



STORE EXTERIOR CUES AND WOMEN IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR: MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONS

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Abstract

In recent years, studies have proved that visual merchandising is one core competency with which retailers can exhibit competitive advantage. It refers to the visual presentation of both exterior and interior of the store artistically in an attractive manner. The exterior of a store usually plays a pivotal role in attracting passing shoppers to enter the store by generating the first impression, and this impression could alter the customers shopping behaviors. But this area has gained very less attention by marketing researchers. However, this absence of attention by researchers should not be understood as lack of importance of external variables on consumer behaviour. Hence the present study aims to provide insight into influence of store exterior elements on impulse buying behavior by exploring various store exterior elements on consumers' emotions (pleasure and arousal) as a moderator of impulse buying behavior with SOR model. The study has adopted store exterior elements like window display, Promotional signage, architecture and landscaping. The result shows that among the three variables only store exterior enhances pleasure and arousal but the emotions did not lead to impulse buying. However, the store exterior plays an important role in attracting passersby into the store.

Keywords: Store Exterior, Window Display, Promotional Signage, Landscaping, and Architecture.

Introduction

The retail industry is highly competitive. Retailers should focus on the preferences of their consumers and the factors influencing their purchase decision. Visual merchandising has gained relevant importance in the field of physical retailing industry. Studies have proved that visual merchandising is one core competency with which retailers can exhibit competitive advantage. Visual merchandising refers to the visual presentation of both exterior and interior of the store artistically in an attractive manner. The purpose of visual merchandising is to educate the customer, to enhance the store image, and to encourage impulse purchases. It is important for the marketers to be able to understand the different factors affecting the extent in impulse buying behavior.

Impulse buying is defined as an unplanned purchase decision, occurring along fairly intense positive emotions and reflecting the buyer's quick reaction to a stimulus (Gardner and Rook, 1988; Youn, 2000). Impulse buying is always incidental in the store and is mediated by pleasure, arousal and dominance (Donovan et al. 1994) or affect (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). The complexity of impulse buying as piloted in numerous studies have attempted to explain the occurrence in terms of situational factors, product related factors, marketing tools-like price and promotions, effect of the store atmosphere and design of the point of sale social environment etc., is abundant in the literature. However, studies which examined the effect of store exterior factors on making impulse purchases are very few. Hence the present study aims at exploring the impact of store exterior elements on impulse buying mediated by emotions of consumers.

Literature Review

Several physical and social elements in the exterior environment may take part in forming of the first impression. Researchers Grossbart, et al. (1990); Edwards and Shackley, (1992) investigated the impact of atmospheric external variables on consumer shopping and found that there is a relationship between them. Pinto and Leonida (1994) investigated the impact parking and location on shopper perception and purchase decision. They found a relationship but overall it has low impact. Sen, Block, and Chandran (2002) demonstrated that promotion, image, fashion and fit affect the consumer's purchase decision which he/she obtained from window displays. Cornelius, Natter, and Faure, (2010) investigated a relationship between store front display and retail store which propose significant means for differentiation in the retail market; window decoration, arrangements, entrances, building design and lighting have also positive impact over consumer perception.

Ballantine, Jack, and Parsons (2010) suggest that the contents demonstrated through the windows should not only convey interesting and exciting feelings to shoppers but also cover the information of products or services inside the store. Mower et al. (2012) provided useful information to small store retailers by investigating the influence of external atmospheric variables, specifically window displays and landscaping (i.e., accessory vegetation), on customers' responses. The study describes that store exterior includes display windows storefront, entrances, physical characteristics of the building (height, size, and color of buildings), parking, location (congestion and traffic), surrounding area and nearby stores.

Also Sheets and Manzer, (1991) demonstrated that landscaping prompts positive emotional reactions and evaluations of the store or mall settings; presence of vegetation positively influenced respondent's moods and evaluation of the store. Turley and Milliman (2000) included the storefront, parking, entrances, and display windows, physical characteristics of the building (height, size, and color of buildings), location (congestion and traffic), surrounding area including landscaping and vegetation and nearby stores. They suggested that far more research needs to be done in this area as exterior variables are usually first set of cues seen by a consumer. However, this absence of attention by researchers should not be understood as lack of importance of external variables on consumer behaviour.

Hence the present study aims to provide insight into influence of store exterior cues on women impulse buying behavior by exploring various store exterior elements on consumers' emotions (pleasure and arousal) as a moderator on women impulse buying behavior. At present very little evidence available about what customers look for when they evaluate a store exterior. Also the research aims to fill the gap in the literature on study of store exterior and its impact on women consumers. Based on the review of the available literature the elements of store exterior viz., window display, promotional signage, architecture and landscaping of the store are considered as independent variables, the impulse buying behavior as dependent variable and emotional states (Pleasure and arousal) as mediating variable is considered.

