

Visual Merchandising and Customers' Impulse Buying Behavior: A Case of a Fashion Specialty Store

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ABSTRACT

Visual merchandising is an extremely important element as the first visual cue that affects buying behavior of customers. This study aims to identify determinants of visual merchandising that influence customers' impulse buying behavior. This study focuses on five elements of visual merchandising which are window display, mannequin display, floor merchandising, promotional signage and lighting. Investigation was conducted at a popular fashion specialty store in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A total of 150 customers' feedback was collected. Results of statistical data analysis show that three out of five visual merchandising elements are important in influencing the customers' impulse buying behavior. Window display, mannequin display and promotional signage are positively related and identified as determinants of effective visual merchandising for impulse buying decision at the women fashion specialty store. The research outcome extends understanding on the adverse effect of visual merchandising on customers' behavior.

Keywords: *Impulse buying behavior; visual merchandising; fashion specialty store*



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INTRODUCTION

A study in retail environments noted a paradigm shift, whereby consumers were found to appreciate hedonic aspects of consumption (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Retailers need to engage with customers emotionally, psychologically and behaviorally, which requires a new experiential paradigm shift in shopping toward how well retailers play to the emotions, psychology and feelings of the shoppers and shoppers' behavior. A recent study suggested some considerations on four store environments (music, light, employee, and layout) and two individual characteristics (shopping enjoyment tendency) that influenced impulse buying behavior through positive affect and urge (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013). Studies on retail atmospherics have focused on consumer reactions to environments (Thurley & Chebat, 2002). Consistently, retail store layout strategy has gained a growing amount of attention from both practitioners and academia (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012). The retailers have long considered visual stimulation and communication as important aspects of the retail store environment (Astrid & Mustika, 2013). Retailers have commonly and often effectively responded to increased competition with a strategic view of how the offer is communicated visually (Kouchekian & Gharibpoor, 2012). Hokkanen (2012) states that effective visual merchandising techniques help in establishing and maintaining store image in the customer's mind and provide support for the rest of the store's selling effort. Merchandise at the store can sell itself with effective display and signage even without the assistance of a sales associate and visual merchandising can aid retailers in lowering their operating costs (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012). Visual merchandising is becoming one of the prominent avenues to obtain differential advantage over competitors. Therefore, it is not surprising that the work of the visual merchandiser has become far more demanding than that of a window trimmer in the past. Likewise, their responsibility has become more important in a time of extreme competition. In this vein, it is critical for the marketers to understand consumers' evaluation of visual merchandising aspects and its relationship with customers' shopping behaviour (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012).

The fashion specialty store is much preferred in Malaysia's modern fashion industry. Despite the increasing popularity of virtual fashion stores which provide online shopping and a shrinking market for traditional brick and mortar retail format, a recent study suggests evolution in retail landscape

had affected the growth of fashion specialty retailers and changed customer preference on types of retail outlets (Shaari & Hong, 2018). Fashion specialty store is a retail format that carries narrow product lines with deep assortment within those lines such as apparel stores and sporting-goods stores. Fashion specialty store focuses on specific product lines and segment by utilizing market segmentation, market targeting and product specialization, allowing self-service in which customers are to perform their own locate-compare-select process in finding their merchandise (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Fashion specialty stores share a common criteria which is brick & mortar stores with some online presence, mainly not targeting trendsetters but rather fashion followers that seek fashion of mid-to-low price range.

Although the effects of visual merchandising on customers' impulse buying have gained attention from many researchers, there is still little research investigating determinants of visual merchandising at fashion specialty stores in the Malaysian retail environment. Observations on most of the fashion retailers' stores around the center of Kuala Lumpur show that shop floors are always overcrowded and not well-organized. Fashion specialty stores which sell Muslim women fashion goods around Tuanku Abdul Rahman Road, which is the fashion center, are typical examples of retailers that suffer from many issues related to messy and unorganized layouts. Shoppers update their negative views and comments through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It is commonly believed that neat, clean and tidy physical environment of stores affect consumers' emotions which include pleasure and encouragement that in turn influence consumers' response behavior, satisfaction and purchase intention (Chan & Chan, 2007). However, instead of being rejected, most of these fashion specialty stores are sustainable and have been in business for more than 50 years despite the rising concerns over poor store layout conditions. The phenomenon is interesting and should be explored and studied. It is well understood that a nice and attractive visual merchandising is critical for projecting the right image of the stores and increased efficiency of operations (Upadhyaya, El-Shishini, Aziz & Kumar, 2018). The situation is contradictory. Hence, the retailers need to investigate these practical issues to ensure adequacy of the business model and layout decision in sustaining the fashion specialty stores, in particular, the case of a traditional fashion center in the capital of

Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, against intense competition in the retail environment.

