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A REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND RESEARCH ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

Marketing is defined as "human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange processes". Thus the beginning of marketing lies in identifying unsatisfied human needs and wants and understanding the ensuing activity which people engage in to fulfill these. And that, as we have described, is the realm of consumer behavior. Consumer behavior and marketing go hand-in-hand. Trying to do the latter without an understanding of the former is akin to firing a shot in the dark. Marketers use a variety of inputs to transfer information to customers. In order to directly work at the cognitive processes of the customer, most marketers try to incorporate perceptual inputs and stimuli in the process of information transfer or information to the customer. Therefore the sensory organs of the customer in this context are dimensions that are worked on. Therefore there exists a need to study the effect of marketing and the various marketing initiatives on consumer behavior through consumer psychology. It's at this juncture that we need to understand the motivation behind a marketer's requirement to incorporate the usage of visual marketing and visual merchandising to affect upon the process of transfer information to customers, the cognitive processes of the customer and thus the consumer behavior of the consumer. This article is a part of my doctoral thesis study on the topic and the information presented is a part of my research. The present study is a conceptual study and aims at identifying the articles that detail about the various facets of visual merchandising. While exhaustive research has been done on visual merchandising and the various facets of visual merchandising, each of the article so presented has spoken one or few dimensions of visual merchandising. There is a need to offer a conducive model that does just speak of few of the dimensions like display and maybe music in isolation. There seems to be a need to study the effect of the various important visual merchandising dimensions in combination with each other, together and then view the holistic impact on the resultant consumer behavior. As known, a consumer's emotions can be a mediating factor in the purchase process. This study intends to have a holistic view of all such dimension (from the visual merchandising angle) and try and detail how these various dimensions of purchase behavior influence the emotional states of consumers.

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KEYWORDS

Consumer behavior, Purchase behavior, Emotional states, Visual merchandising, Consumer psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Visual marketing has a lot to do with the cognitive sub processes of attention and perception, visual cognition, and action and choice. This is an area of interest in marketing, management, industrial design, and consumer and social psychology, marketing communications, retail, and in store marketing.

Going by the retail boom that is so prevalent in India and India fast growing as an economic destination for global brands it becomes imperative to understand the influence of visual marketing on store image and store choice while talking about consumer behavior towards malls and the usage of visual marketing while positioning a store.

"Attractive displays attract and stimulate !! This, in turn, creates desire and behavior – that of increased sales" ---- Bell & Ternus, 2002

Research done on this topic suggests that with increasing entry of strong brand names into the marketing arena, brands, companies are working on customer pull and retention strategies.

All research would justify that advertisements primarily serve two basic roles: to inform and to persuade. In other words, advertisements provide information related to a particular product or service that in turn persuades consumers to buy the product or service. So in the light of our study we look at the retail outlet, the design of the retail outlet and the visual merchandising used as the marketer's tool that would pull the customer to make a choice by appealing to his visual senses.

The run is on to create a marketing strategy that can entice the customer to buy. In any retail mall today, the most striking feature is the value added retail experience offered. In this regard visual merchandising plays a very important role in the overall customer experience. In fact according to Ms. Sharmila Dua and Dr. Anjali Karolia in their article "Visual Merchandising - The Changing Scenario," visual merchandising is the most useful creative art as far as retail business, which is slowly establishing an identity in India

Visual merchandising (VM) is the creative, organized, and sustained approach of enhancing the look and feel of our merchandise in order to maximize sales. It is everything that the customer sees and feels both interior and exterior, that creates a positive image of a business and results in attention, interest, desire, conviction, and sale. "This is who we are and what we stand for."- Martin S. Pegler

VISUAL MERCHANDISING AS A CONCEPT

Visual merchandising is defined as "the arrangement of a outlet and its merchandise in ways that will draw the interest of prospective customers and prompt them to make purchases" (Diamond & Diamond, 2003, p. 5). Traditionally the term "display" was used to describe the job of a "window trimmer" that produced illustration or artistic aspects of the merchandising presentation (Cahan & Robinson, 1984; Diamond & Diamond, 2003). Today visual merchandising emphasizes the total store atmosphere including merchandise presentation, store design and image, mannequins, props and materials, lighting, graphics, and signage (Cahan & Robinson, 1984; Diamond & Diamond, 2003). Visual merchandising is thus concerned with both the visual and the marketing functions of the store atmosphere to augment the store image and to boost sales (Cahan & Robinson, 1984; Diamond & Diamond, 2003). Walters and White (1987) stressed that visual merchandising should kindle consumers' interest about products and motivate them to buy more products. Using theme-oriented props in the retail store, visual merchandising may amplify mood which can influence purchasing (Tyreman & Walton, 1998). Sears stores displays men's shirts with typewriters, globes, and old law books in order to create the ambience of a professional office (Tyreman & Walton, 1998). Theme-oriented props help consumers and the way the products

are displayed influences consumers' reaction to the product (Tyreman & Walton, 1998). Sometimes, improper elements incompatible with consumers' expectations can harm store image (Cahan & Robinson, 1984; Walters & White, 1987). Thus, the quality of visual merchandising is thought to be very important to increase sales as well as to augment the image of the store (Cahan & Robinson, 1984; Walters & White, 1987).

