

The Importance of Visual Merchandising in Communicating the Corporate Identity of Retail Stores

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Abstract

In today's competitive retail environment, retailers struggle in order to increase their sales and to carry their brands to the wider masses. The best way to achieve this purpose is to consider the significance of visual merchandising. **Ries (2012)** asserts that aesthetics within the retail environment not only affect shopper comfort level but can influence employee morale and productivity. It helps the retailers constructing a strong and positive image for their store. V.M is the process through which a retail store's display of products is becoming appealing, attractive, and enticing to the customer, not only as a stimulus to enter the store, but to create an impression inside the customer's mind. **Van den Bosch, De Jong and Elving (2005)** argue that visual messages in corporate communication benefit the organization in the visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency of corporate identity. Thus, window displays with various visual messages of the corporation are assumed to have the responsibility of communicating corporate identity. **Westcott Alessandri, (2001)** argues that visual presentations can consistently bridge the corporate mission and corporate identity. **Topalian, (1984)** argues that VM supports effective corporate communication as it comes with the deep understanding within the company in terms of what the corporation is and what the corporation stands for. The purposes of the paper are to investigate the importance of visual merchandising as a mean of communication, and to analyse how visual merchandising communicates the corporate identity for the store. The significance of the paper to contribute towards understanding the persuasive effect of visual merchandising in making the first impression, representing and promoting the corporate identity. The major results of the paper are: V.M is a retail strategy that maximizes the aesthetics of a product with the intent to increase sales, the V.M remains an important channel of corporate marketing communication.

Keywords

Visual Merchandising "V.M", Retail Store, Corporate Identity, Windows Display, Display Design

Introduction

Over the last decade the retail industry has undergone an immense revolution, with a sharp increase in competition, especially from foreign retail chains. Visual merchandising is a retail strategy that maximizes the aesthetics of a product with the intent to increase sales. Stores are dressed to call customers, and visual merchandising plays a major role in that. In present times, consumers are not influenced anymore from the sales, but they are influenced by the showcases, a product of the merchandiser. Store image and shopping environment for stores is a significant determinant to spend time in the store and to spend more money than planned. Visual merchandising is a major way of communicating with the customers. It has become a very

essential tool in today's era where marketers find new and innovative ways to grab the attention of customers. The fierce competition in the market today has led retail stores to increasingly use visual merchandising to differentiate themselves from competitors, which would ultimately help increase their corporate identity recall in the minds of the customers. Visual attraction and communication have been considered vital components of retailing suggested by both researchers and practitioners (**McGoldrick, 2002**). Corporate identity is extremely vital to a company, because through the communication of corporate identity the company's competitive advantage can be generated (**Gray & Balmer, 1998**). Moreover, Gray and Balmer (1998) emphasize that it is crucial for a company to have comprehensive and consistent communication of a strong corporate identity to stakeholders, and the ultimate survival of a company may rely on the whole communication process which integrates all possible communication resources. The visual merchandising remains an important channel of corporate marketing communication. However, little attention so far has been paid to how the visual merchandising works as a channel for companies to communicate corporate identity. The scope of visual merchandising is growing rapidly with advances in technology, retailers need to ensure their visual merchandising has stronger impact, as competition in the present scenario is high, and retailers are ready to spend more on visual merchandising to attract customers. Visual merchandising is an activity that is given interest in retailing in order to remain in the market and achieve a competitive edge over the competitors, retailers are incorporating various differentiating strategies and techniques in their operations (**Kerfoot, Davies, & Ward, 2003**). Visual merchandising is one of those benefiting strategies that is considered as one of the determinants of success for a retail store. In visual merchandising the management ensures that both the exterior and interior of their store is appealing enough to attract the customers. Both the exterior and interior deem to have a major impact on consumers buying behaviour which is observed in order to stimulate interest and desire to purchase among them. This technique also helps in the selling of the right kind of product to the right kind of customer by developing attraction and displaying products accordingly (**Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007**). For the retailing stores, visual merchandising is an important part of communication and has a significant impact on the store retail environment. Moreover, it is crucial in terms of conveying messages to customers to stimulate sales and build brand or store image as well as corporate identity. The key elements of visual merchandising such as window display, store layout, colour, and lighting, create a unique atmosphere and excite the sense of consumers.

Objectives of the Paper

Visual merchandising plays a key role, basically for pursuing the customer to enter the store by making the store attractive and promoting the perceived corporate identity image from the view point of consumers. The purposes of the paper are to investigate the importance of visual merchandising as a means of communication with the consumers, and to analyse how visual merchandising communicates the corporate identity through the elements of VM, like store exterior and interior, windows display, colours, lightings, etc.

The Paper Significance

This paper contributes towards understanding the persuasive effect of visual merchandising in making the first impression of retail stores, representing and promoting the corporate identity, and also influence shoppers' motivations. This paper also emphasizes the role of visual

merchandising as a technique to visually making the brand attractive and highlights the unique features of the store. Furthermore, this paper improves the understanding of how visual merchandising and its elements grabbing the consumer attention, and increase the sales.

Statement of the Problem

Visual merchandising is described as an attractive and eye-catching technique to present and display the stores' products to the target and potential consumers. It is actually an activity matching the effective assortment of the merchandise with the effective display of it, which means selecting the right merchandise and placing it effectively in the efficiently used retail space. The major aim of using visual merchandising was stated for increasing the sales by drawing the attention of the consumers to enter into the store and encouraging them to remain in the store and having positive experience in the retail atmosphere and even motivating the consumer to make an unplanned and impulsive purchase. The problem of this paper can be formulated in the following questions:

- How does visual merchandising communicate the corporate identity of the retail stores to potential customers?
- How does visual merchandising function in promoting corporate identity?
- What are the key elements of visual merchandising that affect the communication of the corporate identity?
- How do the key elements of visual merchandising create a unique store's environment?
- What is the role of Visual Merchandiser?

