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Influence of Visual Merchandising on Consumer behavior in Apparel with reference to Pantaloons, Ranchi

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Abstract: **Reshaping has become a key phenomenon. Shopping by an individual at one time was need based and also was mainly merchandise centric. The customer was mainly focusing on the price and other attributes of merchandise. A concept of visual merchandise holds its root was back to the days of barter system. In the retail store the visual merchandising itself act a silent sales person and tool which help the customer to focus on the individual product and also help to create awareness among the customer in apparel sector. The role of visual merchandising in a retail store is develop a positive aspect regarding the buying decision of a consumer and it also help to convert the impulsive customer into positive consumer.**

At present this research paper is an attempt to understand the customer satisfaction, its buying behavior and effect of visual merchandising.

Keywords: **Visual Merchandising, Apparel, Consumer behavior, Consumer buying decision**

1. Introduction

Today retailers are facing a keen competitive market and are finding it increasingly difficult to create a differential advantage on the basis of product (merchandise), price, promotion, place, people and location and at this point the store itself becomes a fertile and last opportunity for market differentiation.

Today's customers have many shopping choices, as the merchandise is available easily. Some make purchases on the internet they don't have to worry about the long hours of operation, parking or getting large purchases home. So as compared to the past with development in technology retailers job have become more difficult.

As per the *Job Guide. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*. Retrieved 5 October 2011 - Visual merchandising is the practice in the retail industry of developing floor plans and three-dimensional displays in order to maximize sales.

Both goods and services can be displayed to highlight their features and benefits. The purpose of such visual merchandising is to attract, engage, and motivate the customer towards making a purchase.

Retailers need to create an exciting store design with innovative merchandising techniques to make people come and visit the stores. Here comes the role of visual merchandiser which creates the store design and makes awareness to the people. A Visual merchandiser likes to think of their store as theater. The walls and floors represent the stage. The lighting, fixtures, and visual communications such as signs represent the sets and the merchandise represents the show. According to researcher the real challenge of a retailer and visual merchandiser is to convert the footfall into sales. (Footfall is a term representing the number of people who visit a store. The gatekeeper at the sores will click on his or her counter every time a customer sets foot into the store and this goes to the store manager as a measure of potential sales). Retail space is priced on the basis of the footfall it receives. As per (Kanika Anand 2012) Deputy Manager- Visual merchandising, Boggi Milano DLF Brands Ltd, India. In the article "Inspired by the world of Art" states that "Indian retail is moving into 'Second Gear' with extensive attempts to constantly meet customer expectations. Given the shift of gear from merely creating awareness, it has its own advantage to harness and challenges to overcome" She further states that " Creating strong foundations for consumerism based societies, we are moving towards a first world fantasy where one does not buy a product, but an experience. Shopping malls, Hypermarkets, Branded outlets and even small time retailers understand and acknowledge the need and importance of Visual Merchandising to generate great business". Her opinion for consumer trends and behavior is that Indian consumers are turning increasingly global in their outlook having become much more aware of design trends in the business of fashion, hence demanding the same levels of design and innovations from store spaces.

Customer recognition and loyalty is essential to make consistent business but lack of innovation is hindering the creation of distinct retailer's identities thus challenging their strong up-ward force/push towards Visual merchandising. (Anonymous 2010) had written the dictionary meaning of visual merchandising i.e. Visual merchandising is an activity of promoting the sale of goods, especially by their presentation in retail outlets. She further mentioned that visual merchandising is like an art in the sense that there are implicit rules, but they may be broken for striking effects. For people who fear unmanageable costs and hence avoid Visual merchandisers, for them visual merchandising can help economize by avoiding costly mistakes. She concluded by mentioning that visual merchandising is the art of implementing effective designs, ideas to increase store traffic and sales volume and it is a mechanism to communicate to a customer and influence his decisions to buy. Recently visual merchandising has gained importance as a quick and cost effective way to revamp retail stores.

Visual merchandisers create imaginative, eye-catching displays of merchandise in retail stores.

They aim to attract the attention of the customers and encourage them to buy. Their task can include:

a. researching lifestyle and design trends and making sure designs will appeal to the target audience
b. working with other members of the design, marketing and buying team to develop themes and color schemes for displays- e.g. Christmas, Valentine's Day, sales and special promotions
c. sketching design and developing floor plans, making the most of the space available
d. sourcing material, such as props and lighting
e. installing and dismantling displays

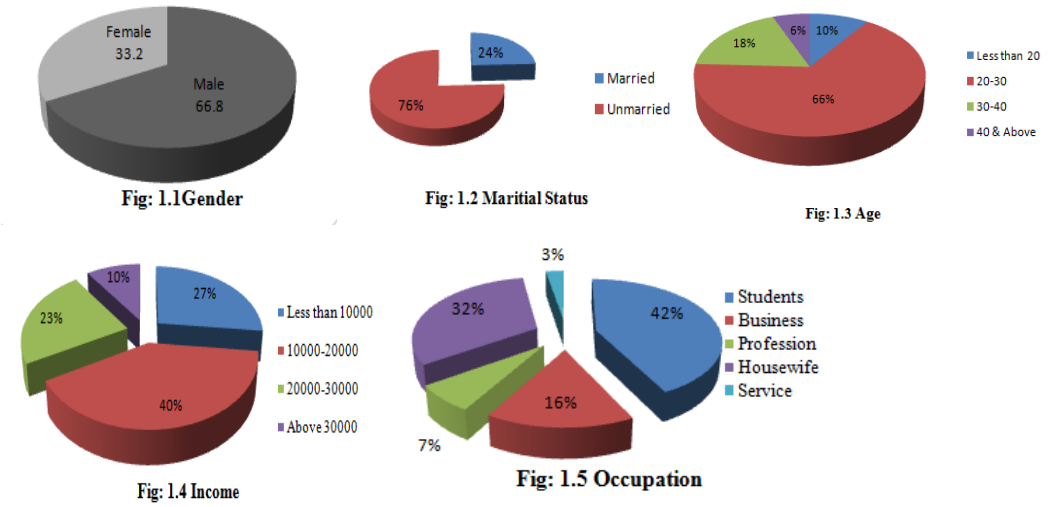
f. preparing visual merchandising packs, including plans and photographs, for other stores in the chain, to make sure all displays present a consistent image