VISUAL MERCHANDISING-SCOPE, IMPLEMENTATION, TECHNIQUES AND IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

According to Ms. Sharmila Dua and Dr. Anjali Karolia in their article, "Visual Merchandising - "The changing scenario", it has been clearly pointed out that "The Indian retail industry is estimated to have a market size of \$180 billion accounting for a national GDP of 10%. It is poised to see a growth of 11 - 12% per year. India is placed sixth in the global retail development index and it is predicted that there will be 1000 - 1500 stores in each of the metros by next year. About 60% of the growth expected is to be in the area of fashion and lifestyle, and visual merchandising is one key area for the same." As in the paper, "The store derives as much of its identity, character and gravity from its physical contours, as from the products it houses and the individuals who manage the transactions there in. It includes not only the products on sale but also the decor, the shop floor and ceiling, restrooms and trial rooms, staff uniforms, lipstick color of female personnel and tie knots of male personnel. It is also inclusive of the attitude of the personnel who interact with customers. Hence everything that makes an impact on the perspective customer is part of visual merchandising." In order to make visual merchandising work, the retailer needs to utilize visual merchandising to develop a powerful store-image effectively. Image can be described as the overall look of a store and the series of mental pictures it evokes within the beholder. Everything you do in the store must fit into the image you chose to create. Creation of a recognizable image that will be applied and communicated effectively through multiple media to gain customer recognition and loyalty. "Image is everything".

Studies indicate that a retailer has roughly seven seconds to capture the attention of a passing customer. The following elements combine to form a distinctive image that not only reaches out and grabs the customer's attention, but also makes a positive impression within those precious seconds. The image makers are: an identifiable store name, a powerful visual trademark, an unmistakable storefront, an inviting entrance and a consistent and compelling store look and hook. The entire store experience would be said to have an effectively working visual merchandising if each of the above would be consistent in reinforcing the brand image of the store.

According to V.P.S. Arora, Shivani Sharma and Nirdesh K. Singh, in the article, "Nature and Functioning of Visual Merchandising in Organized Food Retailing", where a comparative analysis of visual merchandising has been done at Food Bazaar (Ambala), Subhiksha (Chandigarh) and ITC Choupal Fresh (Chandigarh) a study was made to identify the Problems faced in implementation of visual merchandising at retail stores and few implications of the same have been discussed. The study has revealed that retail planograms, retail merchandising and retail signages are the three important components of visual merchandising.

According to Rick Segel in his article, "The Top Twelve Visual Merchandising Ideas" a guide and strategies that can be used to improve a store's visual merchandising has been detailed. According to this study the various strategies that can be used include: setting up a display of merchandise outside the store, usage of signages to identify not only departments but also categories, usage of display windows to set the mood of the store which should match the mood of the customer, To appeal to all the senses by using a combination of smell, touch, taste and display, to show customers how the merchandise will look in their home, to Organize the store logically, to Display merchandise from several categories and Group By Lifestyle, usage of spotlights within the store as well as in the windows to highlight, regular change of display, Effective usage of color and planning displays around a central color that pops and captures the customer's attention, usage of motion for merchandise, usage to principle of three to create a display and work in sets of three.

