

**EFFECTS OF MALL ATMOSPHERE TOWARDS CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR
DURING CHRISTMAS**

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ABSTRACT

Environmental elements are known to elicit stimuli to human being and consequently induce different sensations and psychological effects to a person. However when this stimuli is made of wrong balance it can hinder the positive reactions of consumers especially during festive season shopping where potentially sales are at the highest. This study examines the influence of environmental factors in a shopping mall on consumer behaviour especially during Christmas time. Convenience sampling was employed in the data collection method two months before Christmas. This study was initiated by distributing a set of questionnaires to 300 respondents in a selected shopping mall. Results were collated based on the analysis of four significant environmental variables which are interior settings, music, employee engagement and consumer density. The findings indicated that the effects of interior settings, music and employee engagement were found to be evident. Conversely, consumer density was found to elicit no effect on consumer behaviour. It was also noted that gender moderates the relationship between music and consumer behaviour. The implications of the results obtained are discussed along with the managerial implications, limitations and future researches.

Keywords: Mall, Atmosphere, Approach-avoidance, Consumer behaviour, Christmas Shopping

INTRODUCTION

Shopping has become an activity of leisure and most of the stress of it has been reduced with the introduction of online shopping in recent years. Nevertheless, shopping mall operators are constantly looking out on ways to improve their current operations to enhance customer experience. This research investigates the effects of various aspects of a shopping mall's ambience towards consumer behaviour during Christmas. Shopping malls supply shopping basic needs through the group of stores such as retail shops and restaurants within a single structural design of a shopping mall as presented by Abrudan (2011). Besides, shopping malls are enclosed environment with controlled climate and on-site parking.

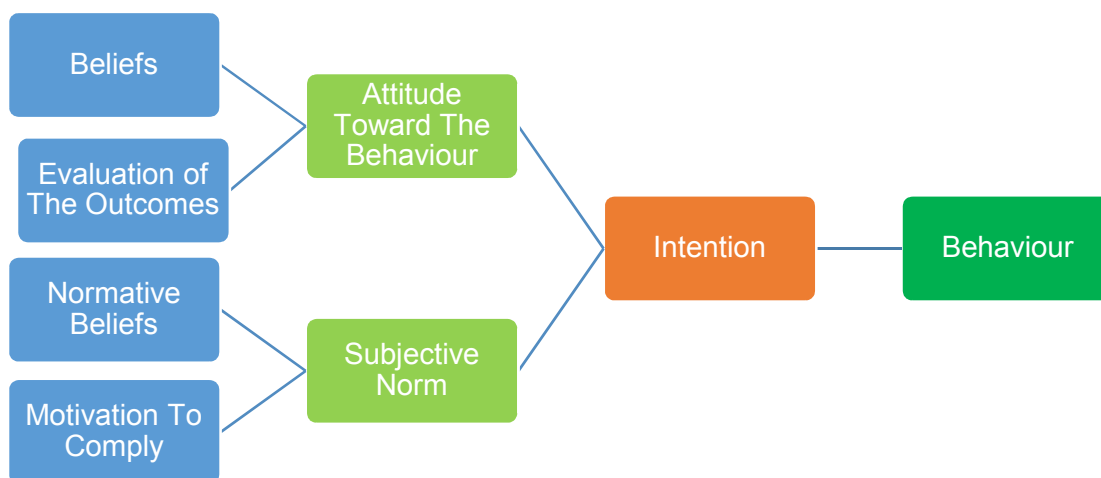
Spangenberg, Grohmann and Sprott (2005) suggested that shopping malls should elicit the consumers' sentiment during any festive seasons by creating an atmosphere relevant to the respective festivals. Similarly, Kotler (2001) believed that the shopping mall ambience produce greater effects on consumer behaviour compared to the products and services offered in the mall. The study also relates to the amount of time an individual spent in a mall as well as the frequency of an individual to engage in shopping. These individuals will be of great assistance to the research study as they would be able to comprehend the survey questions to a greater depth. Hence, optimal accuracy of the results can be obtained.

