

Stimulating Impulse Buying Behaviour through Visual Merchandising: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

This empirical research aims to examine the causal association between respondents' impulse buying behaviour and various cues of visual merchandising like mannequins, store layout, window display and promotional signage. To measure the respondent's opinion, a self-administered questionnaire was drafted. The results of our empirical study suggest that all four elements of visual merchandising have varying influence on impulse buying behaviour. The findings provide useful insights for both theorist as well as the marketer's to synergise their efforts for comprehensive understanding of the consumer's impulsive buying behaviour. Future research prospects were also proposed.

Key words: Impulse Buying; Mannequins; Store Layout; Window Display; Promotional Signage.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fierce marketing environment retailers are left with no option other than portraying an unswerving image in the customer's mind though imperative seamless customer experience. Retailers try to ensure that customers do not leave the store just with products but also profound memories attached with it. However, it was found that promising value product, influx in brand building exercise, rigorous advertisement campaigns is just not enough to gain potential customers or retain the existing ones (Hennig- Thurau and Houston, 2019). As we stepped into new millennium, retailers were concerned with growing competition more than ever before. By using various combinations of aesthetics and behaviours science, retailers started creating a conducive sales environment that had a direct effect on consumer's psyche, emotions and behaviourism (Foxall and Goldsmith, 1988). Appropriate blend of external and internal stimuli reduces customer's competency to rationally evaluate its own actions and enhance the likelihood of impulse buying behaviour (Virvilaitė et al., 2011). In short, marketers leave no stone unturned to chalk out various strategies to win the customers loyalty (Kumar and Reinartz, 2016). Visual merchandising is one of the key tool with the help of which retailers inducing impulse purchase during unplanned buying process (Pawar et al., 2016). Beatty and Ferrell (1998) opined impulse buying to be an unplanned buying process, which is often clubbed with hedonic motive which simply ignites the powerful urge to buy. Visual Merchandising is a part of retail industry since the dawn of civilization (Pundir, 2007). Moreover, creating a right visual appeal sets the euphoria by right store presentation (Diamond and Diamond, 2007). It has been validated by Mattila and Wirtz (2008) that impulse buying sums up to 27-62 % of the total shopping pie of an individual. In order to give a boost to impulse buying marketers are extensively making huge investment in crafting the right store atmospherics using appropriate signage, right blend of hues, lighting, fixtures, façade, mannequins etc.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous styles and themes are incorporated in retail setting to convey the message of the retailers to end customers (Law et al., 2012) resulting an effect on their buying behaviour (Gudonavičienė and Alijošienė, 2015). With the passage of time retailers understood that only selling the product will not fetch the customer's loyalty (Kahn, 2018). They ought to work upon providing a memorable shopping experience to them (Mehta and Chugan, 2014). Retailers should lure customers for shopping in a store by convenient product placement and comfortable store ambience (Iqbal et al., 2011). Thus, visual

merchandising acts as a means of communication by retailers' to drive sales of products and services through captivating presentation tactics which leaves a mark on customer's thoughts (Mehta and Chugan, 2014).

It is the art as well as science of shopping mechanism which helps in appropriate product placements so that customer can find them easily and effortlessly (Underhill, 2009). This technique not only triggers the subconscious mind which crafts a positive image of the store, but also ends up in gaining attention, enticing interest, inducing desire and finally resulting in spurring up action either in form of buying or trying the products by the consumer (Passewitz et al., 1991). Visual merchandising helps in alluring the customer which results in boosting multiple sales by showcasing the merchandise along with complimentary accessories (Frings, 1999), so as to give an idea about the complete look. Visual communications exposed by the consumer in the retail setting affects approximately 80% of the sensory organs and henceforth it is deemed to be a proficient way of advertisement than any other marketing communication tactics (Tullman and Clark, 2004).

Several authors have different views about the various elements of visual merchandising. Some authors incorporate colours, lighting, location, store layout, fixtures & furniture as elements of visual merchandising (Kerfoot et al., 2003). Whereas, Chang et al., (2014) included store atmosphere, store exterior as elements that create visual effects. However, Mehta and Chugan (2013) are of the view that visual merchandising incorporates both store exteriors (store entrance, window display, facade) and interior (layout, props, ambient conditions). Law et al., (2012) stressed upon the paradigm of the stimulus organism-response (SOR) theory, where S-stimulus signifies ambient factor that induces attention from the organism (O) i.e. consumer – and gains the response (R) – of the consumer by its internal evaluation. However, stimulus in retailing ecosystem comprises the triad of product, people and space related dimensions (Quartier et al., 2008). The interrelation between these three has a significant influence on pleasure, arousal and dominance of the customer while making his mind for both high and low involvement buying decisions.