VISUAL MERCHANDISING - A STRATEGIC TOOL

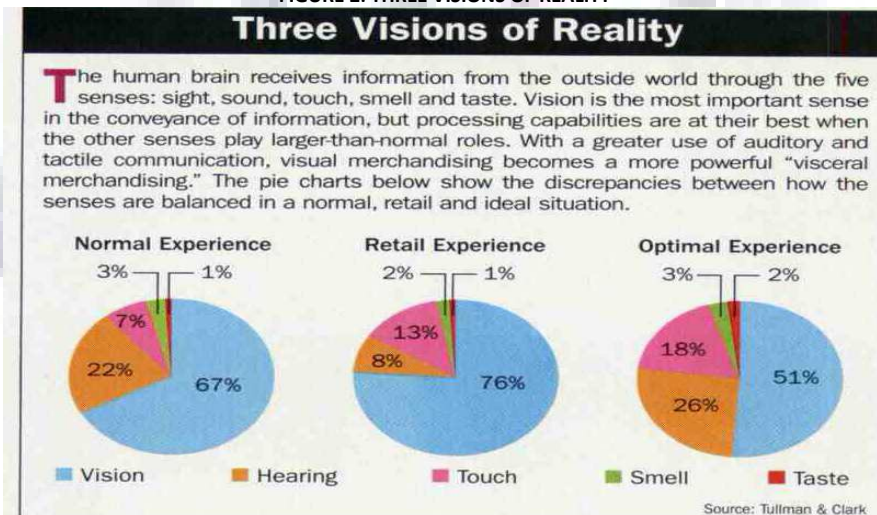
Accordingly Visual merchandising is an important strategic tool in fashion marketing (Lea-Greenwood, 1998). Visual merchandising as the total store environment including merchandise presentation, store design and image, mannequins, props and materials, lighting, graphics, and signage influences product sales and store image in the retail setting (Cahan & Robinson, 1984; Diamond & Diamond, 2003). Previous research found that store environments (e.g., lighting, color, and music) influenced consumers' emotional states such as pleasure and arousal that in turn influenced consumer response behaviors (Baker, Levy, & Grewel, 1992; Bitner, 1992; Buckley, 1991; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Spies, Hesse, & Loesch, 1997). Higher levels of pleasure and arousal induced by store environments increased purchase intention (Babin, Hardesty, & Suter, 2003; Fiore & Kimple, 1997) and approach behaviors (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). This indicates the importance of visual merchandising in retail stores for increasing purchase intention and approach behaviors.

EFFECT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

According to Mathew J. Tullman & K. Rose Clark, in their article "Revitalising Visual Merchandise", Of the vast majority of information collected by the customers about environment, 65% to 70% is obtained through the eyes, the runners up - the sense of hearing is a distant second. Therefore retail environments typically rely far more heavily on visual communication. So methods to effectively influence the customer should not be based on visual impact alone. Providing well rounded in-store communication, that aims at impacting all the senses, is therefore the key to success".

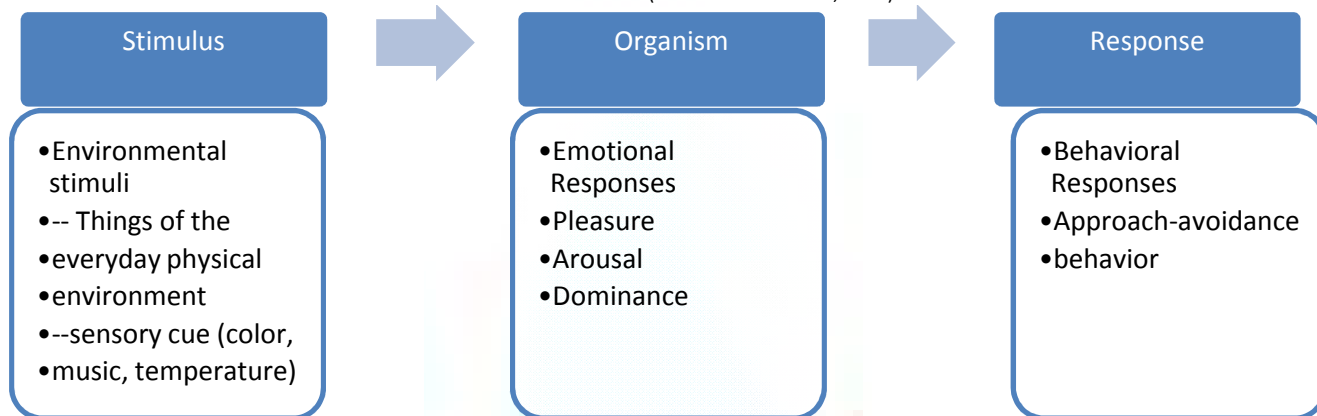
According to Larry B. Johnson, in his article Visual Merchandising and Your Store's Brand Image, "The three major features of visual presentation of jewelry have a significant impact on the store image and how the store's displays support it. These are: color, applicability and presentation".

FIGURE 2: THREE VISIONS OF REALITY



According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), much of the research in environmental psychology has focused on the effects of physical stimuli on human emotions (e.g., pleasure, arousal, and dominance, or 'PAD') and the effects of physical stimuli on a variety of behaviors (e.g., satisfaction, purchase intention, and approach-avoidance behavior). In terms of physical stimuli, most research has relied on the sensory variables such as color, sound, temperature, and texture. Consumer emotions are conceptualized as three dimensions: pleasure, arousal, and dominance. These emotional states cause various consumer response behaviors (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Physical stimuli (e.g., store design) in the environment influence consumer emotions (e.g., pleasure and arousal) that serve as mediating variables in determining a variety of consumer response behaviors such as satisfaction, purchase intention, and approach behaviors in a retail setting. A high level of pleasure and arousal elicited by environmental stimuli in retail stores and in websites enhance satisfaction (Eroglu et al., 2003; Machleit & Mantel, 2001; Spies, Hesse, & Loesch, 1997), purchase intention (Babin & Babin, 2001; Fiore et al., 2005; Spies et al., 1997), and approach behaviors such as desire to explore and desire to shop (Eroglu et al., 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2002). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the theoretical framework with the outline of the important variables that take place in most situations; it is called the Stimuli (S)—Organism (O)—Response (R) paradigm.

