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A Study on the Relationship between Store Atmosphere and Shopper Empowerment in the Sports Retail Sector of Rajasthan

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Abstract

The sports retail sector in India has undergone a significant transformation, with increasing emphasis on creating engaging in-store experiences to meet evolving consumer expectations. This study examines the relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment in Rajasthan's sports retail sector using a secondary data-based research approach. Drawing on existing literature, the study analyzes how ambient, design, and social factors of store atmosphere influence shoppers' confidence, perceived control, access to information, and participation in the purchase process. The findings suggest that a well-designed and sensory-rich store environment enhances shopper empowerment by facilitating informed decision-making and encouraging active engagement. Supportive staff behavior further strengthens consumers' confidence and involvement during shopping. The study contributes to retail and consumer behavior literature by highlighting the importance of store atmosphere in empowering shoppers, particularly in the underexplored context of sports retailing in Rajasthan.

Keywords: Store Atmosphere, Shopper Empowerment, Sports Retail, Consumer Behavior, Retail Environment

Introduction

The sports retail sector in India has experienced substantial growth in recent years, driven by rising health awareness, higher disposable incomes, and a growing inclination toward fitness and sports-related activities. Rajasthan, as one of India's culturally rich and rapidly urbanizing states, has experienced a steady expansion of organized sports retail formats, including exclusive brand outlets, multi-brand sports stores, and shopping malls. These retail formats serve diverse consumer segments, from professional athletes to recreational users, making the in-store shopping experience a critical competitive factor (Singh et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2022).

In the contemporary retail environment, store atmosphere has emerged as a strategic tool for influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors. Store atmosphere refers to the planned design of physical surroundings, such as lighting, layout, music, color schemes, signage, and visual merchandising, to create specific emotional effects that enhance customer engagement and purchase intentions (Kotler, 1973; Singh et al., 2014). Empirical studies in the Indian retail context indicate that a well-designed store atmosphere significantly affects shoppers' emotions, time spent in-store, and overall satisfaction, thereby contributing to favorable behavioral outcomes (Khan et al., 2022; Jain & Jiwani, 2025).

Parallel to the growing emphasis on atmospheric cues is the increasing relevance of shopper empowerment in consumer behavior research. Shopper empowerment refers to consumers' perceived control, autonomy, and ability to make informed decisions during the shopping process (Wright et al., 2006). In retail settings, empowerment is shaped by factors such as transparent information, ease of navigation, supportive store layouts, and interactive retail environments. Research suggests that empowered shoppers exhibit higher confidence, satisfaction, and loyalty, ultimately enhancing store performance (Mishra & Vishvas, 2019; Mishra et al., 2022).

The relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment is particularly significant in the sports retail sector, where consumers often engage in high-involvement decision-making due to product specialization, performance requirements, and brand sensitivity. Atmospheric elements can either facilitate or hinder empowerment by influencing shoppers' comfort levels, information processing, and perceived control within the store environment (Wright et al., 2006; Khan et al., 2022). Despite growing literature on store atmospherics and consumer behavior in India, limited research has explicitly examined this relationship within the context of sports retail, especially at the regional level.

Given this gap, the present study adopts a secondary-data-based approach to analyze the relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment in the sports retail sector of Rajasthan. Secondary data analysis allows for the synthesis of existing empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, and industry reports, making it a cost-effective and methodologically robust approach for identifying patterns, trends, and research gaps in retail studies (Mishra & Vishvas, 2019). This approach is particularly relevant in regions where primary data collection may be constrained by time, access, or resource limitations.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based exclusively on secondary data to examine the relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment in the sports retail sector of Rajasthan. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, doctoral theses, and credible industry and government reports related to retail management and consumer behavior. Relevant literature was selected using purposive sampling based on its theoretical and empirical relevance to store atmosphere, servicescape, sensory marketing, and consumer empowerment. The variables of the study include store atmosphere as the independent variable (ambient, design, and social factors) and shopper empowerment as the dependent variable (information accessibility, decision-making confidence, perceived control, and participation in the purchase process). The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content and thematic analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and research gaps within global and Indian retail contexts.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the concept of store atmosphere in the sports retail context.
- To examine the dimensions of shopper empowerment using existing literature.

- To explore the relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment based on secondary studies.
- To identify key atmospheric factors that empower shoppers in sports retail.
- To provide recommendations for sports retailers in Rajasthan.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the present study is developed to examine the relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment in the sports retail sector. Drawing from established retail and environmental psychology literature, store atmosphere is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of ambient, design, and social factors, which collectively influence shoppers' psychological states and behavioral responses (Baker, 1987; Nguyen & Nham, 2022). These atmospheric cues are proposed to play a significant role in shaping shoppers' sense of control, confidence, and active participation in the purchasing process.

