"Store Atmospherics as a Determinant of Customer Buying Behaviour in Organized Retail Stores."

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Abstract

In today's competitive retail scenario, physical retail stores are facing stiff competition from the ever-expanding online retailing platform. Hence, it is not sufficient for retail businesses to provide products and competitive pricing strategies alone to attract and retain customers. One of the best ways to achieve this is by developing store atmospherics that provide an improved shopping experience to customers. Store atmospherics are those aspects of the retail store's design and sensory elements that influence the behavior and response of customers.

This study is an investigation into the store atmospherics as a factor determining the buying behavior of customers in retail store settings. This research is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, which explains how stimuli in the retail store influence the internal states of customers and ultimately their buying behavior. Primary research was conducted using a structured questionnaire to collect data from retail customers.

Results

The study reveals that different store atmospheric factors play an important role in determining the perceptions and behavior of customers. A pleasant store environment improves the satisfaction level of customers and positively influences their buying behavior.

Keywords: *Store Atmospherics, Retail Environment, Customer Buying Behaviour, Retail Marketing, Shopping Experience.*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Change in How We Shop: Going Beyond Just Selling Products

For a time, stores just focused on having products available and pricing them competitively. Now, in 2026, things are different. We are in the era of Neuro-Aesthetics. Today, when people go shopping, they are not just looking for something to buy; they are looking for a feeling. They want to feel something when they shop.

In a time when people are getting tired of being on their screens all the time, physical stores have become a place where people can go to feel like they are part of a community. This is what is called a **"Third Place."** A place that is not home and not work, but somewhere in between. The feel of the store is what makes people want to go.

In India, in cities like **Lucknow** that are changing fast, the idea of shopping has changed. Shopping is not just about buying something; it is an experience. You can buy things online, that is just a simple task. Shopping is about using all of your senses. This study is about how stores use things that affect our senses to make us want to shop.

1.2 The Problem with Online Shopping: Why Stores Need to Be Attractive

Now, stores are competing with online shopping, which is very convenient. You can get things delivered to your door in a few minutes. If a physical store just sells products, it will not be able to compete.

To survive, stores need to use the one thing that online shopping cannot replicate: **the sense of touch.** People like to go to stores that feel nice. In fact, most people say that they choose to go to a store because it feels good to be there. The goal of a store is not just to look nice; it is to make you feel something.

1.3 How We React to Stores: The Science Behind It

When we go to a store, the way it looks and feels affects how we feel inside. This is called the **Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model.** The store is the "stimulus" that affects us, our feelings are the "organism," and what we do is the "response." This study is about how stores affect our emotions and what we do because of those emotions. It is about how stores use things that affect our senses to make us feel a certain way.

1.4 What Makes a Store Attractive: The Things That Matter

We are looking at the three things that make a store attractive:

- **What we see:** It is not just about the lighting; it is about what catches our eye. When we go into a store, we usually turn right. So, the area near the entrance is very important.
- **What we hear:** The music in a store can affect how long we stay. If the music is slow, we are more likely to stay.
- **What we smell:** Certain smells can make us remember a store. This is called an **"Olfactory Anchor."** It is like a link between the smell and the store.

1.5 Problem Statement

The retail industry has a problem. Stores are spending a lot of money on how they look, but they are not sure what actually works. The problem is that stores do not know exactly what makes people want to shop. They do not know what sights, sounds, and smells make people happy and want to buy things.

This study is trying to figure out what makes people want to shop in a store. It wants to help stores use their money wisely and make people want to come.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the visual, sound, and scent factors that create a store's atmosphere.
- To study how these environmental factors influence a customer's emotional state.
- To analyze how a store's atmosphere affects a customer's decision to shop or stay longer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studying store atmosphere is about understanding how a store's environment acts as a salesperson. This section looks at existing research and industry insights on how different environmental factors shape the customer's experience.

3.1 The Strategy Behind Store Ambience

Store ambience is a tool used to compete with online shopping. According to RetailGear (2024), getting the atmosphere right gives a store its personality. A store that balances lighting, sound, and layout lowers customer stress and makes shopping fun. Research shows that a positive environment turns a trip into a memorable retail experience. The store ambience helps to make shopping a fun experience.

