



THE EFFECT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

The paper examines the impact of visual merchandising on consumer buying behaviour in making evaluation and purchase decision. Various factors which influence the consumer decision, such as ease offered by retailer to customers in defining, selecting and purchasing the product, brand value, utility of the product, reference group, value for money, advertising and its appeal etc are being critically analyzed and its impact is being assessed.

Apart from all the factors, emotion play a critical role in consumer decision-making and it strongly influence the consumer's choices. Very little efforts have been done in the past in order to understand the source of emotional arousal in purchase decision.

Emotions are subject to change and it is subjective in nature. Emotions silently and unconsciously drive the consumer's decision at the destiny, where customers intend to go. Emotions are not necessarily permanent and it varies from customer to customer and even for the same customer, it is different, in different situation, so in order to be successful in this hyper competitive business era, organizations need to leverage emotions for business success, for better brand value, customer satisfaction and employee-management.

Key Words: Emotional Dynamics, Neuro-Marketing, Visual Merchandising, Mannequins, Emotion Driver.

Introduction

What & why customer buy is most important aspect of consumer behavior? What customers buy is well known facts and data are available regarding consumption pattern and frequency of the purchase. Why customer buys is most difficult question of marketing, this must be answered for diagnosis of influences, and for incorporating these influences in marketing mix strategy. The rational decision making, which is being based on price benefit relationship and involves intensive information search have very strong logical and sound justification behind the purchase decision, but unfortunately the consumer's decision which is driven by emotions, do not have such sort of explanation, because emotional attributes are highly qualitative in nature.

Emotions guide to specific judgment (Barrett and Campos- 1987). Emotions can guide and persuade consumers (Andrade and Cohen-2007).The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure (Aristotle-2004). Due to qualitative aspects of emotions most of the retailers are not able to incorporate emotional strategy in their marketing strategy. Emotions matters and emotional connect with the customers delivers very strong edge to the firm over traditional, rational appeal. Most of the customers hide their true desire and emotion and that's why their decisions are unconsciously driven by unspoken desire and emotions. The customers, who are relatively more driven by emotion, skip some of the important steps of consumer decision making process and takes decision in shortest span of the time. This increases inventory turnover, return on asset, and quick return on investment and reduces inventory-carrying cost. It is no longer enough to explain to customers what a product can do for him, infact firm need to win the emotion of the customer in order to go deep inside in the heart and mind of the new generation customers (emotion mics, Dann Hills). Consumer decision-making also depends on mood of consumers. Several studies have shown that in a happy mood customers are more driven by their first feeling and emotion and they take quick intuitive judgment. Intuitive decision-making is characterized by sense by which customers perceive an option better than another.

The customers are not necessarily able to find out the source of this intuition. Sad individuals are strongly persuaded by strong arguments, but not by weak arguments, whereas happy individuals are moderately persuaded by strong as well as weak arguments (Marieke D Vries, Rob W. Holand and Cilia L.M. Witte man, Psychology press). Bolte, Goschke and Kuhl, 2003 suggested that happy mood individuals respond more intuitively than those in bad mood. While choosing an option from various alternatives customers may rely on their intuition or customer may decide deliberately by analyzing pros and cons of different option before making final decision. In the world of retailing today almost all the firms are offering the same benefit and more than hundred brands are available in one product category so rational approach of selling the product and product customization will no longer deliver benefit to the firm. Retail firms need to leverage the emotions for grabbing business opportunity. As most of the customer are not able to define the product while purchasing the product and they do not know exactly what they are looking for in terms of colour, feature and benefit so firm should integrate emotions with their merchandising and visual display for acquiring competitive edge over competitors.



It is also observed that women are relatively more driven by emotional influence. Colour, status of the person who wear a particular dress in a party or social event, window display, dress style of mannequin with related items, fresh arrivals and new fashion merchandise which is displayed through fixture and attractive visual aids are account for emotional arousal which ultimately drive the purchase decision of customers.

It is being observed in the past that Actress of some famous serials created a huge demand for particular dress style and customers blindly purchased the product without any assessment regarding usage, quality and price of the merchandise. In order to succeed in market place retailer should align his merchandising strategy with emotional strategy for catering unspoken desire/ emotion of the customers.

Consumer Behaviour & Visual Merchandising

The world consumers live in is rich with ambience. When entering an apparel retail store, consumers act differently to the sensations and stimuli around them; they either pay attention to it or they ignore it. Each and every message created by an apparel retailer is done with a specific purpose in mind. However, consumers transpire to make their own decisions by adapting the message that is created by certain sensations or stimuli (such as visual merchandising displays) to fit in with their own unique experiences, desires and prejudices (Cant, Brink & Brijball, 2006: 114). Consumer behaviour can be defined as "... the study of individuals, groups or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impact that these processes have on the consumer and society..." (Cant, Van Heerden & Ngambi, 2010: 51). Kardes, Cline and Cronley (2011: 8) added to this definition by stating that consumer behaviour also includes the consumers' expressive, psychological and social responses that lead, establish or follow these responses as demonstrated in following Figure.

