

# Influence of Visual Merchandising on Consumer Perception and Purchasing Decisions in the Retail Outlets: A Cognitive Approach

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## **Abstract**

In today's competitive retail world, visual merchandising plays a key role in shaping customers perceptions on store, products and buying choices. As stores use design, product arrangements, colors, lighting, and layouts to stand out, it's important to understand how customers mentally process these visual elements. This study looks at things from a cognitive angle to see how visual merchandising acts as a signal that grabs attention, affects how things are seen, remembered, and decided upon. The research explores visual merchandising and its impacts on customer perceptions and buying decision towards retail outlet in Bangalore. The quantitative approach is adopted and collecting data is administered through convenience sampling from customers at various retail outlets. Primary data collection has been executed with a structured questionnaire to measure customers' responds to different visual merchandising cues. Pearson s Correlation technique has been adopted to examine relationship between age that relates to buying choices and customers' views on visual merchandising elements connect to their purchasing behavior. The results show the influence of visual merchandising can be made more effective to draw attention and help customers to evaluate products better and encourage them to buy more. The study also suggest retailers' a useful advice on improving their in-store experiences.

**Key Words:** Visual merchandising, consumer perception, cognitive processing, purchase decision, retail outlets, Bangalore, store design, quantitative research.

## **1. Introduction**

Visual merchandising has become an important part of modern retailing because it greatly affects how customers view stores and products (Levy & Weitz, 2012). It involves arranging products in a store using methods like layout, window displays, lighting, color schemes, signs, and product placement to create an inviting shopping experience (Kerfoot, Davies, & Ward, 2003). The research study reveals that visual merchandising is a elements cue to communicate using display signs, logo and sensory marketing that help customers to understand a store equity, store identity and the value of its products (Bhalla&Anuraag, 2010). Visual merchandising key element is store appealing and it encourage customers to spend more time (Turley & Milliman, 2000). From the neuromarketing perspective, Customers perception on understanding a store depends on the store visual elements around them (Solomon, 2018). Variables like product arrangement, colour, lighting and the store layout influence customers store brand recall (Schiffman&Wisnblit, 2015). Visual merchandising has a strong influence on both planned and impulse shopping by customers (Law, Wong, & Yip, 2012). Strategic product design and displays make customers feels value of the product and creates more confident about buying (Park, Jeon, & Sullivan, 2015). Theme based ambience in the store creates a positive shopping experience that leads to repeat purchases (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002).

Lot of research study on the effects of visual merchandising and few studies use cognitive theory to analyze the customer perceptions leads to buying decision (Vieira, 2013). Cognitive approach helps to understand the customers preferences towards the store that links to visual merchandising (Solomon, 2018). Today's competitive retail environment visual merchandising has become a strategic tool for processing consumer perception and influencing buying decision (Jessica Fernandes, 2025). Retailers are mostly depending on store design, product displays, colour schemes, lighting and store layout to analyze consumers decision process. The cognitive approach highlights the customers mental decision making process through visual appeal in the retail outlet. From the perspective of the neuroscience, visual merchandising is not about the exterior beautification, but a strategic stimuli that activate consumers cognitive thought process. Therefore, this study explores how visual merchandising elements affect consumer perception and purchasing decisions through cognitive processes, offering deeper insights into how retailers can design environments that effectively capture attention, improve product evaluation, and encourage purchase intentions.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Retail industry in India is majorly unorganized outlets. Organized retailing has first evolved in west and then entered in India as a revolution. Consumers now have multiple options to buy ranging from small store to organized retail outlets. In a retail outlet although visual merchandising is extensively adopted in retail eco system, there is limited knowledge of implication of detailed visual elements and its influence on consumer perception and purchasing decisions. Many research focused on the aesthetic cues of merchandising but its lacks to examine the cognitive mechanisms as drawing customer attentions, perceptions and information processing that shapes consumer responses (Pleasant, J., et al. 2013). As an outcome retailers have to strategies visual merchandising cues such as store design, product displays, color schemes, lighting, layout and evaluate the most influencing cues that has a strongest cognitive impact on consumer decision making.

In this scenario the research study aims to addresses this gap by examining which visual merchandising influences consumer perception and purchase decisions using a cognitive approach. The study also explores a deeper understanding of consumers buying decisions based on the demographic dividends and there responds to visual cues in store environment. The research contributes to existing literature by bridging the gap between cognitive psychology and visual merchandising cues in retail setup and offers guidance to retail outlets those are seeking to design more effective visual merchandising strategies.