The Hypotheses of the Paper

- A successful retailing business requires that a distinct and consistent corporate identity image be created in the customer's mind that permeates all product and service offerings.
- An effective visual merchandising can improve a store's corporate identity and dramatically increase sales.
- The corporate identity image and the retailers' image can be emphasized with the combination of visual merchandising components.
- Visual merchandising can help create that positive customer image that leads to successful sales because it does not only communicate the store's image, but also reinforces the stores advertising efforts and encourages impulse buying by the customer.

The Methodology of the Paper

This paper follows the descriptive method to describe the visual merchandising as a visual attraction and communication approach, and analytical method to analyse chosen examples of the global brand "Louis Vuitton".

Theoretical Framework

Definition and Scope of Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandising is the activity of promoting the sale of goods, especially by their presentation in retail outlets. (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1999, Oxford University Press). Visual merchandising can be defined as everything the customer sees, both exterior and interior, that creates a positive image of a business and results in attention, interest, desire and

action on the part of the customer. A story can be told that communicates to the prospective customer what the store is all about. It includes the dramatic presentation of merchandise as well as other important, subtle features that create the store's overall atmosphere. Visual merchandising is the activity and profession of developing the floor plans and three-dimensional displays in order to maximize sales. Visual Merchandising is the first impression that a customer will have of the shop. **Matilla and Witz (2008)** stated visual merchandising as a marketing technique in which the retailers enhance both the exterior and interior of their store in order to attract their target customers. It helps the retailers constructing a strong and positive image for their store as well as helps in generating the required amount of attention and desire among the consumer. They also explained that both the exterior and interior of the store must be in coordination with each in order to create a lasting impact and must be designed keeping in mind the target market of the store specifically. They further stated that this technique of visually making the brand attractive has proved to be extremely beneficial in connecting the target market with the brand by visually highlighting the distinctive and unique features of the store over the competitors. **Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow and Young (2009)** highlighted that visual merchandising is one of the in store marketing tools that actually triggers unplanned buying among the consumers. In this technique the marketers visually enhance their outlet by creating an aesthetic atmosphere, appropriate shelf arrangement, attractive window display, cleanliness etc. **Pegler (2006)** describes visual merchandising as the presentation of merchandise at its best; colour coordinated, accessorized, and self-explanatory. **Morgan (2008)** suggests that the visual merchandising is a vital part of any retail operation. In general, Visual Merchandising has two major areas the store exterior and interior and other variety of factors like windows display, colour combination, lighting scheme, product placement, store layout and design, mannequin placement and props selection, furniture and fixtures). All these factors play an important role in creating a favourable shopping atmosphere **Law, Wong & Yip, (2012)**. **Baker et al. (1992)** found how lighting and background music alter a consumer's perceptions and reactions to a store design. Visual merchandising is the process through which a retail store's display of products is made appealing, attractive, and enticing to the customer, not only as a stimulus to enter the store, but to create an impression in the customer's mind. It is a way in which the store can communicate the style and the sense of brand to potential customers. The objectives of visual merchandising are to attract, engage, and motivate the customer towards making a purchase. Although it is primarily a selling space, also to ensure the awareness of customers and to increase the level of perception and comfort of customers. The ultimate objective of visual merchandising is to add value to retail store and to make the customer's experience easier and better, in order to motivate them to purchase more products from the store. The Visual Merchandising projects a message to the customer about the shop, so it is important to consider what you want the message to say. The corporate identity image of the shop can be conveyed through innovative and creative Visual Merchandising. V.M. should efficiently employ some basic elements such as colour and texture, line and composition, light and lighting. These are the indispensable instruments of visual merchandising. By using them, you can encourage the shopper to enter the store. At this point, the role of Visual Merchandiser is significant in the retail sales industry, their task is to increase sales by creating attractive merchandise displays, they set design standards and create the theme, layout, colours,

signage and props of all store displays. V.M is a crucial ingredient that performs an eye-catching; it's part of the branding of the shop. It can form cooperated identity.