1. Store Atmosphere

Ambient factors refer to intangible background characteristics of the store environment such as lighting, music, temperature, and scent. These elements influence shoppers' mood and comfort levels, which in turn affect their cognitive processing and ability to evaluate product information effectively (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008). A pleasant ambient environment can reduce perceived shopping effort and enhance consumers' willingness to explore alternatives.

Design factors include tangible visual and spatial elements such as store layout, color schemes, space utilization, and visual merchandising. Effective store design facilitates ease of navigation and spatial control, enabling shoppers to locate products effortlessly and compare options, thereby strengthening their perceived autonomy and decision-making capability (Van Rompay & Tanja-Dijkstra, 2012).

Social factors encompass human and social interactions within the store, including staff behavior, service quality, and perceived crowding. Positive employee interactions and appropriate social density can enhance shoppers' confidence and perceived influence during the shopping process, while overcrowding or inattentive staff may reduce feelings of empowerment (Garaus, 2017).

2. Shopper Empowerment

Shopper empowerment refers to shoppers' perceived ability to access information, exercise autonomy, and actively participate in the purchase process within a retail

environment. In the context of sports retailing, empowerment is particularly important due to the technical nature of products and the high level of consumer involvement required in decision-making. Favorable store atmospheric conditions play a critical role in strengthening shoppers' confidence, control, and engagement during their in-store journey.

The construct of shopper empowerment is reflected through four key dimensions: information accessibility, decision-making

confidence, perceived control, and participation in the purchase process. These dimensions collectively explain how consumers manage, evaluate, and influence their purchase decisions within physical retail settings (Vrechopoulos, 2010; Wongkitrungrueng, 2019). The relationship between store atmosphere and shopper empowerment, as established in prior studies, is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Dimensions of Store Atmosphere and Their Influence on Shopper Empowerment

Store Atmosphere Dimension	Key Elements	Shopper Empowerment Dimension	Expected Influence
Ambient Factors	Lighting, music, temperature, scent	Decision-making confidence	Enhances comfort and supports effective cognitive processing
Design Factors	Layout, color schemes, visual merchandising, signage	Perceived control	Facilitates navigation, autonomy, and product comparison
Social Factors	Staff behavior, service quality, crowding	Participation in purchase process	Promotes interaction and active involvement
Informational Cues	Product displays, labels, in-store information	Information accessibility	Enables informed evaluation and choice

Theoretical and Empirical Review

1. Store Atmosphere

Store atmosphere represents the overall physical and sensory environment of a retail store that influences consumers' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. It is a strategic marketing element that shapes shopping experiences, enhances customer satisfaction, and supports favorable purchase decisions.

2. Concept and Importance of Store Atmosphere

Store atmosphere refers to the intentional design and arrangement of physical and sensory elements within a retail environment to create specific emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses among consumers. These elements include lighting, color, music, scent, temperature, layout, and visual merchandising. Rather than being a passive background, store atmosphere acts as a powerful marketing tool that differentiates a store from competitors and shapes customers' overall shopping

experience. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) emphasized that atmosphere influences consumers beyond product attributes by affecting their mood, satisfaction, time spent in the store, and purchase decisions. A well-designed store atmosphere can increase customer engagement, encourage impulse buying, and build a positive brand image.

3. Theoretical Foundations: S-O-R and Servicescape Models

The theoretical basis of store atmosphere is rooted in environmental psychology, particularly the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell. The model explains that environmental cues within a store (stimuli) influence consumers' internal emotional state (organism), such as pleasure and arousal, which in turn shape behavioral outcomes (responses), including time spent in the store, exploration, and purchase decisions.

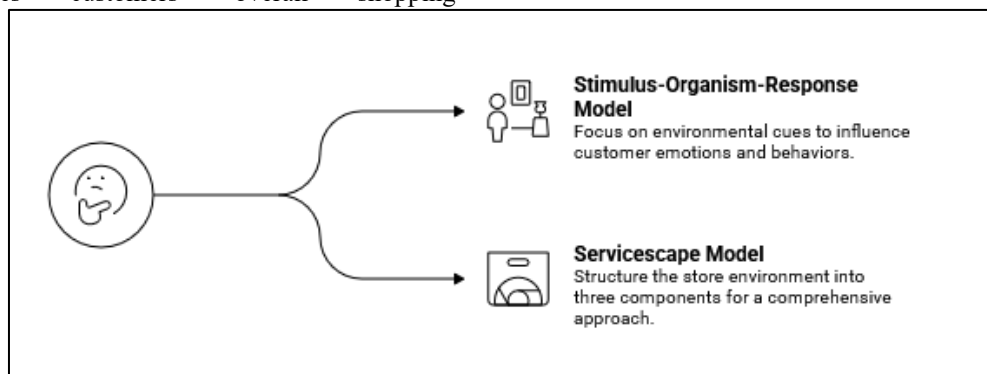


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of store atmosphere based on the S-O-R and Servicescape models