## **3. Literature Review**

Visual merchandising has been identified as key factors of consumer experiences with in retail ecosystems. Influential concept of store atmospheric cues such as lighting, colors, spatial arrangements serves as integral components of visual marketing (Kotler's.,1974). Differentiation between external atmospheric variables such as exterior log design, wall colors, entrance mannequins, and sign boards that shapes consumer perception and influence customer purchase decision (Donovan and Rossiter.,1982). Visual merchandising cues includes color schemes, lighting, merchandise presentation, store layout, mannequins, fixtures, furniture, and display props, all of which contribute to creating a compelling retail environment (Law et al., 2012). The effective visual merchandising that retailer can create a unique brand identity through symbolic and ethno centric (Matthews et al., 2013). Underneath this, visual merchandising enhances sales, increase brand equity and identity, thresholds brand positioning all these factors positively influences consumer buying behavior (Juliana et al.,2017). VM is also conceptualized as a systematic approach to organizing and products presentations that leads to guiding act for the consumer decisions. There is a argument that customized product displays, theme displays in the right store layout significantly enhances purchase decisions (Mehta and Chugan., 2013). In a similar context that VM is also closely linked to retail strategy that states a well-executed merchandise plan that fortifies brand equity and encourages repeat purchases (Maier et al., 2009). Extending the demonstration of product merchandising creates a positive relationship between VM and impulse buying that indicates the store appealing environments stimulates impulse purchases (Kaur et al., 2013). The retailers must assert consistent updates on visual strategies to keep a pace with customer expectation (Stanley et al., 2010). VM has also described as a strategic tool that brings customers into product merchandising engagement and foster purchase decisions (Ahir and Mali., 2013). In addition, it is also observed that global brands has scaled the sophistication of visual appeal, where retailers are focusing not only on the aesthetics but also on positioning brand recall (Mohd ., 2013). The research found that the effective VM tools increases likelihood of customer conversion (Pillai.,2011). While one of the research describes the influence of atmospheric cues create value addition beyond the product displays (Eroglu .,2003). However, the study caution that not all the VM align with customer expectations and store image (Young et al., 2007). The VM can significantly influence buying decisions and act as a trigger to impulse purchase ( Saini et al., 2015). The research argue that effective VM can differentiate retail brands and strengthens shoppers brand preferences (Park et al., 2015). The study found that store front displays, store layouts and visual appealing can generates consumer interest. This technique can convert footfalls into buyers (Pillai et al., 2011). The study identifies three main components of visual marketing such as window displays, creative product assortments and store cleanliness all these contributes to a favorable shopping atmosphere (Kaur et al.,2013). The study found that strong correlations between VM and various shoppers type (Makhal et al., 2015). While the research demonstrated that window displays and floor merchandising strongly influence impulse purchases ( Bashar and

Irshad ., 2012). In this scenario, this research reinforce that visual merchandising plays a key role in shaping consumers perceptions and purchase decision.

#### 4. Objective of the study

1. To analyze consumers' demographic variables their perception of visual merchandising in retail stores Bangalore.
2. To examine key visual merchandising elements that influence consumer attention in retail environments.
3. To analyze the impact of visual merchandising on consumers' purchase intentions and decision-making processes.

#### 5. Research methodology

The aim of this research is to identify the influence of visual merchandising on consumer perception and purchasing decisions in the retail outlets in Bangalore. The study aims to give retailers useful ideas on how to create better in-store displays, improve the shopping experience, and encourage customers to make purchases. The research used a quantitative approach. To choose participants, a convenience sampling method was applied, making sure different groups of customers were included. The data comes from people who often visit retail stores in Bangalore. The primary data was gathered through a structured questionnaire given to customers at the selected retail locations. The questionnaire was made to understand how customers feel about and respond to different aspects of visual merchandising. The structured questionnaire is used in the study that consists of 32 items into several sections designed to measure the key constructs related to visual merchandising, consumer perception and purchase decision. All items are measured using 5-point Likert-scale, allowing respondents to indicate the extent of their opinion with each statement. The instrument has the following constructs: Window display (6 items): measures external visual elements such as window designs, lighting and layouts design to generate the store interest. Store layout and design (6 items): assess consumer cognitive responses to the store's physical arrangements, navigational ease and overall aesthetic appeal. Product display (6 items): Evaluates the arrangement of shelves, product consistency, Color coordination that influence consumer perception. In- store ambience (5 items): includes elements such as lights, music, aroma and overall ambience that shapes the emotion and cognitive consumer reactions. Consumer perception 5 items and purchase decision 4 items that assess influence of visual merchandising on purchase decision of consumers. Reliability and validity was tested to ensure the consistent in the questionnaire design. The Hypotheses was tested in the study regarding the relationship between demographic (age), visual merchandising elements and purchase decisions. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the associations between Age and consumer purchase decision, Perceptions on VM variables and consumer buying behavior.

