

# Impact of Visual Merchandising on Consumer Behaviour towards Women's Apparel

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores' women's decision making behavior towards apparel's based on how they are displayed in windows and in stores on mannequins or in form. Specifically it offers empirical results on the relationship between women's impulse buying, product decision making and visual appeal of apparel displays. A questionnaire survey was employed as the tool to collect primary data and was administered to 150 ladies in the Delhi/NCR region of India. The result shows that apparel displayed on mannequins inside the store and in show windows has a significant impact on the purchase decision of women.

**Key words:** In Store Display, Mannequin, Retail, Visual Merchandising, Women Apparel, Women Buying Behaviour, Impulse Buying

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## INTRODUCTION

Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandising is its presentation and it's attractive and eye catching techniques to display merchandise to potential customers.

It sets the context of the merchandise in an aesthetically pleasing fashion, presenting them in a way that would convert the window shoppers into prospects and ultimately buyers of the product. A creative and talented retailer can use this upcoming art to breathe-in new life into his store. Passion for design and creativity with the understanding of yielding return on investments are essential to be a good visual merchandiser. A perfect design process and the ability to create

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ideas that are different is a must. Awareness of happenings in fashion world is needed so as to keep up-to-date with the dynamics of the market constantly.

Visual merchandising includes window displays, signs, interior displays, cosmetic promotions and any other special sales promotions taking place.

### Components of Visual Merchandising

There are certain things which a retailer needs to take care while proceeding with the process of displaying his products. These components when combined together in a proper ratio will make a successful outcome.

#### Make merchandise the focal point

The main goal of display is to showcase the products within the overall display area. Customers give three to five seconds of their attention to window display. The retailer's visual message should be conveyed to the customer in that short period of time. It should not be like an unsuccessful TV advertisement, where the product is forgotten altogether and only the concept of the commercial remains in the mind of the viewer. The arrangement of window display should go with the product and should not suppress them to make it discernable to the eye.

#### The role of a visual merchandiser

A Visual Merchandiser's role is to increase sales; first by attracting shoppers into the store through the power of the window display, and then through in-store display and layout, which needs to encourage them to remain in the store, purchase and have a positive retail experience so that they return.

### Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour 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 behaviour directly affects marketing strategy (Anderson et al, 2005). This is because of the marketing concept, i. e., the idea that firms exist to satisfy customer needs (Winer, 2000). Firms can satisfy those needs only to the extent that they understand their customers. For this reason, marketing strategies must incorporate knowledge of consumer behaviour into every facet of a strategic marketing plan (Solomon, 2002).

The understanding of consumer behaviour appeals to a set of different areas of knowledge/factors: psychological, cultural social psychological, physio-psychological, genetics anthropology. One of them is the psychology since consumer behaviour deals with emotions, beliefs and attitudes. Research on emotions within marketing has evolved three approaches: the categories approach, the dimensions approach and the cognitive appraisals approach (Watson and Spence, 2007). The categories approach groups emotions around exemplars and considers their different effects on consumption related behaviour.

The importance of the implicit memory in terms of its capacity to process and store information cannot be understated. The implicit memory registers vast amounts of input from our surrounding environment as we move through life. Millions of experiences that we have had throughout our entire lives are stored away in a particular part of our memory system and can be instantly accessed to help us develop an intuitive 'feeling' about what we should, or should not do. The critical issue, however, is that most of the associations that drive intuition reside in the unconscious part of our brain. They are brought into play automatically, and are not the subject of conscious awareness. We can't normally articulate the basis of our intuitions. So consumers often make brand choices intuitively, and cannot tell why they made that choice.

## **PAST STUDIES**

According to John Stanly in his article 'Display does The Magic' (May, 2010) state that People don't buy products just because they are products. They buy them for numerous reasons; to cheer themselves up, to beautify their home, to add value or any other host of reasons. As a retailer, your role is to hit the hot buttons. All "stopping power" displays should provide ideas and solutions, not just product.

Change the displays based on how often the customer visits the store. If the average is monthly, change the displays monthly, if it's weekly, change the displays weekly. Perceptive retailers will have a display roster to introduce constant changes in their business.