FIGURE 3: S-O-R PARADIGM (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974)



Several researchers have examined the S-O-R model in retail store environments and found that consumers' emotions induced by environmental stimuli influenced consumers' response behaviors such as satisfaction, purchase intention, and approach behaviors. Higher levels of pleasure and arousal from the store environment enhances shoppers' purchase intentions (Fiore & Kimle, 1997). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) tested the S-O-R model in retail settings, especially focusing on three emotional experiences—pleasure, arousal, and dominance—and suggested that this framework is a good starting point for studying consumer response behaviors in the retail context. They found that retail environmental stimuli influenced consumers' emotions such as pleasure, arousal, and dominance and these emotional experiences were powerful determinants of consumer behaviors in the retail store. Pleasure induced by store stimuli such as lighting and music had an effect on consumer behaviors including positive attitudes toward store environment, enjoyment of shopping, intention to revisit the store, intention to spend, and intention to browse more.

Baker et al. (1992) examined various aspects of store atmospherics—ambient cues and social cues—and their effects on the retail patronage decision based on the S-O-R model. They found that ambient factors such as music and lighting significantly influenced consumers' pleasure for the low social factor but not for the high social factor. Social cues alone influenced consumers' arousal in the store. These affective states—arousal and pleasure—had a great impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Baker et al., 1992).

EFFECT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR/TYPES OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Sherman et al. (1997) studied the effects of various stimuli (social factor, overall image, design factor, and ambient factor) in apparel retail stores on consumer emotions (pleasure and arousal) which in turn influence consumers' purchasing behavior. The results showed positive effects of social factors and design factors on pleasure and a positive effect of ambient factors

on arousal. Consumer emotions induced by a variety of factors in the store environment enhanced the amount of money and time spent in the store and the number of items purchased in the store (Sherman et al., 1997). Color is one of the most important design elements to communicate style and mood in retail store environments since it is the first thing a customer notices in the store (Colborne, 1996). Exciting colors attract our eye and make a store look alive (Colborne, 1996). Color in retail stores appears to influence consumer emotions such as pleasure and arousal (Bellizzi & Hite, 1992; Crowley, 1993) that in turn influence consumer behavioral intentions. Consumers' evaluations and excitement induced by the color of store environments were positively related to store patronage intentions and purchase intentions (Babin et al., 2003).

Researchers found that impulse buyers usually do not set out with the specific purpose of visiting a certain store and purchasing a certain item; the behavior occurs after experiencing an urge to buy (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998), and such behaviors are influenced by internal states and environmental/external factors. Since impulse buying is a pervasive aspect of consumers' behaviors and a focal point for strategic marketing plans (Rook, 1987), it is worthwhile for retailers to understand factors within the retail setting that trigger consumers' impulsive reactions. Retailers can help customers to find the right products through focused merchandising, intelligent store design and layout, and other visual merchandising practices, such as product displays, packaging, and signage (Abrams, 1996; Baker)

MODELS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING –CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Churchill and Peter (1998) generated a model of the consumer buying process (Figure 3) including five steps: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. According to the model, "The consumer buying process is influenced by social, marketing, and situational factors (Churchill & Peter, 1998). Marketing influences on the consumer buying process include the affect of the marketing mix, known as product, price, placement, and promotion, which influence the consumer buying process at various stages. Consumers, in general, are influenced by characteristics of the situation, circumstances surrounding their shopping trip". The physical surroundings that influence buying behavior are observable features that include location of the store, merchandise display, store interior/exterior design, and noise level of the store. The social surroundings of a situation are other people, their characteristics and roles, and the way they interact.

In the respect of Stern's (1962) classification, therefore, several of Churchill's and Peter's (1998) pre purchase steps are entirely skipped in the impulse buying process. Considering the nature of impulse buying, which occurs in a short period of time without prior plans, Churchill's and Peter's (1998) model has been modified for the purpose of this study to describe the impulse buying process by omitting several steps, such as need recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation, and reclassifying influencing factors. As consumers are exposed to the stimuli, these in turn trigger customers' urge to buy on impulse. When impulse buyers feel the desire to buy, they make a purchase decision without searching for information or evaluating alternatives. At this stage of the impulse buying process, consumers feel an irresistible urge to buy regardless of their prior intention. Then, consumers may experience positive or negative consequences by the post-purchase evaluation after the purchase on impulse. In fact some consumers have reported dissatisfaction with a product, but

maintain satisfaction that the purchase was made (MacLinnis & Price, 1987; Sherry, 1990). The more the store stimuli, such as visual merchandising, serves as a shopping aid, the more likely the possibility of a desire or need arising and finally creating an impulse purchase (Han, 1987; Han et al., 1991)