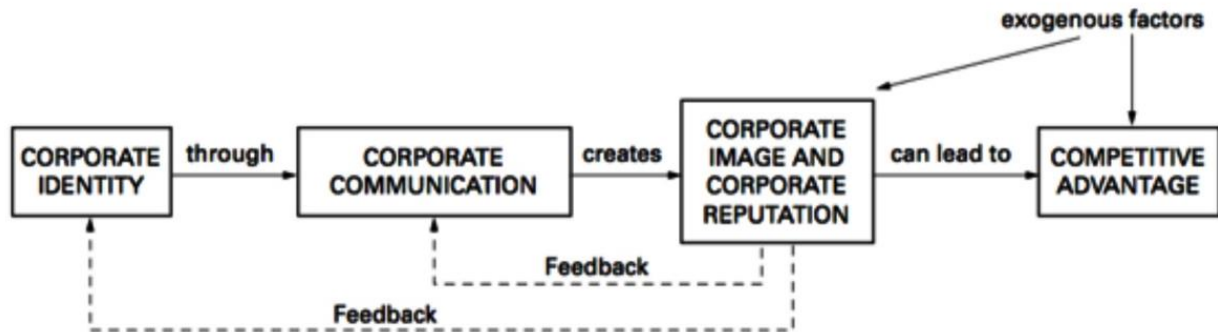
- Corporate Identity

Corporate identity, as one of the central topics in the corporate communication field, often confuses readers when other concepts such as corporate brand, image, and reputation are mentioned together. According to **(Gray & Balmer, 2003)**, the research and exploration in corporate identity have developed through three main stages. The first stage is the graphic design paradigm, in which corporate identity refers to company logos and other visual identifications. It is followed by the stage of integrated communication paradigm, requiring consistency in formal corporate communication. The third stage is the interdisciplinary paradigm, where the concept of corporate identity is broadly discussed in terms of behaviours, communications, and symbolism. **Markwick and Fill (1997)** define corporate identity as the presentation of a company to its various stakeholders which means the company can distinguish itself from other competitors. They emphasize that one can know the company's business as well as its strategies through corporate identity communication. **Cornelissen (2014)** further emphasizes that besides communicating profile to all stakeholders, corporate value is also a crucial component in corporate identity. In most situations, corporate brand and corporate identity are interchangeable. For example, **Ind (1997)** defines that a corporate brand is not only about the outward manifestation of a company its name, logo, visual presentation, but also the core of value that defines it. **Balmer and Gray (2003)** critically highlight the differences that not every company has or is in need for a corporate brand, but every company is in need for corporate identity. They further illustrate that the values of the corporate brand are concise, well-defined and distinct.

- How does Visual Merchandising Communicating the Corporate Identity?

In communicating corporate identity, a company may utilize a variety of cues, planned or unplanned, to represent how the company would like to be perceived, **Markwick and Fill (1997)** illustrate that deliberately sent messages such as advertisements, promotions, dress code and customer policies are delivered to target stakeholders; unplanned messages such as an accident and a crisis may have a negative impact on communicating corporate identity. As for fashion companies, their fashion stores are the channels to communicate with consumers. Moreover, the visual merchandising can be deemed as the planned messages. These cues of corporate identity will shape images in stakeholders' minds at a single point, and the set or the totality of a stakeholder's perception of these cues and messages sent by the company is defined as the corporate image **(Markwick & Fill, 1997; Cornelissen, 2014)**. Over time, experiences and the impact of corporate identity cues have accumulated through corporate communication, and this kind of individual's collective reflection of the company formulates corporate reputation **(Markwick & Fill, 1997; Cornelissen, 2014)**. Because favourable corporate reputations company is likely to achieve great success since customers will purchase products and services, suppliers will maintain the stable contract, and investors will offer more support **(Cornelissen, 2014)**. The reason why communicating corporate identity is extremely vital to a company is that through the communication of corporate identity the company's competitive

advantage can be generated, as shown in “Figure 1” (Gray & Balmer, 1998). In this operation model, Gray and Balmer (1998) emphasize that it is crucial for a company to have comprehensive and consistent communication of a strong corporate identity to stakeholders, and the ultimate survival of a company may rely on the whole communication process which integrates all possible communication resources.



“Figure 1 - Gray and Balmer’s (1998) model”

Applying Gray and Balmer’s (1998) model for fashion companies, the retailing fashion store is one of the ways for fashion companies to communicate corporate identity to stakeholders especially customers. During the communication process, window display in fashion stores is the visual message sent from the fashion company, and the consumers are the message receivers. Researchers have addressed the importance of visual messages in communicating corporate identity, as nowadays the fierce competition is among fashion and stores business, it is important for a company to communicate corporate identity with stakeholders and differentiate itself from other competitors. **Van den Bosch, De Jong and Elving (2005)** argue that visual messages in corporate communication benefit the organization in the visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency of corporate identity. Thus, window displays with various visual messages of the corporation are assumed to have the responsibility of communicating corporate identity. **Simoes, Dibb and Fisk (2005)** underline that the visual system plays a key role in corporate identity management. **Westcott Alessandri, (2001)** argue that visual presentations can consistently bridge the corporate mission and corporate identity. **Van Riel and Van den Ban (2001)** stated that visual message can potentially convey the organizational features to corporate stakeholders. **Topalian, (1984)** argue that VM supports effective corporate communication as it comes with the deep understanding within the company in terms of what the corporation is, and what the corporation stands for.

The key elements of Visual Merchandising and its role in communicating the corporate identity:

Visual merchandising integrates multiple visual resources and factors such as exterior designs, along with interior elements such as floor layouts, internal displays, window displays, banners, and signs in creating a positive store atmosphere and heighten the corporate identity images as well as lure customers to visit the store and induce them to purchase (**Kim, 2013**). Visual Merchandising is commonly accepted as a merchandising technique that uses the visual elements effectively and the visual element refers to windows display, lighting, colours and signage. In short, they are the visual communications in the designing of an environment. The elements of VM, both exterior and interior, of the store, are there to form a positive image in

customers' mind and attract their attention and interests (**Bastow-Shoop et al., 1991**). **Lea-Greenwood (1998)** further argues that visual merchandising is beneficial to communicate a cohesive corporate identity image and differentiate the offer from the competition. **Bell and Ternus (2006)** also emphasize that visual merchandising is supportive to not only sales and retail strategies but also the communication of retail store brand image. **Morrison (2002)** explains "one of the key challenges for retailers is to constantly add value to their brand. The positive atmosphere and design created by visual merchandising attract customers to the store and make them feel comfortable, taking time to browse and purchase products in the store. Elements such as windows displays and music inside the store add to the positive atmosphere and encourage customers to purchase more. Also, when customers get to have good experience in the store, they are attracted back to the store for repeated purchases. Basically, visual merchandising divided into two main parts exterior presentation and interior presentation. I will explain that in the following lines.

