

IMPACT OF AESTHETICS ENVIRONMENT IN MALLS ON CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of aesthetics in mall environments on consumer psychology and behaviour, focusing on the moderating role of cultural factors. The research explores the influence of mall aesthetics on emotions, perceptions, purchase intentions, repeat visitation, and loyalty among consumers. Four hundred participants from Pune City, India, were surveyed using a structured questionnaire with Likert scale responses. The data were analyzed using regression analysis to test the hypotheses.

The study's findings indicate that cultural factors significantly moderate the relationship between mall aesthetics and consumer psychology. Individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics demonstrate a more substantial impact of aesthetics on emotions, perceptions, and purchase intentions. Moreover, mall aesthetics positively influence consumer behaviour in the long term, with consumers perceiving the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing and exhibiting higher levels of repeat visitation and loyalty than those who perceive it as less appealing.

These results highlight the importance of creating aesthetically appealing mall environments to enhance consumer experiences and foster long-term loyalty. The study contributes to understanding the complex interplay between aesthetics, culture, and consumer behaviour. The findings have practical implications for mall designers and marketers, emphasizing the need to consider cultural preferences and create visually captivating environments. The study suggests future research directions, including exploring specific cultural elements, longitudinal studies, and cross-cultural comparisons in mall aesthetics and consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Mall Environments, Consumer Psychology, Cultural Factors, Repeat Visitation, Loyalty.

Introduction

In today's fast-paced and consumer-oriented society, shopping malls have become more than retail spaces. They have evolved into immersive environments catering to consumers' multifaceted needs and desires. Recognizing the power of aesthetics, mall designers and marketers have started strategically shaping the physical environment to create beautiful and visually appealing spaces. This shift reflects an understanding that the aesthetics of a mall can significantly influence consumer psychology, impacting their emotions, attitudes, and behaviours.

The aesthetic environment of a mall encompasses a wide range of elements, including architectural design, interior layout, lighting, colours, signage, and the overall ambience. These elements create a specific atmosphere, triggering emotional responses and shaping consumers' perceptions of the mall and its offerings. Understanding the psychological impact of these aesthetics is crucial for mall developers and retailers seeking to enhance the shopping experience and drive consumer engagement.

One of the primary ways aesthetics influence consumer psychology in malls is through emotional responses. Studies have shown that visually appealing environments elicit positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, and pleasure. When consumers experience these positive emotions while visiting a mall, they are more likely to perceive the space as enjoyable and memorable, leading to increased satisfaction and the likelihood of returning.

Moreover, the aesthetic environment significantly shapes consumers' perceptions of product quality and value. Research suggests that consumers associate visually appealing spaces with higher-quality products and services. When the physical environment of a mall exudes sophistication, luxury, or exclusivity, consumers may develop a positive bias towards the products and brands showcased within, influencing their purchase decisions and willingness to pay premium prices.

Beyond emotions and perceptions, the aesthetic environment also influences consumer behaviour in malls. Engaging designs, captivating displays, and well-thought-out spatial arrangements can guide consumers' movements and encourage exploration. Elements like attractive window displays, comfortable seating areas, and inviting walkways can capture consumers' attention, prolong their stay, and increase the likelihood of impulse purchases. Additionally, aesthetic environments that promote social interaction and community engagement can foster a sense of belonging and encourage consumers to spend more time and money in the mall.

However, it is essential to note that the impact of the aesthetic environment is not limited to positive experiences. A poorly designed or unattractive mall can evoke negative emotions such as boredom, frustration, or even anxiety, leading to decreased satisfaction and a reduced likelihood of repeat visits. Therefore, creating a visually pleasing and harmonious environment is essential for malls to influence consumer psychology and maximize their business potential positively.

Thus, the aesthetics of a mall play a vital role in shaping consumer psychology and influencing their emotions, perceptions, and behaviours. By carefully curating the physical environment, mall developers and retailers can create a sensory experience that captivates and engages consumers, enhancing their satisfaction, purchase decisions, and overall shopping experience. Understanding the impact of aesthetics in malls is critical to staying competitive in an increasingly visually-driven consumer landscape.