Visual Merchandising is a strategic tool in fashion marketing and can attract consumers and communicate brand image (Lea-Greenwood, 1998). In-store visual merchandising includes floor layout, interior design, signage, in-store promotion, and product mix that attract customers (Harris, 1998). Visual Merchandising cues in window displays affect consumer decisions to enter stores (Sen et al., 2002). These findings demonstrate that visual merchandising is important to study (Lea-Greenwood, 1998). Kerfoot et al. (2003) investigated the effects of visual merchandising stimuli on brand recognition, browsing, purchase intentions, and liking for displays in women's apparel stores.

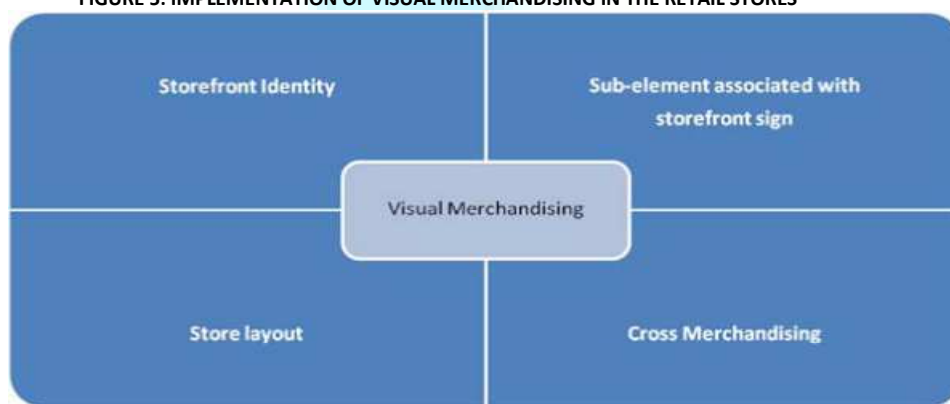
Aspects of visual merchandising that influenced perceptions were identified, including environmental or atmospheric characteristics (e.g., merchandise color, materials and lighting), manner of merchandise presentation, and path finding or having a clear path to navigate in the

Store. Results showed that coordinated merchandise color was more pleasant and led to more purchasing than uncoordinated merchandise color. In addition, presentations that helped shoppers visualize outfits (i.e. hanging presentation) or that gave shoppers an idea of how the outfit would look when worn (i.e. mannequin presentation) were positively perceived and tended to stimulate multiple purchases and browsing (Kerfoot et al., 2003). According to studies, the ease with which shopper are able to navigate the store has a very clear impact on their choices. It has been observed that -When clear paths are not provided, shoppers have difficulty getting around and are unsure where to start (Kerfoot et al., 2003). Path-finding difficulties were also associated with merchandise obstructions due to display and merchandise density, the absence of which was associated with perceptions of quality. In addition, environmental aspects such as flooring, fixtures, hangers, and lighting also affected perceptions. In general, results supported relationships between Visual Merchandising and approach and avoidance behaviors (Kerfoot et al., 2003).

According to Hemanth.Y, in his article, Visual Merchandising –A smart Model, speaks about a smart Model for Visual Merchandising. He feels, The term Smart Visual Merchandising is the way in which the stores display the products electronically. He speaks about the attributes of Visual Merchandising and depicts it in the form of figures as follows: The figure 4 depicts about various attributes of Visual Merchandising, while figure 5 shows how Visual Merchandising can be transformed into a smarter model.