The marketing sensory rich cues that entice innate needs of consumer to purchase unintended goods is called impulse buying (Inman et al., 2009). It is a spontaneous evaluation of products without giving due consideration to its need, affordability etc. (Mehta and Chugan 2014). Instant decision-making process often suppresses the rationale behind making a wise choice (Maymand and Ahmadinejad, 2011) and resulting in post purchase dissonance (Parsad et al., 2019). Some researchers have clubbed impulse buying under psychological factors others consider them into hedonic variables (Piron, 1993; Hausman, 2000; Ramanathan and Menon, 2006; Park et al., 2015) and situational factors (Burroughs, 1996; Beatty and Ferrell, 1998) while evaluating buying decision mechanism.

Meritoriously integrating both internal stimuli and external factors will lead to gaining attention of customers so that they end up going for impulse buying. Visual merchandisers should try to understand the complex impulse buying behaviour (Rook, 1987) of both their current and potential customers so as to diligently craft strategies that give due importance to various facets of visual merchandising such as store layout, displays, facade, mannequins etc. (Dholakia, 2000). This will create a conducive environment for impulse buying that results in increment in sales and enhancement in share of wallet of the shopper for that particular store. The following sections deal with the various antecedents of visual merchandising that has an effect on impulse buying behaviour.

Mannequins

Beautifully adorned mannequins not only provoke customers' interest but also create desire to buy the products. They are strategically placed throughout the store to draw the attention of customers (Sawchuk, 2017). These mannequins provide an apt information about the fit and look of the product on a physical body. Appropriately posed mannequins, in a store display create mental imagination and cognitive activity (Ibrahim et al., 2018). They also add up to customers' cognitive evaluation of products along with their societal significance (Law et al., 2012). Mannequins provide new insights about understanding consumers hedonic and utilitarian motives which helps in framing effective brand communication strategies (Saricam, et al., 2018). Hence on the foundation of existing literature, it can be hypothesized:

H1: Mannequins has a significant effect on impulse buying behaviour.

Store layout

Layout is cited as an important antecedent of visual merchandising. It entails parameters like area optimization, aisle planning and space management (Mowrey et al., 2019). Retailers, with the help of space planners, need to judiciously plan out their retail space in such a manner that they maximise the floor space yet provide enough space for to browse easily inside the store and comfortably access the merchandise (Sorensen et al., 2017). Store layout architecture should be comfortable and encourage shopping as well as browsing. Relaxing atmosphere posed by store layout should give birth to both utilitarian and hedonic motives (Hwangbo et al., 2017). Successful

design of the store's atmospherics results in easy navigation through the store, which ultimately yield satisfying shopping experience and increased sales (Turley and Millian, 2000; Mowrey et al., 2018) and consumers' patronage intentions as well (Kotler, 1973). Popai (2014) highlighted that close to 80% for all purchase decisions are made while browsing inside the store. Moreover, shoppers have a tendency to buy what they see (Ebster and Garaus, 2015). Diligently planned store layout facilitates easy traffic flow, results in maximum customer engagement and helps in avoiding congestion inside the store (Ainsworth and Foster, 2017). So the store layout should be strategically designed to ensure maximum exposure to merchandise displayed and optimise the return on sales per square foot. Hence after reviewing the literature, the second hypothesis of the study is:

H2: Store layout has a significant effect on impulse buying behaviour.
Window Display

Store's sales and shopper's buying behaviour, is great influenced by appropriate product placement (Ferreira et al., 2018). A creative window display acts as face of the store that has the power to create the first impression on shopper (Mehta and Chugan, 2012). Around 60% of shoppers, indulge in impulse buying because of eye catching window displays (PEW Research Centre, 2016). A glimpse at the window display acts a magnet to attract the customers to walk inside the store and explore the merchandise (Lecointre-Erickson et al., 2018). Successful window display helps the retailers to increase footfall inside the store, display latest products, highlight promotional offers, and enhancing the brand image (Somoond and Sahachaisaree, 2018). The creative window displays acts as catalyst to capture an emotional response from customer, that could result in cross-selling the products as well (Bailey and Baker, 2014). Based upon this discussion, it can be hypnotized:

H3: Window display has a significant effect on impulse buying behaviour.
Promotional Signage

Promotional signage is the stand alone wordings or clubbed with in-store displays to inform customers regarding the product or promotional information with sole aim of generating demand form the products (Fernando et al., 2019). Memon et al., (2019) are of the opinion that promotional signage provides vital information about various deals and rebates offered by the store to drive sales. Visual stimulus encountered by the shopper in form of promotional displays (Waseem, 2018) can result in impulse buying. Effective promotion signage has the power to boosting sales and increase store revenues and building brand equity (Inman et al., 1990). In-store promotional stimuli has the power to indulge the customer in impulse buying (Bell et al., 2011). Given strong evidence from the literature, it is hypothesis that:

H4: Promotional signage has a significant effect on consumer impulse buying behaviour.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study tries to explore the impact of four elements of visual merchandising i.e. mannequins, store layout, window display and promotional signage on impulse buying behaviour. The study also attempts to suggest strategies to retailers for making visual merchandising an effective tool in stimulating impulse buying.

4. MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

A research questionnaire was designed based on review of extant literature. The scales used in the present research, had mainly been used in the developed countries like US. Therefore, expert panel comprising of top retail executives from varied sectors (e.g. cosmetics, electronics and fashion,) assisted in refining and adapting in to the Indian context. Impulse buying was measured using the five item from Younand Faber, 2000; Rook and Hoch, 1985. Construct of mannequins was measured using a four items previously used by Han, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995. Three items to measure store layout were adapted and modified from Rook & Fisher, 1995. Reference of four items to measure promotional signage was taken from Younand Faber, 2000; Rook and Hoch, 1985.

Three items of window display were measured by items adapted from Rook and Fisher, 1995; Iqbal et al., 2011. The team evaluated the scales for its comprehensiveness, relevance, and purpose (content validity), along with safeguarding its face validity particularly for Indian footwear and apparel retail business houses. To measure the respondent's opinion, a questionnaire was drafted using a 5 point Likert scale which ranged from "1" being strongly disagree and "5" being strongly agree. It also comprised some open ended questions related to demographic profile of respondents. All the instructions about filling the questionnaire was mentioned in it for the ease of filling.

Methodology

The prime motive of conducting this empirical study is to innumerate which visual merchandising antecedents has the strongest influence on consumers' fashion has oriented impulse buying behaviour in Chandigarh while shopping for specialised apparels and footwear. The data for our quantitative study was collected using mall intercept method. The Elante mall of Chandigarh were selected as the area for collecting data as it 21`acts as the shopping hub in the city. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents after briefing them about purpose of the research. A sample of 350 collected. After deleing the redundant questionnaire, the final refined sample that were to be used for further analysis were 307showcasing the yield of 87.7%. SPSS version 21 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, karlpearson correlation and stepwise regression were used to understand the data and drive a conclusion to our study. The demographic characteristics of our respondent are shown in Table 1.

| Table 1 :Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| | N | % |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 141 | 45.9 |
| Female | 166 | 54.1 |
| Age (in years) | | |
| 20-24 | 160 | 52.1 |
| 25-34 | 138 | 45.0 |
| 35-40 | 9 | 2.9 |
| Educational Qualification | | |
| Under Graduation | 9 | 29.0 |
| Graduation | 130 | 42.3 |
| Post-Graduation | 147 | 47.9 |
| Professional Degree | 21 | 6.8 |
| Occupation | | |
| Business Man | 63 | 20.5 |
| Salaried | 101 | 32.9 |
| Student | 116 | 37.8 |
| Homemaker | 27 | 8.8 |
| Annual Income (INR) | | |
| Less than 3 lakh | 12 | 3.9 |
| 3-7 lakh | 93 | 30.3 |
| 7-10 lakh | 121 | 39.4 |
| More than 10 lakh | 81 | 36.4 |
| N=307 | | |

| Table 2: Reliability and Descriptive Statistics | | | | |
|--|--|--|-------------|----------------------------|
| Construct | Statements | Cronbach alpha(α) | Mean | Standar d Deviation |
| Mannequi ns | When I see clothing featuring a new style or design on display I tend to buy it. | 0.875 | 3.29 | 1.231 |
| | I get idea about what to buy after looking through in-store or mannequin display. | | 3.36 | 1.152 |
| | I tend to reply on store display when I make a decision to purchase clothing. | | 3.32 | 1.224 |
| | When I see clothing that I like on in-store or mannequin display I tend to buy it. | | 3.32 | 1.200 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-------|------|-------|
| Store Layout | I tend to try on clothing that catches my eye when I pass by. | 0.940 | 3.68 | 1.068 |
| | When I see clothing that catches my eye I tend to try on without looking through the whole section. | | 3.59 | 1.121 |
| | When I walk along the aisle I tend to look through clothing close to me. | | 3.67 | 1.076 |
| Window Display | I feel compelled to enter the store when I see an interesting window display. | 0.964 | 3.90 | 1.038 |
| | I tend to enter the store when I am attracted by an eye-catching window display. | | 3.93 | 0.997 |
| | I tend to choose which store to shop in depending on eye-catching window display. | | 3.85 | 1.065 |
| Promotional Signage | If I see an interesting promotional offer on in-store signs, I tend to buy. | 0.959 | 3.47 | 1.158 |
| | Sale/clearance signs entice me to look through the clothing. | | 3.39 | 1.246 |
| | When I see a special promotional sign, I go to look at that clothing. | | 3.32 | 1.232 |
| | I am more likely to make an unintended purchase if the clothing has a sale or clearance sign. | | 3.33 | 1.202 |
| Impulse Buying Behaviour | I go shopping to change my mood. | 0.951 | 3.16 | 1.169 |
| | I feel a sense of excitement when I make an impulse purchase. | | 3.22 | 1.164 |
| | After I make an impulse purchase I feel regret. | | 3.23 | 1.150 |
| | I have difficulty controlling my urge to buy when I see a good offer. | | 3.23 | 1.165 |
| | When I see a good deal I tend to buy more than I intended to buy. | | 3.33 | 1.143 |