#### 6. Hypotheses of the study

H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between the age of customers and their perception on visual merchandising

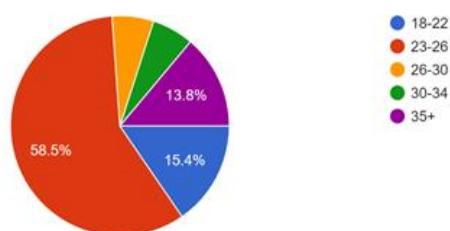
H<sub>1</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between the age of customers and their perception on visual merchandising

H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between customers perception towards visual merchandising and their likelihood of visiting store

H<sub>2</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between customers perception the towards visual merchandising and their likelihood of visiting a store

#### 7. Data Analysis and Interpretations

Chart 1: Age Distribution of Respondents



Interpretation of Age Distribution: The pie chart illustrates the age distribution of the respondents in the study. The largest group of participants falls within the 23–26 years' age range, representing 58.5% of the sample. This indicates that more than half of the respondents are young adults in their mid-twenties. The second-largest group

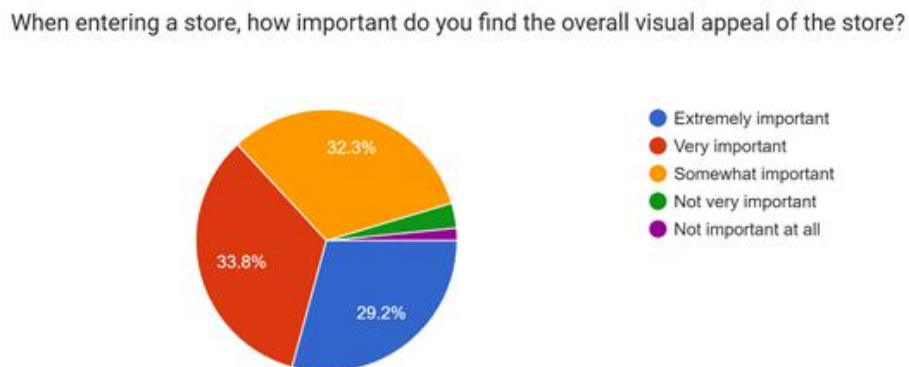
is the 35+ years category, accounting for 13.8% of the respondents. This suggests a smaller proportion of older adults participated in the survey. Respondents aged 18–22 years make up 15.4% of the sample, showing a significant presence of early adults. The remaining age groups, 26–30 years and 30–34 years, constitute 6.1% and 6.1% respectively, indicating relatively fewer participants in these ranges. Overall, the sample is heavily skewed toward younger consumers, primarily in the 23–26 age bracket, which may reflect the primary demographic of shoppers for the retail environment.

Chart 2: Frequency of Respondents’ Visits to Retail Outlets



Interpretation: A steady purchasing pattern is observed, with the largest group of respondents (30.8%) shopping at physical retail stores once a week. Additionally, a significant portion (36.9%) visits these stores a few times a month, indicating relatively infrequent shopping compared to weekly visits. Only 20% of respondents reported shopping more than once a week, reflecting a higher shopping frequency likely driven by necessity or convenience. Meanwhile, a smaller segment (12.3%) shops infrequently, showing limited engagement with physical retail outlets. Notably, none of the respondents reported never shopping in physical stores, suggesting that all participants have had some experience with in-person retail shopping.