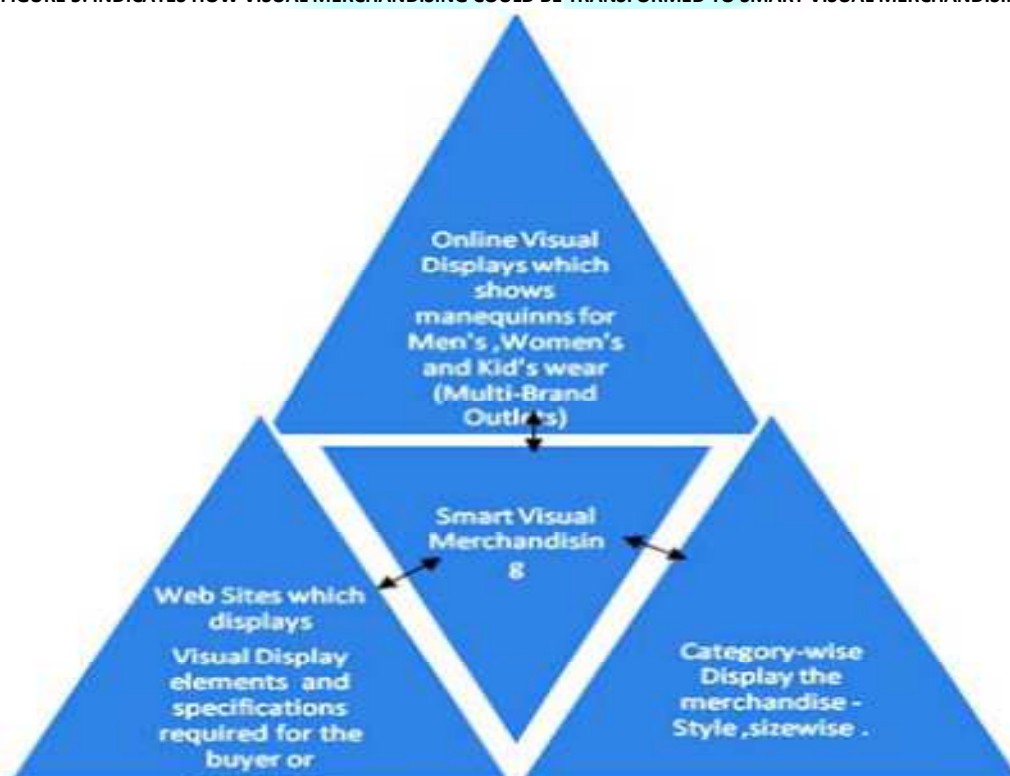
The tools used to achieve these attributes are based on creating the most satisfying experience for the shopper, turning web user into buyers.

FIGURE 5: IMPLEMENTATION OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING IN THE RETAIL STORES



He says, the way merchandise is displayed in show windows also has a lot to do with tantalizing the guests into the store. Whether a store in the mall or on the street, the customer has only a few seconds to view and be attracted by the store's displays. Therefore a store's visual philosophy should replicate a billboard: which should be making it bold, colorful, and simple.

FIGURE 5: INDICATES HOW VISUAL MERCHANDISING COULD BE TRANSFORMED TO SMART VISUAL MERCHANDISING



RETAIL STORE LAYOUT AS A VARIANT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING

According to Evans et al. (1996) an association exists between store layout and walking patterns of consumers and the layout could affect the duration of the consumers' experience in-store and the number of products they are exposed to. Underhill (1999) defines a good fashion store, as one that maximises the fashion consumer's exposure to fashion merchandise and invites consumers' consideration of fashion items by displaying merchandise in their path and field of vision (Underhill 1999). It is also suggested that factors such as the accessibility, visibility and attractiveness of the merchandise in combination with the store layout may promote fashion purchases.

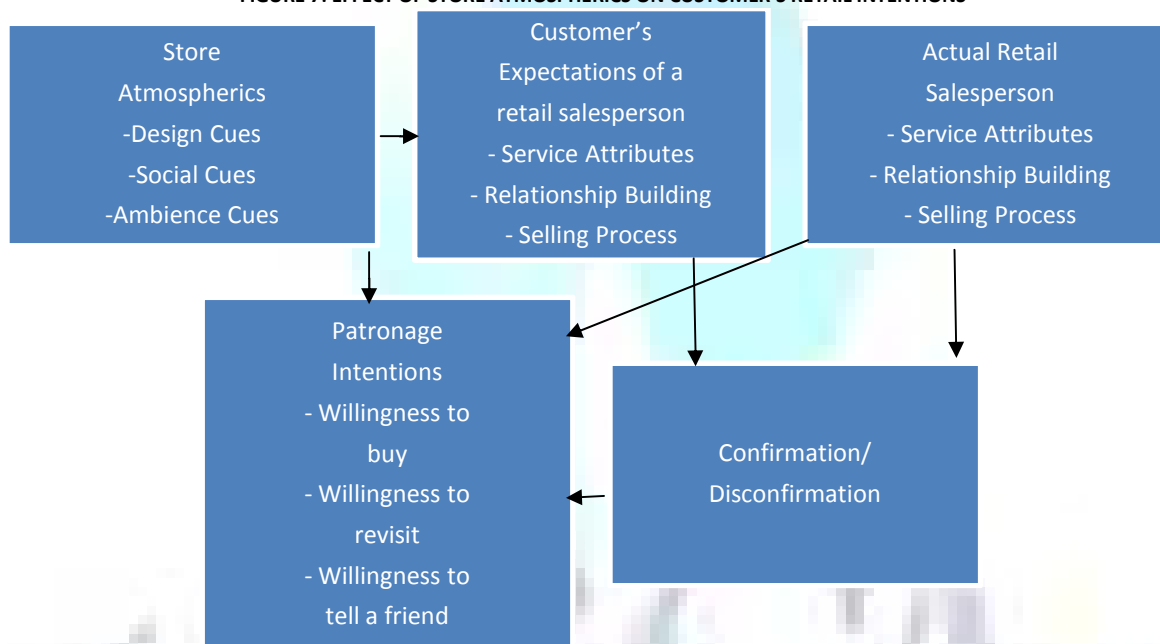
The article, 'The Effect of Fashion Store Layout And Visual Merchandising On Female Consumer Walking Patterns: A Systems Perspective' by Elizabeth Kempen, Dept. Of Consumer Sciences, North-West University, Daleen Van der Merwe, Dept. Of Consumer Sciences, North-West University, Nadine Sonnenberg, Dept. Of Consumer Sciences, North-West University, through the empirical study very clearly pointed out that both store layout and visual merchandising as subsystems within the store system have a prominent role to play in consumers' in-store behavior and walking patterns, as the different consumer categories notice visual merchandising in different ways.

