

Influence of Visual Merchandising on Buying Behavior of Consumers in Gwalior

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Abstract

Constructive merchandising is the art of creating Visual displays and arranging merchandise collection within a store to improve the overall presentation to increase growth, sales, and profitability of the business. Visual Merchandiser helps to attract the consumers, towards the displayed products and persuade them to buy that product and improves the shopping experience for customers by delivering the right message about the merchandise and presenting it in a unique way. Dedication to design and creativity are essential to be a good Visual Merchandiser. The study was initiated in Gwalior to determine the important aspects of visual merchandising, which influence consumer buying behavior and in-store promotion activities. Questionnaires regarding visual merchandising were given to the consumer to take their views which are filled by the customers visiting the retail stores present at different locations in Gwalior. A various visual merchandising approach like graphics and signage, fixtures, props, lighting and space management were considered and study their impact on the purchasing approach of the consumers. The study also tried to explain the relationship between impulse buying and visual merchandising. Through this research, we will be able to see that whether visual merchandising can pull more consumers, increase the traffic of the customer in the store, which ultimately would increase the sales figures and profitability of business.

Keywords- Merchandising, Space Management, Promotion, Retail Management

I. Introduction to Visual Merchandising

As we know the Visual merchandise is a kind of a presentation of a store and its merchandise in such a manner that will grab the attention of potential buyers. It includes decorating the store with the proper theme or according to the merchandise requirement and the interior presentation the same as what is promised on the outside of the store. The end purpose of visual merchandise is for assistance in making a sale. Visual merchandise presents an image of whom or what the buyer can be when using the merchandise displayed. It enables in converting a walk by window shopper into a walk-in consumer. Visual merchandise requires a combination of skills including creativity, artistic, cleverness, imagination, knowledge and understanding of store design. Color plays a very important role towards the attraction point in converting potential shoppers into permanent customers. The use and handling of attractive sales and displays and retail floor plan to engage the customers and raise the sales activity in visual merchandising, the products being sold are generally displayed in such a way as to attract customers from the intended market by drawing attention to the products best feature, benefits and durability. The importance of VM is an essential way of connection to the retailer and manufacturer is derived basically from the demand of the consumer.

II. Objectives of Visual Merchandizing

The most important objective for visual merchandising is a greed to attract consumers towards the store in order to sell the merchandise. VM is a technique which is commonly and rightly called 'Silent Salesman' and is widely used in the market to increase, footfalls and attract buyers and make shopping an enjoyable experience to one and all. This is achieved by creating an environment not only to attract a customer, but also retain his/her interest, create desire and finally boost the selling process.

- a. Visual merchandising completely helps to promote fashion merchandise.
- b. It helps to create an eye-catching product display and store layouts for retail outlets and shops.
- c. It helps to get an exclusive position for a company or fashion brand.
- d. It helps to promote the overall retail store image in costumer's mind.
- e. It helps to show merchandise collection easily.

III. TOOLS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Broadly these comprise of:

Fixtures- Fixtures are used to display the merchandise products.

Props- Props are the essential part of a display. A prop is something which is used with a product to enhance, to tell a story or to make a complete theme in a display.

Lighting- Light is one of the most effective, but trickiest parts in the Visual Merchandising world.

Signage- Signage helps the customers to easily reach their desired destination.

Promotional signage- This signage is used to tell the offer price, events or special occasions sale of the product.

Location signage- For direction to the specific department, which customer wants to buy.

Institutional Signage- Signs for the store policies. For example-Return Policy, Refund Policy, etc.

Informational signage- For product related benefits, features, price etc.