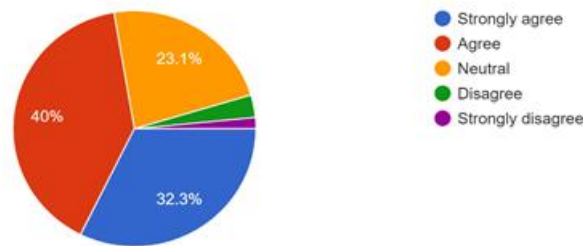
Chart 3: Respondents’ perceptions on visual appeal in Retail Outlets



Interpretation: From the above chart it is inferred that the majority of respondents 63% believe that from the store entrance the overall visual attractiveness is either very important or extremely important. Around 29.2% represents that the visual aesthetic elements of the store environment was regarded as extremely important and highly valued. In addition, 33.8% respondents expressed that visual appeal was extremely important, underscoring the need of designing aesthetic retail environment environments to keep the customers engaged during shopping. 32.3 % respondents felt the visual attractiveness was somewhat significant, that indicates store aesthetics are given a moderate amount of weight. A few portion of respondents felt that visual appeal was not relevant at all. This infers that store's overall visual appeal may not have much impact on their decision-making.

Chart 4: Respondents perceptions towards VM influencing in Retail Outlets

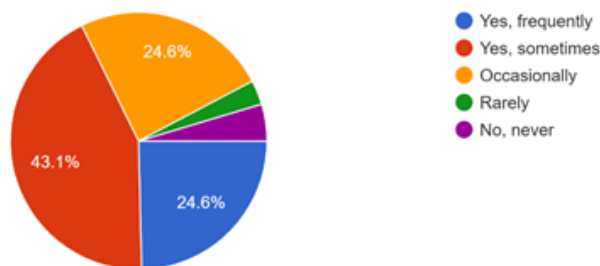
Do you believe that visual merchandising plays a significant role in influencing your perception of a brand/store?



Interpretation: From the above chart it is inferred that the vast majority of respondents (72.3%) expressed strong agreement that visual merchandising has an impact on customer perception of a store. 32.3% of respondents strongly agreed by demonstrating a high passion towards visual merchandising. 40% of respondents added weight to the idea that visual merchandising has an impact on consumer perception towards a store. Regarding the impact of visual merchandising, a sizable portion of respondents 23.1% is undecided, indicating that opinions among those differed. The small minority of respondents who strongly disagree (1.5%) or disagree (3.1%) that visual merchandising has a substantial impact on store perception.

Chart 5: Respondents' perceptions towards Products presentation in Retail Outlets

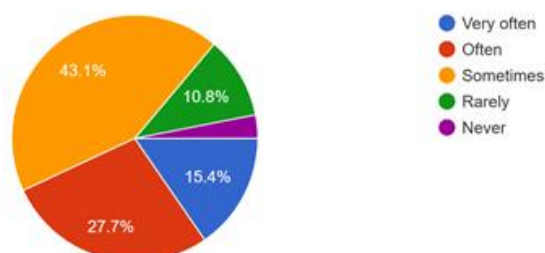
Have you ever been attracted to a product solely based on its presentation or arrangement in a store?



Interpretation: From the chart it is inferred that product presentation plays a critical role in influencing the consumer decision-making process. A majority of respondents 91.3% are occasionally attracted to a product presentation in the store. 43.1% represented that they are occasionally drawn to products based on the visual appeal, while 24.6% reported that they are often influenced by the product presentation. These signify that visual merchandising is shaping consumer choices. A small portion of respondents represents 4.6% and 3.1% stating never infer that product presentation rarely affects their purchase decision. Overall, the responses highlight that effective product display is a key factor in attracting consumer attention.

Chart 6: Respondents making impulse purchase towards Retail Outlets

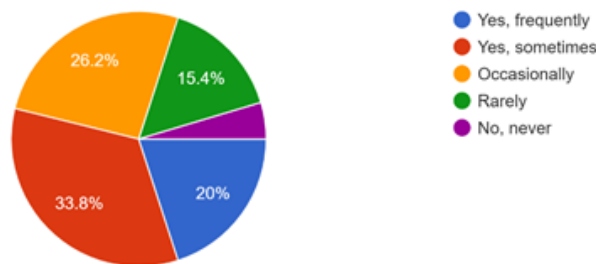
How often do you find yourself making impulse purchases because of attractive visual displays?