This study was fundamentally executed to explore beyond the various investigations of past researchers regarding the effects of shopping malls' ambiances towards consumer behaviour. The variables involved in this study include interior settings (colour, decorations and lighting), music, consumer density and employee engagement. Thus, it is of primary importance to identify that these elements play a role in attracting consumers to visit certain malls during the festive seasons as well as the aspects that influence an individual to stay longer in a particular mall. Hereinafter, the current research will be able to provide shopping mall management with the opportunity to enhance significant aspects of a mall ambience during upcoming festive seasons through the acquisition of reliable data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THEORY-OF-REASONED ACTION (TRA) MODEL

Figure 2-1 Theory of Reasoned Action Model



The theoretical framework was established based on the theory-of-reasoned action (TRA) which corresponds to the research topic. This theory model was developed by Martin

Fishbein and Icek Ajzen that explicates the attitude-behaviour relationship as illustrated in **Figure 2-1**. The TRA model denotes a comprehensive combination of the attitude elements that is constructed to provide better elucidation and prediction of individuals' behaviour (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Besides, Hale, Householder, and Greene (2002) also explained that it is necessary to first discern the individuals' behaviour intention to predict their volitional behaviour in the TRA model. The authors further mentioned that a person's behavioural intention can be determined by the results of two components, namely the individual's attitude towards performing the behaviour as well as the subjective norms.

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), attitude refers to an individual's noticeable favourable or unfavourable orientation towards performing the behaviour. This theory stated that an individual's attitude towards his or her behaviour is determined by a combination of an assessment of the individual's belief concerning the outcome arising from the behaviour and evaluation of the outcome of that behaviour to be judged in either a positive or negative way (Hale, et al., 2002).

Secondly, the subjective norm can be defined as the perceived influence that an individual received based on other individual's perceptions, social pressure or beliefs (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Apart from that, a subjective norm comprises of the normative beliefs where the influence of other referents is significant on an individual's perception and expectation to perform his or her behaviour as well as the individuals' motivation to comply with the desire of these referents (Chiou, 1998)

2.2 APPROACH-AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOUR OF THE SHOPPER

The atmospheric effects measure the dependent variable of the approach-avoidance behaviour in this research proposal. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggested that this model is based on all responses towards the environment encompassing four aspects as follows:

1. The desire to physically stay (approach) or leave (avoid) the environment.
2. The desire and willingness to explore the environment (approach) against the propensity to avoid interacting or moving through the environment as well as the propensity to remain inanimate in the surrounding environment (avoidance).
3. The desire and willingness to communicate with others in the environment (approach) against the propensity to avoid communications with others or to ignore interaction attempts from others (avoidance).
4. The degree of enhancement (approach) or hindrance (avoidance) regarding the performance and satisfaction with the required task performances.

The approach-avoidance behaviour also comprises three emotional states in response to the environment, namely pleasure (P), arousal (A) and dominance (D) (Turley and Milliman, 2000; Turley, et al., 2002; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Bohl, 2012). Urban consumers are constantly evaluating the ambient quality and the extent of stimuli experienced during shopping which relates to the scenario of the research (Rajagopal, 2011). The author further suggested that higher levels of approach are apparent in a congruent environment while the avoidance behaviour is exhibited in a less conducive environment.

The ambience of a shopping mall is governed by factors such as consumer density (Turley, et al., 2000). Ryu and Jang (2008) stated that background music is a contributing factor to an individual's impression on the environment. The authors also attributed the increase in awareness towards the interior settings in a mall. Furthermore, they stated that employees'

engagement with the consumers will ultimately influence the level of the consumers' pleasantness and arousability.