A- Exterior Presentation: Exterior Signs, Marquees, Banners, Awning, Walks and Entries, Landscaping, Windows Display.

The quality of a store front is a major determinant for a customer, particularly new customers, and should not be underestimated. The exterior appearance of one store, a block of businesses or a cluster, silently announce what customers can expect inside. Good exterior visual merchandising attracts attention, creates interest and invites the customer into the business. The exterior presentation can offer a conservative, progressive, lavish or discount image to the customer. How a store visually welcomes customers has a lot to do with whether or not they enter the store. Although good prices and positive word-of-mouth advertising is important, it is hard to overcome the negative image of a poor store exterior. When examining a store's exterior, consider the following questions:

- How do customers locate the business?
- Are the sidewalks clean, safe and accessible?
- Are the exterior signs clean, fresh and readable?
- Does the store front need cleaning, painting or touch-up?
- Are the outside entrances clean and accessible?
- Are the windows clean, bright and inviting?
- Are the window display preparation materials such as tape, pins and packaging materials removed?
- Are the window displays frequently changed?
- Do the window displays carry a theme?

- Exterior Signs

A store's sign is its signature. It is personal, original and continuously recognizable to the public. It should create an image that is consistently carried throughout the remainder of the store and its business actions. A sign is a silent salesperson, and part of a shopper's first impression of a store. In less than 10 seconds the sign must attract attention, tell who the business is and what it has to sell. An effective sign will communicate what type of business is being conducted. A sign's design conveys a great deal about the business inside. A stark design and limited materials may suggest discount prices and no frills. Elegant and expensive sign

materials may suggest luxury goods and services. Signs may also be used to target a specific market segment such as youth, women, senior citizens, singles, etc. Where many signs compete for customers' attention, design and logo become even more important. They should be unique, noticeable and readable. When preparing a sign to draw the customer's attention, consider size, shape, materials, lettering, height, placement and structure. Simple, brief, well-designed, well-lettered and easy-to read signs will convey a feeling of welcome. Design graphics appropriate for the nature of the business, and create a message that is clear and simple.

- **Marquees**

This special type of sign is used to display the name of a store. An effective marquee must stand out from the other businesses to attract attention. A marquee on some older buildings is a permanent canopy projecting over an entrance that provides protection from the elements. It can be used to announce a change in seasons, a special event or a promotion. The top of the permanent canopy (marquee) provides an opportunity to showcase seasonal displays or special promotional banners.

- **Banners**

Banners are used increasingly as an inexpensive but colourful, eye-catching means of promotion. A new and interesting appearance can be offered by changing the banners frequently. Consumers will think exciting changes are taking place, and be drawn into the store. Banners can be hung from flagpoles, projected from the building or hung flat against the exterior. To provide continuity, the same banner design can be reduced in size and scale, can be hung from the marquee and displayed inside the store. However, do not overuse banners because shoppers will stop noticing them. With each new banner, select a different size, shape and colour from those previously used. Consistency is an important aspect of retailing used to maintain a businesses' image and identification. The design concept used on the banners will be more effective if an attempt is made to carry the colours and graphics throughout the store, and on promotional materials and newspaper ads.

- **Awnings:**

Colour and appeal can be added to a store's exterior with the use of awnings. They provide the customer with protection from weather and makes viewing the window display more pleasant as it reduces heat, cuts down on glare and reflection, and prevents fading of the merchandise from exposure to the sun. However, an awning in poor condition may do harm by distracting from the total store image. Many businesses are updating their storefronts with new back-lit awning systems. Other names for these may include electric awnings, interior lit canopy signs, and back-lit conventional awnings. These modern-looking awnings are used on new as well as older buildings and are usually bright and attractive, especially at night.

- **Walks and Entries**

Approximately 75 percent of first-time customers remember a store's entrance, which provides the first and last view of the store's interior. Picture walking up to an expanse of wall whose flat surface is pierced only by a plain glass door, as opposed to the protective feeling offered by walking under a porch or canopy. A properly designed canopy or porch not only protects the

customer in bad weather, but can add to the aesthetics of the building. When adding an entryway, be sure it is designed to blend or be consistent with the architecture of the building. A cluttered entryway causes shoppers to indefinitely postpone entering a store, while an attractive, well-designed entrance is inviting to the customer. Entrances that allow shoppers to come into a store without being aware of their entering, is also becoming more popular.

- **Landscaping**

Landscaping should lead the customer's eye to the focal point using colour and texture to provide contrast and harmony. The focal point is the business sign and/or the building itself. Landscaping can also screen undesirable sights such as garbage receptacles, power transformers and refrigeration equipment. The essence of good landscaping is simplicity; simple landscape designs that are easy to maintain. For example, uninterrupted expanses of grass are easier to maintain than areas cut up by several small beds of flowers or shrubs. Planters, flower boxes and plants used in front of a store add to the general appearance, regardless of what type of merchandise is being sold. Plants (especially flowering bedding plants) enhance the overall look of the store, and also add to the store's positive reputation in terms of beautifying the community. Planters placed below and in front of a display window actually strengthen the display by adding greater depth to the setting. Real flowers and plants are recommended over artificial ones; high quality silk flowers may be used in some cases. During the winter, artificial flowers should be removed from stores located in parts of the country where flowers do not grow in the winter. Well designed and sturdy benches for resting and relaxing can be a part of the landscape and may encourage customers to stay longer. Aesthetically designed and strategically located garbage receptacles for customer use will help keep the grounds free from litter.