Consumer Behavior: Consumer behavior research is the scientific study of the processes consumers use to select, secure, use and dispose of products and services that satisfy their needs. Knowledge of consumer behavior directly affects marketing strategy (Anderson, 2005). Firms can satisfy those needs only to the extent that they understand their customers. For this reason, marketing strategies must incorporate knowledge of consumer behavior in every facet of a strategic marketing plan (Solomon, 2002). According to **Engel, Blackwell, and Mansard**, 'consumer behavior is the actions and decision processes of people who purchase goods and services for personal consumption'. According to **Louden and Bitta**, 'consumer behavior is the decision process and physical activity, which individuals engage in when evaluating, acquiring, using or disposing of goods and services'.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kotler (1973) indicated that one of the most significant features of the total product is the place from where it is bought. In some cases, the place, the ambience more specifically the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the merchandise itself in the buying decision. In most of the cases, the atmosphere is the primary product. The paper emphasizes that the VM is not practiced 'as consciously and skillfully some retailers now use price, advertising, personal selling, public relations, media and other tools of marketing.

Mills, Paul and Moorman (1995) defined visual merchandising as "the presentation of a store and its merchandise to the customer and potential buyer through the teamwork of the store's staff members and also through advertising, display, special events, fashion coordination, and merchandising departments in order to sell the goods and services offered by the store/outlet".

McGoldrick suggests that in his book "**Retail Marketing**" that Visual Merchandising is "one of the visible elements of positioning strategy."

Berretto Anton (2007) in the article "**Tricks of the Trade**" points out in visual merchandising when the basic components of store design used effectively like - color, texture, light and music – which can enhance store appeal, it also attracts a potential buyer to touch the product and make a mind to buy the product.

Bhalla and Anurag (2009) explain Visual merchandising as the presentation of any merchandise at its best, color coordinated (synchronized colors), accessorized (related products/ props) and self-explanatory (vivid/illustrative). It is one of the concluded stages in the process of setting up of a retail store/outlet which customers would find attractive and appealing.

Andrew. j. Newmen and Peter Cullen (2007) in his book '**Retail Environment and Operation**' defines **merchandise** as one who targets the right people, with the right merchandise at the right time at the right place. The right people are retail consumer's one wish to target. The right place means that the store must have a suitable quantity of floor space and appropriate merchandise for the area it is located in. According to them, when we think about the function of merchandising in a retail store we tend to forget about all the efforts required in choosing and sourcing the products and services to be displayed. Merchandising is not just about laying out merchandise or product on shelves. It is concerned with all the important aspects like planning,

sourcing, buying and arranging of these products and services. So, one can say that the term '**Merchandising**' is used to describe many aspects of the planning and presenting of stock. It also refers to the intermediary stages, which the products pass through from the initial source to the end customers. These stages are: Planning, sourcing, buying, arranging, displaying and space management of products or services. It is the coordination of these and other functions that make for a successful retail business. Merchandising is much needed for most types of product and services.

Gibson G. Vedamani, in his book on Retail Management states that Visual Merchandising is needed and its importance is felt in today's retail industry as the primary purpose of merchandising is a presentation of products or merchandise in a way that causes them to be sold instantly, and at the highest possible retail margin. Secondly, the visual persuasion that charms the customer results in add-on sales. The third and one of the important role of merchandising is the creation of the merchant's individual retail image which relates directly to the living and lifestyle of the community and the consumer. The targeted result of the activity of VM is ongoing sales and customer faith. Gibson also states that visual Merchandisers face three challenges while designing the store.

- a. **The first challenge** is to maintain the store atmosphere consistent with the store image.
- b. The **second challenge** is to influence customer buying decisions and activities with the help of store layout, store atmosphere, and space-planning.
- c. The **third challenge** is to consider the costs associated with each store design element versus the value received in terms of higher sales and profits. For example, the free-form design found in many boutiques is much costlier than rows of gondolas in a discount store (Gondolas are a four-sided shelving cum display cum selling unit, often movable, used on the retail floor as part of the merchandise fixtures). Also, custom wood fixtures are also more expensive than wire racks. Visual merchandiser must be aware of the financial consequences of any store layout decision.

V. AIM OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted with the following aims:

- To find out the outcome of visual merchandising on buying behavior of consumers.
- To find out the important factors of visual merchandising influencing consumers' buying behavior and in-store and outlet promotional activities.