This paper aims to examine factors of customers' impulse buying behavior at the fashion specialty store, taking into consideration the importance of visual merchandising, the practical issues as well as some theoretical gaps in providing an effective strategy. The research questions are two folds: 1) What are the determinants of buying behavior at the selected fashion specialty store? and 2) how do the factors influence customers' impulse buying behavior? Thus, the paper is divided into five sections. The review of the literature on customers' impulse buying behaviour and elements of visual merchandising extends the understanding on past studies. Subsequently, the following section looks into research framework and hypothesized relationships. Section three describes the research context, development of survey instrument and data collection process. The survey results are presented and discussed in Section 4. The closing section discusses theoretical and practical implications of the results. It concludes with limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandising is store presentation, along with its merchandise, through the store's advertising, display, special events, fashion coordination and merchandising departments in order to sell goods and services (Astrid & Mustika, 2013). Visual merchandising involves functional and aesthetic elements which comprise store layout, display, comfort, privacy, architecture, color, material and style (Oh, Florito, Cho & Hofacker, 2007). Visual merchandising aims to attract customers, upgrade the store's image and increase sales. Ortega-S (2011) posited that visual merchandising is a means of communicating a store's fashion value and quality to the customers. Every space, environment and visual factor to visual merchandising (Kim, 2003) focusing on the shop's sign boards, atmosphere, shelf arrangement, section divisions, and cleanliness are set up to attract customers and encourage impulse or unplanned buying (Bhatti & Seemab, 2013). It has become one of the vital marketing tactics for retailers

to attract customers (Kouchekian & Gharibpoor, 2012). The success or failure of a company is due to visual merchandising, the exterior or interior, which provides positive images and attract the attention, interest, desire and customer behaviour (Gajanayake, Gajanayake & Surangi, 2011). With effective display and signage, the retailers influence customers to select a store and purchase products (Mehta & Chugan, 2013; Seock & Young, 2013). The subsequent sections explain the five elements of visual merchandising.

Window Display

Window display essentially provides the first impression towards a store (Astrid & Mustika, 2013). The purposes of window displays are to convey types and positioning of merchandise in order to promote appealing images (Somoon & Sahachaisaree, 2018). Product display gives important information on store image, product offerings, fashion stance, price range and market position, besides informing, educating, entertaining and persuading the customers (Wu et al., 2013). According to Seock and Young (2013), window display is an important visual communication tool that leads to increment in sales, especially for new products. The well-known brands would need an attractive window display. An attractive window display can be referred for style, content and pricing techniques. It can function as an advertisement corner for seasonal sales or other short-term promotion purposes (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013). Bastow-Shoop, Zetocha and Passewitz (1991) found that the average amount of time for a customer to focus on the window display would be less than 11 seconds. Hence, window display needs to be arranged attractively for customers to stop, look, desire, enter and buy (Christopoulou, 2011). Ortega-S (2011) noted that interior display must focus on the decoration of a store, which includes color, display, cases, counter and merchandise in a creative way. Though most customers do not really fancy openly exposed displays, it is noted that the more attractive the window display, the higher the opportunity for sales gain (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012). Likewise, product display has become an in-store stimulus that encourages impulse buying which can increase the rate of unplanned purchase in retail stores (Gajanayake, Gajanayake & Surangi, 2011).

H1: There is a significant relationship between the window display and customers' impulse buying behavior.

Mannequin Display

Mannequin display is merchandise presentation by using mannequins to attract customers' attention (Kim, 2003). Retailers encourage consumers on personal affective interaction by displaying mannequins that provide natural body shapes and gestures (Strategic Direction, 2012). Viewing clothes on the mannequins may enhance the possibility to visualize the clothing arrangement directly. The mannequin displays increase customers' interest and provides required visualization of products (Xuefei & Peiwen, 2014). According to Law, Wong and Yip (2012), customers would have a better impression on the mannequins with proportionate body measurements. All parts of them need to be secured, with special attention that is used in enclosed windows (Christopoulou, 2011). According to Tidy (2012), mannequins are normally described as a blank canvas that act as a human shaped clothes hanger to ease the customers' evaluation on a product from many angles. An effective mannequin would enable the customers to really "see designs", "entire outfits" and "see what clothes will look like on" (Fister, 2009). Mannequin display is found to impact customers' apparel buying behavior (Mehta & Chugan, 2016).

H2: There is a significant relationship between the mannequin display and customers' impulse buying behavior.