2.3 INTERIOR SETTINGS

Interior settings play a predominant role in affecting consumers to visit the mall. According to Berman and Evans (1995), interior settings fall under the category of general interior variables which include flooring, lighting, scents and sounds, temperature, cleanliness, wall textures and colour usage. However, the study is emphasising on lightings, colour schemes and décors in the shopping malls.

Grossman and Wisenblit (1999) discovered that consumers often follow the norms of their colour choices based on the associations developed through experience. Hence, it is mandatory for the marketers to understand the factors that influence consumers' colour decisions. Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg (2000) argued that the shopping mall ambience such as appropriate colours and lightings will attract customers to the mall.

Besides, the results obtained from Wakefield and Baker's (1998) field study illustrated that environmental factors such as designs and décors portray a significant relationship to the excitement and desire of the customers to linger in the shopping mall. Researchers assumed that interior settings in the mall will develop positive relationship towards consumers' behaviour. Therefore, a hypothesis will be tested in order to examine the validity of this variable.

H₁: There is a relationship between interior settings and customer behaviour

2.4 MUSIC

Music is another ambient factor in the shopping mall that affects the consumers' approach-avoidance behaviour. This is supported by Wakefield, et al. (1998) where it was stated that music played in the shopping mall induce a positive influence on the consumer's desire to stay longer in the mall which is attributed to their positive perception of the mall environment. Besides, the introduction of Christmas music was found to be an effective practice that captures consumers' attention to visit their stores as music is believed to evoke the feeling of Christmas spirit and season (Spangenberg, et al., 2005).

Likewise, Eroglu, Machleit and Chebat (2005) discovered that the effects of music tempo had an effect on the approach-avoidance tendency towards the store as well as the extent to which customers explore the store environment. Moreover, Yalch and Spangenberg (1988) stated that younger shoppers who were exposed to the background music tend to spend more time to shop while older shoppers showed similar tendency in the presence of foreground music.

Research study concerning the effect of music ambient is also discovered in the dine setting and supermarket. Milliman (1986) discovered that the behaviour of patrons were affected by soothing background music whereby patrons are likely to spend more time in the restaurant in the presence of slow-tempo music whilst Herrington's (1996) research study provided that the customers' music preference regardless of the music tempo and/or volume also played an important role to influence the amount of time customers spent in the supermarket.

Music ambience was found to affect consumers' behaviour from previous researches. However, it is essential to perform further research and analysis to verify that music significantly influences consumer behaviour. Therefore, a hypothesis will be examined to test the validity of this variable.

H₂: There is a relationship between music and consumers behaviour.

An individual's gender serves as a moderating factor that alters the impact of music ambience on the consumer's behaviour. Similar environmental dimension in general would affect males and females to respond in a different way (Mehrabian, et al., 1974). Besides, Yalch and Spangenberg (1993) argued the store was seen to be more mature for the female shoppers when background music was played whereas male shoppers discerned the store to be more mature when foreground music was played. In addition, Peretti and Swenson (1974) explained that there were significant distinction between female and male in giving responses to the music. The effects of music are more consistent among female responses as the diminution in anxiety levels for females are greater than that of males. All of the aforementioned research studies suggested that gender has a considerable impact as a moderating effect between music and the consumer behaviour. Thus, this will lead to our third hypothesis.

H₃: Gender has moderating effect between music and consumers' behaviour.

2.5 CONSUMER DENSITY

According to Machleit, Kellaris and Eroglu (1994), consumer density was shown to be a critical element in affecting consumers' behaviour. Likewise, Hui and Bateson (1991) also discovered that high levels of consumer density would lead to negative shopping experience among the shoppers due to limited space.

Besides, consumer density will have greater negative effect on shopping satisfaction for consumers with lower tolerance level for crowds (Machleit, Eroglu and Mantel, 2000). However, consumer density produces both positive and negative behavioural effect towards consumers depending on the settings (Hui, et al., 1991). For instance, high level of consumer density affects shopping satisfaction positively in a discount-type store whereas consumer density is negatively correlated with satisfaction in an upscale store (Machleit, et al., 2000). Therefore, it may be speculated that consumer density imposes a crucial impact on consumer behaviour which then leads to the fourth hypothesis.