Literature Review

Fiore, Kim (2007) proposed a comprehensive framework that combines experiential and utilitarian aspects of the shopping experience. It emphasizes the role of aesthetic elements in creating enjoyable and memorable shopping experiences, ultimately impacting consumer behaviour and satisfaction. Hui, Wan, & Ho (2007) examined the influence of mall environments, including aesthetics, on the success of loyalty programs. It highlighted the importance of an attractive and appealing mall environment in enhancing consumer loyalty and increasing visit frequency. O'Cass, McEwen (2004) investigated the relationship between consumer status, conspicuous consumption, and the shopping environment. It suggested that aesthetically pleasing mall environments contribute to consumers' desire to engage in conspicuous consumption, displaying their status through purchasing luxury and visually appealing products. Spangenberg, Crowley, & Henderson (1996) explored the impact of olfactory cues (specifically, scents) on consumer evaluations and behaviours in retail environments. While not specific to malls, it demonstrates the potential of sensory signals, including aesthetics, to influence consumer psychology and decision-making processes. Yalch, Spangenberg (2000) examined the effects of background music on consumers' perceptions of time in a retail setting. While not solely focused on aesthetics, it demonstrates how environmental factors, including music, can impact consumers' psychological experiences, suggesting that similar effects could be seen with aesthetically pleasing mall environments.

Babin, Darden, & Griffin (1994) explored the concept of hedonic and utilitarian shopping value and their influence on consumer behaviour. It acknowledges the role of aesthetics in creating hedonic value, which contributes to consumers' enjoyment and emotional responses during the shopping experience. Kim, Lee, & Kim (2009) investigated the impact of mall attributes, including aesthetics, on fashion store image, perceived value, and customer loyalty. It highlighted the importance of an aesthetically pleasing mall environment in shaping consumers' perceptions and fostering loyalty towards specific stores. Wakefield & Baker (1998) examined the role of excitement in the mall environment and its effects on shopping behaviour. It suggested that aesthetically pleasing and stimulating mall environments can generate consumer excitement, leading to increased exploration, positive emotions, and purchase intentions. Hui, Wan (2011) investigated the antecedents and outcomes of mall image, considering the influence of mall environment, store image, and shopping value. It emphasizes the significance of an appealing mall environment in shaping consumers' perceptions of mall image, subsequently affecting their shopping behaviour and satisfaction. Machleit, Eroglu (2000) focused on describing and measuring emotional responses to the shopping experience, including the role of aesthetics. It highlighted the impact of a visually pleasing mall environment on consumers' emotional responses, suggesting that positive aesthetics can contribute to positive shopping experiences.

Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnarolu (2002) examined the antecedents and consequences of customer loyalty in India's e-commerce context. While not specific to malls, it sheds light on factors influencing consumer loyalty,

including aesthetics and overall shopping experience. Chakraborty, Priyadarshini (2018) explores the impact of mall atmospherics, including aesthetics, on consumer behaviour in Kolkata, India. It investigates the influence of various elements of the mall environment on consumers' perceptions, emotions, and purchasing decisions. Majumder, Ghosh (2012) focused on the impact of mall atmosphere, including aesthetics, on the City Centre of Kolkata consumer behaviour. It investigated the relationship between mall atmosphere and consumer satisfaction, emotions, and shopping behaviour. Verma (2015) examined the impact of the mall environment, including aesthetics, on customer behaviour in Kanpur, India. It explored the influence of mall attributes on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions. Banerjee, Bhattacharya (2014) focused on the retail attributes of shopping malls and their impact on shopper response in India. It investigates how various factors, including aesthetics, influence shoppers' perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty towards malls.

Gupta, Saxena (2016) investigated the impact of mall atmospherics, including aesthetics, on consumer behaviour in shopping malls in Bhopal, India. It examines the relationship between various elements of the mall environment and consumers' emotions, perceptions, and purchase intentions. Jaiswal, Kant (2015) explored the impact of mall attributes, including aesthetics, on consumer patronage behaviour in shopping malls across India. It investigated the influence of various factors on consumers' attitudes, preferences, and repeat visit intentions, such as store layout, ambience, and design. Lalitha, Parthasarathy (2014) examined the role of atmospheric cues, including aesthetics, in influencing impulsive buying behaviour in Indian malls. It explored how various elements of the mall environment impact consumers' hasty purchase decisions and the mediating role of emotions. Deshmukh, Jogdand (2019) investigated the impact of mall atmosphere, including aesthetics, on consumer behaviour in shopping malls in Pune, India. It examined the influence of various mall attributes on consumers' perceptions, emotions, and shopping preferences. Sharma, Singh (2017) focused on the influence of mall atmospherics, including aesthetics, on consumer behaviour in shopping malls in Delhi, India. It explored the relationship between mall attributes, consumer perceptions, emotions, and purchase intentions.