Harris, Harris and Baron (2003) recently attempted to create a framework in which these marketing mix variables combine to create the holistic experiential goal. When designing the framework, it was found that the two central components required to complete the experiential goal were the humanics: the experience performers, and the mechanics: the experience design (Carbone and Haeckel, 2000; Harris, Harris and Baron, 2003). Figure 7, extends the work of Harris, Harris and Baron (2003) and Baker et al. (2002) and places it in a consumer context. The framework indicates that store atmospherics and retail salespeople work as separate variables to affect consumer's patronage intentions. The framework additionally suggests that store atmospherics can influence a customer's expectations of a retail salesperson in a retail environment. This leads to a potential difference between a consumer's expectation of a retail salesperson and their perceptions of the actual retail salesperson delivery. The 'moment of truth,' where the consumer disconfirms the match between expectations and perceptions of actual delivery is displayed because this will influence the customer's patronage intentions.

VISUAL MERCHANDISING & IN STORE ATMOSPHERICS

According to the research, In-store atmospherics are sensory or environmental cues used to develop store/brand image, which will lead to influence a consumer's evaluation of the environment and subsequently leading to a positive behavioral response. Responses include increased stay time (Lacher and Mizerski 1994; Yalch and Spangenberg 1990), mood (Swinyard 1993), purchase intention and customer share (Babin and Attaway 2000; McGoldrick and Pieros 1998). Store atmospherics encompass cues such as color, lighting, scents, sounds, layout and furnishings. Bitner (1992) proposed that consumers view the store environment as a composite of three dimensions: ambience, space/function and signs, symbols and artifacts. Mattila and Wirtz (2001) identified a relationship between scent, music and the store environment, and called for more research that examined the combined effects of atmospheric cues. Baker et al. (2002) combined multiple environmental cues with customer values of time, cost, merchandise value and interpersonal service quality, and found store atmospherics influenced customer assessments of store criteria such as merchandise quality.

FIGURE 7: EFFECT OF STORE ATMOSPHERICS ON CUSTOMER'S RETAIL INTENTIONS



VISUAL MERCHANDISING MODELS

According to Michel Wedel, Univ Of Maryland, USA AND Rik Pieters, Tilburg Univ, Netherlands, in their article, "Visual Marketing –From Attention to Action", various areas of consumer behavior patterns like attention and perception, visual cognition and action and choice and their effect on vision which is the primary human sensory modality and its impact on marketing is discussed.

According to Mehrabian and Russell and their proposed S-O-R Paradigm (1974), it is called the Stimuli(S)—Organism (O)—Response (R) paradigm (much of the research in environmental psychology has focused on the effects of physical stimuli (e.g., things of the everyday physical environment) on human emotions (e.g., pleasure, arousal, and dominance, or 'PAD') and the effects of physical stimuli on a variety of behaviors (e.g., satisfaction, purchase intention, and approach-avoidance behavior). As mediators, these emotional states cause various consumer response behaviors (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Physical stimuli (e.g., store design) in the environment influence consumer emotions (e.g., pleasure and arousal) that serve as mediating variables in determining a variety of consumer response behaviors such as satisfaction, purchase intention, and approach behaviors in a retail setting.

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the theoretical framework with the outline of the important variables that take place in most situations; it is called the Stimuli(S)—Organism (O)—Response (R) paradigm. Applying the S-O-R model to an Internet shopping context, a recent study (Eroglu et al., 2003) found that the effects of consumer emotions as intervening variables between various web cues and consumer response behaviors in an Internet retail setting are analogous to those in an in-store retail shopping context. Emotions (pleasure and arousal) induced by atmospheric stimuli presented in the website had a significant effect on consumer response behaviors such as satisfaction and approach behaviors (Eroglu et al., 2003).