- **Windows Display**

Windows display is a crucial part of visual merchandising, which remains an important channel of corporate marketing communication. The window display is recognized as the most crucial in visual merchandising elements since it is the first point of interaction between the store and customers. To viewers, shop window displays sometimes become free exhibitions of beautiful and fashionable objects stimulating the imagination of viewers to exercise their taste as the mannequins embody good design and communicate style and meaningful content. In window displays, visual elements are intertwined to create an impact on customers as well as attract media attention, moreover, to tempt passers-by to enter the store and purchase merchandise (**Diamond, 2006**). Also emphasize that the window displays, as a mix of art, fashion, design, and marketing, is similar to advertising in the sense of creating the overall image and identity of the retailer. Special emphasis should be placed on a store's window displays because they are the information link to the potential customer. Window displays can be as important, if not more important, than advertising. As many as one in every four sales could be the result of a good window display. **Morgan (2008)** states that with the advent of new technology in the 1840s that allowed the production of large panes of glass, department stores were perhaps responsible for taking the art of window display to a higher level, using their large windows as stages, some of them as theatrical show. Window displays should attract attention, create interest and invite people into the store to purchase goods. Display can be used to introduce a

new product, a fashion trend, or a new “look” or idea. Display is simply the method by which a retailer’s assortment is presented to the shopper. The primary goals of a display are to present the assortment in such a way that sales maximized. Other goals can be identified such as gaining the shopper’s attention, fulfilling shopper demand, communicating and reinforcing store image and helping to control traffic flow. Effective displays educate the consumer as to how the new item can be used or worn and how it can be accessorized. Carefully planned and a well-dressed window display not only attracts shoppers into the store, it also enforces the retailer’s corporate identity image. It can act as an advertising tool and give an insight into what is available in-store. The display window is accepted as the most important part of the store design because it is the first meeting place the customer has with a brand and it gives passers-by a quick impression of the store. A passer-by can hold an opinion about the type of merchandise sold inside. The layout of the display windows should not take the focus away from the products and it should suggest a feeling. Window displays are crucial whether a store is situated in a mall or in a busy street. They are mix of art, fashion, graphic design and marketing. They must compel customers to enter a store by defining a brand’s image. Today, retailers are recognizing the importance of window display as the first point of contact between the store and the customer. Window displays play an important part in visual merchandising and some of the objectives of window displays, is to create, impact, image, theme and composition. The elements in visual merchandising, e.g. layout, theme, light, and colour, are also taken into window displays. Different combinations of these items in window display function differently to the shoppers. For example, mood windows convey the spirits of a holiday season (e.g. Christmas gift shopping), whereas fashion message windows carry the new fashion trend as well as suggestions for dressing, and direct-sell windows present the most popular items with tempting bargain prices (Frings, 1987).

B- Interior Presentation: Shop Interior

Selling space is the most important part of a store and therefore, efforts to utilize each square foot will help to maximize sales. One proven way to do this is through interior displays that effectively show merchandise to the customer. When planning interior displays, remember that the theme and image presented on the exterior must be carried throughout the interior of the store to provide consistency for the customer. The purpose of interior display is to develop desire for the merchandise, show what is available, and encourage both impulse and planned buying. Three major goals of a store should be to: motivate the customer to spend money, project the image of the store and keep expenses to a minimum. Promotion and advertising dollars are less effective or even wasted when efforts are not made within the store to effectively merchandise the products. Well-designed displays and in-store promotions are essential for a consistent theme and to help the customer find advertised items.

- Shop Interior

Shop interior is a significant part of merchandising because designing a modern retail store can affect the profit and image of the brands. Designing a shop interior is the art of planning because it is a creative process. It is the art of drawing, composing and selecting colours, materials, furnishings and accessories to enrich the design of a store interior. The main purpose is to create an attractive shopping environment and to enhance the presentation of merchandise. To create

a distinctive corporate identity image should be the main task of a designer because such an image will create a brand recognition which will be immediately perceived by the consumers. Today's competitive retail environment, fashion retailers struggle in order to increase their sales and to carry their brands to the wider masses. The best way to achieve this purpose is to consider the architectural and interior design. The exterior of the buildings and their interior designs can help to for recognition of the fashion brand. As a customer response to these new building, we, sometimes, see pictures of long queue down the street the night before these buildings opened. There are many brand loyalists who sleep overnight on the street and their purpose is to be the first to see the new designs. Store image and shopping environment is a significant determinant to spend time in the store and to spend more money than planned. On the other hand, retail store elements such as colour, lighting and visual merchandising have an immediate effect on the buying decision making process.

- Display Design

For a Visual Merchandiser, a store is like a theatre. The walls & floor are like stage of theatre. The lighting, fixtures & visual communications makes the set of the stage & the merchandise play the characters in the show. An effective way of attracting customers to a store is by having good displays, both exterior and interior. A customer will be attracted to a display within three to eight seconds; that is the time a customer spends to determine interest in a product. This is why it is critical have a properly designed display. Every display should be planned and have a theme. Good design makes a visual presentation come together. This means the design attracts attention in a way that strengthens the store corporate identity image, as well as introducing merchandise to the customer. Before designing good displays, answer the following questions:

- 1- What is the store's corporate identity image? Select an image to present to the public. The customer will identify a certain look with a store and expect that look to be carried throughout the business, and to be trendy, elegant, off-price or discount. Do not mix images within one store, it will only confuse the customers.