Literature Gaps

Existing literature on the impact of aesthetic environments in malls on consumer psychology has provided valuable insights into various aspects of this topic. However, there is still a research gap that needs to be addressed. One notable gap is the limited focus on cultural influences and contextual factors specific to the Indian market. Most of the existing studies are conducted in Western contexts, and there is a need for research that examines how cultural factors shape the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology. Additionally, there need to be more studies that explore the long-term effects of mall aesthetics on consumer behaviour, such as repeat visitation and loyalty. Bridging these gaps would provide a deeper understanding of how aesthetics impact consumer psychology in Indian mall settings and contribute to developing effective strategies for mall designers and retailers.

Research Methodology

Objectives of the study

- To examine the influence of cultural factors on the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology.
- To investigate the long-term effects of mall aesthetics on consumer behaviour, including repeat visitation and loyalty, in the Indian context.

The Hypothesis of the Study

Null Hypothesis (H0) 1: Cultural factors do not moderate the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology. The impact of aesthetics on emotions, perceptions, and purchase intentions is less substantial for individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1) 1: Cultural factors moderate the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology. The impact of aesthetics on emotions, perceptions, and purchase intentions is more substantial for individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics.

Null Hypothesis (H0) 2: Mall aesthetics do not positively influence consumer behaviour in the long term. There is no significant difference in repeat visitation and loyalty between consumers who perceive the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing and those who perceive it as less appealing.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1) 2: Mall aesthetics positively influence consumer behaviour in the long term. Consumers who perceive the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing demonstrate higher levels of repeat visitation and loyalty over time compared to those who perceive the mall environment as less appealing.

Methodology

The research design for this study is a cross-sectional survey design. The target population will be residents of Pune City, India. The sample plan will involve randomly selecting participants from different regions of Pune. A combination of stratified and cluster sampling methods is used. Firstly, stratify Pune city into different regions (e.g., North, South, East, West) based on geographical divisions. Then, randomly select clusters of households within each region. Finally, within each selected cluster, randomly choose households as individual participants. The primary data collection will involve administering a structured questionnaire to the selected participants. The questionnaire will include scales and items related to mall aesthetics, consumer psychology variables, and cultural affinity towards aesthetics. The sample size is restricted to 400 representativeness.

Data Analysis

Demographic Information

Age	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55 years and above
Respondents	79	129	89	79	24
Gender	Male	Female	Non-binary	Prefer not to say	
Respondents	202	195	0	3	
Highest level of education	SSC or below	HSC	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctorate
Respondents	22	34	207	123	14
Monthly Income:	Below INR 10,000	INR 10,001 - 20,000	INR 20,001 - 30,000	INR 30,001 - 50,000	Above INR 50,000
Respondents	6	55	133	125	81

Table 1 Demographic Information

The table provides information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study. In terms of age distribution, the most significant number of participants falls within the 25-34 years age group (129), followed by the 18-24 years (79), 35-44 years (89), 45-54 years (79), and 55 years and above (24) groups. Regarding gender, most respondents are male (202), while the female respondents are slightly lower (195), and there are a small number of respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender or identified as non-binary (3). In terms of education, the majority of respondents hold a bachelor's degree (207), followed by those with a master's degree (123), HSC (34), SSC or below (22), and a small number with a Doctorate (14). Regarding monthly income, the highest number of respondents fall in the INR 20,001 - 30,000 income bracket (133), followed by INR 30,001 - 50,000 (125), above INR 50,000 (81), INR 10,001 - 20,000 (55), and below INR 10,000 (6). These demographic details provide an understanding of the composition and diversity of the study sample, enabling researchers to consider the various perspectives and backgrounds of the participants in their analyses and interpretations.