H₄: There is a relationship between consumer density and consumer behaviour.

2.6 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement is described as an individual's passion and the commitment in his or her job (Ariani, 2012). The employee's behaviour and the way their duties are conducted will influence the customers' behaviour in the mall (Turley, et al., 2002). Besides, retail employees play a role in affecting shoppers' satisfaction level (Turley, et al., 2000). Correspondingly, it was stated that shopping mall management must provide optimal security and cleanliness services to achieve shoppers' satisfactory level (Kimani, Kagira, Kendi, Wawire and Fourier, 2012; Khairul, 2013)

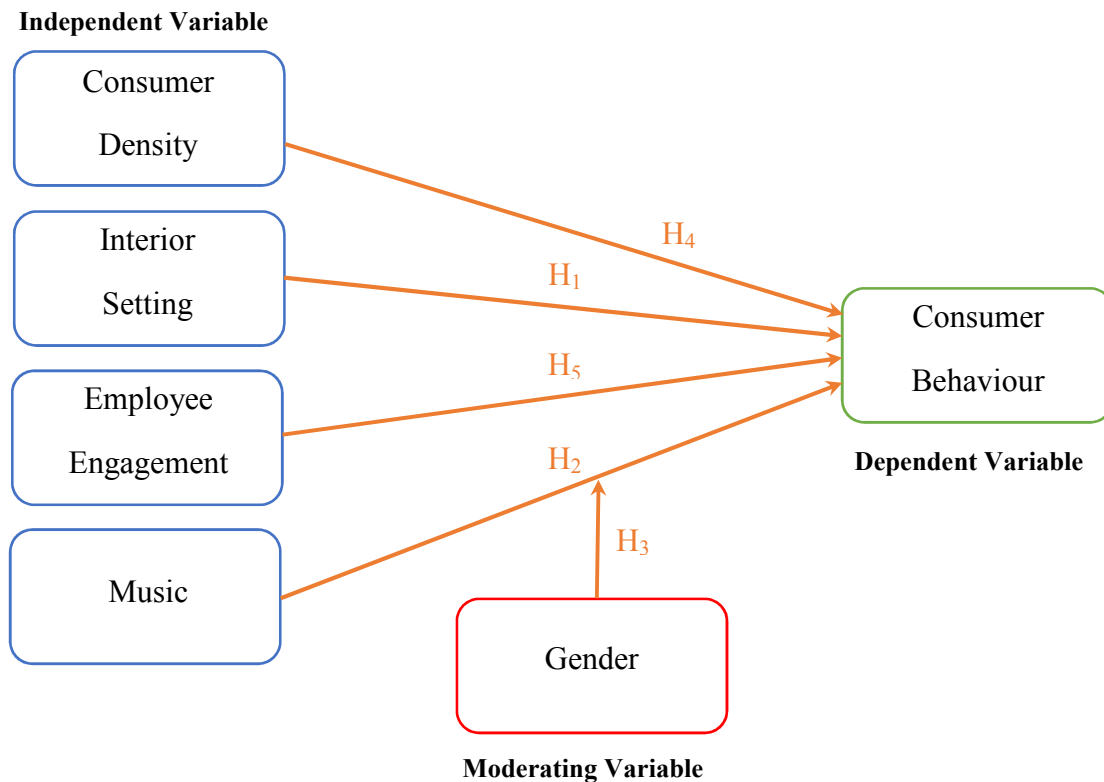
According Kimani, et al. (2012), the attitude of an employee which includes friendliness and helpfulness will determine the consumer's store selection. Thus, it evokes a positive vibrant between the consumers and employees. Furthermore, the research conducted by Merrilees and Birch (2003) also suggested that the services provided in the shopping centre are confined with the employee's knowledge, sociability and courteousness. Moreover, the appearance and the professionalism of the employee will affect the customer's provenance and satisfaction (Bitner, 1990).