3.2 Visual Setup and How Customers Move

What customers see first decides what they think of a brand. Insights from UK POS (2024) point out that visual details like signage and eye-catching window displays grab attention. The layout acts like a map. By highlighting products with lighting or clever placement, stores guide shoppers through the aisles. This smooth flow gets people to see products, leading to unplanned buys. The visual setup and customer movement are directly connected.

3.3 The Importance of Temperature and Comfort

Physical comfort is a big part of the customer experience. Research by Hitachi Aircon (2024) stresses that the right temperature is a requirement for keeping people inside. If a store is too hot, cold, or stuffy, customers get uncomfortable and want to leave. A perfect climate encourages people to stay. Ultimately, the store temperature affects how long customers stay.

3.4 Sensory Upgrades and How People See the Brand

Shoppers link a store's beauty with its products. Constellar Consultancy (2025) notes that in premium retail, upgrading the experience builds an emotional connection with the buyer. This Aesthetic Intelligence makes it easier for brands to justify pricing. When a store feels high-end, customers see the brand as more valuable and trustworthy. The store's sensory experience directly affects how customers see the brand.

3.5 How Psychology Changes Buying Behavior

The goal of store atmosphere is to guide behavior using psychology. Modern retail focuses on the Emotional Reward. Oruncak (2025) explains that smart store design changes a shopper's mindset from getting a task done to enjoying the process. When customers feel comfortable and enjoy discovering things, they are more likely to make purchases and stay loyal to the brand. The physical store gives them a satisfaction that online shopping cannot match. Store atmosphere and psychology are deeply connected.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the framework used to examine the relationship between store atmospherics and customer buying behaviour. It explains the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and analytical tools used in the study.

Research Design:
The study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to understand consumer preferences and analyze how atmospheric elements such as lighting, scent, and music influence the shopping experience. A **quantitative approach** is used to convert customer perceptions into measurable data for objective analysis.

Data Collection Methods:
Both **primary and secondary data** were used in the study. Primary data was collected through a **structured**

questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to gather consumer opinions about retail store environments. Secondary data was obtained from **academic journals, industry reports, and online sources** related to retail atmospherics and consumer behaviour.

Sampling Design:
The **sampling unit** consisted of retail consumers in **Lucknow** who frequently visit organized retail outlets.
Convenience sampling was used due to time and accessibility constraints. The study was conducted with a **sample size of 35–40 respondents**.

Data Analysis Tools:
The collected data was analyzed using **percentage analysis** and presented through **pie charts and bar graphs** to illustrate consumer preferences and trends.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the primary research conducted to understand the impact of store ambiance on customer experience. The data was collected from 29 respondents via an online survey. The analysis focuses on demographic profiles, sensory factors (visual, auditory, olfactory), and the resulting psychological impact on consumer behavior.

5.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

5.2.1 Age Group Distribution

The study primarily captures the views of the younger consumer demographic. As shown in the data, 72.4% of respondents fall within the 20-35 age bracket, which is a critical target segment for modern retail brands.
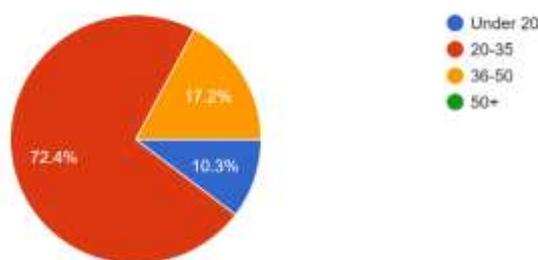

Interpretation: The high concentration of respondents in the 20-35 age group indicates that the findings reflect the preferences of "experience-seeking" consumers who are highly influenced by the aesthetic and technological environment of a store.

5.2.2 Gender Distribution

The survey maintains a balanced perspective with 55.2% female and 44.8% male participation.
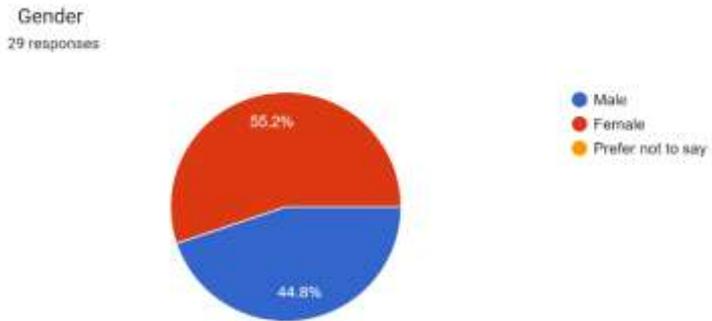
Interpretation: The balanced gender ratio ensures that the conclusions regarding store atmospherics are applicable across genders and are not biased toward a specific shopping style.