The reliability statistics (α) and descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation for each of the dimensions i.e. mannequins, floor layout, window display, promotional signage and impulse buying are shown in Table 2. Cronbach Alpha (α) for all dimensions-exceed way above the lower limit of acceptability i.e. 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). So, it can be inferred that survey questionnaire accurately measures internal consistency for the set of items in the construct. However, to investigate the determinants of impulse buying in specialised apparel and footwear stores, Karl Pearson correlation and stepwise regression analysis were applied that linked impulse buying behaviour to mannequin, store layout, window display and promotional signage dimensions.

Relationship Analysis

Table 3 depicts the Karl Pearson's Correlation coefficients for the dimensions specified in the framed hypotheses. The analysis reveals, strongest association between impulse buying behaviour and mannequins ($r=0.556$, $p<0.05$) followed by store layout ($r=0.445$), window display ($r=0.410$) and lastly promotional signage($r=0.317$) in specialised apparel and footwear retailers. The results shows that there was no breach of the assumption related to linearity and homoscedasticity and all associations were significant at 95% level.

Table 3. Karl Pearson Correlation Analysis Results.

| Hypothesis | Hypothesized Relationship | Pearson Correlation Analysis Results |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| H1 | Impulse Buying & Mannequins ----->positive | $r = 0.556$, $p \leq 0.05$ |
| H2 | Impulse Buying & Store layout -----> positive | $r = 0.445$, $p \leq 0.05$ |
| H3 | Impulse Buying & Window display -----> positive | $r = 0.410$, $p \leq 0.05$ |
| H4 | Impulse Buying & Promotional signage----->positive | $r = 0.317$, $p \leq 0.05$ |
| Sample size = 307 | | |

In the next step, to recognize the specific dimensions of impulse buying at specialized apparel and footwear retailers step wise regression was applied on four dimensions i.e. mannequins, store layout, window display and promotional signage which were measured by 14 items served as the independent variables and impulse buying behaviour with 5 items served as the dependent variables. The value of adjusted $R^2 = 0.502$. Standardized beta coefficients were enumerated in the Table 4 as they specify the variables explanatory power. The four constructs on the basis of importance as shown by their beta coefficients, are promotional signage ($\beta=0.394$), mannequins ($\beta=0.352$), store layout ($\beta=0.335$) and window display ($\beta=0.207$) where $p \leq 0.05$ level. The results support the hypotheses, H1, H2, H3, H4. Value of Durbin Watson test is 1.785. It also lies between 1 to 3, depicts independence of auto correlation errors (Hair et al., 1998) in the Table 4.

The independent variables were also scrutinized for multicollinearity. The most common test to measure it, is the variance inflation factor (VIF). It shows the extent to which each independent variable is explained by the others. Our results show VIF is less than 10 indicating independence from multicollinearity issue. The tolerance value (TV) of an independent variable is an additional test to check the effects of multicollinearity in our regression model. Tolerance of variable value closer to 1 indicates independence. Hence multicollinearity diagnostics statistics were shown in Table 6. Indicate TV and VIF are within the recommended level in our data set (Hair et al., 1998).