The observations of this study is reminiscent of Omar's (1999) classification of interior display types namely merchandise, point-of-sale and architectural. According to the study, similarity between aspects of retail image and interior display types helps to highlight the potential connection between display and the development and communication of a retail brand. The article suggests that of the display types that related to merchandise is most apt.

Lynch(1960) devised the acronym "PLEND" to describe the ability of individuals to find their way by reference to paths, landmarks, edges, nodes and districts as a model for Visual Merchandising in a retail outlet.

According to Young Ha, Wi-Suk Kwon and Sharron J. Lennon, The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA in their article "Online Visual Merchandising (VMD) of Apparel web sites" a model of online store atmospherics is discussed. According to the article, Eroglu et al (2001, 2003) had developed a model of online store atmospherics that builds a stimulus-organism-response framework.

Eroglu et al (2001) suggest that images of the merchandise, music, icons, color, background patterns, animation and fonts effect behavior.

Studies by Stanforth and Lennon, 1997, suggest that customers expectations of customer service is a function of the visual merchandising affect satisfaction and ratings of salespeople

Studies by Sen et al (2002) suggest that Visual Merchandising cues in window display affect consumer decisions to enter stores.

Studies by Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) as in Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) framework specifies that individuals react to their environment along at least three dimensions: Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance (PAD). The first is an affectual reaction, labeled Pleasure-Displeasure. This entails whether individuals perceive the environment as enjoyable or not enjoyable. For example, playing popular songs should enhance shoppers' enjoyment, whereas unpopular music might diminish it. The second dimension relates to Arousal. It assesses how much the environment stimulates the individual.

Relatedly, Kellaris and Kent (1993) found main effects for music tempo on subject arousal in a laboratory study. The third dimension is Dominance which concerns whether individuals feel dominant (in control) or submissive (under control) in the environment.

CONCLUSION

While exhaustive research has been done on visual merchandising and the various facets of visual merchandising, each of the articles so presented has spoken one or few dimensions of visual merchandising. There is a need to offer a conducive model that does not just speak of few of the dimensions like display and maybe music in isolation. There seems to be a need to study the effect of the various important visual merchandising dimensions in combination with each other, together and then view the holistic impact on the resultant consumer behavior. The various dimensions to be studied in union would be: store décor, product display, usage of mannequins in display window, usage creative and innovative window display, usage information signage, display on shop floor, physical contours of the outlet, balance of design, color and aesthetics, usage of different types of fixtures and nuances of floor merchandising.

Consumer Buying Behavior is strongly related to emotional/affective reactions and behavior despite of the possible fact that it might have been more likely influenced by external factors, the type of influence/response was somewhat difficult to determine by the survey questionnaires. If consumers were aware of their responses to various visual merchandising situations, the influence of different factors/events/visual merchandising strategies and Visual Merchandising aids could have been directly examined. Therefore, combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods (e.g., observational or experimental research methods) is recommended for future research. In addition expended research with various demographical and geographical groups as well as influences of visual merchandising in various non-store formats is recommended.

Having conducted a conclusive study of the literature available, further on studies in the directions listed below may add to the better understanding of visual merchandising. These include:

- To precisely speak and discuss the efficacy of using sensorial purchase drivers to improve impact of visual merchandising
- The future expected growth patterns in visual merchandising
- Most sought after visual merchandising Strategies-Drivers
- Prospects and Challenges faces by visual merchandising in the Face Book Era

A consumer's emotions can be a mediating factor in the purchase process. Studies like "Store environment and consumer purchase behavior: Mediating role of consumer emotions" by Elaine Sherman Anil Mathur and Ruth Belk Smith clearly state that store environment and emotional states of consumers influence various dimensions of purchase behavior.

Human beings have this unique ability to think, to recall and manipulate past impressions and experiences in response to present stimuli, requires a different way of storing impressions than other animals use. Every human being stores impressions. Impressions which are unique to each being. In addition to just storing impressions humans also have the ability to manipulate an impression by virtue of labeling each impression which makes it possible for them to recall and relate them, one to another.

The manner in which a marketer intends to create an impact on his consumers mind may need to understand the dynamics of this process.

Once that is done, a marketer's ability to draw maximum customers to a sale would be a cake walk.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Research on the topic of Visual Merchandising has dramatically increased over the past decade. However, this rapid growth in research has resulted in the emergence of issues incorporating the need to better understand the differences and similarities between the usage of the various aids of visual merchandising and their differential outputs. In this paper, an attempt has been made to address the issues and to identify avenues for future study. This paper attempts to highlight some key issues of interest.

NOTES

1. The terms-concepts of Visual Marketing and Visual Merchandising relate and connect to each other. So much so that one leads and flows into the other. Therefore for the purpose of this study the two have been used interchangeably and synonymously.
2. For the purpose of meta analysis

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