

A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF CONSUMERS TOWARDS VISUAL MERCHANDISING OF BRANDED APPAREL IN GUJARAT RETAIL OUTLETS

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ABSTRACT

The current competitive scenario in all industries is characterised by significant cutthroat competition, and corporations and retailers are virtually always willing to pay for undifferentiated merchandise in the Postmodern Era. Retailers in the modern-day use merchandising as a means to set themselves apart from the competition, increase their visibility in the marketplace, and win over customers. Customers' impressions of the store will determine its fate. Consumers' propensity to spend extra time and money at a business is strongly influenced by first impressions of the store and its shopping environment. To this end, visual merchandising principles should be studied in depth. Visual merchandising strategically positions a company's products or brands near the checkout counter. Visual merchandising is widely acknowledged as an efficient method of selling products. This research aims to establish whether retailers' use of visual merchandising influences customers to make more impulsive purchases. Primary data collected from those being questioned formed the basis for this education. The study's target population consists of 250 consumers in Gujarat.

KEYWORDS: Retail, Visual Merchandise, Customer, Buying Behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

Visual merchandising (VM), often known as "visual presentation," effectively conveys a positive picture of a business and its products to potential buyers. Customers are informed, the store's or brand's reputation is bolstered, and additional sales are prompted by displaying complimentary items such as clothing and accessories in close proximity to one another. It stimulates purchases by bringing attention to services or products at a significant point in the buying procedure. It encompasses both indoor and outdoor displays, as well as window displays. A comprehensive visual merchandising plan will include storefronts with decorative glass, signs in various colours, innovative window displays, an inviting atmosphere with ample lighting and luxurious carpeting, and vividly painted walls. While it is most commonly linked with stores, it is also used by other industries to promote their products and services.

Retailers of all sizes, from supercenters to boutiques, have caught on to the fact that these establishments are popular meeting spots for young people. There is a rapidly expanding middle class in India, making it well on its way to becoming a consumer-driven society. The "Consumer is the King" tenet of Mahatma Gandhi must serve as our compass here. Even the most dedicated consumer can benefit from the social aspects of mall hopping, window shopping, ostentatious consumption, eating out and travelling and shopping in groups. Modern Indian consumers expect service, product quality, and store ambience on par with those found in other developed countries. Given this development, virtual reality (VR) is quickly becoming a popular and well-paid career choice in India.

1.1 TOOLS AND PROCEDURES USED FOR VISUAL MERCHANDISING

"visual merchandising" refers to any method used to improve a store's interior appearance. It's a crucial last step in creating an inviting retail space for customers. Lighting, colour, product information, sensory inputs (include touch, sound and scent), space and technology like interactive installations and digital displays and are just some of the components visual merchandisers can use when designing exhibits.

“Plan-o-gram”

These recommendations stem from a Visual Plan. A photograph, sketch, or graphic rendering of the real display makes up the visual plan. Plan-o-gram is another name for this diagrammatic representation. It is only a depiction that shows how your products will be displayed on the walls, shelves, and other equipment. The idea is straightforward but potent because it draws from studies of consumers' preferences. When making a plan-o-

gram, a store must think carefully about how many of each item to stock and where to put it. More sales can be generated via an efficient store layout than a costly advertising effort.

“Window Displays”

Seasonal sales and other promotions can be promoted through storefront display windows. Storefront windows often attract customers' gaze for three to five seconds. Examples of props include mannequins, themed products and accessories, and other items used in window displays. In the field of Visual Merchandising, mannequins are the most ubiquitous of all fashion accessories. Abstract, articulated, custom, ethnic, headless, and junior are just some of the many varieties available today.

“Colours”

Color is a potent instrument in the field of Visual Merchandising. When setting up a store display, it's important for the store owner to choose colours that complement the overall theme. The correct use of colour in the display items can greatly increase the number of clients converted from browsers. Black is a necessary component of every Halloween-themed décor. A red, pink, and white colour scheme is ideal for a Valentine's Day celebration. Pinks and blues in pastel tones are ideal for a baby accessories display. Red, green, gold, and silver are the traditional Christmas colours.