If displays are built that are full of items the consumer is familiar with, the chances are they will not stop and have a look. The familiar products must be displayed with the unfamiliar, not only will they stop and look, the chances are they are more likely to purchase the familiar items. That's the "stopping power" working in action.

According to D.M Sezhiyan, T.Nambirajan & T Kumarn In their article on 'Segmentation of Shoppers using their behavioural pattern based On store Images' published in Asia Pacific Business Review (April 2010), Store Image may be defined as the overall attitude towards the store based upon the perceptions of relevant store attributes. Image considerations are important aspects in the development on an integrated marketing strategy for individual stores, store chains and shopping centers. Store Image has been found to be related to such key concepts of retail success as store patronage and profits. A unique store image is one of the retailer's most valuable marketing assets and creates a competitive advantage which is not easily duplicated by other retailers.

No store can be all things to all people. Different groups of consumers might place different importance on the various store image attributes. Store may emphasize different image attributes as part of their marketing strategy and ideally the important attribute stressed by the store should be those which the target segment attaches most importance. The importance of segmenting retail markets on the basis of store image attributes and the development of an image that conforms to the needs of the retailers target group of consumers have been repeatedly stressed in the literature. Store segmentation image provides guidelines for a retail firm's marketing strategy and can increase profitability.

In a retail outlet, there are multiple ways to showcase a brand and promote sales growth. Of these, the use of mannequins to exhibit merchandise is of great importance. The word 'mannequin' comes from the Dutch word manneken, literally meaning 'little man'. A mannequin is an assembled model of the human body used by retailers to demonstrate their products, especially to exhibit the draping of apparel.

NehaMalhotra in her article 'Mannequins: Sculptures of Success' (15 Feb 2010) Mannequins help a retailer in many different ways. As and when a new fashion trend hits the market, they are the first ones to showcase it. It is through them, we get to know about the latest collections of clothing that have arrived at a particular store. Some retailers upgrade or dress the mannequins on regular basis and change the get-up as soon as new merchandise arrives in the store. Mannequins also give an appeal to the product while letting customers know how a particular piece of merchandise would look once worn. This helps them to procure a piece of merchandise quickly. Subsequently in a way we can say that mannequins are beneficial not only for retailers but also for the clientele.

Mannequins in a store look good if maintained properly. A broken or ill fitted mannequin can have an adverse effect. Hence, to keep up the image, maintenance of mannequins is very important. Any chipping of the paint or color, cracks or broken parts, scratching and for any other damage there should be a periodic check. Thus, as and when required, new mannequins should be replaced with old ones.

Garvey John in his article 'All About Visual Merchandising' (21st Jan,2010) state that Visual merchandising is so important, especially if you run a small retail store like a boutique. People that work in visual merchandising specialize in marketing, advertising, promotions and the look of your store. Maintaining visual displays, such as window displays, is an important part of making your store visually effective. A retail visual merchandiser may also be responsible for managing inventory while planning for promotions.

Keep all of your displays arranged in alignment with your prices and the message that you want to portray. Visual merchandising is all about making the customer feel how you want them to feel. Identify your target market, figure out how they want to feel when they make a purchase, and go from there. If they want to feel unique, make sure that you don't put out too many of one item. Make them feel like they are one of the only people that will buy this item. Take all of these tips and work them into your displays and you will be building the brand image that you want in no time.

VishwaSharvaDobhal in his article 'Success With Alluring Display' (Dec, 2009) State that Displays are an important part of every retail business and highly acknowledged universally. A display when skillfully done is sure to fetch customers as well as profits. Every prospective retailer would want to cultivate this art to infuse life in his products but this requires a degree of passion, creativity and skill to carve out something new and unique which may captivate audience attention and turn him from a window browser to a buyer.

Visual merchandising commences right from frontage of show-room to its store lay-out, interior designing, interior displays, and other cosmetic additions. The objective of display is to drive the audience to merchandise column. It is imperative that the guests step in, or else they would never tend to buy. The display should therefore, be so eloquently designed that it instinctively draws

audience to the merchandise column. Goods displayed artistically and positioned on mannequins may tempt customers to get into the show-room and buy products of choice.

