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Faitira Manuere, Kaviya Martha

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The Effect of Visual Merchandising on Impulse Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Clothing Industry: The Case Study of Chinhoyi Town

Faitira Manuere, Kaviya Martha

Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Management

Abstract

Retailers in the clothing industry are facing stiff competition due to the fact that they are offering similar products hence they cannot differentiate their products from those being offered by others. Most retailers today are using merchandising techniques to fight competition in the industry. This study wishes to investigate the factors that motivate customers to do impulse buying. It is against this background that this study explores the effect of visual merchandising on consumer impulse buying in the clothing industry. This study focused on window display mannequin display, floor merchandising and promotional signage as the independent variables that are used to change the behaviour of consumers. The study was conducted in Chinhoyi Central Business District which houses a number of clothing shops. A structured questionnaire was used to select 200 respondents to participate in the study and a multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse the correlation between visual merchandising and customer impulse buying. The results of the study show that there is a strong positive relationship between visual merchandising and customer impulse buying behaviour. Therefore this study recommends that all fashion clothing shops in Chinhoyi Town should incorporate effective visual merchandising techniques in their strategic marketing plans in order to increase sales and attract more and more loyal customers.

Keywords: Visual Merchandising, Customer Impulse Buying, Fashion Clothing Shops, Strategic Marketing Plan and Retailers.

Introduction

Visual merchandising is defined as, “everything the customer sees both exterior and interior that creates a positive image of a business and result in attention, interest, desire and action on the part of the customer” (Baston - Shoop et al., 1991). Several authors argue that visual merchandising starts from “Window display to forum display and floor merchandising along with promotion Signage” (Mills et al., 1995). The physical display of products in any form is key to the concept of merchandising (Mills et al., 1995). Macgoldrick (2000) argues that customers usually make purchasing decisions using several senses, such as sight, smell, aural and touch and to analyse and measure the value of the products they come in contact with (Oakley, 1990; McGoldrick, 2002). Visual merchandising is therefore a marketing

communication technology used by retailers to promote the sale of a product and to help customers to make impulse buying decisions (Mills et al., 1995; McGoldrick, 2002). According to Bhatti and Latif (2014:25) Visual merchandising is also represented by physical artifacts such as “Billboards, banners, posters, panaflexes, buntings, placards, pamphlets, shop boards, shelf markers and hand bills of any company, shop or brand which a buyer can see or come across which are considered in the course of making a decision to purchase a product”. Visual merchandising includes the store’s attributes, such as, the number of shelves in the store, compartments that contain the products, the cleanliness of both the inside and the outside of the store, and the product mix available to the customers (Mills et al., 1995; Oakley, 1990; McGoldrick, 2020). Visual merchandising is the means by which retailers are able to establish the relationship between the buyer and the product or service (Oakley, 1990; McGoldrick, 2002).

A number of authors define impulse as the process in which customers make a rapid decision to purchase a product without considering the merit and demerits of adopting such actions (Bhatti and Latif, 2014). Impulse purchasing behaviour is motivated by the visual set up of the store and the physical display of products (Kacen, 2002). In fact, impulse buying does not benefit the customer in the long run although the process helps the retailers to push up their sales (Kacen, 2002). Rook (1987) argues that it is a strategic marketing plan which is used by retailers to increase their sales (Bellenger et al., 1978). The literature on impulse buying shows that impulse buying is a strange behaviour exhibited by customers when they make unplanned purchasing decisions (Kollat and Willet, 1967; Kollat 1996; Bellenger et al., 1978). In impulse buying, the purchasing of a product is not based on need but on physical and visual attractions of the product as arranged by the shop (Kollat and Willet, 1967; Kollat, 1966; Bellenger et al., 1978)