“Display Themes to Support the Product”

For example, if you want to sell kitchen accessories, you could set up a display with items from that category together. People's imaginations are piqued by their potential for becoming romantic, wild, or arbitrary. A customer who is already in the shopping mood will be drawn in by a well-executed theme. The retail store's ability to think creatively and imaginatively will determine most themes. The key to a good window display is not spending a lot of money on materials, but rather focusing on the right theme.

“Store Layout or Floor Plan”

Products that can only be experienced through direct physical contact are given easy access. All products that are likely to be purchased on impulse are prominently displayed so that buyers can easily locate and purchase them. It has also been noted that upon entering a room, a person's gaze travels in a Z pattern. Decorating the far left corner of the room tastefully can help direct a shopper's gaze and keep them engaged in what they're seeing.

“Illumination and Lighting”

Lots of studies have looked at how different lighting schemes affect shoppers' decisions to buy. The findings show that customers are more at ease and businesses do better when the lighting is well thought out to complement the interior design. In the summer, bluish lights are employed to provide a feeling of cool comfort on the ladies' floor, but all year round, the lighting is kept dim. Crystal and jewellery, for example, benefit greatly from the strategic use of spotlights. The right illumination has been shown to boost sales by as much as 20%. Having well-placed lights is essential in retail, as they assist customers form a favourable image of the products and the store itself.

“Signage”

Customers can navigate the store with ease thanks to the well-defined divisions and the accompanying signage that informs them exactly what is available where. Because different brands appeal to different people in different ways, brand signage is also displayed within the product categories to help shoppers locate their preferred brands quickly and simply.

1.2 VISUAL MERCHANDISING RELATED TO IMPULSE BUYING

Visual merchandising is "the presentation of a store/brand and its merchandise to the customer through the teamwork of the store's advertising, display, special events, fashion coordination, and merchandising departments in order to sell the goods and services offered by the store/company," as defined by Business Dictionary.

An integral part of the impulse-buying procedure, in-store glancing may also serve as a connecting element between consumers' impulsive shopping habits and environmental cues such as window and in-store displays.

Customers may utilise some type of in-store planning to solidify their decisions while they're still physically present. Individuals who enter a store without a clear understanding of what they need or want to purchase might use the business's environment and displays as a kind of informational help by being reminded or inspired to make a purchase based on what they see. When a customer walks into a store and is immediately bombarded

with enticing visuals, auditory, or olfactory cues, they are more likely to make an impulsive purchase than if they had intended to do so.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of Sanjita Bista's (2018) research was to identify the connections between store management, customers, and visual merchandising in brick-and-mortar retail. This research looks ahead to the future difficulties that shops will have to encounter regularly. Display window, visual merchandising components, and the benefits to the store manager were the main topics of the authors' attention.

Researcher Saumya Sinha (2018) writes about the importance of using visual merchandising techniques and social media to attract online shoppers in her essay titled "Visual Merchandising in the Digital World." Some of those shops' displays completely revolutionised the conventional wisdom about how merchandise is supposed to be shown off. Shopping is a tactile experience, and its language may be understood by looking, touching, and even smelling the merchandise.

By taking into account consumers' aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural interpretations of visual merchandising aspects like colour, Law et al. (2012) set out to investigate the emotional response of in-store shoppers to such stimuli.

Customers' impulsive purchases are studied by Randhawa and Saluja (2017), who investigate the role of visual merchandising in this phenomenon. Visual merchandising is often undervalued in India. But in the recent years it observed the interest of youth and is helping merchants overcome the difficulty of acquiring customers. The study's overarching goal was to shed light on the interesting predicament that confronts today's merchandiser in his or her quest to attract customers through strategic use of visual merchandising cues.

According to Soomro et al. (2017), conveyed that VM is a potent tool which can be used to increase a store's visibility and draw attention to a brand's products. Aesthetically-driven brands like these strive to improve customers' purchasing experiences over the long term.

