CHALLENGES IN BUILDING IMAGE OF RETAIL STORES USING VISUAL MERCHANDISING PRACTICES – THEORY BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

As Tier-I cities are flooded with Brands across retail stores in India it's time for retailers to understand the nuances and developments in enhancing store image in retail stores and specifically in fashion segment that changes can be witnessed in the existing business patterns for attracting both new and existing customers providing a comfortable experience with brands. Keeping this aspect, the paper addresses specifically various aspects of visual displays of merchandise for appealing to right people by not wasting time either way. Further, retailers can go about transforming their conventional visual displays into smart visual merchandising strategies

KEYWORD(S): Fashion, Visual displays, Retail, Visual merchandising

1.0 BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The term 'Visual merchandising' is used earlier during twenty first century which is considered as science and gradually incorporated as vital element in retail organizations (http://www.rusnauka.com/28_NII_2012/Psihologia/7_117255.doc.htm) which is highly creative and required high amount of hard work using artistic challenges inside stores. In this context, Strong visual merchandising techniques have huge impact in minds of customers and eventually increase sales.

It was unfamiliar to people and came into being during mid-2000's in India. It is considered as a great tool for promotion of merchandise in retail stores for the purpose of increasing sales. Visual Merchandising is an art of displaying merchandise particularly in Fashion product line signifying the vital features to people. It is a strategy of attracting and converting a person into consumer. It appeals to certain segment of people by automatically making them enter inside store. This paper addresses various elements of Visual displays incorporated by retailers across India. In this line, Visual merchandising is highly creative tool to differentiate stores and very challenging and apparently it can be a risk taking job.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

- Curiosity from researcher

- Limited study in the area of Retail Store Operations

1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bloemer and de Ruter (1998) indicates that image of store consist of complex set of customers' perception of a store with an array of attributes. Image of Retail store is defined as individual's cognitive and emotions that are inferred from perception that are connected to particular stores which creates appeal to people. It is in sync with the study made by (Porter and Claycomb (1997)) which indicates the image is perceived as outlook of stores. Various literatures indicates that Image is considered as perception as as with retail store. It says something about stores which is a consistent process existing with or without knowledge of retailers and customers as well. Eventually, it attracts customers to store (Martenson (2007). This is quite challenging task for the retail chain across India as it is a combination of tangible and intangible which helps retail store to attain or sustain good will. Further, in the study made by Doyle and Fenwick (1974) specifies five dimensions for defining image such as product, dimension, assortment, styling and location. Further, Lindquist (1974) defines store image in nine dimensions which includes attributes namely merchandise, service, customers, physical facilities, convenience, promotion, store ambience, institutional factors and post-transaction satisfaction

Pierre Martineau (1958) has described that the customers feeling associated with the retail store. This concept was developed for the first time and it describes about the customer buying behavior in broader sense. In the same line, Porter and Claycomb (1997) have specified that above all, the outlook of the retail store can have drastic impact on the shopping behavior. Porter, S. S., &

Claycomb, C. (1997) have indicated that the retail store will have favourable image when merchandise mix is composed of a relatively more number of brands which possess high brand awareness. The study also indicates to brand and retail managers for effective implementation in order to develop the store image. Apart from this, visual merchandise helps to drag customers to store by adding theme based display which has impact on purchase process (Shona kerfoot , Barry Davies, Philippa Ward (2003) which is in sync with the study made by (Hemanth Y, unpublished article) using creative colours, presentation techniques, fixtures and appropriate lighting on fashion consumers to purchase merchandise inside store. Further, Panna B and Gupta S(2015) indicating that Store ambience is a complex factor which doesn't have much impact on fashion consumers but design elements namely displays and layouts have impact. The findings from the study Bedi et. al(2014) indicates Image of store and store loyalty have impact on Indian consumers for purchasing

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts meta-analysis of literatures pertaining to Image of retail stores without any contradiction to existing Visual Merchandising concepts. At the same time, observations were made by researcher in Apparel/Fashion stores to arrive at factors which pertain to visual displays.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand and elicit factors for building Image of store using Visual Merchandising techniques

1.6 QUICK FACTS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Researcher after extensive observations in stores, opine the fact that in retail Stores Visual merchandising plays is a vital role for attracting and creating an appeal to customers. In this line, there are associated design elements which are adopted in sync with merchandise in creating visual displays by utilizing adequate space, merchandise, color, lightings and digital displays with symmetry, rhythm and themes as well. It comprises of creative presentation of In-Store and Window displays and associated elements discussed further in the following section. This is adopted for the very simple reason of attracting and persuading customers to stores and makes them to do impulse purchases. (pris and Bratucu G(2013)). Researcher believes the fact that Visual merchandisers should put in immense effort to change the Visual displays very often as the fashion trends are very fast. Besides this, Smart model of Visual Merchandising can be adopted by retail stores (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315306910_Visual_Merchandising_-_A_Smart_Model, Hemanth Y)

1.6.1 WHAT'S INSIDE VISUAL MERCHANDISING?

In Visual Merchandising, visual display is an important design element in retail business practices in creating image of store by displaying merchandise appealing to right person walking in store especially in Fashion or Apparel stores. (Refer Appendix 1, observation by Researcher). In this line, retailers have to adopt creative and innovative displays to build image without cluttering with many elements which are detailed below:

A) EXTERIOR DISPLAYS

Exterior window displays can be adopted to persuade customers entering the store. In this line, innovate displays should be portraying the brand of stores and it is a effective way to appeal consumers.