2. Research Methodology

The present research has employed a combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs for preparation of this paper. Primary data on customer views on visual merchandising at Pantaloons, Eastern Mall, Ranchi was collected through a structured questionnaire. The population of the research study consists of all current buyers of apparel at Pantaloons, Eastern Mall in Ranchi city. To investigate the significant aspects of buyers, respondents have been selected on convenience sampling basis which is a non-probability sampling technique. The questionnaires were administered on 100 customers but 72 customers responded. These variables are measured using 5 scale based with responses ranging from "Strongly Agree"=1, "Agree" = 2, "Cannot Say" = 3, "Disagree" =4 and "Strongly Disagree" =5.

Sample Size & Selection

Non-probability convenience sampling techniques has been employed to select the sample unit for the study. Such a selection is undertaken as the unit represents the sample in a better way and reflects better relationship with the other variable of the study. The questionnaire was administered on total respondents but only 72% respondents provided their views for the paper.



Source: field data

Fig. 1 The profile of the respondents at Pantaloons, Eastern Mall, Ranchi

3. Analysis and Results

The Table 2 indicate that the descriptive statistical analysis for customer buying decision with respect to visual merchandising at Pantaloons, Eastern Mall Ranchi city. The mean score ranges from 2.08 to 3.17, and the standard deviation ranges from 1.16 to 1.47. The average standard deviation being closer to 1, it indicates that there is uniformity in the views expressed by the buyers.

Table I showing individual questionnaire response (Scale Based)

Table I (a)

I prefer to shop in the store, where visual merchandising is done attractively	
Response(scale based)	No. of respondents
1	24
2	20
3	18
4	06
5	04

Table I (b)

Good lightening will enhance merchandising buying decision	
Response(scale based)	No. of respondents
1	15
2	10
3	12
4	18
5	17

Table I (c)

Mild music will create mood and induce the purchase decision	
Response(scale based)	No. of respondents
1	10
2	16
3	20
4	12
5	14

Table I (d)

Visual merchandising with related accessories will increase the chance of purchase decision	
Response(scale based)	No. of respondents
1	27
2	20
3	09
4	10
5	06

Table I (e)

Mannequin display promotes impulsive buying	
Response(scale based)	No. of respondents
1	32
2	18
3	10
4	08
5	04

Table I (f)

Price tag promotes impulsive buying	
Response(scale based)	No. of respondents
1	25
2	20
3	18
4	05
5	04

Table II. Descriptive Statistic for customer buying decision w. r. t. visual merchandising in Pantaloons, Eastern Mall, Ranchi

Particulars	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
I Prefer to shop in the store , where visual merchandising is done attractively	72	1	2	2.25	1.16
Good Lightning will enhance merchandise buying decision	72	1	2	3.17	1.47
Mild music will create mood and induce the purchase decision	72	1	2	3.06	1.3
Visual merchandising with related accessories will increase chance of purchase decision	72	1	2	2.28	1.3
Mannequin display promotes impulsive buying	72	1	2	2.08	1.23
Price tags promotes impulsive buying	72	1	2	2.23	1.16

Source: Field Data & Own Calculation

Data Source

Market research requires two types of data i.e. primary data and Secondary data. Primary data has been used abundantly for the paper. Structured questionnaire was used and observation has also done to gather primary data. There is also a use of secondary data collected from the various journals, books, and websites & from store managers and staffs.

Findings

a. From the analysis it was observed that majority of respondents (66%) belong to young age group category and therefore the demographical profile of the respondents is matching with the countries median age with highest purchasing power.
b. It was inferred that half of the sample respondents had the monthly average income of Rs. 20000 and this justifies the rise of middle class and their aspiration for branded merchandise.
c. More than 80% of the sample respondents expressed that, the aesthetic appeal of the store was excellent and that augmented their buying decision also lead to impulsive buying.
d. Most of the respondents are highly satisfied with the store's front arrangements and lighting system which has played important role in attracting the customers and to enriching their buying experience.
e. Most of the respondent said that mild music enhances their buying decision and also the visual merchandising with related accessories had increased the probability of impulsive purchase.
f. Maximum respondents agreed that price tag on merchandise mannequin displayed in the store and at the entrance had helped them to make conscious buying decision with reference to price & quality parameter. Many customers have suggested maintaining the price tag on all display items so that they can make quick buying decision during the peak hours of shopping.
g. In general majority of the respondents have expressed that they were part of impulsive buying and the main attributes of impulsive buying were attractive mannequin display, price tags, and visual merchandising themes during the festival seasons and also special days like Independence Day, Republic Day, and Valentine's Day etc.

4. Conclusion

The paper shows that visual merchandising plays a significant role in apparel purchase decision of the customer. Customer's expectations changes periodically and retailers must realize the significance of these expectations and offer them a congenial environment to attract and retain the customers. Apparel retailers must consider various factors like store design, layout, store front, display themes, lighting, music, etc. while making visual presentation. Pantaloons, Ranchi retail store has taken special care for visual merchandising, marketing program and the store team collects customer suggestions on regular occasion's to arrange necessary visual displays for better purchase decision.

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