5.3 Consumer Shopping Patterns

5.3.1 Visit Frequency and Duration

The data reveals that a majority of shoppers spend significant time in the retail environment, with 51.7% spending 1-2 hours per visit.
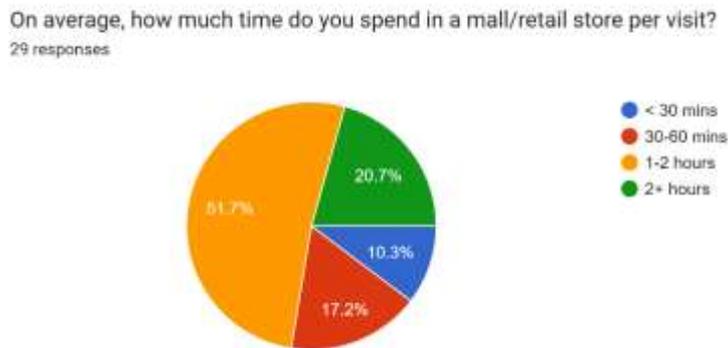
Interpretation: The "dwell time" (time spent in-store) is high for over half the respondents. This highlights the importance of ambiance; a comfortable and engaging atmosphere is required to sustain customer interest over a 60-to-120-minute period.

5.4 Sensory Factors (Store Atmospherics)

5.4.1 Visual Appeal and Lighting

Visual cues were rated as a high influence by nearly 90% of the sample size. Specifically, the preference for "aesthetic lighting" was marked as a top priority.
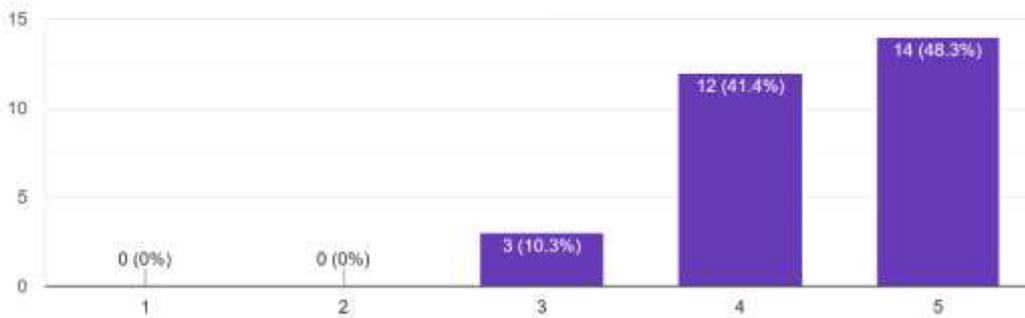
Visual Appeal: The interior design, colors, and product displays influence my decision to enter a store.