Store atmosphere, Product display, promotional strategy, discount signage board and floor merchandising, are all examples of visual marketing elements, according to Khan and Kumar (2016).

In their investigation, Zulaikha Fatima et al., 2017 shed light on a developing field within retailing. Smartphones, which have transformed the shopping experience as we know it, are a boon to merchants, as their research suggests that technology should inspire them to innovate. Customers' expectations have shifted because of the Internet, mobile apps, and scan-and-go technologies, which has improved their ability to reach their desired demographic.

Two retail math formulas are presented by Dale (2017) as a means by which the success of visual merchandising may be evaluated. They are contributing to the Visual Merchandising Council and the Visual Merchandising Industry. It was determined through further testing that the remaining scale item also loaded only one of the factors. The results displayed that there were no momentous interactions between store type and visual merchandising in terms of customer response.

Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response model as a guide, Chang et al. (2014) looked at how customers' favourable emotional reactions to the atmospheres of clothing stores influenced their spontaneous purchases. Positive feelings and spontaneous purchases may be influenced by stores that are well-designed, according to the study's findings.

Both Upadhyay et al. (2017) and Tumbe & Krishnakumar (2018) draw the conclusion that reshaping alters the business landscape. Innovative services, such as home delivery and the creation of a bazaar-like environment, have become crucial to the success of modern retailers. They saw the proliferation of new methods as adding to the complexity and vivacity of the corporate world as a whole. Unlike in the past, consumers now do not centre their purchases on satisfying basic needs. Businesses have invested more in the VM concept in an effort to grab consumers' attention. Customers care less about prices and more about the features of a product. The seller's interest is maintained by the ever-shifting attitudes of the customers and the skillful presentation of the merchandise for sale.

According to Saif and Aimin (2016), a solid marketing plan is crucial to any business's long-term viability. If you want to achieve your marketing goals and objectives, you need to be able to conceptualise and create a strategy with limited resources. The authors performed a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between two

aspects of marketing plan content—decisions made and actions taken. To reposition a product and make it more appealing to a different demographic of consumers, a sustained effort over time is essential. The authors established a connection between the effectiveness of a standardised international marketing strategy and the financial success of a corporation using a previously developed theoretical model. They looked for a correlation between the company's success and its efforts to localise their marketing strategies abroad.

Logkizidou's (2016) doctoral dissertation explores the impact of visual merchandising on consumer cultural capital, finding that it has a greater impact on consumers with higher levels of cultural capital. His thesis elucidates the moderating effect of cultural capital and the influence of visual merchandising displays on consumers' intent to buy.

Storefront displays and promotional materials have been shown to have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions (Kiran & Mridula, 2015; Saeed, 2015), therefore visual merchandising is no longer something that can be disregarded. The primary purpose of Saeed's study was to ascertain the effect of lighting on customers' propensity to make a purchase or pay a visit to a given storage facility was studied using a before-and-after experimental design. Light was proven to have a good influence on enticing customers to enter the store, and researchers also saw an uptick in foot traffic.

Despite their importance to the fashion industry, single-brand clothing retailers (Kumar & Kim, 2014) have not studied the correlation between their stores' ambiance and customers' reactions. It was determined that the retail store-as-a-brand idea is relevant for any single known or unknown brand product since social, design, ambient, and retail signals all influenced internal assessments.

In their extensive literature analysis, Roxana and Ioan (2013) discussed the results of empirical investigations that looked at shoppers' mental processes, feelings, and reactions when shopping. The authors came to the conclusion that researchers paid little attention to other impressive stimuli such as ambient aroma, background music, etc. In their research, they provided a comprehensive theoretical framework for exploring how background fragrance affects buyers' decisions.

To address this void, Mari & Poggesi (2013) conducted a comprehensive literature assessment of the field, using strict criteria; they examined 188 papers and mapped out promising new directions for further study. Their findings helped establish a connection between customers' actions and novel understandings of certain aspects of the services provided.

