Psychology of Visual Merchandising

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Psychology is a science of the human mind and behaviour. Wikipedia describes psychology as the "study of the soul".

Visual Merchandising is a clever way to exhibit products with the intent to touch the potential customers' senses, striking the right chords in him and arising in him an emotion to possess the product on display, thus subtly persuading him to make an impulsive purchase.

VM includes store layout and décor, merchandise presentation, and displays.
It incorporates the products, environment, and space into a stimulating and engaging ambience to encourage the sale of a product or service.

A good presentation can and should stop you, get your attention, and may be even make you smile.

In very broad sense, visual presentation not only helps to sell the merchandise itself but the store image as well.

It provides a window into a "Brand's" soul!

The goal of VM is to ensure the "Brand" becomes the chosen one!
Thereby increasing sales and building brand loyalty.

Displays can be used to introduce a *new* product, a fashion *trend*, or a *new* "look" or idea. Effective displays educate the consumer as to how the new item can be used or worn and how it can be accessorized.

Psychology behind the display is to make the potential consumer buy for emotional reasons.

Enticing customers to purchase requires something as simple as using the right theme, color, pop-up displays or display racks.

Arranging merchandise in a specific pattern can subconsciously trigger a buying motive within a prospect.

The psychology of visual merchandising is the creative use of non-verbal cues that speak directly to a prospects desire for the products on display.

Visual merchandising or commonly known as "the quiet salesman" requires a keen eye, meticulous taste, and a creative mind.

The visual merchandise display must incorporate the retail organizations' psychology, aims, objectives and brand.

Store associates must be taught the importance of:

- Maintaining visual merchandise displays.
- Ensuring display cabinets are kept fully stocked.
- Ensuring product availability in the warehouse to restock the shop floor.

Gender sensitivity plays a big role in our choice of purchase and shopping habits.

A female shopper takes a longer time in a retail store; examining merchandise before making a purchase decision. They study every detail of the display. A display that catches their attention must be brightly coloured, fashionable, contemporary and attractive.

A male shopper on the other hand might have already decided on the item he requires , therefore upon entering the store , he makes his way directly to the section the item is located, selects it and makes his purchase.

VM Generates

Functional Value: Analytical: Optimization of use
Emotional Value: Primal Instinct; Predatory Survival Self - Esteem, Emotional Nurturing.
Symbolic Value: Logical: Rational
Brand Value: I bought this Cola because I got the most for the least expense.

Brand Culture: When I get behind the wheel of my Hummer, I rule the road!
I always buy L'Oreal, because it makes me feel beautiful.

Store Atmospherics

The concept of 'atmospherics' was first introduced by (Kotler, 1973), where a store's atmosphere was defined as the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance purchase probability.

- Store environment has an emotion inducing capability.
- Consumer satisfaction with the store is greater in a pleasant store environment.
- Customers spontaneously spend more money on shopping, if the store environment is pleasant.

When ambient cues interact with social cues, it can affect consumers' emotional states of pleasure.

Social cues influence arousal in the store environment.

A recent study shows that ambient and social elements in the store environment are more likely to affect consumers to make inferences about merchandise and service quality, and these inferences in turn, influence store image.

A positive store environment can be an effective tool to help foster goal attainment:

- Pleasurable shopping experience
- A positive emotion
- Arousal to possess and purchase
- High customer satisfaction

Stores with courteous and friendly personnel are associated with high levels of pleasure.

Shoppers have reported high customer satisfaction when they have experienced high pleasure in a store environment. When expectations are not met, consumers are found to be discomforted. If the perception matches the expectation, the customer is satisfied. If the performance exceeds expectations, the consumer is delighted and highly satisfied.

Successful retailers need to identify and respond to consumer's expectations. (Baker, 1986) in her research on the store atmosphere developed three category frame work for evaluating store atmospherics namely:

- **Store ambient factor**
- **Store design factor**
- **Store social factor**

Store Ambient Factors refer to the background characteristics of the environment that tend to influence consumers at a subconscious level.

Elements such as temperature, lightning, music can profoundly affect how people feel, think about a particular store establishment.

These comprise visual and aural senses.

Three Atmospheric Dimensions are:
- Color, lighting levels, appearance of objects (size and shape)
- Volume, pitch tempo and style of sounds
- Nature and intensity of scent

Color can **focus attention** and **highlight** certain products. It can be used for informative reason. It can influence **mood** and direct **emotions**; increase arousal or can be seen to have a **physiological effect on individual**.

Researchers have studied the instinctive physiological and a psychological reaction to a color. For example red is perceived as a color symbolizing danger or excitement seen in both human and animals.

The physiological effects of color have generally been measured in a laboratory setting. Measurements made in laboratory include changes in **blood pressure, respiratory rate and eye blink**, under the blue and red extremes of the visual spectrum.

The findings (Gerad 1957; Wilson 1966; Clynes 1977) show that red is inherently exciting and physically stimulating to the human brain – i.e. blood pressure and respiratory rate may increase, and eye blink may increase in frequency. At the other end of the spectrum, blue is found to be much more relaxing in its effect.

It is seen that prisons use blue walls to relax inmates and dental surgeons u se blue to relax patients. Retailers may use these findings to either excite or relax shoppers at the appropriate time and location.

As an example, shoppers probably need to be excited when walking through the entrance in order to put them in the shopping mood, but may need to feel relaxed whilst in the store.

The psychological effects of color are the result of a combination of learned and natural responses. Aspects such as **nationality, culture, family and peer groups** have an effect on an individual's **learned responses**.