Objectives

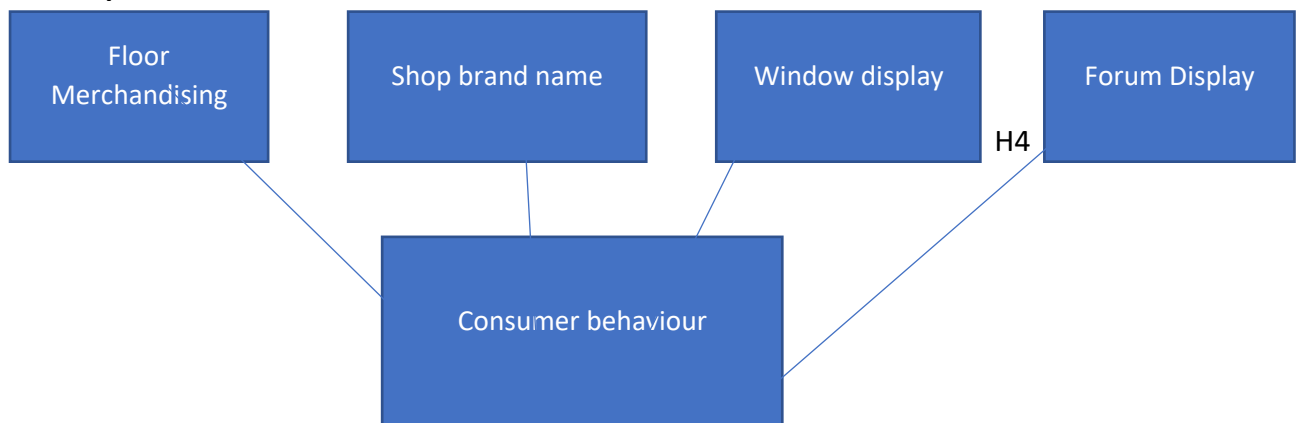
- To investigate the impact of window display on consumer impulse buying.
- To find out the effect of forum display on consumer impulse buying
- To explore the relationship between floor merchandising and consumer impulse buying
- To ascertain the relationship between shop brand name and consumer impulse buying.

Literature review

Bashar and Irshad (2015) carried out a study to investigate the effect of form display, window, promotional signage and floor merchandising on impulse buying. The researchers used a sample of 200 customers and Pearson’s correlation statistics was used to measure the relationship. The findings revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between window display and impulse buying. However, the researchers concluded that store and impulse buying are not well correlated. On the other hand, the studies conducted by Sujata et al (2012) on the impact of visual merchandising on impulse buying concluded that there is no positive relationship between floor merchandising and impulse buying. The research used Pearson’s correlation Matrix to measure the relationship between visual merchandising and impulse buying. The respondents were aged between 18 and 45 years and they comprised of both sexes. Vinamra et al (2012, studied the effect of visual merchandising on consumer buying behaviour. All the respondents were women who patronized certain shopping mall to buy clothes. The finding showed that visual merchandising is the main cause of impulse

buying. Maria et al (200) investigated the relationship between impulse buying and visual merchandising. The researcher used a sample of 334 consumers and used the mean and standard deviation to measure the relationship. The results showed that visual merchandising influences impulse buying positively. However, the results of the study also showed that both female and male consumers were affected in the same way by the practice of visual merchandising. Mohmood and Ahmdrigad (2011) conducted a research study to find out the impact of store environmental factors on impulse buying. The independent variables consisted of the shop environment, promotions, product mix and the pricing regime. The dependent variable was impulse buying. The researcher used a sample of 329 respondents or customers who visited certain shopping malls and the statistic used to measure the relationship was the variance coefficient. The results of the study showed that the environment of the store has a direct and positive relationship with impulse buying. Ridmi et al, (2011) investigated the impact of visual merchandising on patronage intention. The researcher used the following store attributes as independent variables; store layout, colour, product display, music, lighting and cleanliness. The study was carried out in Sirilanka and the sample consisted of 384 respondents. The statistics used to measure the relationship were called regression analysis. The results showed that store layout is not correlated to patronage intentions whereas colour is correlated to patronage intentions. The study concluded that cleanliness is correlated to patronage intentions. Sonali and Sunnetra (2012) conducted a study to find out the impact of visual merchandising on consumer behaviour. The study concluded that visual merchandising has a strong positive relationship on consumer behaviour.

Conceptual Framework



Hypothesis

- H1: There is a positive relationship between floor merchandising and consumer impulse buying
- H2: There is a positive relationship between shop brand name and consumer impulse buying.
- H3: There is a strong positive relationship between window display and consumer impulse buying.
- H4: There is a strong positive relationship between forum display and consumer impulse buying.

