

A Shifting Status Quo in Visual Merchandising

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates a reasonable status of visual merchandising conducted in the year 2007 & 2023 in Pune. Survey method was implemented to carry out the work. Talk agenda (interviews) and goal-directed (purposive) sampling were the tools used. The key discoveries showed that apparel retailers have started placing more importance on visual merchandising to differentiate their products from others. All the stores use attractive window displays, proper store layout, appealing visual merchandising themes to entice the potential patrons. All retailers were involved in several types of displays and individuals were hired who were qualified or professionally skilled with having a grade in this field. As compared to 2007, the amount of time and money spent on fixtures, props, in store displays, widow dressings have enlarged manifolds. All the retailers were having alteration in displays weekly, fortnightly or monthly, were working on different elements, tools and techniques for maintaining their store atmosphere and motivating potential patrons to real patrons. Through Visual Merchandising only the retailers can look for a constant modest benefit over other competitors. Visual Merchandising is not how you display products/merchandise in the store; but is a broader notion which includes Brand, store image and Patron Purchasing Behavior, as the upcoming of retail will be administered by the concept of Visual Merchandising.

KEYWORDS: Retail; Visual Merchandising ; Productivity ; Store design; window display; store lighting.

INTRODUCTION

Visual Merchandising has come long way, experts and researchers have known the noteworthy role of visual stimulus and communiqué in the field of retailing. Over time, this awareness in visuals has evolved into a cohesive concept known as "visual merchandising" within the retail industry. A short classification of visual merchandising is, relating it as a marketing tool that empowers businesses to effectively connect their brand and products/merchandise to patrons. Visual merchandising is the amalgamation of art and science in presenting products/merchandise in the most visually appealing way to form a striking impression and communiqué the store's fashion, price, and excellence characteristics to potential patrons, persuading them to procure the product/merchandise. (Goworek and McGoldrick, 2015).

Visual merchandising is about all what patrons see when they approach and come in a store, as it covers a wide areas of visual resources and factors, together with layout, graphic signage, window displays, lighting, props, infra, etc. In addition to visual stimuli, retail activities that appeal to the patron's senses beyond sight, such as music and fragrance, also play a noteworthy role in persuading patrons insights and connections, including patron amenity. Thus, in response to the increasing competition, retailers are actively seeking to advance visually captivating and impactful displays that leave a lasting impression on

patrons and visual merchandising is to boost the image of the store, entice patrons and encourage unplanned purchases and gives an outcome in growing the sales. Nevertheless, visual merchandising is not restricted to a specific retail industry and could find its application in several segments, including fashion, home adornment, pharmaceuticals, and foodstuffs, among others. On the other hand, it is predominantly projected in the fashion industry, where the visual appearance of products/merchandise plays a crucial role in the retail communiqué of fashion brands, as retailers in the fashion industry face the task of adapting to the everchanging landscape regarded as, the overview of new styles, trends, and products/merchandise on consistent basis. Within the active and competitive fashion retail environment, a vital factor for victory lies in the capability to steadily present new products/merchandise and fashion trends in the market at the right time (Lakanen, 2016).

In such a flooded marketplace, retailers face the task to distinctive themselves from their competitors, to address this, many retailers are adopting visual merchandising techniques that aims to balance the store's appearance and identity with its main brand values, in that way transforming the store into a distinct brand being also. One of the most significant choices retailers need to make is the choice about how to connect the brand visually and how to maintain visual consistency in all communications with patrons. Henceforth, to create a total convincing brand image, it is vital for visual communiqué within a retail space to align consistently with all elements, inside and outside of the store. (Barrelet et al., 2023)

An essential part of merchandising is window display design, as it entice patrons, showcase products/merchandise, and link to the brand identity. Nevertheless, forming an operative and alluring window displays is not an easy task, particularly when there are different seasons and times to ponder. Some of the contemporary trends and tasks in window display design for different seasons and times, and how it applies in the store are stated underneath.

- **Seasonal themes**

Seasonal theme is one of the most mutual way to design window displays, like spring, summer, autumn, and winter, show off new merchandise, encourage add-on purchases and create interest, also it help to generate a sense of freshness, significance, and synchronization with the situation. For instance, bright colors, flowery designs, and lightweight fabrics for spring, and warm tones, cozy textures, and festive elements for winters. Nevertheless, the seasonal themes also carry some challenges, for instance how to stand out from the rivalry competitive stores, dodge clichés, and how to be accustomed to different climates and regions.