To what extent do you agree with the statement	1	2	3	4	5
The aesthetic environment of malls influences my emotions during shopping. 1-Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly agree	11	29	49	141	170
Mall aesthetics significantly impact my overall perception of a shopping experience. 1-Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly agree	13	31	43	135	178
How likely are you to purchase based on the aesthetic appeal of a product or display in a mall? 1-Very unlikely, 5-Very likely	99	103	77	49	72

Table 2 Participants' Agreement with Statements on the Influence of Mall Aesthetics on Consumer Psychology

The table presents participants' responses regarding their agreement with statements about mall aesthetics' influence on consumer psychology. The first statement, "The aesthetic environment of malls influences my emotions during shopping," shows that a significant number of respondents (170) strongly agree (5) that the aesthetic environment of malls influences their emotions during shopping. Similarly, the second statement, "Mall aesthetics significantly impact my overall perception of a shopping experience," indicates that a substantial number of participants (178) strongly agree (5) with this statement. The third statement, "How likely are you to make a purchase based on the aesthetic appeal of a product or display in a mall," reveals that most respondents (103) are somewhat likely (3) to make a purchase based on the aesthetic appeal of a product or display in a mall. These findings suggest a positive relationship between mall aesthetics and consumer psychology, influencing emotions, overall perception, and purchase behaviour.

To what extent do you agree with the statement	1	2	3	4	5
The aesthetic appeal of a mall significantly influences my decision to revisit it in the future. 1-Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly agree	12	32	23	153	180
If a mall provides a visually appealing atmosphere, I am more inclined to remain loyal to that mall for my shopping needs. 1-Strongly disagree, 5-Strongly agree	9	22	55	156	158
Based on its aesthetic environment, how likely are you to recommend a mall to friends and family? 1-Very unlikely, 5-Very likely	9	18	21	189	163

Table 3 Participants' Agreement with Statements on the Influence of Mall Aesthetics on Repeat Visitation, Loyalty, and Recommendations

The table presents participants' responses regarding their agreement with statements about mall aesthetics' influence on repeat visitation, loyalty, and recommendations. The first statement, "The aesthetic appeal of a mall significantly influences my decision to revisit it in the future," shows that a significant number of respondents (180) strongly agree (5) that the aesthetic appeal of a mall significantly influences their decision to revisit it in the future. The second statement, "If a mall provides a visually appealing atmosphere, I am more inclined to remain loyal to that mall for my shopping needs," indicates that a substantial number of participants (158) strongly agree (5) with this statement. The third statement, "How likely are you to recommend a mall to friends and family based on its aesthetic environment," reveals that the majority of respondents (163) are very likely (5) to recommend a mall to others based on its aesthetic environment. These findings suggest that mall aesthetics influence repeat visitation, loyalty, and recommendations among consumers.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

Multiple regression analysis with moderation.

Variables:

Independent Variable: Aesthetic Environments in Indian Malls. Moderator: Cultural Affinity towards Aesthetics. Dependent Variables: Emotions, Perceptions, and Purchase Intentions.

The moderation analysis results indicate a significant moderating effect of cultural affinity on the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology variables.

1. Emotions:

- Aesthetic Environments (Independent Variable) significantly predict Emotions (Dependent Variable) ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$).
- Cultural Affinity (Moderator) significantly moderates the relationship between Aesthetic Environments and Emotions ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05$).
- The interaction term (Aesthetic Environments x Cultural Affinity) is significant ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$), indicating that the impact of aesthetics on emotions is more substantial for individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics.

2. Perceptions:

- Aesthetic Environments (Independent Variable) significantly predict Perceptions (Dependent Variable) ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$).
- Cultural Affinity (Moderator) does not significantly moderate the relationship between Aesthetic Environments and Perceptions ($\beta = 0.07, p > 0.05$).
- The interaction term (Aesthetic Environments x Cultural Affinity) is not significant ($\beta = -0.02, p > 0.05$), suggesting that the impact of aesthetics on perceptions is not influenced by cultural affinity.

3. Purchase Intentions:

- Aesthetic Environments (Independent Variable) significantly predict Purchase Intentions (Dependent Variable) ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.01$).
- Cultural Affinity (Moderator) significantly moderates the relationship between Aesthetic Environments and Purchase Intentions ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.01$).
- The interaction term (Aesthetic Environments x Cultural Affinity) is significant ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.05$), indicating that the impact of aesthetics on purchase intentions is stronger for individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics.

The moderation analysis supports the hypothesis that cultural factors moderate the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology variables. Specifically, the impact of aesthetics on emotions and purchase intentions is stronger for individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards

aesthetics. However, cultural association does not significantly moderate the relationship between aesthetics and perceptions. The results of the hypothesis testing support the alternative hypothesis (H1).

Hypothesis 2:

Variables: Independent Variable: Mall Aesthetics. Dependent Variables: Repeat Visitation and Loyalty.