Store front: This is an important element which is exterior to the business including following elements

a) Marquee: Basically, this displays name of store which reflects the brand name of store. This display helps customers to recall the brand

b) Entrances: Retail Stores comprises of different types of entrances based on the format. In this line, there are various entrances are built as shown below:

- **Revolving:** This type of entrance is adapted in up- scale fashion stores involving high fashion clothing.

- **Climate Controlled**: This is an emerging phenomenon in Visual Merchandising techniques adopted in shopping malls.

c) Window Displays: It is one way of capturing the customers' attention to stores by displaying the right merchandise which should be in sync with seasons like Sprint/Summer and Autumn/Winter in Apparel retail stores. At the same time, it plays an important role in festive seasonal displays. The findings of the study made by Edward and Shackle M (1992) suggests that retail stores can influence emotions of customers and persuade them to enter stores and create a pleasing ambience by modifying the dimensions of window displays.

- **Store Layouts**: This is conventional practices adapted by chain of retail stores in fashion segment. In this context, free form layouts are the right fit especially for fashion category and it is evident in stores that multi-brand stores showcase their displays. Free form layouts are suitable for

Apparel stores that help customers in easy access to merchandise (**Ebster, Cluas and Garaus, Marion (2015))**

- **Colour**: Researcher opines that Color is considered as King as it is powerful and most effective element in displaying detailing of merchandise which can be associated with brand building. It describes array of colour which stimulates emotional responses among people. (OPRIŞ (CĂS. STĂNILĂ), M.; BRĂTUCU, G. (2013)) For instance, store can create a great ambience by carefully choosing the appropriate colors such as warm colors like red, yellow which can create excitement among people Likewise purple indicates elegant and style.

- **Signages:** This is another visual element this is another visual element for effective way of graphic displays through text in advertising process for different customer. (Morgan, Tony (2011)). In this line, Signage communicates clear message consistent with the merchandise and it is image building practice

- **Lighting:** Lighting is a technique to enhance windows displays highlighting the merchandise feature, create different moods by adding brightness and colours.

- **Seasonal displays:** Adjusting window displays should be changed based on seasonal events and holidays such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, mother's day, children's day which should lead to purchases. During this process, seasons should match with the merchandise display and remind customers for gift purchases for particular holidays. (OPRIŞ (CĂS. STĂNILĂ), M.; BRĂTUCU, G. (2013). "Visual Merchandising Window display". *Bulletin of the Transilvania University Of Brasov*. **6** (2))

d) Mannequins: In Apparel Stores, Mannequins play a dominant role to display merchandise based on themes. In fact they are used to align the prevailing trends. Research indicates that mannequins project an image to customers based on size and proportions. This is used to further reinforce the characteristics of particular segment. However, consumers found the size of mannequins were unrealistic and cannot relate them (**Derry Law; Christina Wong; Joanne Yip (2012-02-10).** Therefore, it is important for retailers to understand the thoughts and opinions of consumers as mannequins as visual stimuli so they can create a great shopping ambience.

1.7 DISCUSSIONS

This section explores into the various aspects of Visual Merchandising with a broader perspective and narrowing to specific visual merchandise (Visual displays) associated with business retail strategies

accordingly. Moreover, it addresses the creative element incorporated in retail stores across Nation. This is vital factor which affects image of retail stores. In this line, the study made by Hemantha Y and Arun B K (2017) the respondents have mentioned that Visual merchandising is displayed at the entrance of the retail store has an impact on image and attract customers walking inside stores. Besides, it gives idea about the merchandise.

By revisiting the objective of the study few factors below emphasizes in building image of store

- **Color-** It is often said by people that Color is a powerful aspect which can make or break visual displays in store. Perhaps, eye catching displays are adopted to balance the colors based on merchandise and attract customers.

- **Tell A Story-** Retailers should use powerful Signage's to display inside stores in which it should have headline indicating powerful points especially price point appealing to customers clearly and make purchase decisions.

- **Focus point:** The visual displays should be done based on the floor space and right and left sides. In this context, merchandise should be placed in right place which makes easy view of merchandise. It is important to remember that focusing is to be done to merchandise than visual elements displayed with merchandise. It is also observed in stores that more merchandise you display the customers will be willing to purchase but the retailers should be cautious about making more elements of visual displays rather than conventional aisles. Layouts should be associated with the merchandise category. In this line, displays should be sharp and ensure that aisle space should be comfortable to customers inside stores.

- **Strategic Competitive Advantage**: As Visual merchandising communicates about the stores, retailers can capitalize on visual display techniques to appeal to right customers especially in Fashion category to build the right image of store which can be differentiating factor and adds value to store.

- **Visibility of Stores**: Retailers can adopt visual merchandise as digital enabled to increase visibility of stores by not merely increase sales but

- **Usage of Empty Space:** As said earlier to increase visibility it is done by enhancing by utilizing the empty spaces inside stores by adopting Signage's which provides merchandise information associated with brand and Lifestyle graphics are displayed to attract the right people. For

example, a department store displays a man wearing Sports jacket creating an association

between store and healthy lifestyle which eventually indicates a healthy image to customers.

CONCLUSION(S)

This study addresses the Visual merchandising techniques for retail business practices which involve elements associated with visual displays for enhancing the image of store. In fact Image is more multi-dimensional in nature which has both physical and emotional cues to customers. It is quite challenging to retailers as every retailers are in the state of generating revenues without creating and building image. This study presents the way of display mechanism with appropriate layouts and design elements in sync with merchandise displayed to attract people and eventually build an image of stores.

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APPENDIX 1

Figure 1: Observation by Researcher in Men's wear section at Apparel Stores