Supporting this framework, Bitner's Servicescape Model provides a structured understanding of store atmosphere by categorizing the physical environment into three dimensions: ambient conditions (lighting, music, scent, temperature), spatial layout and functionality (space arrangement, ease of movement), and signs, symbols, and artifacts (signage, décor, visual cues). The model emphasizes that the servicescape affects not only customer perceptions and behaviors but also employee performance and service quality. Therefore, store atmosphere functions as a strategic element influencing both customer satisfaction and employee outcomes (Bohl, 2012; Mishra et al., 2014).

- **Store Atmosphere and Sensory Marketing**

In recent years, store atmosphere has been strongly linked with sensory marketing, which focuses on engaging multiple human senses to create memorable and immersive shopping experiences. Sensory marketing emphasizes that consumers do not evaluate stores purely on rational factors; instead, their perceptions are shaped by sensory stimuli such as visual appeal, background music, pleasant scents, and tactile experiences. Research shows that multisensory environments enhance emotional engagement, strengthen memory recall, and improve brand recognition and differentiation. While visual cues like color schemes, lighting, and product displays remain the most dominant, auditory cues (music tempo, volume, genre) and olfactory cues (store fragrance) are increasingly recognized for their ability to influence mood, time spent in-store, and purchase intentions (Spence et al., 2014; Helme Falk & Hultén, 2017).

- **Sensory Congruence and Experiential Retailing**

The effectiveness of store atmosphere largely depends on the harmony and congruence among different sensory elements. When visual, auditory, and olfactory cues are consistent with each other and aligned with the store's brand image, they create a coherent and pleasant environment that enhances customer satisfaction and perceived quality. On the other hand, conflicting or excessive sensory stimuli may lead to cognitive overload, discomfort, and negative evaluations of the store. Studies suggest that coordinated atmospheric design increases pleasure and arousal, encouraging approach behaviors such as longer visits, repeat patronage, and positive word-of-mouth (Šliburytė & Le, 2017). Consequently, modern retailers increasingly use store atmosphere as an experiential strategy, transforming physical stores into engaging experiential spaces rather than merely transactional outlets.

Shopper Empowerment

Shopper empowerment refers to the extent to which consumers feel confident, knowledgeable, and in control of their shopping decisions. It reflects a shift from passive buying behavior to active participation, where shoppers independently seek information, evaluate alternatives, and influence purchase outcomes.

1. Concept and Meaning of Shopper Empowerment

Shopper empowerment represents the shift from retailer-controlled markets to consumer-centric retailing, where consumers play an active role in the shopping process. It refers to the degree to which shoppers feel knowledgeable, confident, autonomous, and capable of influencing purchase decisions and outcomes. Empowered shoppers are not passive recipients of marketing messages; instead, they actively search for information, compare alternatives, and make independent judgments. This sense of empowerment reflects a higher level of awareness and control, allowing consumers to shape their own shopping experiences according to their needs and preferences (Kumar et al., 2025).

2. Importance and Outcomes of Shopper Empowerment

Shopper empowerment is strongly associated with positive behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. Empowered consumers tend to exhibit higher levels of satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement with retailers. When shoppers feel confident and in control, they are more likely to perceive greater value in their shopping experiences and develop favorable attitudes toward the store. This is especially important in complex or high-involvement purchases, where decision-making requires greater cognitive effort and information processing. Empowerment helps consumers navigate such environments more effectively, reducing uncertainty and enhancing confidence in their choices (Hur, 2019).

3. Dimensions of Shopper Empowerment

Researchers identify several key dimensions of shopper empowerment, including access to information, decision-making competence, perceived control, and active participation in the purchase process. Access to information enables shoppers to evaluate alternatives, compare prices, and assess quality more accurately. Decision-making competence reflects consumers' confidence in their ability to make appropriate choices. Perceived control refers to the degree of autonomy shoppers feel over their shopping journey, while participation represents their involvement in product selection and evaluation. Together,

these dimensions indicate how effectively consumers manage and direct their shopping experiences (Kumar et al., 2025; Natarajan & Raghavan, 2024).