- 2- What type of customer is being attracted? Use a display that reflects the targeted consumer. A display that works well in one community may be ineffective in another community.

- 3- What is the concept of the merchandise to be presented in the display? Display and highlight the merchandise, do not merchandise an attractive display. Items should be displayed as they are meant to be used or worn. If formal wear is combined with day wear and kitchen accessories, the consumer is confused and sales are lost.

- 4- Where is the display going to be set up and how will the location determine the design? There are many types of locations for display in every store: windows, walls, cases, gondolas or islands. The principles of display should help make the location work for the display.

- 5- Why is this merchandise being put on display as opposed to other merchandise? This reason will determine the visual presentation and design. For example, if the merchandise is on sale, it will be displayed differently than regular price merchandise. Keep in mind there should be enough backup stock to warrant a display. If not, do not display it. Place sale or promotional goods in the front of the store for short periods of time only. If the sale or promotion lasts for several weeks, move the merchandise to the rear of the store. Interested customers will search out a bargain. Introduce the customer to new, exciting and creative merchandise with a display at the front of the store.

- Colours in Display Design:

Pegler (2006) suggests: "colour psychology is very important in visual merchandising. Colours can immediately create a mood. Colour contributes significantly to people's impression of a display, as well as a store's overall appearance. Colour in a display can catch the eye and make people pause and look. The colour combinations of the ceiling, walls, floor covering and the overall decor can affect the atmosphere of a store. Changing the colour scheme can change people's attitudes and perceptions of a store, and can increase (or decrease) business. Colour can change the shape and add interest to a dull room, and can direct attention toward a specific object or away from problem areas. People tend to respond a certain way to different colours; these responses are outlined in the chart on the following page. Colour is accepted as the biggest motivation for shopping. **Pegler (2006)** suggests that people buy colour before they buy, size, fit, or price. Colours says something about the kind of merchandise and merchandiser. Warm colours (red, yellow, orange and colours with red or yellow hues such as yellow-green, beige, peach, brown and orange-red) are stimulating and cheery. They make a room feel warm and intimate. Warm colours make a room seem smaller while making objects in the room appear larger. A warm colour on the end walls of a long narrow room will appear to shorten the room. Blue, green, violet and colours containing blue, such as blue-green and violet-blue, are cool colours. These helps create a relaxing atmosphere. Rooms decorated primarily in cool colours tend to appear larger and more spacious. Cool colours are especially pleasing in smaller rooms. Colours are considered as one of the effective way to capture customer's attention. This is realized with the effective and knowledgeable use of colours. As the most powerful and effective tool of the Visual Merchandising, colours pull more customer into the store. In this context, a retailer has to focus on the right choice of colour.

- Lighting in Display Design:

Lighting is essential in calling attention to merchandise in a display. A shopper's eye is drawn automatically to the brightest item or area. Lighting treatment may be used to draw attention to part of the display area, a specific item in the display, or to coordinate parts of the total display area. Lighting can also be used to direct shoppers through the store, attracting them to various displays along the way. Because of this tendency to follow a lighted path, display lights should be two to five times stronger than lighting in other parts of the store. The choice of the right lighting in retail stores should be well considered. There are numerous products that offer many choices for shopping environment. Lighting deals that create an ambiance and make environments visually pleasing. The right utilization of light is highly important for shopping environments. Light reflections and energy requirements should be well analysed. **Quartier and Cleempoel (2008)** suggest: "Lighting has an influence on the mood and hence the behaviour of humans in retail environments. Lighting has an influence on how spaces are perceived. It can arouse positive or negative feelings in the perception of that space. Lighting in retail environments encourage people to stay longer in that retail environment and increase the sales numbers". Lighting is an integral part of design. It contributes greatly to the look of a space. There are many types of lighting that affect the perception of any space. In retailing, to create a special ambiance by using special lighting techniques, should be one of the main tasks of visual merchandisers and designers. **Pegler (2006)** advices that the cheapest and most

effective starting place in getting attention and recognition is with good lighting. **Ries (2012)** points out lighting quality and quantity. He calls attention that: “insufficient foot candle levels may result in poor visibility and a dark environment. Low light levels will also prevent consumers from comparing and possibly purchasing products. However, too much light can make shoppers uncomfortable and will waste limited operating dollars on energy that is not needed”. The objectives of lighting are explained as:

- To attract the customers’ attention
- To create an appropriate mood for the merchandise
- To contribute to a positive visual image of the merchandise
- To allow careful inspection of the merchandise

- **The Five Design Basics of Visual Merchandising: (Bastow-Shoop et al., 1991)**

By following these principles, stores can maximize the effectiveness of distinctive visual presentations in order to enhance the brand image as well as stimulate more consumption, there are five main principles are widely followed by visual merchandisers in their design. They are:

- 1- **Balance:** This principle refers to the distribution of weight. The placement may follow symmetrical balance for identical items, or use the asymmetrical balance to show off design talents.
- 2- **Emphasis:** Taking particular area as a focal point to catch customers’ eyes and attention can motivate them to shop in the store.
- 3- **Proportion:** It involves that different elements in visual merchandising should be appropriately scaled and placed.
- 4- **Rhythm:** It formulates the flow of customers’ eyes traveling from one part to another and guarantees that they will have a look at the entire presentation.

Harmony: This is the umbrella principle integrating every other principle. Harmony ensures the feeling that every element in the display is interrelated.