Interpretation: From the above chart it is inferred that visually appeal displays have a remarkable influence on impulsive purchase decision. 86.2% majority respondents represent impulsive purchases at least occasionally as a result of attractive product presentation. 43.1% indicates that they occasionally engage in impulse buying. 27.7% represents purchase decisions are frequently influenced by visual merchandising. 15.4% of respondents indicate a high frequency of impulse purchases due to product displays. Conversely a smaller percentage of respondents states that they rarely make impulsive purchases, suggesting that while the effect is widespread, it is less significant for some customers. Overall, it is inferred that visual merchandising plays a crucial role in prompting spontaneous purchase decisions.

Chart 7: Respondents visit Retail Outlets due to window displays

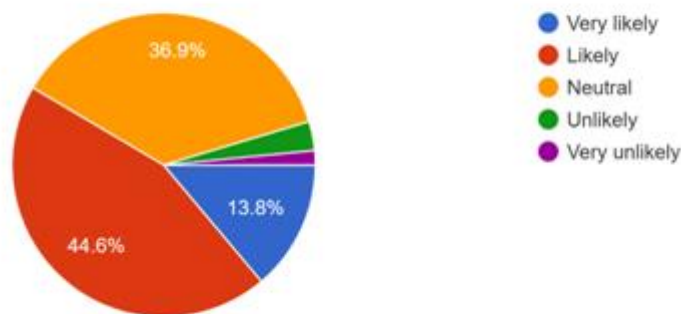
Have you ever visited a store specifically because you were drawn in by its window displays



Interpretation: From the chart it is inferred that visual merchandising particularly window displays and overall store presentation plays a significant role in influencing store visits. A majority of respondents (80%) has been visiting a store at least occasionally because they were attracted by the visual presentation. 33.8% and 26.2% indicates that respondents occasionally visit a store for the visual presentation and window display respectively. Notably, 20% of respondents regularly visit stores due to visual appeal, demonstrating a strong correlation between effective visual merchandising and customer footfalls. 4.6% states that they never consider visual displays when deciding to visit a store. Overall it is inferred that the importance of visually engaging store presentations in attracting and maintaining customer interest.

Chart 8: Respondents revisit to Retail Outlets due to visual appealing

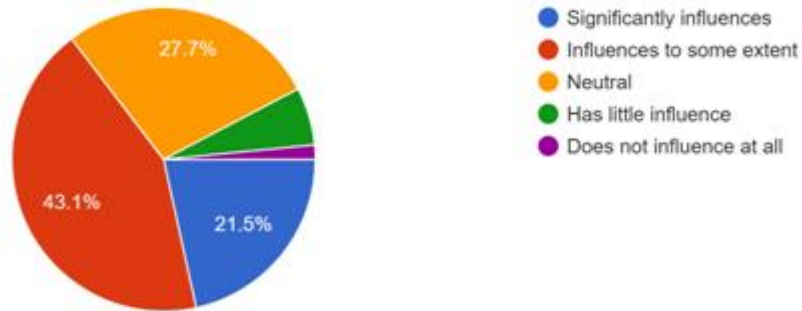
How likely are you to revisit a store with visually appealing displays compared to one with less appealing displays?



Interpretation: From the chart it is inferred that the majority of respondents (58.4%) have been likely or very likely to revisit a store because of visually appealing displays. 44.6% respondents indicates that they would be inclined to return to stores due to product displays. While 13.8% respondents expressed a high likelihood of returning store, highlighting a strong overall preference for eye- catching visual presentations in retail environment. In contrast, 36.9% of respondents remained neutral, implying that visual appeal may not substantially influence the return intentions. A small minority stated that they were unlikely to revisit a store with attractive displays. This inferred that visual merchandising is generally valued and positively with revisit intentions and its impact may vary across customer segments

Chart 9: Respondents Purchase decision making based on visual merchandising

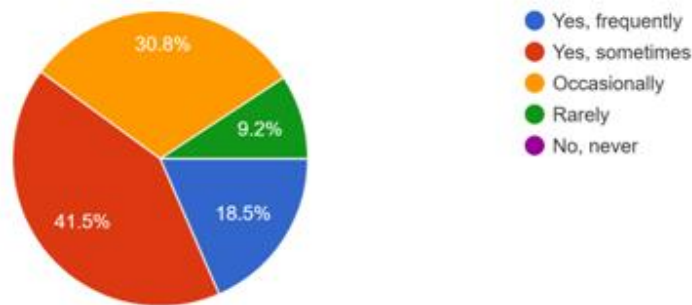
In your opinion, how does visual merchandising influence your decision-making process when comparing similar products from different brands?