The impact of employee services on consumers' shopping behaviour is evident based on the findings from previous studies as discussed. However, a hypothesis is necessary to verify this theory.

H₅: There is a relationship between employee engagement and consumer behaviour.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 2-2 Theoretical Framework



As shown in Figure 2-2, the relationship between the independent and dependant variables in this research study are in accordance to the TRA model explained previously. The independent variables which are music, interior setting and consumers' density represent the attitude of an individual towards performing the behaviour whilst employment engagement represents the subjective norm. These independent variables are able to affect the individual's approach-avoidance behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING DESIGN

Convenience sampling was used in this research to select the appropriate target population which consists of the male and female respondents. The sample population that was chosen includes the shoppers in Malaysia. The quantitative method involved the equal distribution of 300 questionnaires to 150 males and 150 females shoppers respectively in Sunway Pyramid Shopping Centre to correspond with the gender moderating effects aforementioned. These shoppers would represent other shoppers in other shopping malls in Malaysia. Besides, permission to distribute the questionnaires was granted by Sunway Pyramid Centre Management Office prior to commencing the research within the specific areas provided in the shopping mall.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Primary and secondary data are collected for the purpose of this research study. The secondary data is first collected, used and compiled in the literature review to clarify the research problem and discover the independent variables that would affect consumer behaviour in the mall during Christmas. Next, primary data is collected from both quantitative and qualitative data. Firstly, quantitative data is obtained through questionnaire and thus the pilot test is essential to be conducted before the distribution of the actual questionnaire. The pilot test was conducted twice in Sunway University and Sunway Pyramid Mall by selecting a total sample of 50 respondents comprising of 25 males and 25 females. Such distribution is crucial as gender is the moderating factor between music ambience and consumer behaviour. Ultimately, the actual questionnaires were distributed to 300 respondents with the aim that the generalised results can be concluded to validate our findings from the secondary research. Hence, these data will be analysed by a set of statistical tools to test the hypotheses.

3.3 INSTRUMENT DESIGN

Table 3-1: List of Instrument Adapted

Sections	Variables	Description	Sources
Part A	-	General Information	-
Part B	Interior Settings		Wakefield, et al. (1998)
Part C	Music		Obermiller (1985); North, Hargreaves and McKendrick (1999); Ramos (1993); Wakefield, et al. (1998); Spangenberg, et al. (2005); Herrington, et al. (1996)
Part D	Consumer Density		-
Part E	Employee Engagement		Ahmad (2012); Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991); Wakefield, et al. (1998)
Part F	Consumer Behaviour		Mehrabian, et al. (1974); Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994)
Part G	-	Demographic	-

3.4 FACTOR ANALYSIS AND RELIABILITY OF MEASURE

Table 3-2 Original Variables from Theoretical Framework

Variables	Variables Description
IS1 to IS5	Interior Settings
M1 to M9	Music
CD	Consumer Density
EE1 to EE8	Employee Engagement
CB1 to CB7¹	Consumer Behaviour

1. Consumer Behaviour is the dependant variable and thus, it is not subjective to factor analysis

The original variables from the instrument were listed in Table 3-2 and they were reduced to 3 through Varimax Rotation in factor analysis which is shown in Table 3-3. The result of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 0.814 and the KMO is below 0.05 which shows that the variables are significant.