Sampling Size

Sample Size: 150, Customers visiting the stores present at different locations in Gwalior.

Data Source

Both secondary data and primary data were used for the information generation. The assumptions were drawn mainly from the primary source.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Place of Purchase: it was found during the survey that 32 percent of the customers purchased apparels from malls while 22 percent customers preferred to buy their garments from brand outlets because they want to stick with some specific brands. It was also found that 24 percent customers bought from supermarkets in comparison to 22 percent who preferred to buy apparels from ordinary retailers. Hence revealing malls as the most desired shopping destinations these days, as these malls have a good ambiance, nice crowd, security, variety, food court and above all these malls provides customers with a great shopping experience.

Time of Purchase: The research identified that a maximum number of respondents (77 %) preferred to shop in the evening as its time when they are free from their job and can devote time to their families. Whereas the majority of the housewife's and non-working females (17%) preferred to shop in the morning and 6% customers shopped in the afternoon.

Expenses on Purchase of Apparels/Garments: As we know in today's time people feel shopping as a medium of outing and best utilization of time in their free time or on weekends and this was revealed when it was found 52 % of customers, 15-25 % of their total monthly expenditure on shopping are for apparels while 22 % customers are in the category who spend less than 10 %. For another 11 % of customers, 23-42 % of their total monthly expenditure of shopping is contributed to purchase of apparels and for the remaining 15%, it is more than 35 %. This shows that people are ready to spend a handsome amount of their monthly income on shopping of apparels/garments or other items of their use. This indicates that the people's buying power is increasing and so does the disposable income.

People like to visit an Organized Retail Outlet: People told many reasons for visiting retail outlets like better quality, lots of different varieties, appealing ambiance, attractive discounts. 46 % of the respondents felt the ambiance and the store environment was their main cause of visiting the retail outlet followed by 28%

consumers who visit an organized retail outlet because they get better quality products and lots of varieties and different brands under the one roof. Promotional Schemes like attractive discount offers, buy one get one free, buy two get the third one completely free, coupons were also the reason for the star attraction by 26 % of the respondents.

Elements Affecting Purchase of Apparels: During the study, six important factors (quality, price, variety, design, discounts and visual merchandising) affecting the purchase of apparels have been identified. The survey clearly shows that 76% of customers feel that quality is a very important element affecting the purchase of apparels. 24% of customers said that visual merchandising is a very important element in the purchase of apparels. Therefore, it is an indication to the retailers that they can increase the footfalls in their stores by focusing on the art of visual merchandising hence proving the saying visual merchandising acts as a silent salesman. Visual merchandising is an important element which attracts the customers towards the store.

Attention Paid to Displays and Signage: It was found in the research that 94 % of the people when enters the retail store first they spot all the displays and signage available in the store. The display window displays are ways to grasp the customer's attention and drag them towards the retail store. One thing always should be kept in mind by the retailer that the consumers just spent a few seconds at the display so it becomes important for the retailer to put such a display that will attract and grab the customer or force the customer to visit the store or deliver the required information to the consumers. Very few people only 6% do not pay any attention to displays or signage.

A shift towards Change – Try New Garments: It was analyses of a survey that 82 percent of consumers said that they would try new Garments which are on display while 18 percent do not try and prefer their usual garments for which they have come to the store. Since, a larger part of customers tends to adapt, change, therefore; the retailers can make use of this opportunity to display new products or ranges in a different manner on display. They can make use of effective visual merchandising techniques and can attract customers to buy new apparels.

Displays Draw More Attention: 95 percent of peoples felt that those things which are on display grab more attention of the buyer as compared to the ones which are stacked in the stores. People during shopping give lots of attention to the in-store from and what is displayed on the dummies. Thus, the display on the manikin should be attractive as the buyer gets a fair of what should they buy only after looking at the display. Maybe the retailer has many challengers in the market, but the winner is one who has a good display, which as a way of attracting the customer towards your store and once he is in then it is a salesman's skill which will work to make an effective sale. Hence the important step is to bring the customer to the store and this is possible by attractive displays.