Window Display

Window display is the art of displaying range of goods in the store window. Attractive window displays often feature mannequins displaying what is sold in the store, a theme of presenting products like "back to school with autumn leaves behind sweater and jean-clad mannequins holding books, Christmas and Valentine's Day, Festivals etc., Attractive window displays can increase store traffic.

Promotional Signage

Refers to the visual representation which gives information to the customers about the promotional message relating to offers, discounts, sale, end of season sale, stock clearance sale etc., with the help of banners, posters, billboards, pull-up banners, display stands, poster holders, pop-up walls, teardrop flags.

Architecture and Landscaping

Architecture includes the aesthetic, functional and often artistic look of the store. It includes the store front or building colour, exterior building design, exterior building shape, size of the mall, parking, space, etc., Landscaping refers to the accessory vegetation (plants, flowers trees etc.) surrounding the area of malls or store.

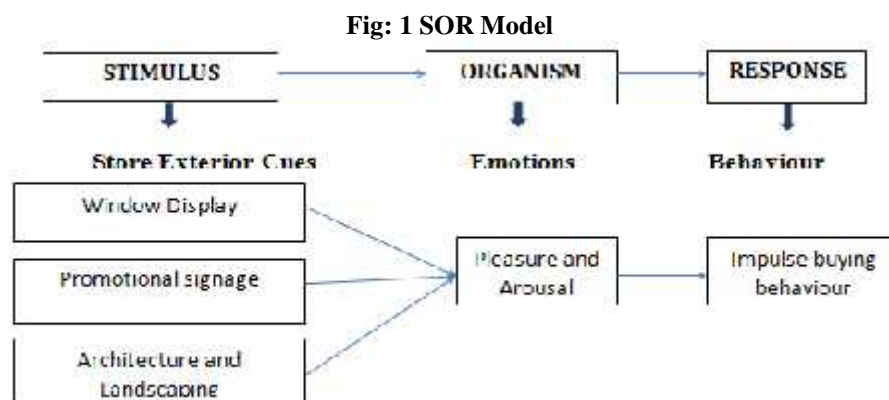
Objectives

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To explore the various dimensions of store exterior as an element of visual merchandising.
2. To study the impact of store exterior on the impulse buying behavior of the consumers.
3. To study the mediating role of consumer emotions (Pleasure and arousal) on consumer impulse buying.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Based on the extracts of the literature review the following conceptual framework was developed based on SOR model. Belk (1975) proposed a revised SOR model in which he deliberated that a person is stimulated by both situation and object and after this combination he reacts in a way he do. The S-O-R components that the study investigates are shown in Fig.1.



Source: Russell W. Belk (1975)

For this study, window displays, promotional signage, architecture and landscaping were selected as key elements of store exteriors. Pleasure and arousal are the emotions considered as organism, and the response is the Impulse buying behavior.

Hypothesis Framed

- H1: Window display has significant influence on impulse buying behavior.
H2: Promotional signage has significant influence on impulse buying behavior.
H3: Architecture and landscaping has significant influence on impulse buying behavior.
H4: Store exterior cues have significant influence on Emotions ((a) Pleasure and (b) arousal)
H5: Emotions ((a) Pleasure and (b) arousal) have significant influence on impulse buying behaviour.

Research Methodology

Given that the researcher in this study intended to investigate the impact of store exterior cues of visual merchandising on consumer impulse buying behavior. The population involved all the customers visiting malls in East Bangalore. Since the population was unlimited, 250 customers were selected as sample through convenient sampling method. The questionnaires were handed out by simple random procedure. In this research, three components of store exterior (viz., window display, promotional signage, architecture & landscaping) and other variables including emotional states (pleasure and arousal) and Impulse buying were assessed through a structured questionnaire. To make the study more effective and efficient, questionnaire consists of closed ended question and five point Likert's scale questions.

Findings and Discussion

From the demographic profiles of the respondents, it is understood that 36% of the respondents are in the age group of 18 to 22 years, 32% are above 23 to 30, 19% of them are in the category of less than 40 years and the remaining 13% of the respondents are in the age group of above 40 years. The monthly disposable income of the 22% respondents is less than 15,000, 41% is in the range of 16,000 and 30,000 and the rest have a monthly disposable income above 30,000. Most of the women around 54% of women are married and the rest were unmarried. The occupation status of the respondents showed that 39% of them were students, 33% of them were employed and the remaining 28% of the respondents were housewives.

After collecting and scrutinizing the questionnaires, the data of completed questionnaires were coded and then entered into SPSS tool for analysis. To calculate the internal coordination of the measurement instruments Cronbach's Alpha is applied. The overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.817, which is more than the standard value 0.7. Multiple regression analysis is used to identify how the three store exterior cues (independent) affect the women impulse buying (dependent) and also to prove that emotional states (mediating variable) pleasure and arousal act as mediating force between the independent and dependent variables. A four step approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) is conducted to measure the mediating effect and examine the significance of coefficients. The association level between the independent, the moderate and the dependent variables is presented in following table extracted from the multiple regression analysis.