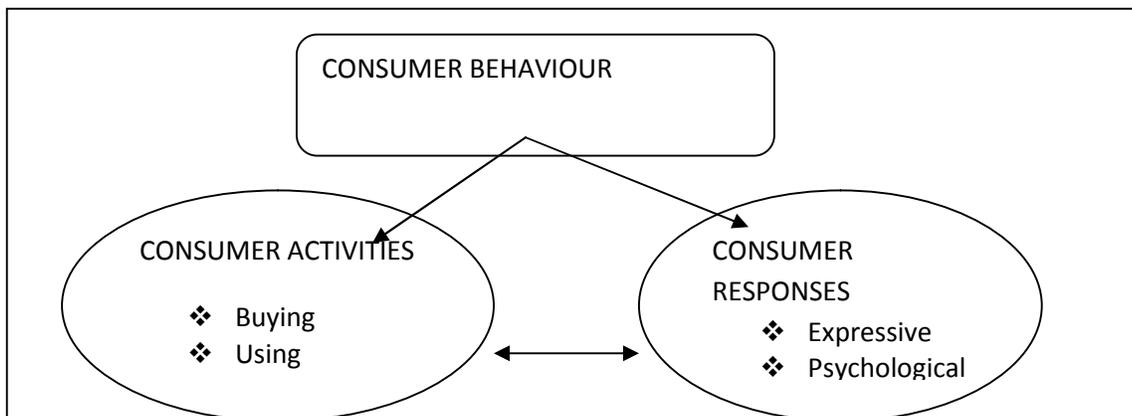


Figure indicates that consumer behaviour consists of consumer activities and consumer responses, that both influence each other. Therefore, a consumer's expressive, psychological and social responses will have an influence on their buying, using and disposing activities, and vice versa. An expressive response reveals a consumer's passions, feelings and their frame of mind. Furthermore, Figure also refers to psychological responses that consist of a consumer's thought processes, judgments, attitudes and values and could include a consumer's feeling toward a specific apparel retail store. A retailer's store environment could also influence the consumer's purchase decision, which is discussed below. For example, if a consumer wants to buy a new winter's coat, both pleasure and indecision may form a part of his/her expressive response due to the various decisions that have to be made. The consumer will have to decide on a specific product, store, brand, style and colour, as well as on payment method. As part of the responses in Figure, the consumer could imagine wearing the coat, making a psychological list of characteristics the coat should have in order to enhance the decision-making process. The social responses, include a consumer's obvious actions during a purchase decision.

The consumer will start by comparing different stores and brands with one another, paying attention to different advertisements, trying on different coats, and obtaining opinions from friends or family. If a consumer is not completely satisfied with the store environment, he/she might make a psychological choice not to enter the store, therefore deciding not to purchase the coat from that specific store. All of these actions could have an influence on the way consumers behave. Apparel retailers have to establish how their visual merchandising displays will be perceived by the consumers. It is essential to identify what consumers are actually seeing and how they interpret it. By establishing how visual merchandising displays are perceived by the consumers, it could benefit apparel retailers to align the internal focus of their visual merchandising displays with the consumers' expectations.



Store Design & Visual Merchandising as an Emotion Driver

It is an art that involves the implementation of effective design and product presentation ideas to increase store traffic and sales volume. Store design is the basic layout of the store using signage and other techniques to guide customers through the store and assist them in locating and finding information about merchandise which is supported by visual merchandising techniques implemented. There many type of store layouts some as 1. Grid layout, racetrack layout, free form layout.

Visual merchandising is the display tools that transform shoppers into stoppers and passers into buyers. It should be noted that visual merchandising does not impose any idea over customers and works as an idea person and lead the emotion in the direction where customers wish to go. As it is believed that 80% of influence/impression is created by sight that's why mannequin and window display is weightier than thousands of the words. The impression of different elements of visual merchandising such as colour, light, merchandise, odour, sound is different for different customers as impact of this encounter is unique for each customer in terms of emotional influence.

