duration of customer visits, spending behavior, and overall satisfaction, making them crucial considerations for retailers seeking to create an inviting and profitable store environment.

Consumer purchasing decisions are no longer solely based on product features. Factors like the retail environment, including color, lighting, music, and aroma, are increasingly important. Store ambiance, often subtle, significantly impacts attitudes towards the shopping experience. This study focuses on how a supermarket's air affects consumer buying intentions, recognizing that most purchases occur in retail outlets. The food retail sector acknowledges the significance of store atmosphere in enhancing the shopping experience, resulting in more satisfied customers. The store atmosphere heavily influences consumer behavior in Sri Lanka's growing supermarket industry. Supermarkets should prioritize these elements to create a positive shopping experience, ultimately driving customer satisfaction, purchase intent, and loyalty. This knowledge is imperative for retailers looking to thrive in this market.

METHODOLOGY

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
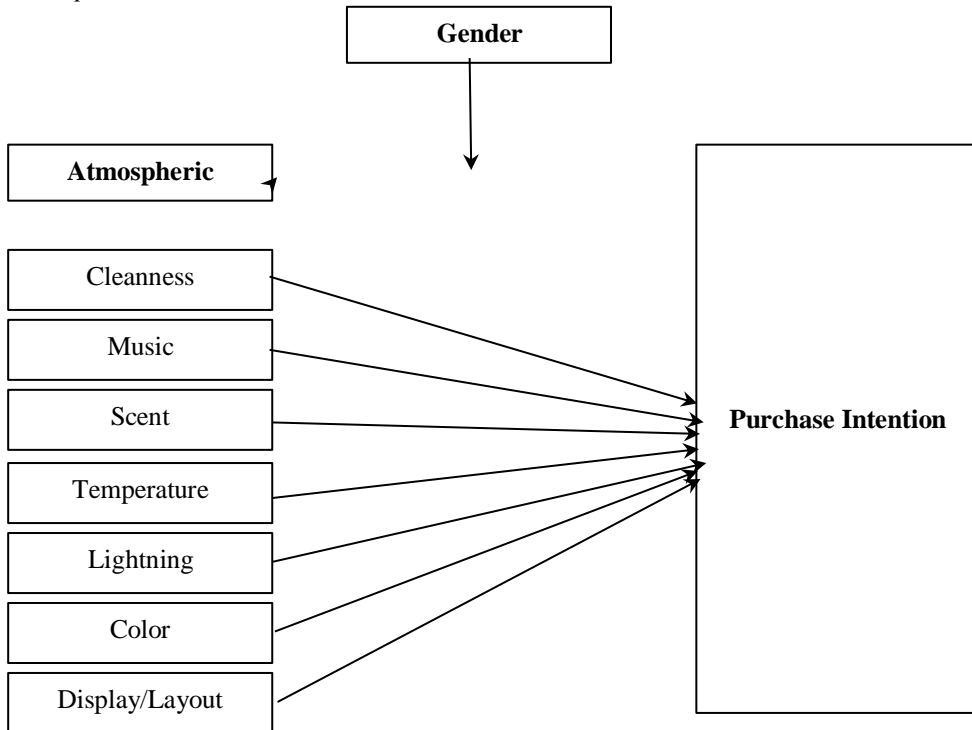
Research hypotheses

Based on the theoretical and empirical evidence, following hypotheses are constructed (Hussain & Ali, 2015)

H_1. There is a significant moderating impact of Gender the relationship between atmospheric and customer purchase intention

Sub research hypotheses

H_2: There is a significant impact of cleanliness on purchase intention

H_3: There is a significant impact of music on consumer purchase intention

H_4: There is a significant impact of scents on consumer purchase intention

H_5: There is a significant impact of temperature on customer purchase intention

H_6: There is a significant impact of scents on customer purchase intention

H_7: There is a significant impact of color on customer purchase intention

H_8: There is a significant impact of display/layout on consumer purchase intention

Operationalization

Table 1

Operationalization of the Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Empirical research
Cleanliness	3	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Music	7	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Lightning	3	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Temperature	3	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Scents	7	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Color	4	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Display/Layout	6	(Hussain & Ali, 2015)
Purchase intention	5	(Kharchenko, 2011)

The research approach adopted for this study is quantitative, which aligns with the positivism paradigm. Quantitative research aims to collect numerical data to analyze and predict a specific population or samples. The study follows a causal research design to examine the cause-and-effect relationships between variables. The research philosophy used in this study is positivism, which emphasizes using quantitative data to make predictions and correct future assessments. It relies on objective observation and measurement to validate hypotheses. For this research, the methodological choice is a quantitative study, specifically a correlation study. The researcher is interested in identifying critical factors connected to the issue, which is the impact of the atmosphere on the purchase intention of supermarkets.

Western province retail customers are the study's target group. Due to time restrictions and geographic limitations during Sri Lanka's economic crisis, gathering 384 samples from the Western province was only possible. Even using Google Forms made data collection extremely challenging. Because of this, this research aims to use convenience sampling to get data from people from any district in the Western province.

The population for this study includes all supermarket consumers in Sri Lanka, while the sample is taken from active shoppers in the Western province. The sample size consists of 384 active shoppers selected using simple random sampling. The sampling technique employed in this research is trait sampling, a non-probability sampling method focusing on gathering information from willing members of the population. The sampling procedure involves collecting data from convenience sampling due to time and geographic limitations during Sri Lanka's economic crisis. The method of data collection for this study is a structured questionnaire.