Table 1: Relationship of Store exterior cues and Impulse buying

Hypothesis	Independent variable		Std. Error	t	Sig(p)	Result
H1	Window display	.214	.083	2.562	.012	Accepted
H2	Promotional Signage	.185	.080	2.305	.023	Accepted
H3	Architecture and landscaping	.200	.101	1.978	.051	Rejected

Dependent Variable: Impulse buying behaviour

The impact level of the independent variable on Impulse buying behaviour is discussed below:

H1: Proposed that there is a significant relationship between window display and impulse buying. The regression results showed that there is association at 5% significance as the p-value is less than 0.05 as shown in table 1. Hence H1 is accepted and concludes that there is significant relationship between window display and impulse buying. The study reiterated result of Meysam Moayeri, Samar Zamani and Hosein Vazifehdoost (2014); Rusa Gudonaviciene (2015); Sonali Banerjee (2012) that window display directly affect impulse buying.

H2: Suggested that there is significant relationship between Promotional signage and Impulse buying. Table 1 shows that there is association between the variables at 5% level of significance as p value is less than 0.05 (p=.023) accepting the H2 hypothesis. This result reiterated the findings of Meysam Moayeri, Samar Zamani and Hosein Vazifehdoost (2014).

H3: Proposed that there is a significant relationship between architecture and landscaping and impulse buying. The results showed that there is no association between the variables as the p value is greater than 0.05 (p=0.051). Hence the Hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2: Relationship of Store exterior cues and emotions (Pleasure)

Hypothesis	Independent variable		Std. Error	t	Sig(p)	Result
H4a	Window display	.478	.143	3.351	.001	Accepted
H4a	Promotional Signage	.078	.118	.664	.508	Rejected
H4a	Architecture & landscaping	-.002	.113	-.020	.984	Rejected

Dependent Variable: Pleasure

Table 3: Relationship of Store exterior cues and emotions (Arousal)

Hypothesis	Independent variable		Std. Error	t	Sig(p)	Result
H4b	Window display	.347	.151	2.294	.024	Accepted
H4b	Promotional Signage	.192	.120	1.599	.113	Rejected
H4b	Architecture & landscaping	-.023	.125	-.187	.852	Rejected

Dependent Variable: Arousal

H4 was framed to identify the significance difference between store exterior cues and emotion (Pleasure & Arousal). The result in the Table 2 & 3 reveals that only window display has a significant relationship with pleasure showing p value as .001(Pleasure) and .024(Arousal) which is less than .05. But the other two exterior variables promotional signage and architecture & landscaping did not show any significance. Hence the H4 is rejected. The findings was partially consistent with the results by Jennifer M. Mower and Minjeong Kim (2012) which indicated that window display and landscaping had no main effects on pleasure or arousal and Supporting prior research on window displays that attractive window displays enhances shoppers' liking of the store exterior (Sen, Block, & Chandran (2002).

Table 4: Relationship of emotions (Pleasure & Arousal) and Impulse buying

Hypothesis	Independent variable		Std. Error	t	Sig(p)	Result
H5a	Pleasure	.064	.093	.691	.491	rejected
H5b	Arousal	.159	.089	1.789	.077	rejected

Dependent Variable: Impulse buying

H4 was proposed to identify if the emotions (Pleasure and arousal) has a significant relationship with impulse buying. The relationship between emotional responses and impulse buying is not significant, as the p value of both the emotion responses is greater than .05 this leading to reject H5a, and H5b. Contrary to our expectations, the results do not validate the effect of emotions in impulse buying. The results rule out the argument that emotional states are a mediating force between store exterior cues and impulse buying behavior of women.

Conclusion

Findings from this research extend understanding of the influence of exterior store cues upon impulse buying behavior of women, an area that has received relatively little attention. Although results revealed that individual elements of exterior store minimal impact on women emotional states but did not show any impact on impulse buying behaviour, analyses did not support for Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) S-O-R model; among the store exterior cues window display enhanced the emotions (pleasure & arousal) which triggered them to enter the store but does not lead to impulse buying, it means that store interior cues play an important role in prompting the customer intentions who entered the store to make impulse purchases. It is possible that customers' internal states and impulse buying behavior varied depending on the store's internal characteristics. Hence the study concludes stating that the exterior of a store/mall usually generates the first impression a positive impact over consumer perception and this impression could affect shoppers' inferences about a store's service/merchandise quality and could alter their shopping behaviors once they enter the store after encountering the products or services inside the store. It is natural that emotions only stay temporary in a person relatively for short time duration, while intention is stored in memory which can turn to action at any right time. Hence retailers should explicitly focus on effectively tailoring the exterior atmospheric factors to increase the number of foot falls into the retail store. One should not neglect, the fact that the store exterior is the first "pass muster" before the store interior is ever processed.

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