29 responses
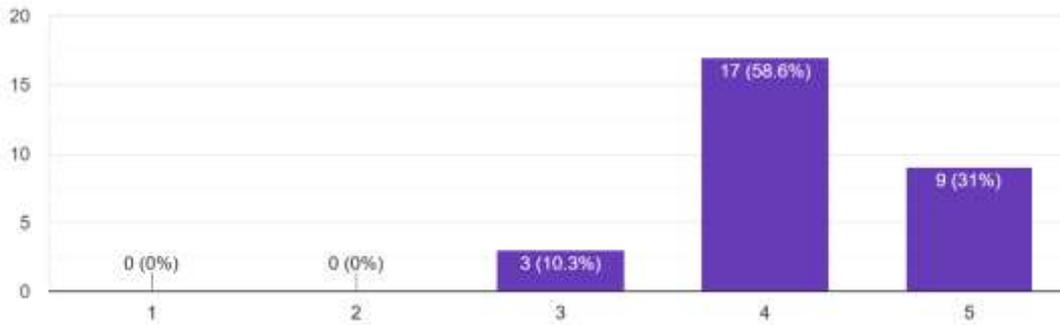
Aroma/Scent: A premium ambient scent (like in Phoenix Palassio) makes the shopping environment feel luxury.
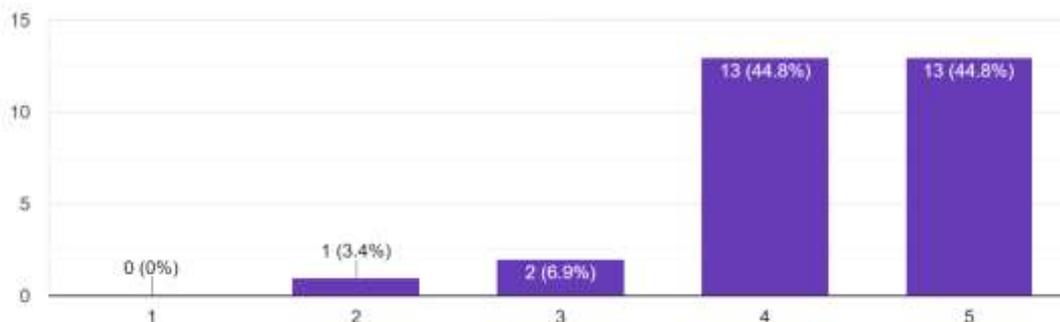
29 responses

Interpretation: Visual atmospherics serve as the "silent communicator" of a brand's value. Bright and aesthetic lighting is not merely a utility but a psychological trigger that enhances product appeal and store entry rates.

5.4.2 Aroma and Background Music

The data shows that a "premium ambient scent" is strongly associated with a "luxury" feeling, while soft/trending music is linked to relaxation.

Background Music: I feel more relaxed when a store plays soft or trending music.

29 responses

Cleanliness: A clean and well-maintained store enhances my shopping experience.
29 responses
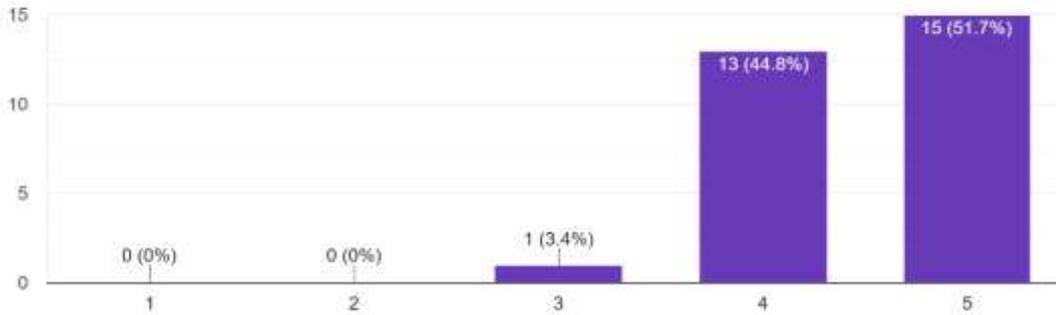
Interpretation: Olfactory and auditory elements are powerful tools for emotional branding. By making the customer feel relaxed and associating the space with luxury, retailers can reduce "shopping fatigue."

5.4.3 Store Layout and Cleanliness

Cleanliness and Layout received the highest "Strongly Agree" ratings in the entire survey, indicating they are the most fundamental requirements for a positive experience.