To analyze the data, the researcher used SPSS software. Multiple regression analysis is employed to test the hypotheses, while confirmatory factor analysis is used to ensure the reliability of the research instrument. SPSS is used for data analysis. To measure them effectively, different quantitative categories are ranked on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. The mean value and the standard deviation are calculated for every variable and 0 to 2 mean values pending a weak level and up to 4 to 5 mean values pending a good level of every variable. Because 1 = strongly disagree, 2= = disagree, 3= = neutral, 4= = agree, and 5= = strongly agree, values measure the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the model summary results, the R square is represented as 0.634, which means the independent variables explain 63.4% of the dependent variable. Similarly referred to as

the atmospheric (cleanliness, music, scent, color, temperature, display/layout, and lightning) is explained by 63.4% of the variation of the purchase intention.

Table 2

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
1	0.796[a]	0.634	0.627	0.431	1.666

Table 3

Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	β		
(Constant)	-0.005	0.176		-0.027	0.978
Cleanness	0.130	0.044	0.118	2.986	0.003
Music	-0.106	0.046	-0.106	-2.319	0.021
Scent	0.027	0.047	0.031	0.582	0.561
Temperature	0.090	0.051	0.090	1.781	0.076
Lightning	0.169	0.046	0.168	3.697	0.000
Color	0.146	0.055	0.144	2.637	0.009
Display/layout	0.515	0.055	0.463	9.399	0.000

According to the above table, the Sig-value is 0.003, less than 0.05; it can be rejected as the null hypothesis. Cleanness has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for cleanness, Hypothesis H_2 was accepted. According to the above table, the Sig-value is 0.021, less than 0.05; it can be rejected as the null hypothesis. Music has a significant negative influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for music, hypothesis H_{2B} was accepted. According to the above table, the Sig-value of 0.561, which is more than 0.05, can be rejected as the null hypothesis. Scent does not have a significant influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for scent, hypothesis H_4 was rejected.

According to the above table, the Sig-value is 0.076, more than 0.05; it can be rejected as the null hypothesis. The temperature does not have a significant influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for temperature, hypothesis H_5 was rejected.

According to the above table, the Sig-value of 0.000, less than 0.05, can be rejected as the null hypothesis. It can be concluded that lightning has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for lightning, hypothesis H_6 was accepted.

According to the above table, the Sig-value is 0.009, less than 0.05; it can be rejected as the null hypothesis. It can be concluded that color has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for color, hypothesis H_7 was accepted.

According to the above table, the Sig-value 0.000, less than 0.05, can be rejected as the null hypothesis. Display/layout has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Therefore, for display/layout, hypothesis H_8 was accepted.

MODERATE ANALYSIS

Table 4

Model Summary

R	R^2	MSE	F	Df1	Df2	p
0.741	0.550	0.226	155.116	3.000	380.000	0.000

According to the above table, the R-square value is 0.550, and the p-value is 0.000, which means a combination of atmospheric and gender factors affects the purchase intention to 55.05%. According to the P-value, it is less than 0.05(0.05> 0.000). Thus, the impact between dependent and independent variables is considered in this model, which is a significant model according to the P-value.

Table 5
Product Terms Key

	R^2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	0.006	5.098	1.000	380.000	0.024

Note. Moderate analysis (product terms key)

According to the above table, the R-Square change value is .0060. Thus, a combination of atmospheric and gender (moderate variable) contribute to the strength of this model by 0.60%. In other words, according to the summary table, it has a 55.05% effect on purchase intention, for the combination of gender and atmospheric factor receives this 0.60% contribution. Thus, there is no significant effect of moderate variables on purchase intention in this investigation.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The research focused on assessing the influence of atmospheric factors on consumers' purchase intentions in the Western province of Sri Lanka, including cleanliness, music, scent, temperature, lighting, color, and layout. The study encompassed specific sub-objectives derived from existing literature and introduced a moderating variable.

The study found that five atmospheric dimensions (cleanliness, music, lighting, color, and layout/display) directly influenced purchase intention, while scent and temperature had no significant impact. It concluded that cleanliness, music, lighting, color, and display/layout significantly affect customers' purchase intention. Notably, cleanliness, product display, and lighting are crucial in attracting and motivating customers to make purchases. The study recommends that supermarket owners prioritize cleanliness, lighting, color, music, and product display to align with customer attitudes and perceptions. Additionally, gender should not be considered in promotional activities to enhance customer purchase intention.

The findings also indicated that the impact of atmospheric factors on purchase intention extends beyond supermarkets and may apply to other industries, such as textiles, banking, hotels, and beauty salons, where the proper ambiance and atmosphere could positively influence customer purchase behavior. In conclusion, the study contributes valuable insights into the effects of atmospheric variables on consumers' purchase intention in the supermarket industry. It highlights the importance of creating a pleasant and appealing shopping environment to attract and retain customers. The research outcomes provide practical implications for supermarket managers and owners to enhance the overall shopping experience and, ultimately, increase consumer purchase intention.

Keywords: Atmosphere, cleanliness, color, display, purchase intention

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