Customers point of view for Choosing a Store: As said in the above point, there are many challenges present in the market who are selling the same product. The survey says 42% customers feel that better quality is the main reason for choosing a particular store. Other, 35% customers said that attractive offers and discounts are the main factors which help them to take a decision which store to choose. Store environment/ visual merchandising 23% are the prime reasons for visiting a store. According to survey visual merchandising is not the prime reasons, but that does not mean retailers can ignore on this, in fact, the retailers should the strategy of combining visual merchandising with quality products thereby increasing their market percentage.

Association of Color, Lighting, Ambience and Attractive Visuals with Time Spent by the customers in Store: 88 % of the costumers felt that color, lighting, ambience and attractive visuals make them spend more time in store while 12% customers feel that various aspects of visual merchandising do not have any association with the time spent in the stores. These results clearly tell that in general, stores that are brightly lit, with the lights cleverly merge with the interiors lead to higher customer comfort, and as such, more sales. The impact of Good Interiors, exteriors and Display on Buying Behavior: 83% of customers feel that good interiors, exteriors and display affect their buying behavior and encourage to shop more. The reason behind this is that once customers walk in, it is but crucial to ensure that they enjoy their first encounter with the store. After all, repeat visits will only possible if a customer's first visit is a memorable one. The sensible arrangement of counters, with clear passageways, allows for easy access to merchandise. Remaining 17% said that their buying behavior is not affected by good interiors, exteriors, and display.

Relation of Visual Merchandising and Marketing of Product: The research indicated that 87% of customers feel that by applying effective visual merchandising techniques the company can market their product in a better way. The data illustrate that only 4% of customers said that effective visual merchandising has no effect on the marketing of products. The remaining 9% said that they had no idea regarding the effect of visual merchandising to marketing of products.

The impact of Visuals and Display of Apparels on Final Buying Decision: The survey indicates 80% of buyers said that their final buying decision is affected by visuals and display of apparels while 20% customers said that the visuals and display have no effect on their final buying decision. Visual merchandising sets the background of the merchandise in an aesthetically pleasing fashion, presenting them in a way that would convert the window shoppers into anticipation and ultimate buyers of the merchandise. Various tools of visual merchandising like graphics and signage, window display, manikin, and lighting can be effectively used to influence the final buying decision.

Relevance between Visual Merchandising and Impulse Buying: At the time of the study, it was found that 69% buyers said that effective visual merchandising lead to impulsive buying. Remaining 31% of customers said that visual merchandising does lead to impulsive buying. The retail setting, such as VM, therefore, can influence consumers' impulse buying by providing information or reminding needs and desires as well as producing positive feelings. At the stages of the impulse buying process, retailers can attempt to provoke customers' desire for the products, and the appreciation of the products, which can satisfy the desire and wants, can be achieved by browsing and being exposed to the encouragement, such as visual merchandising. The positive impulse buying experiences contribute to establishing store/outlet loyalty and consumer anticipation and satisfaction influences future buying decisions.

Findings

A most important finding is that the store developed as much of its identity, humor, and gravity from its physical outline, as from the products it houses and the individuals who manage the transactions therein. In addition, it was also analyzed that visual merchandising practices certainly influence consumers buying behavior. The research acknowledges that is a directly proportional relationship between customers' buying behavior and in-store form/mannequin display, promotional signage and window display. Through the research it was also found most of the company's main ideas on display is to show the exclusive trends and the new arrivals. It is observed that most people are enticed into buying the product looking at the shop's ambiance and visual display. Accordingly, retailers should put more efforts to create a creative, attractive and eye-catching window display providing information regarding new products, latest fashion trends, or coordination tips. Studies indicated that a retailer has hardly 7 to 9 seconds to grasp the attention of a passing customer. The following elements combine to form an extraordinary image that not only reaches out and grabs the customer's attention but also makes a positive impression within those precious seconds. The image builders are: an identifiable store name, a powerful visual trademark, an unmistakable storefront, an inviting entrance and a consistent and fascinating store look and hook. Since most of the tools of visual merchandising significantly influence consumers buying behavior, retailers should continually emphasize their usage to create favorable shopping environments to influence customers' both in-store responses and future store choice decisions. All things you do in the store must fit properly into the image you chose to create. Creation of an observed image that will be applied and communicated effectively through multiple media to get a customer recognition and loyalty