Store Layout: I get frustrated and leave if the store is crowded or the aisles are confusing.
29 responses
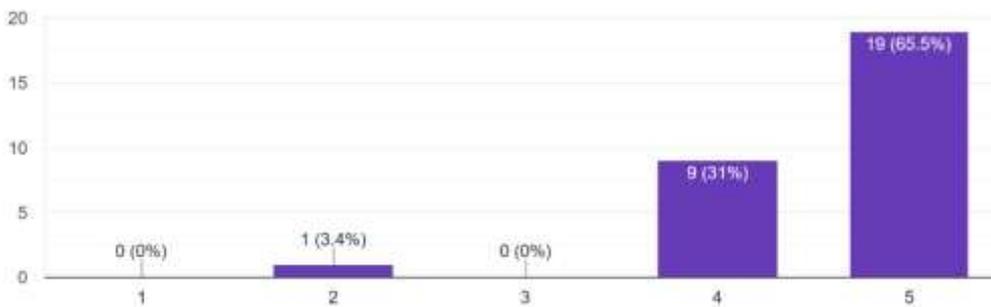
Interpretation: Navigation is a functional necessity. The data proves that while beauty (lighting/scent) attracts, functionality (layout/cleanliness) retains. A confusing layout is the primary reason for customer frustration and store exit.
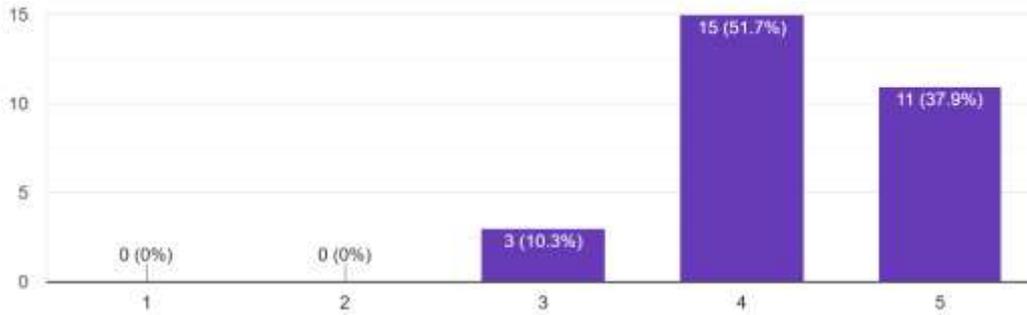
5.5 Psychological and Behavioral Impact

5.5.1 Time Perception and Brand Image

A vast majority of respondents feel that time passes more quickly in a pleasant environment and that a premium ambiance directly improves their perception of the brand.
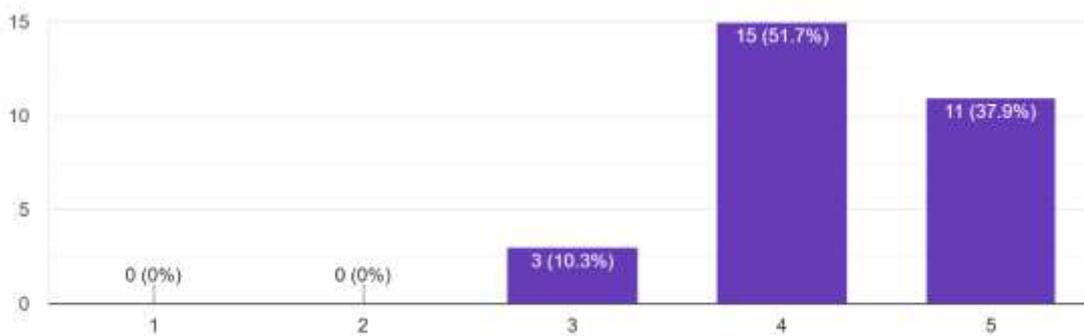
Time Perception: "In a pleasant store environment, I feel that time passes more quickly."
29 responses

Brand Image: A premium store ambience improves my perception of the brand.
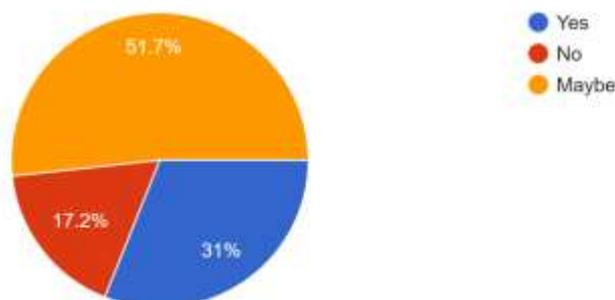29 responses

Interpretation: Ambiance creates a "Halo Effect" over the brand. When the environment is premium, customers subconsciously attribute higher quality and reliability to the products sold within that space.