4. Psychological Foundations of Shopper Empowerment

Shopper empowerment is closely linked to psychological empowerment theory, which views empowerment as a motivational construct based on feelings of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). In a retail context, meaning reflects the relevance of the shopping experience to consumers' personal goals, competence refers to their confidence in making good decisions, self-determination represents autonomy in the shopping process, and impact denotes the belief that their choices influence outcomes. Applying this framework to consumer behavior explains how retail environments and experiences strengthen consumers' sense of agency and intrinsic motivation, ultimately shaping their satisfaction, engagement, and behavioral responses (Shukla et al., 2023).

Relationship between Store Atmosphere and Shopper Empowerment

Store atmosphere plays a significant role in shaping shoppers' sense of empowerment by influencing their perceptions of control, confidence, and autonomy during the shopping process. A well-designed and supportive retail environment enhances ease of navigation, clarity of information, and decision-making ability, thereby strengthening shoppers' psychological empowerment and active participation in purchase decisions.

- **Influence of Store Atmosphere on Psychological Empowerment**
- Environmental psychology literature suggests that store atmosphere plays a vital role in shaping consumers' psychological states, including their sense of empowerment. Atmospheric elements such as spatial layout, lighting, visual clarity, signage, and service interactions act as environmental cues that influence shoppers' perceptions of control, competence, and autonomy. A well-organized and aesthetically pleasing store reduces confusion and cognitive effort, making it easier for consumers to process information and evaluate alternatives. When shoppers feel comfortable and confident in navigating the store, they are more likely to experience a sense of control over their decisions, which strengthens their psychological empowerment. Favorable store atmospherics thus support informed and independent decision-making (Aw et al., 2024).

- **Role of Supportive Retail Environments in Enhancing Empowerment** Empirical studies across global retail contexts show that supportive and customer-friendly store environments significantly contribute to shopper empowerment. Retail stores that offer structured layouts, clear product categorization, informative displays, and responsive staff encourage consumers to participate actively in the shopping process. Such environments promote ease of navigation and clarity of choice, enabling shoppers to explore products confidently and independently. When consumers feel that the store facilitates their decision-making rather than complicates it, their perceived competence and autonomy increase, leading to higher levels of empowerment (Hur, 2019; Itani et al., 2023).
- **Store Atmosphere and Shopper Empowerment in the Indian Context** In India, most research on consumer empowerment has focused on digital and omnichannel retailing, highlighting the role of technology in providing access to information and enhancing consumer control. These studies emphasize that Indian consumers increasingly value autonomy, transparency, and personalized experiences, particularly in urban and emerging markets. However, empirical research examining the direct relationship between physical store atmosphere and shopper empowerment remains limited. The existing literature predominantly addresses online and hybrid formats, leaving a gap in understanding how traditional brick-and-mortar retail environments contribute to empowerment (Natarajan & Raghavan, 2024).
- **Research Gap: Sports Retail and the Regional Context of Rajasthan** Most previous studies have concentrated on general retail sectors such as apparel, grocery, and electronics, while sports retail has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Sports retail is distinct due to its high product involvement, technical complexity, and experiential nature of consumption, which makes shopper empowerment especially important. Furthermore, the regional context of Rajasthan remains underexplored despite its growing organized retail sector and diverse consumer demographics. This lack of focused research highlights a significant gap in the literature, justifying the need for the present secondary-data-based study to examine how store atmosphere influences shopper empowerment in sports retail settings at the regional level.

Findings of the Study

The study reveals that store atmosphere plays a significant role in influencing shopper empowerment in the sports retail sector. A positive and well-organized store environment enhances shoppers' confidence and sense of control during the purchasing process. The findings indicate that well-designed sports retail stores, characterized by effective layout, clear product displays, and supportive ambient conditions, facilitate informed decision-making among shoppers. Additionally, interactive and sensory-rich environments incorporating visual merchandising, lighting, and music contribute to higher levels of shopper engagement and empowerment. The study further finds that proactive and supportive staff behavior strengthens shopper participation by assisting consumers in product evaluation and reinforcing their confidence in purchase decisions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that store atmosphere is a crucial determinant of shopper empowerment in the sports retail sector. Atmospheric elements such as layout, lighting, visual merchandising, and interactive sensory cues positively influence shoppers' confidence, perceived control, and ability to make informed purchase decisions. The findings also emphasize the role of staff support in enhancing shopper participation and engagement within the store environment. By synthesizing existing research, the study highlights that empowering retail environments not only improve consumer experiences but also strengthen retailer–consumer relationships. The research adds value by addressing a notable gap in the literature concerning sports retail and regional retail contexts like Rajasthan, and it underscores the need for retailers to strategically design store atmospheres that promote consumer empowerment.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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