Figure.1 Autumn Winter -Picture by author Pune-PMC mall



Figure.2 Spring -Picture by author Pune-PMC mall

- **Occasional themes**

Occasional themes another way to design window display such as, holidays, festivals, or promotions. Occasional themes helps to form a sense of urgency, pleasure, and originality for patrons. For instance, use of colors like orange, white, green and blue for Independence Day, or balloons, fabric drapes, and markdowns for a store anniversary. Occasional themes also carry some challenges, such as how to balance creativity and uniformity, respect cultural diversity and sensitivity, and how to align with the brand individuality and principles.



Figure.3 Festive window -Picture by author Pune-PMC mall



Figure.4 Festive window -Picture by author Pune-PMC mall

- **Communicating features**

Digital screens, touch panels, sensors, etc are the latest trend in window display design which incorporate interactive features and helps to create a sense of rendezvous, personalization, and excitement for the patrons. For instance, digital screens are used to display energetic images or videos of new season launch products, or social media feeds, or touch panels to let patrons to customize their likings, browse promotional offer. Communicating features also carry some challenges, such as how to safeguard functionality and security, will it integrate with the store layout and inventory, and how the impact can be measured and improve.



Figure.5 digital screens -Picture by author Pune-PMC mall



Figure.6 digital screens -Picture by author Pune-PMC mall

- **Maintainable practices**

A current trend in window display design is maintainable practices, like using recycled materials, natural, or ecological materials, reducing energy consumption and backing up social causes, it also help to create a sense of accountability, reliability, and trustworthiness for the patrons. For instance, recycled paper, reprocessing sunboards, or wood for the props, LED lights, controls for the window lighting, etc. However, maintainable practices also carry some challenges, sense of balance in rate and quality, how to connect the message and mission, and how to avoid deceptive advertising or criticism.



Figure.7 Maintainable Practice window – Picture by author Pune-PMC



Figure.8 Maintainable Practice window – Picture by author Pune-PMC

Every new fashion season presents retailers with business prospects to ventilate the stores through new merchandise/products. Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter are regulated by the promotional calendar for developing themes for visual exhibition. Spring merchandise (fig 1) often combined with spring flowers creates a refreshing feeling in the store. Fall trims (fig 2) depend on the insight of varying color in nature. The colors of orange with deep reds and yellow stimulus the decorations used. There are many events when the visual presentation of merchandise/product changes. Displays changes weeks previous to, Diwali celebration (fig 4) and other festivals.

The learning actions to find out the changing situation of Visual merchandising that befell between 2007 and 2023 and to study the different elements, techniques and displays employed by these stores and the budget allocated for the stores.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study method was implemented to carry out the present study and to gather required information. Questionnaire method and interview schedule were the tools used. The sample size consisted of 50 Shop owners/Managers and 50 visual merchandisers. The shopping mall-Phoenix Market City of Pune, Viman Nagar was taken as location for learning. Two types of interview schedules were used to conduct the study. These included a questionnaire for Store Managers and Visual Merchandisers

- **Interview Schedule For Store Managers:** The interview consisted of questions related to personal profile of the manager (his name, title, address of the store), type of store, basic information about store (size of the store, when refurbished, layout etc), individuals involved in putting up displays, types of displays, tools and techniques for maintaining store atmosphere, budget allotted for Visual Merchandising.
- **Interview Schedule For Visual Merchandisers:** It comprised of questions related to personal profile of the visual merchandiser, including his name, educational grade, professional qualification and number of individuals working in Visual Merchandising team, material, tools used for displays and budgets allocated for Visual Merchandiser.

PRE-TESTING

After the creation of interview schedule, a experimental study was necessary to gain precise facts of the subject and to get an awareness of various problems likely to appear during the course of study. The technique implemented for pretesting was the same as that for 10% respondents of total sample i.e. 20 respondents together with 10 store managers and 10 visual merchandisers were interviewed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

• **Budget fixed to visual merchandisers**

The budget prearranged to Visual merchandisers is presented in Table 1. The result are as follows

- 48 % kept upto 20 %, as compared to 14 % in 2023.
- 14 % kept upto 30 % as compared to 20 % in 2023.
- 12 % kept upto 40 % as compared to 32 % and further more just
- 6 % kept upto 50 % as compared to 28 % in 2023.

The figures of comparison shows that Visual Merchandising is a familiar technique of selling product/merchandise today and stores have started giving a percentage to Visual Merchandising displays.

Budget allotted to visual merchandisers	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2007	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2023
0-10	20	6
10-20	48	14
20-30	14	20
30-40	12	32
40-50	6	28

Table 1. Budget Allotted To Visual Merchandiser

• **Kinds Of Displays active throughout the Stores.**

The table 2 represents the kinds of displays working throughout the year. As compared to the figures in 2007, all the 50 stores gaged were active with open displays, window display and Interior display technique of Visual merchandising. 52 % made use of theme displays as compared to 96 % in 2023, practically 6 % showcased communication feature display as compared to 96 % in 2023.