5.5.2 Impulse Purchase and Price Perception

One of the most significant findings is that over 80% of respondents are susceptible to impulse purchases based on the store environment, and 75.8% are willing to pay a price premium for a better experience.
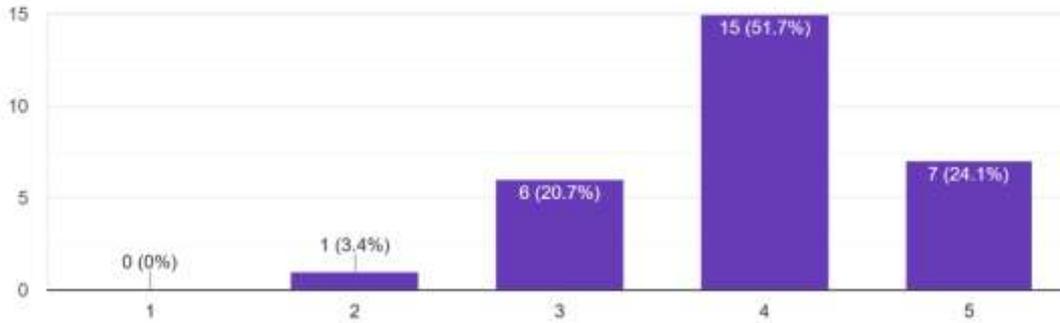
Impulse Purchase: Have you ever bought an item you didn't need just because the store environment was inviting?
29 responses

Price Perception: "I don't mind paying a little extra for products if the store provides a premium experience."
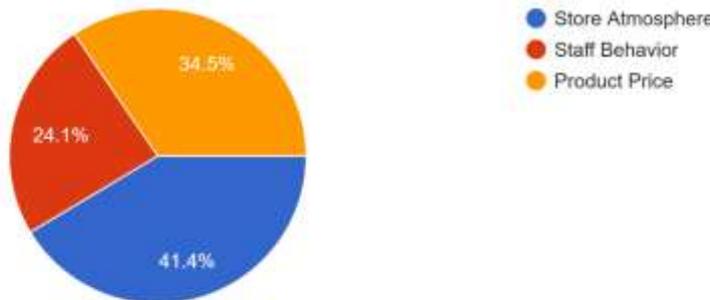
29 responses

Interpretation: Ambiance is a revenue generator. By shifting the consumer's focus from "price-sensitivity" to "experience-satisfaction," retailers can increase their profit margins and encourage unplanned spending.

5.6 Comparative Analysis: Atmosphere vs. Staff vs. Price

When forced to choose the most influential factor, the "Store Atmosphere" (41.4%) outperformed both "Product Price" and "Staff Behavior."

Staff vs. Ambience: Which affects your experience more?

29 responses

- Store Atmosphere
- Staff Behavior
- Product Price

FINDINGS

6.1 Overview of Findings

The primary objective of this research was to analyze the impact of store atmospherics on customer experience. Based on the survey conducted with 29 respondents, the following findings have been identified. These findings provide a clear picture of how sensory elements like lighting, music, scent, and layout influence the modern shopper.

6.2 Major Findings from the Study

- **Impact of Visual Elements:** Visual appeal remains the strongest factor in retail. **89.6%** of respondents agreed that a store's interior design and product displays are what convince them to enter a store in the first place.

- **Aesthetic Lighting Preference:** A significant **58.6%** of shoppers gave a perfect score (5/5) for bright and aesthetic lighting. This proves that customers prefer well-lit, visually pleasing environments over traditional or dim lighting.

- **The Scent-Luxury Correlation:** The research highlights that olfactory marketing is highly effective for branding. Nearly **90%** of participants associated a premium ambient scent with a "Luxury" shopping experience.

- **Atmospheric Relaxation:** Background music plays a vital role in consumer mood. **89.6%** of respondents reported feeling more relaxed when the store plays soft or trending music, which directly contributes to a positive shopping experience.

- **Layout and Navigation :** The most critical finding regarding store functionality is that **96.5%** of respondents feel frustrated and are likely to leave if a store is crowded or the aisles are confusing. This makes "Layout" the most important factor for customer retention.

- **Time Perception:** A well-designed ambiance alters the customer's sense of time. **89.6%** of respondents felt that time passes more quickly when they are in a pleasant environment, leading to longer "dwell time."

- **Atmosphere vs. Price:** In a direct comparison, **41.4%** of respondents prioritized **Store Atmosphere** as the most influential factor, which is higher than those who prioritized **Product Price (34.5%)**. This shows that experience is becoming more important than cost for the 20-35 age group.

- **Revenue and Impulse Buying:** The store environment is a direct driver of sales. **82.8%** of the sample size (combining "Yes" and "Maybe") admitted that a good ambiance can lead to unplanned or impulse purchases.