Interpretation: From the chart it is inferred that the majority of respondents (64.6%) reported that visual merchandising influences their decision making when comparing similar products across brands. 43.1% indicates that visual merchandising has some influence on respondents choices and preferences, suggesting that consumers consider visually appealing product presentation during product evaluation. 21.5% respondents that consumers consider visual merchandising has a major influence and it's has a strong impact on product selection. Meanwhile 27.7% respondents has a neutral stance, that has a various perception regarding the influence of visual merchandising on purchase decision of consumers. A small percentage of respondents state that visual merchandising does not influence their decisions.

Chart 10: Respondents disappointed after purchase decision making based on visual merchandising

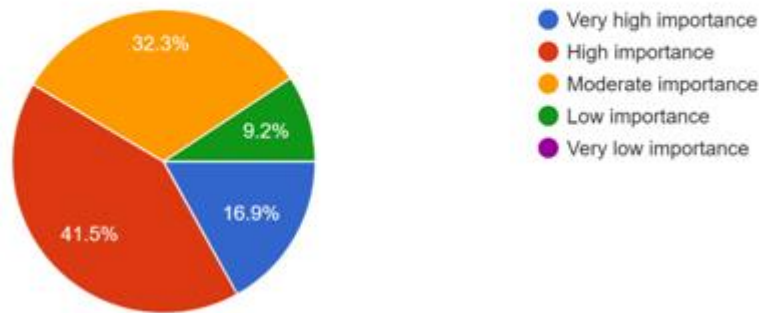
Have you ever felt disappointed by a product after purchasing it, despite being attracted to it by its visual presentation in-store?



Interpretation: From the above chart, it's inferred that 91% felt little disappointed after post purchase even though, the visual appeal is good in-store, but later it did not meet the customers expectations. About 41.5% inferred that few visits led them to disappointed because something product display looks elegant but when the product is bought respondents are unhappy. 30.8% respondents are disappointed sometime after post purchase. 18.5%, respondents felt disappointed due to not meeting the expectations of the respondents. 2% rarely felt disappointed, inferred that respondents may not consistently be happy with a product because of its visually appeal.

Chart 11: Respondents Overall purchase decision making based on visual merchandising in retail outlet

Overall, how much importance do you place on visual merchandising when making purchasing decisions in physical retail stores?



Interpretation: From the chart, it is inferred that 90.7% respondents felt visual merchandising is very important due to purchase decisions are made in-store. 41.5% of respondents inferred that purchase decision depends on the product display. 16.9% respondents inferred that visual merchandising is extremely important factor due to its influence on impulse buying. 32.3% respondents inferred that visual presentation is not only an important cue but they do consider other factors while buying the products. A small portion of respondents felt its negligible. It is inferred that consumers value the product displays in retail outlet before they decide to buy.

### 8. Hypotheses Results

Table 1 :Showing Correlation between age and the importance placed on visual merchandising

		Age	Overall, how much importance do you place on visual merchandising when making purchasing decisions in physical retail stores?
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.200
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.110
	N	65	65
Age and importance of visual merchandising while making purchasing decisions in retail stores	Pearson Correlation	.200	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.110	
	N	65	65

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between age and the importance placed on visual merchandising

H<sub>1</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between age and the importance placed on visual merchandising

A person correlation technique was used to analyze the correlation between customer s age influencing visual merchandising and its impact on buying decision in retail outlet. The correlation coefficient was  $r = 0.200$  with a significance value of  $p = 0.110$ . Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the correlation is not statistically significant. This indicates that age does not have a meaningful influence on how much importance consumers place on visual merchandising. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between age and the importance placed on visual merchandising is accepted, while the alternative hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that consumers across different age groups value visual merchandising similarly and age is not a determining factor in perceiving the visual displays in retail settings.