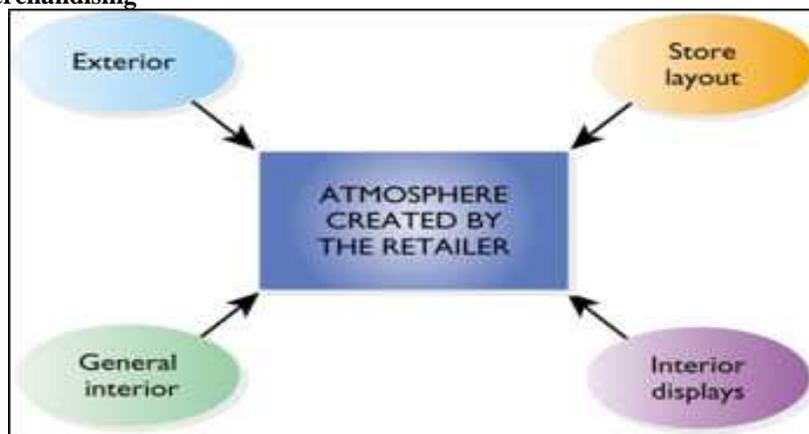
Key Purposes of Visual Merchandising & Store Design

- Informing and educating customers about the product or service.
- Adding value to the atmosphere of the store.
- Making it easier for the shopper to self-select.
- Acting as a significant promotional tool.
- Drawing attention of the customer to enable him to take purchase decisions within shortest interval of time and thus augmenting the selling process.
- To communicate with the target customers much more easily.
- To attract customers during festivals and occasions.
- Offering a distinct identity to a retail store vis-à-vis the competition.
- Implementing the retailer's strategy.
- Influence customer buying behavior.
- Provide flexibility.
- Control design and maintenance cost. Etc.

Visual Merchandise as an Emotional Stimuli

- Make your competencies visible.
- Make strategic relevant products best visible.
- Increase the level of consumer awareness.
- Formulating activities to stimulate additional sales.
- To provide consumers efficient information & emotional loaded pictures supporting customer please and shopping activity.

Elements of Visual Merchandising



1. Window Display

Window display is like a visiting card of the store and it is most controllable element of the store in relation to image building. Well-designed window display works like a talking point and communicate with the customers silently regarding merchandise story. Attractive window displays not only draw the attention of the customers and creates first impression but it also entertain pedestrians. Real setting, Atmospheric setting, Semi real setting, Abstract setting and whimsical setting of window display creates different impact over customer's mind.



2. Colour

Medical science has proven that colours have definite and various impact over the nervous system. Colour can immediately create the mood and it is biggest motivation for shopping. Colours cheer us up whenever we feel bad. Colours are associated with human emotions and it is highly individualistic. The problem for the visual merchandiser is that each person may have distinct reaction to the same colour. In the vast and global market place there are cultural and regional differences in colour preference. Following are the general feeling of particular colour.

- a. Yellow- caution, cowardice, treachery
- b. Red- passion, love
- c. Orange- knowledge, warmth, energy, force
- d. Violet- royalty, depression
- e. Blue- fidelity, sobriety, fear
- f. Green- Wealth, outdoors, luck, nature
- g. Brown- Maturity, humility
- h. White- Purity, truth
- i. Black- Death, sorrow, depression

3. Neuromarketing

Neuromarketing is emerging field that utilizes medical technologies such as FMRI (functional magnetic Resonance Imaging) and EEG (Electroencephalography) to study the brain's response to marketing stimuli (P Raj Devasagayam, Tara Maloney, DIAS Technology review, vol-6, No-2, Oct-Nov-2010). FMRI is used by researcher for measuring the change in the activity of the brain and to learn what part of the brain is affecting decision and why consumers take decision. As it is believed that brand choice of the customers is based on sub conscious thought process so Neuromarketing uses traditional Neuroscientific method to map the brain pattern against encounter between stimuli and brain. It also analyzes impact of these stimuli on consumer decision-making. The Retailer need to do the research at sub conscious level to know what customers are thinking and why and neuromarketing is believed to give answer of these questions. As the participants is shown a particular stimulus, his or her brain is monitored with neuroimaging monitor such as FMRI, EEG, PET, TMS, SCR Etc, . Any one of these monitors can be used for brain mapping. Eventually the brain pattern is interpreted by determining whether or not person liked what he was experiencing and up to what degree.

Views from the field of Neuroscience

1. 1-“The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to an action while reason leads to conclusion” (Calne, 2000)
2. 2-“Over 85% of the thought, emotions and learning occur in unconscious mind and it can be said that reasoning strategies are defective (Damasio, 1999)
3. 3-“The wiring of the brain favors emotions” (Ledoux, 1996)(Sources- Advertising journal of Research, March, 2009, John Pawle and Peter Cooper)

Conclusion

Most of the customers hear to their emotion while taking decision that's why their decision is primarily driven by the emotion and emotional influence play a very important role in consumer decision making process. Intuitive decision driven by the emotion provide more post purchase satisfaction and pleasure. The emotion based decision take less time in purchase decision as compared to reason based decision making.

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