- **Willingness to Pay Premium: 75.8%** of consumers stated they do not mind paying a little extra for products if the store provides a premium and comfortable experience.

In summary, the findings suggest that for the target demographic (predominantly aged 20-35), the "Physical Store Environment" is the primary driver of brand perception. While staff and price are important, the sensory combination of **Visuals, Scent, and a Seamless Layout** is what ultimately converts a visitor into a buyer.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the final conclusions of the study, directly answering the primary research objectives regarding how store ambiance impacts the overall customer experience.

Final Conclusions The research successfully proves that store ambiance is a critical driver of consumer behavior. The core findings are:

- **Sensory Factors Define the Experience:** Visuals, music, and scent are not just decorations; they are the active ingredients that create a store's atmosphere. However, these elements only work if the basic functional needs—like a clear layout and strict cleanliness—are met first.

- **The Emotional Connection:** There is a direct, proven link between environmental stimuli and a customer's internal mood. When a store correctly balances its sensory inputs, it lowers customer stress and creates a genuine feeling of relaxation and happiness.

- **Impact on Buying Behavior:** A positive emotional state directly translates into sales. Because the environment makes them feel good, customers stay longer, are highly driven toward impulse purchases, and are even willing to pay a premium price. This physical experience is the ultimate advantage physical stores have over online shopping.

Closing Statement The future of retail is purely experiential. To compete with the convenience of e-commerce, physical stores must move beyond simply selling products. By carefully designing the sensory experience—from lighting to layout to music—brands can create a lasting impression that turns casual shoppers into loyal customers.

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ANNEXURE

10.1 Research Instrument (Questionnaire)

The following questionnaire was used to collect primary data from respondents in Lucknow to analyze the impact of store atmospherics on customer experience.

Section A: Demographic Profile

1.   Age Group: (Under 20 / 20-35 / 36-50 / 50+)

2.   Gender: (Male / Female / Prefer not to say)

Section B: Shopping Patterns

3. Frequency of visiting malls/retail stores? (Rarely / Once a month / 2-3 times a month / Weekly)

4. On average, how much time do you spend in a mall/retail store per visit? (< 30 mins / 30-60 mins / 1-2 hours / 2+ hours)

Section C: Store Atmospherics (Sensory Factors)

Respondents were asked to rate the following on a Likert Scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