Table 3-3 New Variables after Varimax Rotation in Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests

Variables	No. of Items	Item Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Interior Settings (IS)	5	IS1, IS2, IS3, IS4, IS5	0.856
Music (M)	4	M1, M2, M3, M5	0.793
Employee Engagement (EE)	8	EE1, EE2, EE3, EE4, EE5, EE6, EE7, EE8	0.836
Consumer Behaviour¹	7	CB1, CB2, CB3, CB4, CB5, CB6, CB7	0.906

1. Consumer Behaviour is the dependant variable and thus, it is not subjected to factor analysis

Several variables from the original instrument are excluded because they are low loading (<0.4). The researchers had tested the reliability of the new constructs and they are acceptable. The Cronbach's Alpha of all the new constructs are above 0.5 which is shown in Table 3-3.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

4.1 RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Table 4-1: Respondents Profile with Mean Interior Settings, Music, Consumer Density,, Employee Engagement and Consumer Behaviour

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR	GENDER	
	MALE	FEMALE
Frequency	150	150
%	50.0	50.0
Interior Settings	5.07	5.14
Music	4.37	4.69
Consumer Density	14.90	12.21
Employee Engagement	4.55	4.51
Consumer Behaviour	4.73	5.01

The male and female respondents are distributed equally in all of the 300 available data. Table 4-1 illustrates the demographic breakdown of the respondents along with the interior settings, music, employee engagement, and consumer behaviour (rated as 1 - extremely disagree to 7 - extremely agree) as well as consumer density (amount of people surrounding).

It can be seen from Table 4-1 that both genders have agreed that all of the variables affected their shopping behaviour at the mall. However, the atmospheric effects of the mall affected more towards the female respondents as their overall mean for most of the variables are higher compared to male respondents.

4.2 REGRESSION

Table 4-2: Model Summary for Dependant Variable (Consumer Behaviour)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
.567 ¹	.322	.312	.90137	2.047

2. Predictors: (Constant), CD, EE, M, IS

As depicted in Table 4-2, the R square value of 0.322 attains a 32.2% of variation in consumer behaviour denoted by variables consisting of consumer density, employment engagement, music and interior settings. The R square value is below the acceptable percentage of 50% because there may be misrepresentation of instrument or misspecification of the model. However, a Durbin-Watson value of 2.047 is demonstrated and it is within the acceptable range of ± 2 .

Table 4-3: ANOVA for Dependant Variable (Consumer Behaviour)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	113.642	4	28.410	34.968	.000 ¹
Residual	239.678	295	812		
Total	353.320	299			

1. Predictors: (Constant), CD, EE, M, IS

This table shows that the regression model is significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 4-4: Regression Results for Interior Settings, Music, Consumer Density and Employee Engagement with Consumer Behaviour

Hypotheses	t-stats	Sig.	Decision
EE → CB	4.918	$p < 0.01$	Supported
IS → CB	4.857	$p < 0.01$	Supported
M → CB	3.449	$p < 0.01$	Supported
CD → CB	0.422	$p > 0.05$	Not Supported

The relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable is:

$$\text{Consumer Behaviour} = 1.073 + 0.289 \text{ Interior Settings} + 0.155 \text{ Music} + 0.350 \text{ Employment Engagement} + 0.002 \text{ Consumer Density}$$

4.3 MODERATION

Figure 4-1: Gender as the Moderating Variable in the Relationship between Music and Consumer Behaviour