Table 2: Table showing the correlation between consumers perception towards visual merchandising and likelihood in visiting store

		Do you believe that visual merchandising plays a significant role in influencing your perception of a retail store?	Have you ever visited a store specifically because you were drawn in by its overall visual presentation?
Do you believe that visual merchandising plays a significant role in influencing your perception of a retail store?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 65	-.344** .001 65
Have you ever visited a store specifically because you were drawn in by its overall visual presentation?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.344** .001 65	1 65

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between customers perception towards visual merchandising and their likelihood of visiting store

H<sub>2</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between customers perception the towards visual merchandising and their likelihood of visiting a store

To explore how consumers' views on visual merchandising affect their chances of visiting a store because of how it looks, a person correlation analysis was carried out. The findings show a statistically significant connection between the two factors ( $r = -0.344$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Since the p-value is under 0.01, this correlation is significant at the 1% level. The relationship is negative, meaning that as people think visual merchandising plays a bigger role in how they see a store overall, they are less likely to say they went to the store specifically because of its appearance. On the other hand, people who visit stores because of the way things are displayed tend to give visual merchandising a slightly lower importance when it comes to shaping their general view of retail stores.

## 9. Findings and Discussion

**Store Ambience :** The study found that bright and staple colours, product displays and visual appealing store setup are effective in drawing customers attention and to increase the customer engaging in the shopping. By observing where customers movement in the store it is because of visually appealing displays, contrast colour product display and digital signs are more likely eye catching for the customers. These findings are in line with earlier study that shows noticeable visual presentation can make footfalls more engaging in shopping experience (Pieters & Wedel, 2004; Chandon et al., 2009).

**Emotional reactions:** The research also found that retail store design use lighting that stimulates a good mood among the shoppers, combining sensory experiences that makes customer feel positive during shopping. Few study ravelled that playing music in the background during the shopping can stimulates the customer emotional involvement and connect positive feeling. This also aligns with neuro science marketing that shows sensory experience from the customers is connected to store feeling (Pleasant et al., 2013; Spence, 2020). This emotional excitement is connected to customers feeling towards stores

**Cognitive Processing :** The study result shows the effective product display can help customers to understand and decode information for efficiently. Neuromarketing shows a difference between product displays and customer engagement in the shopping. This study is evident in the previous research that product assortment and presentation leads to better decision making (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004).

**Store perceptions and visual merchandising:** Visual merchandising have a consistent presentation across all merchandise display that helps customer to connect with the retail store. store connecting with customer emotionally feel more excited through visual elements like store logo, color, pallets, store layout and design. These findings support previous studies that show emotionally engaged in the store merchandising presentation like brand elements, assortment of product and aesthetics (Koenigstorfer&Groepel-Klein, 2012; Plassmann et al., 2015).

**Decision making and purchase Intentions:** The study reveals that store design and layout looks visually appealing. The product display are more engaging among customers. Attractive offers within the store and customer spending the time in the store shows a association between customer engagement and purchase decision. The previous study support that attractive and informative product displays make customer fell more delighted when making store choices and a better store sales.(Park, Iyer & Smith, 1989; Clement et al., 2015).

## 10. Suggestions

Visual Merchandising: Enhancing visual merchandising to target customers by customizing according to their preferences make shopping more engagement. Experimenting with different colour patterns, store design and layout, sensory elements to create visually appealing shopping environment. Bringing point of difference concept in the stores can get the customers attention and can create customer trust

Consistent innovation: Keeping store message, store designing elements throughout the store helps to create a smooth and delightful shopping experience. Using creative elements in the store can get the attention of the customer and improve the overall shopping experience

Strategizing Visual merchandising continuously: Based on the feedback and reviews of the footfalls regularly evaluate and update the visual merchandising techniques so that consistent footfall can be maintained in the store. This helps stores to build loyal customers.

Training to staff: As visual merchandising is a key element in retail outlets, training is mandatory for the store staff regarding visual merchandising so that communication will be clear during the customer engagement. Arrangement of products will be strategically done.

Technology : Technology adaption to enhance visual merchandising. Using technology tools like augmented reality, virtual reality, interactive screens and smart displays to create more immersive experience. Data analytics to be used to understand customer behaviour patterns and improve merchandising strategies.

Teamwork across different department will develop a comprehensive cohesive merchandising strategy.

## 11. Conclusion

Visual merchandising is a core element for the retail stores that shapes customer perceptions. Visual merchandising also creates a store image thereby encouraging customers to buy more. Generating customer interest through store identity, using new technologies, store can offer shopping experiences to keep connecting customers. Monitoring staff performance and training employees, working across functional department make the better store brand identity. The retail sector is always changing shopping trends, being proactive and creative visual merchandising helps a store brand outstanding and creates customers delight.

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