VII. SUGGESTIONS

- Windows display acts as an encouragement for the consumers to enter the store. It has lots of benefits like displaying best merchandise, providing information about exclusive arrivals and attracting price sensitive customers by displaying promotional merchandise in a good manner, therefore, retailers should put up an attractive and informative display in a unique way.
- Most of the customers are willing to purchase apparel from retail stores in the evening time and therefore, managers of the stores can pay special attention to make an attractive environment in the store premises and make a proper action to control the rush condition.
- Colors always play with the mind of costumers and create a psychological impact on the minds of the customers and can capture attention. They reflect one's moods and thus, add meaning. Therefore, color plays a vital role in creating a positive purchasing experience. Hence, retailers should be very careful at the time of selecting or choosing the color scheme at the time of building a store.
- A greater number of customers or we can say most of the consumers respond to the lighting more positively. They specially quoted that lighting helps to select correct products, cut down the time wasted and feel relaxed during the shopping outing. Therefore, Visual Merchandisers can select an appropriate lighting system that creates a proper satisfaction of the psychological needs of customers.
- As we know music is played in retail store not with the aim of providing entertainment but for influencing buying behavior. The type of the music played in the stores completely depends upon the products being sold and target audience. Therefore, the selection of the music to be played at the store and at what volume is some of the major challenges that retailers generally face because they make a great impact on buying behavior of customers. The soft and classic music is highly recommended than another type of music.

- There should be an appropriate relation between the season and the merchandise displayed in the store. The store environment should be warm, welcoming and friendly, giving a customer a memorable shopping experience. The Store should be classified logically like proper groups and categories of a product should be mentioned, so that all merchandise of one type, color, and size is positioned to together help the customer to make a clear and early choice. Visually appealing stores and outlets did help the respondents to create an image of the brand in the minds of the customers. Therefore, a customer will be loyal to that brand.
- Among the many features of the store like the lightening, display on the mannequins, interior, staff behavior, cleanliness was important to convert the window shoppers into the real and permanent buyers. The shop managers should always supervise these personally and purposely to increase the footfalls.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As we know Visual Merchandising as a 'Silent Salesperson', as its tools do not speak, but convey their sales messages through visual appeal. To fulfill the changing outlooks of today's customers, retailers need to place better emphasis on presentation of merchandise. Retailers must understand the importance of the buyer's expectations and provide the right environment to lure them. Visual Merchandising serves as a substantial influence on the retail experience and the buyer's decision-making process. It provides a competitive advantage and helps in building the overall image of the store or outlet. Meanwhile, a lot of retailers have started approving this concept, one should be innovative enough in Visual Merchandising to achieve healthier results. It was known from the study that VM has a direct relation to the sales performance. Because of Visual Merchandising, the consumers get attracted towards hence increasing the stores/outlet footfall, which ultimately has a positive impact on the sales statistics. The research also threw light on the fact that visual merchandising has the skill to invite people to enter the store and develop their buying behavior. The outcomes proved that there was relationship between customers' buying behavior and in-store form/manikin display, promotional signage and window display. The research also provided insights about types of visual merchandising that can stimulate customers' buying behaviors. Three most important factors of visual merchandising namely attractiveness of window display, innovative assortments and cleanliness, and neatness of store/outlet environment have been identified. Hence, Visual Merchandising has become the most important variable in the current situation.

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