- **Analytical Study:**
- **Store Study: “Louis Vuitton”**

Louis Vuitton, the legendary name in fashion was founded in 1854, by luggage maker Louis Vuitton. The iconic name in fashion circle today is essentially the journey of a visionary man who profoundly changed the art of luggage making, and in doing so, changed the notion of travel itself. Equipped with exceptional craftsman’s technique and designer’s vision, Louis Vuitton manufactures a range of shoes, watches, later goods, clothing, jewelry and accessories that reflect the elegance, distinctiveness and the brand signature style which bears witness to the French lifestyle.

- **Corporate Identity:**

Louis Vuitton Malletier – commonly referred to as Louis Vuitton or shortened to LV. The label is well known for its LV monogram, which is featured on most of its products - this ranging from luxury trunks and leather goods to ready-to-wear, shoes, watches, jewelry, accessories, sunglasses, and books. Louis Vuitton is one of the world's leading international fashion houses; it sells its products through standalone boutiques, lease departments in high-end department stores, and through the e-commerce section of its website.

- **Brand Logo.....**



“Figure 2 -Louis Vuitton Logo”

- Tagline: “Legends of Yesterday and Today”
- Target Customers: High-end society. The brand is categorized to be one of the globally leading luxury brand in the fashion society.
- Brand Ambassador: Angelina Jolie. Louis Vuitton maintains a design team of 500 people, all of which produces 20,000 new styles every year.

- **Visual Merchandising:**

1- Louis Vuitton Visual Merchandising of 'Billowing Sails' in japan

In what Louis Vuitton calls a ‘silent discussion between past and present, the French fashion house Louis Vuitton has opened the largest of its flagship stores in Osaka, Japan with a facade by architect Jun Aoki and interiors by New York designer Peter Marino “Figure 3”. inspired by sailing vessels the concept reflects the city’s heritage as Japan’s most important port. Jun Aoki has designed a light and airy white structure that references the billowing sails of traditional Higaki-Kaisen cargo ship, which once transported cargo from Osaka to Tokyo. the purity of the façade is reinforced by the use of metal fretwork motifs at ground level, giving the impression of a ship floating on water. Inside the four-floor Louis Vuitton store, Peter Marino has followed similar inspirations. Wooden floors give the impression of decks, with wood-clad pillars and metal ceilings reminiscent of the spirit of a grand yacht embarking on an exciting adventure. meanwhile, traditional Japanese materials such as woodwork and origami washi paper decorate spaces of various volumes including large halls and smaller corners. The top floor makes optimal use of its proximity to the sky, with a sea-like terrazzo floor and colored roof decorations reflecting and refracting the rays of the sun. The store basically involves very attractive and highly luxurious exterior which invites the customers into the stores. This also includes store logo. The Interior store designing has great atmosphere and aesthetics, extremely spacious and posh “Figure 4”. Regarding to the space planning, the store has different merchandise like leather goods, footwear, clothing, perfumes etc., which was spread out all over the store. The fixtures in wooden racks were highly used, with wall enclosures and mirrors. Excellent lightings were maintained throughout the store, where garments didn’t lose its color. The wooden flooring and bright lighted ceiling complemented each other. Graphics were used all around the store, promotional graphic were specially used to showcase the new collection and the corporate identity ambassador.



“Figure 3 -Louis Vuitton “Billowing Sails” Japan - Exterior



“Figure 4 -Louis Vuitton “Billowing Sails” Japan – Interior

1- Vibrant Louis Vuitton Visual Merchandising of 'X' exhibition

Louis Vuitton is celebrating 160 years of creative exchanges and artist collaborations with a temporary retrospective detailing the Mayson's history. entitled 'Louis Vuitton X', the French fashion house draws on over 180 items from its archives, bringing together a remarkable collection of early twentieth-century special-order trunks, art deco perfume bottles and iconic monogram bags reworked by renowned artists and designers such as Karl Lagerfeld, Rei Kawakubo, Cindy Sherman, and Frank Gehry. Now open to the public, the vibrant exhibition, which takes place in a converted mansion in North Rodeo Drive building in Beverly Hills, California “Figure 5”, is set across two floors and is comprised of ten distinct rooms. 'Louis Vuitton X' presents objects and artworks in the following order: 'Louis Vuitton: as seen by;' 'origins: a tradition of modernity;' 'reinterpreting icons;' 'the monogram as a blank canvas;' 'art on silk;' 'art meets fashion;' 'lights, camera, action. Louis Vuitton on the red carpet: “the past is present”’.



“Figure 5 -Louis Vuitton “X Exhibition”

North Rodeo Drive building in Beverly Hills, California

Inside the exhibition there is a portrait of Louis Vuitton “Figure 6” by American painter Alex Katz. the portrait was commissioned as part of an ongoing project for the brand that will see the house commission portraits from important artists from the 20th and 21st century to re-imagine the brand’s founder.