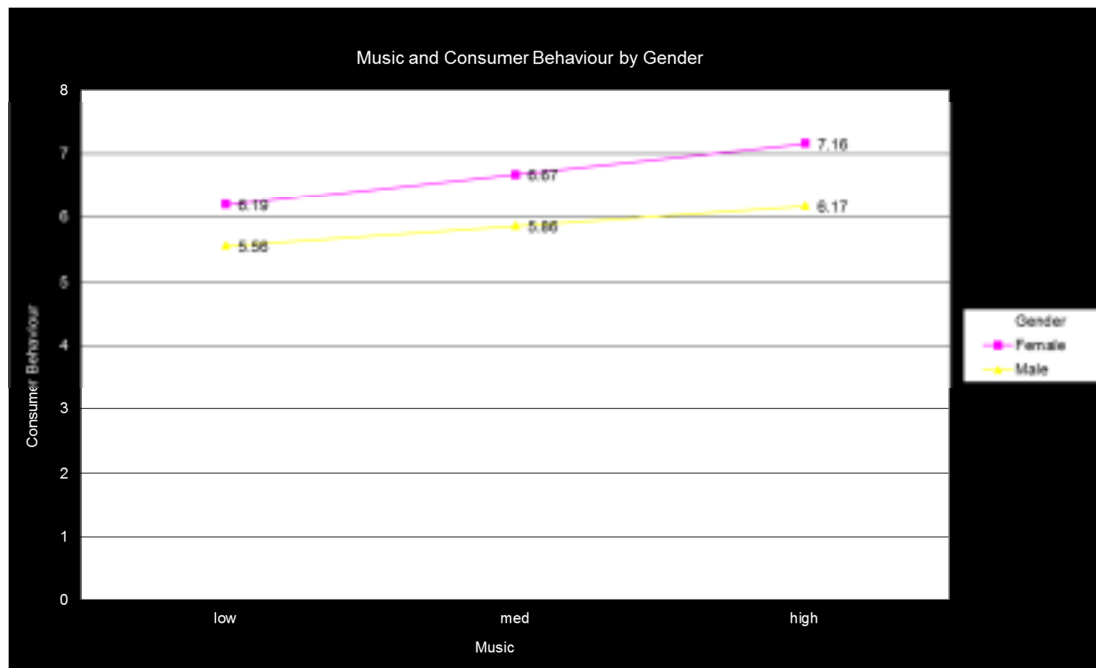


Table 4-5: Slope Summary for Figure 4-1

Gender	Simple Slope	t-value	Sig.
Female	0.381	5.3882	$p < 0.01$
Male	0.242	3.8264	$p < 0.01$

To perceive a greater understanding on consumer approach-avoidance behaviour, music was tested to check whether its relationship with consumer behaviour is moderated by gender. As illustrated in Figure 4-1 and Table 4-5, a significant slope is evident which implies the presence of gender moderating effect between music and consumer behaviour. Hence, H₃ is accepted.

CONCLUSION

STUDY DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interior settings, music, and employee engagement show significant positive relationships with consumer behaviour. The industry should recognise the role of interior settings towards the consumers' sentiment. Hence, prospective shopping malls may want to nurture an environment according to the predilection of consumers. Significantly, the findings derived from the influence of music on consumer behaviour are partially influenced by the moderation effect in terms of gender variation. This analysis enables active growing companies to identify the music preference of consumers, followed by the implementation of changes to accommodate the favours in hope for an enhanced psychological perception. The accessibility in acquiring information from various parts of the mall and employee engagement is precursor for a satisfactory experience among the consumers. Therefore, managers could introduce service desk at strategic corners of the mall to assist inquiries directed from the consumers.

This is contrasted by the non-significant relationship between consumer density and consumer behaviour. This is an interesting finding as it indicates that shoppers do not necessarily enjoy shopping in crowded spaces especially during festive season. They would prefer to shop during off peak hours for their Christmas shopping. Nevertheless, managers could introduce environmental designs to alter the shopping mall image further that will induce a constructive psychological effect among the consumers whilst shopping in a shopping mall.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Research within the shopping mall experience is still scarce as many more shopping malls continue to mushroom within the vicinity of Klang Valley. However, most of these shopping malls experience a shortage of parking spaces especially during the festive seasons. This research showed a low percentage for R-Square and may have not included atmospheric variables such as parking availability (Turley, et al., 2000). Future research could include this variable as an important element to determine the pull factor for consumers to the shopping malls. The other limitation was that the entire research focused on data collection on a single shopping mall in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Hence, the findings may not be representative of all the shoppers in Malaysia in general. Therefore, researching other malls in Malaysia is required to examine the validity and reliability of the malls' atmospheric effects towards consumer behaviour. .

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