Choice of colours is a vital tool in the visual merchandising. Colours attract attention and pull customer into the store. Colours can be associated with occasions, gender and emotions. A retailer should focus on the right choice of colours that may match with the theme of display. Such as, Valentines theme may be coloured in red, pink and white, and the Christmas in red, white and green colours.

Retailers should devise themes for specific items sales. A trendy theme may lure customers into a shop for impulse buying. Retailers may carve out themes as per their imagination and creativity in sync with season, festival or events. Such as, a shoe store can theme on a group of elves buying shoes, whilst an apparel store may theme on his mannequins posturing audience.

According to article Visual Merchandise-A Smart Model(October, 2009) by Hemanth Y, Smart Visual merchandising is just the beginning to target Indian consumer; since it involves online buying patterns of Apparel and related products which attracts consumer to retail stores and presenting merchandise in a manner that will appeal to consumers.

A good visual merchandising and store planning will play an important part. Maintaining a store presentation of desirable products that are clean, orderly, easy to find, and easy to buy will provide a great service to the people looking for something special. Good in-store signage is the important final element of store presentation and promotions. Category signage that helps to guide the customer through your store is essential. In addition, creating a professional looking graphics package that displays price and features and benefits messages clearly communicates the value of your offer.

According to the report on the Visual Merchandising (2009), the evolution of Store Display from Store Warehouse and the innovative visual merchandising practiced in Western countries. With the coming of malls, visual merchandising and store displays are getting prominence, but one of the flip sides being that all malls and displays look similar with very few exceptions.

This report has arrived at the conclusion that a little more attentiveness to innovative Visual Merchandising, loosening of budget strings, use of Indian ethos and the ability to understand Visual Merchandising needs and work around budgets in an imaginative and utilitarian manner will go a long way in creating world class Visual Merchandising practices in India. Visual Merchandising can be the unique selling proposition, the first point of intimate contact between product and customer.

According to the Matthew L Tullman& K. Rose Clark (2004), the art and science of retailing in the coming years will consider much more than what is visual. Store environments may then be fashioned as holistic sensory environments catering to customers seeking refuge from life's visual cacophony.

In store marketing and merchandising can be enhanced with more balanced arrays of sensory communication, resulting in significant reductions in visual liability and major improvements to store and brand performance.

The purpose of the study conducted by Young Ha, Wi-Suk, and Sharon J Lennon was to examine visual merchandising elements of apparel retail web sites, to describe the state of

apparel online Visual Merchandising and to develop taxonomy of online Visual Merchandising cues whose effects can be studied empirically.

In spite of the strategic importance of Visual Merchandising in online apparel stores, specific online Visual Merchandising features that may influence consumer attitudes and behaviors have not been identified. Findings provide a comprehensive list of online Visual Merchandising elements available from apparel web sites that are comparable to traditional offline Visual Merchandising.

According to Jiyeon Kim in the article ‘College Students Apparel – Impulse buying Behaviour in Relation with Visual Merchandising’, definitions and characteristics of impulse buying and normative evaluations of impulse buying behaviour as well as factors and cues influencing impulse buying behaviour are well related. In addition, this research defines visual merchandising and explains its purpose along with relevant literature to link impulse buying behaviour with visual merchandising as an influencing factor.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Empirical research is a way of gaining knowledge by means of **direct** observation or experience. Empirical evidence can be analyzed quantitatively or qualitatively. Through quantifying the evidence or making sense of it in qualitative form, we have answered empirical questions, which should be clearly defined and answerable with the evidence collected (usually called data). We have tried to describe accurately the interaction between the instrument (the human senses) and the entity being observed. We conducted a study with a sample size of 150 women of different age groups randomly selected in Malls of Delhi/NCR.

Independent T-Test has been used for hypothesis testing to help us conclusively answer, how strongly visual merchandising influences the buying behaviour of women.

### **Objective of the Study**

- To study the influence of visual merchandising on various factors (motivation, perception, lifestyle) affecting the consumer buying behavior towards women apparels.
- To study the role of Visual Merchandising in impulse buying.

### **Results and Discussions:**

#### **INTERPRETATION:**

According to the above graph, we can say that 42% of the women choose the store to shop in depending on the eye catching window display. Thus, we can say that the window display matters a lot and a good window display attracts the customers.