UK and the Western world associate white with weddings whereas the Eastern world associates it with funerals. This is an individual's pattern of socialization. Red may be for danger, Black for funerals, Purple for royalty and Yellow for the sun.

A retailer can use these responses to provide a cue to the shopper on the nature of the store or the particular area of the selling space. Health food products may benefit from a green display to convey health and naturalness. Luxury products may benefit form purple colour; the association with royalty.

Lighting and Lighting level

Research studies on the effects of lighting levels on behavior have found that performance improves with increased brightness - i.e. individuals were found to perform better when lighting levels were increased. But according to (Meer, 1985) Soft lighting can create a more pleasant mood as compared to using bright lighting.

Appropriate lighting in a store can make the displays and merchandise more dramatic, attracting the customers' eye and persuading them to buy. Spot or high intensity discharge bulbs can brighten a selected area creating visual energy. Pin spots can be used to accent small areas leaving some part of the display in shadows. Track lighting enhances color and vivid color sells merchandise. Elements of light and shadow are important but too much shadow can hide important details of the merchandise and also change the appearance and color of merchandise. At night it is important to make sure that the shadow fall in the correct places in the display.

Florescent lighting does not create shadows .These come in colors that can create a natural, cool feeling or a warm, sunny feeling. Caution is necessary, as the light beam can give off enough heat to fade or even burn merchandise and props. Placing bright colored merchandise directly under these bulbs should be avoided as florescent lights also create problems of fading.

Windows require the same amount of lighting in the day as in the evening because the window light is competing with the bright sunlight outside. Retailers should vary lighting to fit different types of merchandise and customers.

Store Design Factor

This includes layout, comfort and privacy as also aesthetic elements such as architecture, materials, color and elements of merchandise displays.

If layout is functional in nature it can contribute to consumer's pleasure in shopping, helping route him through the entire store in search of merchandise.

Some apparel consumers regard the dressing room and its facilities as major elements in store selection.

Merchandise fixtures help to show the merchandise to consumers besides playing a secondary role of aesthetic function.
Consumers can more easily locate and obtain the required merchandise / services, if they are displayed on fixtures.

Size and Shapes: Theory on the physiology of the visual system shows that the contrast in shape and size of objects (design elements; store design elements) affect their impact on the individual.

Window Signs and Banners: Traffic stoppers:

Get a shopper's attention!!
Signage is a visual and graphic form of communication to the customer by the use of mechanical or hand lettering of any recognizable symbols.

They are used to:
- Designate the name of the store
- Locate departments in large stores and in shops within a section
- Give directions and indicate department locations.
- Announce a special event such as Fashion Show or a personal appearance by a Celebrity. Indicate locations of fitting rooms and rest room facilities, escalators and elevators

The Auditory Dimension:

The auditory dimension concerns the control of sounds of the store environment.

Research in this area has proved the effects of music as well as the impact of music type, its tempo, pitch and volume on the psyche of the customers. Music can evoke emotion and one's attention can be gained by matching music to that of one's current mood state. Enjoyment of the music can produce a positive mood within the listener.

Faster tempo of music makes a customer happier than slow music, firm rhythms make the customers more serious. High-pitched music is more exciting than low, minor keys are sadder. Louder music tends to animation while softer music suggests tranquility. Studies have found that tempo is related to traffic flow in store. Loud music significantly reduces expenditure and time as compared to soft music. Tempo and popularity of music were seen to have an effect on behavior. Background music that is soothing creates a pleasurable atmosphere. Once attention is gained, the ability to make a sale increases.

The Olfactory Dimension

The olfactory dimension relates to the presence of scents in the store environment.
Pleasant scents have been found to increase alertness and performance or range of tasks.
They facilitate recall of pleasant memories, increase positive social behavior and increase the time spent in store.

The effects on behavior of scents can be partly explained by the concept of congruity, or the degree to which a given scent perceives to fit the immediate environment.
As an example many shoppers associate the smell of leather with a furniture store, so would see this scent as congruent.
Shoppers may not, however, associate the smell of leather with grocery store, so this scent would be seen as incongruent.

As (Laird, 1932) found that women buying silk stockings sce nted with a pleasant odor believed them to be of higher quality than scented with a more natural odor.

Ambient conditions are especially noticeable to consumers in extreme circumstances.

Undesirable ambient cues can cause dissatisfaction if the attention of consumers is heightened.
For example, a store where the air conditioning has failed, and the air is hot and stuffy, it will heighten a consumer's awareness and dissatisfaction may result.
Instead of taking more time to shop, consumers who feel uncomfortable may hurry to make their intended purchases and leave the store.

Store Social Factor:

This involves people who are present in the store environment.
The number, type and behavior of both consumers and salesperson are included in elements of social factor.
Consumers expectations increase and they expect salespeople to have deeper product knowledge and to be reliable and responsive to their needs with store staff around.
A positive impact of the conversations between consumers and salespeople can achieve consumer satisfaction; which has been well researched and documented.

Inadequate salespeople can make consumers feel annoyed when they are required to wait. Salespeople's performance can also greatly affect consumer dissatisfaction.
Number of consumers inside a store can have an impact on the shopping experience. Overcrowded stores are associated with low levels of pleasure of consumers.

Social factor has been investigated in terms of other consumers in the store which is exemplified by research on crowding.

A crowded store can lead to avoidance behavior, because shoppers perceive that crowdedness can restrict task performance within a store.

Overcrowded conditions result in 'tense' or 'confused' feelings whereas positive feelings such as 'pleased' or 'relaxed' occur in less crowded conditions.

Today's shoppers, shop for leisure and regardless of their shopping motives are more attracted by safe, attractive and comfortable shopping environments......