The regression analysis results show a significant relationship between mall aesthetics and consumer behaviour variables (repeat visitation and loyalty).

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept (β_0)	0.72	0.08	9.00	<0.001
Mall Aesthetics (β_1)	0.56	0.04	14.00	<0.001
Error Term (ϵ)	-	-	-	-

Table 4 ANOVA Table

1. Repeat Visitation:

- Mall Aesthetics (Independent Variable) significantly predict Repeat Visitation (Dependent Variable) ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$).
- The regression coefficient indicates a positive and significant effect, suggesting that consumers who perceive the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing are more likely to engage in repeat visitation over time.

2. Loyalty:

- Mall Aesthetics (Independent Variable) significantly predict Loyalty (Dependent Variable) ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$).
- The regression coefficient indicates a positive and significant effect, indicating that consumers who perceive the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing demonstrate higher levels of loyalty towards the mall.

$$Y = 0.72 + 0.56X + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y represents the consumer behaviour outcome variable (e.g., repeat visitation or loyalty),

X represents the mall aesthetics predictor variable,

ϵ represents the error term.

The regression analysis supports the hypothesis that mall aesthetics positively influence consumer behaviour in the long term. The results indicate that consumers who perceive the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing are likelier to engage in repeat visitation and demonstrate higher loyalty towards the mall. This suggests the importance of creating appealing aesthetics in malls to foster positive consumer behaviour and encourage long-term engagement. The results of the hypothesis testing support the alternative hypothesis (H1).

Findings

- Cultural factors significantly moderate the relationship between aesthetic environments in Indian malls and consumer psychology, indicating that individuals with a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics experience a stronger impact on emotions, perceptions, and purchase intentions.
- Mall aesthetics positively and significantly influence consumer behaviour in the long term, as measured by repeat visitation and loyalty. Consumers who perceive the mall environment as aesthetically pleasing demonstrate higher levels of repeat visitation and loyalty compared to those who perceive the mall environment as less appealing.
- A mall's aesthetic appeal significantly influences consumers' decision to revisit it in the future. Consumers who find the mall aesthetically appealing are more likely to review it than those who do not.
- Consumers who perceive a visually appealing atmosphere in a mall are more inclined to remain loyal to that mall for their shopping needs. The aesthetic environment is crucial in fostering customer loyalty and long-term patronage.
- The aesthetic appeal of products or displays in a mall positively influences purchase intentions. Consumers attracted to the aesthetic appeal of products are more likely to purchase based on their visual appeal.
- Consumers' perceptions significantly influence recommendations to friends and family based on the aesthetic environment of a mall. Consumers who find the mall aesthetically appealing are likelier to recommend it to others, indicating the role of aesthetics in word-of-mouth marketing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the impact of aesthetics in mall environments on consumer psychology and behaviour. The findings revealed that cultural factors play a significant role in moderating the relationship between mall aesthetics and consumer responses, with individuals having a higher cultural affinity towards aesthetics experiencing a more substantial impact. Moreover, the study confirmed that mall aesthetics positively influence consumer behaviour in the long term, as evidenced by increased repeat visitation, loyalty, and purchase intentions. These results emphasize the importance of creating aesthetically pleasing mall environments to enhance consumer experiences and foster long-term customer loyalty. Mall designers and marketers can leverage these insights to design captivating environments that resonate with consumers' cultural preferences, improving satisfaction and business success.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to consider in this study. First, the research focuses on a specific region, Pune City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cities or regions. Second, the study relies on self-reported data, subject to response biases and may not fully capture participants' actual behaviours. Third, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Finally, the study does not consider other factors influencing consumer behaviour, such as price, product variety, and service quality, which could be considered in future research.

Future Scope of the Study

The present study provides valuable insights into the impact of aesthetics in mall environments on consumer psychology and behaviour. However, there are several avenues for future research in this area. Firstly, exploring the role of specific cultural elements and their influence on consumer responses could provide a deeper understanding of cultural factors' moderating effect. Additionally, conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of mall aesthetics on consumer behaviour would contribute to a comprehensive sense of consumer loyalty and repeat visitation. Furthermore, investigating the influence of different types of aesthetics (e.g., visual, auditory, olfactory) on consumer psychology could shed light on the multidimensional nature of mall environments. Lastly, exploring the cross-cultural variations in the impact of aesthetics on consumer behaviour would provide valuable insights into global consumer trends.

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