**I tend to choose which store to shop in depending on eye catching window displays.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	1.3	1.3	1.3
	2	33	22.0	22.0	23.3
	3	41	27.3	27.3	50.7
	4	63	42.0	42.0	92.7
	5	11	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 1

**I get an idea of what I want to buy after looking through in-store form/mannequin display.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	2.7	2.7	2.7
	2	13	8.7	8.7	11.3
	3	20	13.3	13.3	24.7
	4	68	45.3	45.3	70.0
	5	45	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

**INTERPRETATION:**

Women while shopping give a lot of attention to the in-store form and what is displayed on the mannequins. Thus, the apparels displayed on mannequins must be good and attractive. 45.33% of the women get an idea of what they should buy only after looking through the mannequin display.

**When I see clothing featuring a new style or design on mannequin display, I tend to buy it**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1	5	3.3	3.3	3.3
2	29	19.3	19.3	22.7
3	39	26.0	26.0	48.7
4	68	45.3	45.3	94.0
5	9	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

**INTERPRETATION:**

Around 45.33% of women rely on the mannequin display and whenever they see clothing featuring a new style or design on mannequin display, they tend to buy it.

**I always pay attention to different window displays no matter what is being displayed**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1	2	1.3	1.3	1.3
2	22	14.7	14.7	16.0
3	35	23.3	23.3	39.3
4	67	44.7	44.7	84.0
5	24	16.0	16.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

**INTERPRETATION:**

44.67% of the women always pay attention to the different window display no matter what is being displayed. While strolling in the malls, whether interested or not, one always pay attention to the window display and many a times they also end up in impulse buying. Thus the window displays must always be good and attractive.



**One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
When I see clothing on tempting posters /print adverts/catalogs/TV/Videos displays in-store I tend to buy them.	150	3.31	1.087	.089

**Table 5**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 3					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
When I see clothing on tempting posters /print adverts/catalogs/TV/Video displays in-store I tend to buy them.	3.457	149	.001	.307	.13	.48

**Table 6**

**Ho:** Tempting displays has a neutral role in influencing the purchase decision of buyers.

**H1:** Tempting displays has a significant role in influencing the purchase decision of buyers.

*At 95% level of significance*

*P value is 0.001 & Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is equal to 0.05.*

*Thus,  $p < \alpha$ ; Null hypothesis is rejected.*

**One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I get motivated to buy by an attractive display of the store	150	3.43	1.006	.082

**Table 5.16**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 3					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
I get motivated to buy by an attractive display of the store	5.275	149	.000	.433	.27	.60

**Table 5.17**

**Ho: Attractive display of the store has a neutral impact on Impulse Buying.**

**H1: Attractive display of the store has a significant impact on Impulse Buying.**

*At 95% level of significance*

*P value is 0 & Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is equal to 0.05.*

*Thus,  $p < \alpha$ ; Null hypothesis is rejected.*

**CONCLUSION:**

Objective 1: To study the influence of visual merchandising on various factors (motivation, perception, lifestyle) affecting the consumer buying behavior towards women apparels.

Visual Merchandising has a very high impact on Consumer Buying Behavior.

Many women get influenced by Visual Merchandising.

Majority of the women gets an idea of what to buy after looking through in-store form/mannequin display.

Women most of the times look at the displays no matter what is being displayed.

Objective 2: To study the role of Visual Merchandising in impulse buying.

To an extent Visual Merchandising also leads to Impulse Buying.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The Visual Merchandising of the apparels must be pre tested before finalizing.
- The apparels should always be placed in a neat and systematic order.

- There should be proper synergy between the season and the apparels displayed.
- Customer should be offered facilities of Drinking water and Seating arrangements
- If the retailers are allowed, and the weather is clear, then the retailers should display their apparels with the help of mannequins outside their store, as it creates a sense of excitement among the customers.
- The retailers should organize their stores logically and groupings should be created within categories, so that all the merchandise of one type, color, size is positioned together.
- The use of lights attracts the customer's; hence the retailers should make the use of lights within the store as well as window displays and create attention.

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