Murray et al. (2019) looked at the literature on aesthetics to understand how consumers' responses to novelty, unity, and diversity explain their aesthetic enjoyment and avoidance. The authors analysed shoppers' reactions to a newly remodelled clothing store and a previously used store prototype. Compared to the traditional shop, they discovered that novelty and variety increased shoppers' aesthetic satisfaction.

In a 2011 study by Pillai et al., they used a survey to collect data, and they randomly selected some of the respondents to interview. The most important discovery in the area of VM that is the retail store must keep an appealing display window; the business's layout is the single most important factor in successful visual merchandising. The store must keep its lighting and display concept appealing to customers. The research showed that it was important to keep the visual attractiveness of stores up-to-date with the times.

El-Gohary, in 2010, set out to do a marketing literature review of E-marketing. His writings served as a repository of previous studies' findings and methods for interpreting and developing an appropriate knowledge of re-emergence marketing across a variety of topics and philosophies, all of which were incorporated into E-Marketing publications.

All of these studies emphasised the importance of developing a strategy for visual marketing that takes into account the aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural expectations of the target audience. Visual merchandising is approached from various angles, each tailored to the specifics of a given product type. Most of the research done thus far has concentrated on how specific visual merchandising components affect customers. There was a lot written about other things, but nothing about cell phones. The field of visual merchandising for digital and mobile devices is poorly researched. The primary focus of this study is on the impact that proper visual merchandising can have on sales of electronic goods. This data is useful for merchants as they plan their store layouts.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To know the effect of the visual merchandising (VM) on impulsive buying behaviour.
2. To analyse the relativeness among demographic variables of the consumers and perception towards visual merchandising

3.2 SAMPLE SIZE

A total of 250 customers from the state of Gujarat in India were questioned as part of this research study to investigate their thoughts on various aspects of visual merchandising.

3.3 SOURCES OF DATA

Targeting two hundred and fifty individuals who are residents of the state of Gujarat allowed for the collection of primary data.

The secondary data have been collected from numerous sources such as websites, papers, and published reports.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this investigation, the primary data were analysed utilising one sample testing as well as chi-square testing.

4.1 ONE SAMPLE TEST

1. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that store interior affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that store interior affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					
	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Fashion ability of Store Interior	-6.387	249	.000	-.468	-.61	-.32

INTERPRETATION

It can be observed from the table that the significance value is 0.000, which is significantly lower than the normal value of 0.05. Because of this, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be deduced that customers feel the atmosphere of a store has an effect on their purchasing decisions.

2. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that discount and offer signage affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that discount and offer signage affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					
	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Discount and Offer Signage	-3.121	249	.002	-.260	-.42	-.10

INTERPRETATION

It can be seen in the preceding table that the significant value is 0.002, which is lower than the normal value of 0.05. Because of this, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be drawn from the data that consumers feel that discount and offer signage influences their purchasing behaviour.

3. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that lighting in store affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that lighting in store affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					
	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Lighting	-9.718	249	.000	-.624	-.75	-.50

INTERPRETATION

It can be seen from the preceding table that the significance value is 0.002, which is significantly lower than the standard value of 0.05. Because of this, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be drawn from the data that consumers believe that the lighting in a store has an impact on their purchasing behaviour.

4. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that music inside store affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that music inside store affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					
	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Music	.275	249	.784	.024	-.15	.20

INTERPRETATION

It can be seen in the table that the significance value is 0.784, which is greater than the standard value of 0.05. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted, and it can be concluded that consumers do not believe that music played inside stores affects their tendency to make purchases.

5. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that adequate free space for movement inside store affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that adequate free space for movement inside store affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					
	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Adequate Free Space for Movement	-7.005	249	.000	-.524	-.67	-.38

INTERPRETATION

The null hypothesis is rejected since the significance value of 0.002 is lower than the standard value of 0.05. As a result, the conclusion is that consumers feel that appropriate open space for moving inside stores has an effect on their purchasing behaviour.

6. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that attractive mannequins affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that attractive mannequins affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					

	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Attractive Mannequins	-2.342	249	.020	-.228	-.42	-.04

INTERPRETATION

It can be observed from the above table that the significance value is 0.020, which is less than the usual value of 0.05. Because of this, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be deduced that consumers feel that attractive mannequins have an effect on their purchasing behaviour.

- 7. H0 :“Consumers do not believe that window display at store affects their buying behaviour.”
 H1 :“Consumers believe that window display at store affects their buying behaviour.”

“One-Sample Test”

	“Test Value = 3”					
	“t”	“df”	“Sig. (2-tailed)”	“Mean Difference”	“95% Confidence Interval of the Difference”	
					“Lower”	“Upper”
Window Display	-7.970	249	.000	-.544	-.68	-.41

INTERPRETATION

Consumers feel that window display at stores affects their purchasing behaviour, as shown in the above table, where the significance value of 0.020 is lower than the usual value of 0.05.

4.2 CHI-SQUARE TESTING

H0 :“There is no significant relation between demographic variables of the consumers and their perception towards visual merchandising.”

H1 :“There is significant relation between demographic variables of the consumers and their perception towards visual merchandising.”

“Variable-1”	“Variable-2”	“Pearson Chi-Square”	“P-Value”	“Decision”
Gender	Fashion Ability of Store Interior	3.844	0.428	“There is no Significant Relation”
	Discount and Offer Signage	9.067	0.059	
	Lighting	1.382	0.847	
	Music	5.723	0.221	
	Adequate Free Space for Movement	2.439	0.656	
	Attractive Mannequins	0.955	0.966	
	Window Display	3.576	0.466	
Age	Fashion Ability of Store Interior	10.335	0.587	
	Discount and Offer Signage	7.620	0.814	
	Lighting	13.759	0.316	
	Music	15.028	0.240	
	Adequate Free Space for Movement	6.707	0.876	
	Attractive Mannequins	24.235	0.061	
	Window Display	6.789	0.871	
Marital	Fashion Ability of Store Interior	6.880	0.865	

Status	Discount and Offer Signage	10.095	0.608
	Lighting	20.308	0.061
	Music	13.090	0.363
	Adequate Free Space for Movement	12.931	0.374
	Attractive Mannequins	16.252	0.365
	Window Display	11.310	0.503

According to the results of the chi-square test presented above, there is no link between the demographic characteristics of the customers studied and their attitudes toward visual merchandising.

5. CONCLUSION

Visual merchandising is like having a salesperson in the room who doesn't say a word but gets the point through just as effectively through the use of eye-catching visuals. Retailers need to prioritise product presentation in order to meet the evolving demands of modern shoppers. Retailers must appreciate the significance of customers' expectations and create an atmosphere that will entice them to make purchases. Based on the data analysis, we can say that VM plays a vital role to influence in luring customers into making impulse buys while they are in the store. According to the ever-evolving demands of their clientele, retailers must constantly strive to stock their shelves with as much fresh, on-trend merchandise as possible. In order to draw in as many customers as possible and keep them around for as long as possible, the store should strive for a welcoming environment. The store should pay close attention to visual merchandising aspects such as planogram, display screening, signs, other props and graphics while constructing the merchandising presentation.

Consumers' perceptions of the store's fashionability are influenced by factors such as the store's interior design, the visibility of sales and discounts, the quality of lighting, the availability of clear pathways for customers to shop, the attractiveness of the store's mannequins, and the attractiveness of its window displays.

6. SCOPE FOR THE FUTURE STUDY

The attitudes of customers regarding visual merchandising are the focus of this research. Consumers in both rural and urban parts of India could be surveyed for more insight.

Additional research into the effects of visual merchandising on online shopping is possible.

Since this research only surveyed people in Gujarat, we recommend doing a larger study in which more cities are included.

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