5. Visual Appeal: The interior design, colors, and product displays influence my decision to enter a store.

6. Lighting: I prefer shopping in stores with bright, aesthetic lighting over dim lighting.

7. Aroma/Scent: A premium ambient scent (like in Phoenix Palassio) makes the shopping   environment feel luxury.

8. Background Music: I feel more relaxed when a store plays soft or trending music.

9. Cleanliness: A clean and well-maintained store enhances my shopping experience.

10. Store Layout: I get frustrated and leave if the store is crowded or the aisles are confusing.

Section D: Psychological & Behavioral Impact

11. Time Perception: "In a pleasant store environment, I feel that time passes more quickly."

12. Emotional Response: A good store ambience makes me feel happy and comfortable while shopping.

13. Brand Image: A premium store ambience improves my perception of the brand.

14. Impulse Purchase: Have you ever bought an item you didn't need just because the store environment was inviting?

15. Price Perception: "I don't mind paying a little extra for products if the store provides a premium experience."

16. Staff vs. Ambience: Which affects your experience more? (Store Atmosphere / Staff Behavior / Product Price)

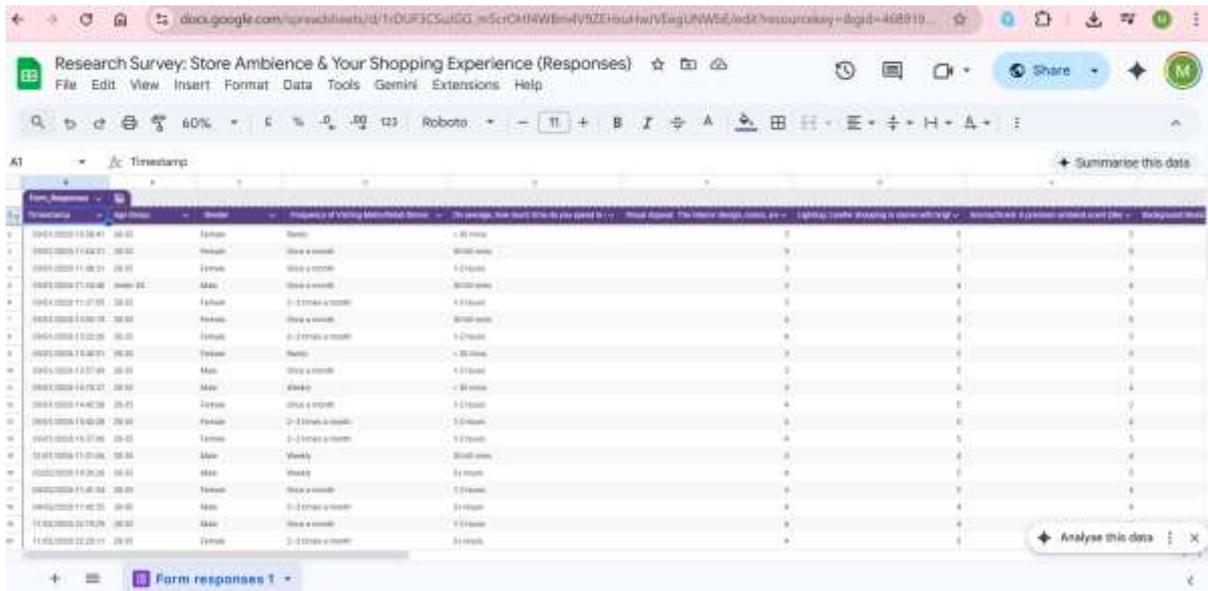**10.2 Data Validation (Response Evidence)**

10.2.1 Google Forms Response Summary

Below is the visual summary of the data collected from 29 respondents, showing the distribution of various sensory and behavioral factors.
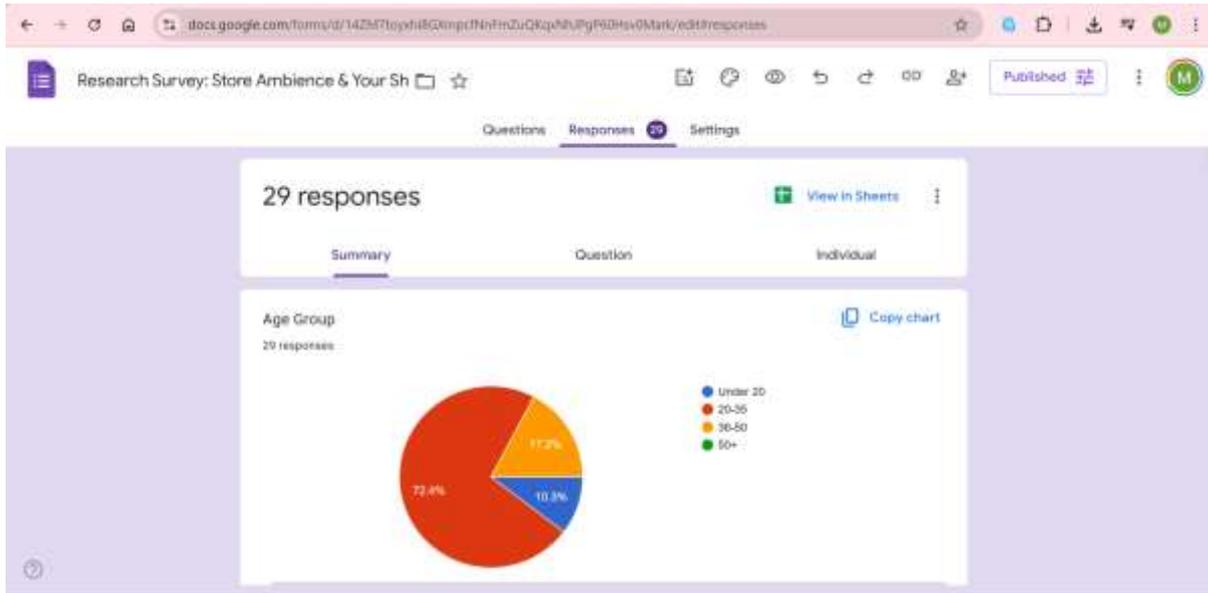
10.2.2 Raw Data Spreadsheet

This section provides a snapshot of the raw data recorded in the master spreadsheet, illustrating the individual responses for each survey parameter.