However Isolated and project displays were employed by 10 % and 6% as compared to 50 % and 48 % in 2012.

Type of Displays	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2007	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2023
Open display	100	100
Theme display	52	96
Interior Display	82	100
Window Display	100	100
Communication feature display	6	96

Isolated Display	10	50
Project Display	6	48

Table 2. Kinds Of Displays Active Throughout The Stores

• **Individuals Who Does The Displays For The Store**

The table 3 shows that 84% of the stores obtain their themes from the franchiser as compared to just 10 % in 2007. 72% stores have their full time Visual merchandisers as compared to 20 % in 2023. Moreover 56 % of the displays were done by store employees as compared to just 16 % in 2023. Only 14 % hired the services of visual merchandisers on part time basis as compared 12 % in 2023.

Individuals who does the displays for the store	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2007	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2023
The franchiser	10	84
Part-time VM	14	12
Full-time VM	20	72
Store Manager	56	16

Table 3. Individuals Who Does The Displays For The Store

• **Materials Used For The Visual Merchandising Display**

The table 4 shows that all the visual merchandisers made the use of lightings, mannequins and shelves. A larger percentage of them made use of banners/media(flex, vinyl) is 92 %, gondolas 98%, and slat walls 94% respectively as compared to their use in 2007. These were used to highlight the merchandise/product and draw the patrons attention. Grid panels were less in use as they were used for hanging, and shelving .

Material used for Displays	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2007	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2023
lightings	100	100
mannequins	92	100
banner	78	92
Shelves	96	100
Gandolas	92	98
Grid pannels	42	56
Slat wall	42	94

Table 4. Materials Used For The Visual Merchandising Display

• **Merchandising Tools For Visual Merchandisers**

Underneath table shows the merchandising tools being used for Visual Merchandising. All the respondents interviewed used the tools like colors, music, store freshners and store temperature parameter . 64 % made use of ACP sheet/ Sunboard for Visual Merchandising displays as compared to 20 % in 2007.

Props and visuals were used by 40 % and 42 % of stores. Only 2 % made use of digital screens and touch pannels in 2007 and 98% in 2023.

Types of displays	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2007	Percentage (%) of respondents in 2023
Colourize	100	100
music	100	100
Store freshner	100	100
Store Temperature parameter	100	100
props	6	40
Visual changeover	10	42
sunboard	20	64
Sunboard/ACP		
Digital screen , touch pannels	2	98

Table 5.Merchandising Tools For Visual Merchandisers

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The outcomes of the learning presents that Visual merchandising is the art of exhibition, which positions the product/merchandise in attention and provides quiet service for the patrons, helping them in discovering the merchandise/products more effortlessly. It includes everything from display windows to fixtures used for visual presentation. Window display is now a big business. as it represent the brands and business uniqueness, and entice patrons and endorses the merchandise/ products. The drive of visual merchandising is to encourage the sale of product/ merchandise while reflecting the store’s image. As in case of designer store like UBC, LV, Benetton etc uses lots of props, and custom visuals along with their daily display merchandise/products to entice patrons attention. U.S polo ,Adidas, Reebok, Nike, uses diverse images, and videos along with different mannequins, relevant sport props, etc to highlight their athletic/casual merchandise/products. The Dummy industry is crucial to visual merchandising as it has undergone extreme changes with the dummies being realistic earlier, abstract at that point, without a head later and now swapping back to the realistic notion, allied with human touch. (Clark 2007)

The idea of doing a presentation is to catch the patrons attention to make them aware about the new trends, how it can be used or how it can be accessorized, as a good design aids to progress effectiveness and boosts patrons to browse and get the look and feel of the store.The sense of gratifying shopping experience will be boosted,if patrons are satisfied with their spending in the store.

Store displays change from season to season and from one festival to another. Visual merchandising once an unknown skill is growing popular nowadays as it educate the patrons, creates desire and finally increases the selling process. Visual merchandiser core emphasis is to display the newest trend and best moving items/products into the display windows as window displays and instore displays entice, induce, and influence in a polished fashion and good exhibition can stop spectator, to get their attention and may aggravate patron to enter the store.

In the present study, store managers worked on different types of displays tools of visual merchandising like color, music, fragrances, temperature, props, lightning and techniques for enhancing the stores sale. The shifting necessity for Visual merchandising has mirrored by the rise in budget in their displays and practice of using assorted props, furniture(fixtures) and tools has upgraded. Visual merchandising is a crafty way to exhibit products/merchandise with the intent to touch the patron's minds, striking the right chords in patron and ascending an excitement to own the product which is been displayed and thus slightly urging patrons to make an impulsive purchase. At present retailers cannot afford to overlook the influential effects and massive potential of executing Visual Merchandising for the stores.

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