Methodology

The purpose of the research was to investigate the relationship between visual merchandising and impulse buying of consumers in the clothing industry of Zimbabwe. To that end, the study involved independent variables such as, floor merchandising, shop brand name, window display and forum display whereas the dependent variable was consumer impulse buying. The study was conducted at selected clothing and fashion stores in Chinhoyi Central Business District (CBD). The descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The questionnaire approach was used to collect data from 200 consumers. Multiple regression analysis from SPSS version 25 was adopted in order to measure the relationship between visual merchandising and consumer impulse buying. The questionnaire was developed and adopted from the literature review. The theoretical scales of Mehta et al (1990); Cobb and Hoyer (1986) were used to develop the questionnaire in this study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Correlation among the chosen constructs of variables

Variables	Correlation coefficient
Floor merchandising	0.799**
Shop Brand name	0.966***
Window display	0.850**
Forum Display	0.755**

** and *** are significant at 5% and 1% respectively

Table 1 shows that multiple regression analysis was used in order to test the impact of visual merchandising on consumer impulse buying behaviour. Thus the correlation coefficients shown in Table 2 show that constructs chosen for visual merchandising and impulse buying are significantly ($P < 0.05$) convergent and valid measures for analysis. Thus visual merchandising has a positive relationship with consumer impulse buying.

Table 2

Multiple linear regression analysis results

Variables	Coefficient (SE)	P-Value
Floor Merchandising	(X_1) 0,216(0,086)**	.046
Shop and Brand name	(X_2) 0,333(0152)**	.026
Window display	(X_3) 0,446 (0.168)**	.022
Forum Display	(X_4) .0447(0.248)**	.016
Constant (a0)	4.029(0.510)***	.000

** and *** are significant at 5% and 1% respectively, $R^2=0.814$

The coefficient of the determinant ($R^2 = 0.814$) show that the variation in consumer impulse buying was 81.4% as explained by the chosen visual merchandising variable used in the model and the regression equation fitted with data. Therefore the model (equation 2) was derived from the regression analysis. Thus the standardised coefficient (a_1) values, p values for visual merchandising variables of the model show that the highest positive relationship is shown by shop brand name (0.966) whereas the lowest positive relationship is shown by forum display (0.755).

$$Y=4.029+0.216X_1+0.333X_2+0.446X_3+0.477X_4$$

Findings and Conclusions

Floor merchandising has a positive impact on customer buying. A positive relationship ($X_1=0.216$) between floor merchandising and consumer impulse buying could be observed as described by (Bhatti and Latif, 2014). The floor merchandising of the store must be well positioned in order to attract customers (Madhavi and Leelavati, 2013). The shop brand name was also found to be an important attribute that significantly influenced customer impulse buying. The influence of shop brand name was positively related to customer impulse buying ($x_2=0.333$). Therefore the shop brand name is a powerful tool that can be used by clothing and fashion stores to show customers the importance of buying their products.

According to Mehta et al (1990), the shop brand name is a powerful attribute that can be manipulated by the clothing and fashion stores to persuade customers to buy their products. Window display is yet another attribute of visual merchandising that can easily motivate customers to engage in impulse buying. There is a positive relationship between window display and customer impulse buying ($X_3=0.446$). Effective window display in any clothing store is a sign that goods and services are always available to stimulate consumers to make a well-defined purchasing decision (Bhatti and Latif 2014). A well planned window display arouses a positive attitude in customers to make a repeated purchasing decision (Bhatti and Latif, 2014). Abarajthan (2014) argues that a customer needs eleven seconds to analyse and appreciate a window display before engaging in a meaningful purchasing decision, all things being equal (*ceteris paribus*). The highest positive relationship between forum display and consumer impulse buying is registered at ($x_4=0.477$). Therefore forum display is found to be the most significant attribute in motivating customers to engage in impulse buying. The study shows that there is a positive relationship between forum display and consumer impulse buying. The results seem to show that visual merchandising variables have a meaningful effect on consumer buying behaviour in the clothing and fashion stores (Thomas et al, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Consumer impulse buying is a process in which consumers engage in unplanned and immediate purchasing decisions. The unplanned and sudden decision to make up a purchase is aroused by shop attributes. This study showed that customers can engage in impulse buying when they encounter shop attributes such as floor merchandising, shop brand name, window display and forum display. This study revealed that there is a positive relationship between floor merchandising, shop brand name, window display and forum display. Visual merchandising activities have the effect of driving consumers to engage in impulse buying and this eventually affects the buying habits of customers. The results of this study provide significant evidence that retailers can manipulate visual merchandising tools to make customers aware of their products, to increase the desirability of their products and to create favourable buying attributes in customers.

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