Table 4: Antecedents of Impulse Buying Behavior — Stepwise Regression Results.

| Independent Variable | Standardized Regression Coefficients* | T-value** | Significance Probability | TV | VIF |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------|-------|
| Constant | 0.4677(0.597) | 7.830 | .000 | | |
| Promotional Signage | 0.394 | 8.494 | .000 | .756 | 1.521 |
| Mannequins | 0.352 | 7.557 | .000 | .709 | 1.491 |
| Floor Layout | 0.335 | 3.314 | .001 | .259 | 0.274 |
| Window Display | 0.207 | 2.045 | .002 | .159 | 0.289 |
| Multiple R | 0.713 | | | | |
| R^2 | 0.508 | | | | |
| adjusted R^2 | 0.502 | | | | |
| Durbin- Watson Test | 1.785 | | | | |
| F | 78.093 | | .000 | | |
| Sample Size =307 | | | | | |
| *Beta co-efficient is the standardised regression co-efficient which allows comparison of the relatives on the dependent variable of each independent variable. | | | | | |
| ** t-statistics help to determine the relative importance of each variable in the model | | | | | |

4. FINDINGS

Our research adds value to the existing research by highlighting the antecedents of visual merchandising which have deep influence on impulse buying behaviour in specialized apparel and footwear retail segment. As per our analysis it was found that mannequins, promotional signage, floor layout, window display were perceived to be the most important antecedents of visual merchandising that has an effect on impulse buying. Retailers along with store managers and visual merchandisers should focus on these factors to enhance impulse buying behaviour. Our results highlight that greatest positive influence on impulse buying in the specialised apparel and footwear stores is made promotional signage. These results are consistent with the literature review as it acts as a stimulus for impulse purchase (Bell et al., 2011; Cant and Hefer, 2014). It also asserts that store's promotional advertisements have strong effect on proliferating impulse buying sales (Wilkinson et al., 1982; Khachatryan, 2018). Store managers should creatively craft point of purchase and point of sales advertisements so that they hit the bulls eye and result in pull buying process. Visual merchandisers should do in-store promotional campaigns either for promotions, endorsements or loyalty schemes by using various combinations of poster display, counter display, led display so as to boost visibility and impulse buying.

Our analysis also reveals a substantial association between mannequins and impulse buying behaviour. As mannequins enable consumers to visualize the merchandise in a three-dimensional format, so retailers should opt for realistic mannequins. These mannequins will provide apt information about the fit and look of the product on a physical body. Mannequins vary in their shape, colour, and features across retailers (Schneider, 1997). So, visual merchandiser sought to judiciously select them depending on the type of merchandise and ethnicity. The positioning of mannequins should be done with creativity and an artful eye. In order to induce impulse buying they should be strategically placed either on the main aisle or show window so that they catch the eye of those passing by customers. Beautifully adorned mannequins with

complementary accessories add flare, charm and beauty to the store. Thus multiplying and strengthening the chances of customer engaging in impulse buying.

The next important antecedent of visual merchandising which spurs up impulse buying is store layout. The important role played by store layout to facilitate impulse buying process. Retailers should stock the key shelf locations with latest and trendiest merchandise. Store planners and visual merchandisers should craft fully plan the entrance of the store, endcaps, placement of fixtures, furniture and racks so that maximum space could be utilised (Pegler, 2010; Bellini et al., 2017).

Lastly store's window display also acts as most important retailers' communication strategy that triggers unplanned purchases. Window display act as the first touch point of store with the customers (Mehta and Chugan, 2012). So retailers should invest in displaying a creative and attractive show window which gives a cohesive picture rather than making it cluttered and confusing. They should be displaying a directional relationship with merchandise which is stocked inside the store and what is displayed in show window. Visual merchandisers should plan them keeping in view the prospective customers. Using spotlights to highlight products is a sure shot tactic to grab the attention of customers (Dang, et al., 2018). The retailers should keep on changing the theme of window display's keeping in view the current seasons, trends and fashion (Ibrahim et al.2018; Somoon and Sahachaisaree, 2018).From this study it is pretty evident that managers must realise that only one aspect of visual merchandising cannot stimulate impulse buying behaviour in a consumer. It is a combined effect of the various dimensions of visual merchandising that can influence the consumer for impulse buying. Hence in this competitive environment if these retail outlets want to increase their consumer base then visual merchandising should be made an integral part of their strategic marketing plan for the store.

LIMITATIONS

There are few limitations in this research. The survey was conducted only in one city with the participation of just 350 respondents. Therefore, it is suggested that future research can be conducted in a multiple location. However, the sample size should also be increased in order to ensure the generalisability of the research outcomes. Moreover, the study is purely based on the respondents' point of view. The respondents might express biased opinions which limit the validity of the results. Our study only focused on specialised apparel and footwear segment. So, future research may expand its dimensions to other retail categories such as food, toys, accessories, and IT products as well. However, in order to have a multidimensional view of the research area, cross measures incorporating quantitative, qualitative and empirical methods can also be included.

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