“Figure 6 -Louis Vuitton Portrait”

As visitors’ journey through the series of multi-hued spaces, the digitally-savvy among them will discover three Louis Vuitton-inspired Instagram camera effects developed specifically for the exhibition. using a smartphone, guests scan a bar code to unlock x-ray and technicolour filters that are exclusive and unique to the space. “Figure 7”



“Figure 7 - multi-hued spaces”

A digital wall display pays tribute to the brand’s monogram hold all, including a never-before-seen bronze sculpture by Sylvie Fleury. other highlights include silk scarves by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki as well as the American conceptual artist Sol Lewitt. “Figure 8”



“Figure 8 – Digital Wall Display”

Louis Vuitton “X Exhibition” culminates with six visions of a contemporary classic.’ timed to the exhibition, it celebrates the house’s latest collaborative project with six leading contemporary artists: Sam falls, Urs Fischer, Nicholas Hlobo, Alex Israel, Tschabalala self and Jonas wood. “Figure 9”



“Figure 9 – Exhibition Six Visions of a Contemporary Classic”

1- Louis Vuitton Visual Merchandising of NYC Pop-Up in Neon Green:

Louis Vuitton celebrates the men’s fall-winter 2019 collection designed by Virgil Abloh with a limited-time, pop-up retail space in New York city. The site is entirely bathed in neon green, with the single hue spanning from the street to all interior elements set inside the store. green furniture, figures, and even the fire hydrant outside the corner site have been colorized to create an all-encompassing experience for the collection’s presentation. “Figure 10”.



“Figure 10 – NYC Pop-Up in Neon Green”

Abloh’s design for the Louis Vuitton fall-winter 2019 collection includes new prints inspired by New York city; accessories; patches drawn from the brand’s archives; flag prints representing the diversity of its studio designers. The all-green retail experience absorbs visitors as soon as they step down Rivington street, as a green-painted mailbox, bicycle and trash bags tease at the immersive installation and special product offering that lies within the store. “Figure 11”.



“Figure 10 – green-painted mailbox, bicycle and trash bags in Neon Green”



“Figure 11 – green-painted display in the store interior”

Results

- 1- Visual merchandising is a retail strategy that maximizes the aesthetics of a product with the intent to increase sales.
- 2- Visual merchandising has strong impact due to the fierce competition in the market today.
- 3- Visual attraction and communication have been considered vital components of retailing.
- 4- Visual merchandising is an important benefiting strategy that is considered as one of the determinants of success for a retail store.
- 5- The key elements of visual merchandising create a unique atmosphere and excite the sense of consumers.
- 6- Visual merchandising is an important part of communication and has a significant impact on the store retail environment.
- 7- The visual merchandising remains an important channel of corporate marketing communication.
- 8- Window displays can be as important, if not more important, than advertising.
- 9- Windows display is an important channel of corporate marketing communication.
- 10- The display design attracts attention in a way that strengthens the store corporate identity image.
- 11- Store window displays is the most important tool to draw people into the store, because they are a great way to highlight certain types of merchandise.
- 12- Colour contributes significantly to people's impression of a display.
- 13- The lighting deals with creation of an ambiance and making the stores' display environments visually pleasing.
- 14- Visual messages in corporate communication benefit the organization in the visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency of corporate identity.
- 15- Visual merchandising can consistently bridge the corporate mission and corporate identity.
- 16- Graphics and Signage are cost-effective and efficient tools for delivering a message or inform the customer about the products available in the department store.

Discussion

Visual Merchandising is the essence as it is a crucial ingredient that performs an eye-catching process; it is a part of the branding of the shop and it can form cooperate identity. A Visual Merchandising has the ability to change a person walking along the high street into a potential customer, it is a strong advertising and marketing or business management tool, so it is worth investing a little time, money and energy to achieve the best results possible, as thoughts and intentions of people can be directed away from what is occupying them and towards the

products on sale in the shop. The importance of store or shopping environment as a tool for market differentiation is accepted by many retailers, so the focus of visual merchandising is on the presentation of goods in retailers, it emphasizes visual elements because they capture attention of consumers. With this paper I would certainly say companies should make a strategic plan in order to use the visual merchandising techniques because it plays a very critical role to directly influence customer at the store. So, the Companies and retailers need to focus on innovative presentation of products, creative displays, and strategic assortment of the products in the shelves. Visual merchandising starts with the store design to reflect the products in the store and window display. The purpose is to create a warm, friendly, and approachable atmosphere for customers. I do believe that it's too important to predict future merchandising trends, as most of people give buying or shopping decision by looking at the shop's ambience and visual display. Regarding to the display's lighting the majority of customers respond to the lighting more positively and a sophisticated Visual Merchandising requires convenient lighting combined with display themes. So visual merchandisers should select appropriate lighting system that creates satisfaction of psychological needs of customers. So, success factors of visual merchandising include the store's appearance, signage, windows display, lighting, colour, shapes, textures, presentation and the "wow" factor each of these elements bring together in a retail setting When these elements come together to showcase a corporate identity, it enriches the customer experience, leading to a positive shopping experience and increased sales.

Conclusion

Visual Merchandising is the art of displaying merchandise in a manner that is appealing to the eyes of the customer. 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. It has frequently been concluded that "good" exterior and interior design within a store can maintain customer interest, encourage customers to lower their psychological defenses and make a purchase. The Visual Merchandising uses visual communication by putting the product or brand at the point of sale by making it as a title character. Visual Merchandiser are responsible for visual communication within a store. Their objective is to make evident the characteristics of a product in order to favor the selection process of the customer. They achieve this through the organization of display systems in the store. The elements of visual merchandising have a huge impact on consumer's reaction to the store or brand. Today, there is a growing trend intended provocative storefronts and interiors and architects have begun to create in such a manner. Their purpose is to create a special aura to draw in customers and also attract media attention. Store design and its display windows are the most important communication channels for the stores. The purpose of a display is to sell specific merchandise. It should attract attention and stimulate the customer sufficiently to lead to a purchase decision. By analyzing thoroughly in this paper, the paper problems' questions are answered.

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