Floor Merchandising

Floor merchandising can be defined as the merchandise arrangement based on the plan-o-gram/zone-o-gram in a store (Kim, 2003). Floor merchandising affects the affective perception of customers in terms of selective attention, distortion and retention of information (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012). It influences customers' perceptions and purchase decisions. In accordance with the fast fashion concept, the arrangement needs to be a flexible communication that can always be changed or altered depending on current fashion (Astrid & Mustika, 2013). The store which is easily accessible and comfortable for the customers will persuade customers to stay longer in the store. Madhavi and Leelavati (2013) mentioned that when a customer enters a room, his or her eyes will move from the rear left of the room to the rear right, then the front left of the room to the front right. This means that care should be taken to arrange the rear left end of the room in an attractive manner to keep the customers interested. Factors such as the

arrival pattern of customers and desired service level affect the floor merchandising. Floor merchandising refers to how the stores use the floor space in promoting and facilitating each part of the floor, depending on the type of products being sold, the building location and how much the store can afford (Asirvatham & Mohan, 2014). Floor merchandising is an important element that will influence customers' buying behavior, in-store traffic patterns, shopping atmosphere and operational efficiency (Tlapana, 2009, Thomas, Louise & Vipinkumar, 2018). Customers shop longer without pressure and enjoy the experience as there is enough space to move around the store, easy access from the outside and clear navigation (Singh, Katiyar & Verma, 2014).

H3: There is a significant relationship between the floor merchandising and customers' impulse buying behavior.

Promotional Signage

Signs are considered as silent sales associates that provide important information for customers to make a purchase (Seock & Young, 2013). Effective signs provide departments' identification, merchandise and price description, special sales events information, alert on merchandise advertisement and theme of window display. Signage provides information which assists customers to find products easily and publicise various promotional schemes of the store (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013). Besides cost-effective, promotional signage is an efficient tool to deliver message on products that are available in the store (Memon, Kazi, Zubedi & Ansari, 2019; Pillai et al., 2011). Apart from textual style of signage, graphics may enhance window display's sophistication (Kernsom & Sahachaisaeree, 2011). A sign enables customers to perceive whether the store is a good or bad one and a sign with stark design with limited materials would usually focus on discount prices and no frills whereas elegant and expensive sign materials would normally focus on luxury products and services (Bastow-Shoop, Zetocha & Passewitz, 1991).

Signs should be unique, noticeable and readable for customers' attention. Some stores have included airbrushed murals, animated cartoon characters, backlit transparencies, light walls and some other designs (Diamond & Diamond, 2007). Signs not only need to be unique but simple and welcoming as well. According to Mopidevi and Lolla (2013), a sign also

acts as a silent salesperson, which must attract the customers' attention in less than 10 seconds by providing information about the business and what it intends to sell. A store needs to focus on key words in describing its business as the sign would become the store's signature. It needs to be personal, original and can be recognized easily by the public.

H4: There is a significant relationship between the promotional signage and customers' impulse buying behavior.

Lighting

Lighting contributes to the distinctive effect on products displayed as it creates moods for consumers' emotional state and behavioral intention through color temperature and appearance (Astrid & Mustika, 2013). Lighting enhances the identity, comfort and visual quality of a store which would reflect the retailer's image that is consistent with the store's selling strategy (Freyssinier et al., 2006). Lighting attracts and guides customers in evaluating products for final purchase. There are three elements of lightings, namely primary, accent and atmosphere which are used to attract customers. Somoon and Sahachaisaeree (2010) noted that the attractiveness of merchandise can be affected by the displays of spotlight with bright lighting. Any designs with spotlight and props can induce elements of complexity and store attractiveness. The brighter the light is, the more attractive it is to the customers (Bastow-Shoop, Zetocha & Passewitz, 1991). In addition, consumers tend to examine and observe more products under bright lighting than under soft lighting. This proves that bright light manages to attract more consumers, cause purchases and sales (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013; Kouchekian & Gharibpoor, 2012). Madhavi and Leelavati (2013) indicated that bright lighting leads to higher customer comfort and different types of lighting are used on different floors.

In contrast, fluorescent light can provide negative customer perceptions on a fashion store, whereas cooler light can have the opposite effect (Ortega-S, 2011). Fluorescent light is used in many stores as it is cheaper than other types of lights. As for the display lights of the store, two to five times brighter lighting is preferred. Most stores are using fluorescents lights but today, halogen and quartz lights have started to become the trend as they are able to provide functional needs to achieve dramatic effects (Diamond & Diamond, 2007). Tlapana (2009) noted that lighting is a means

to increase the floor traffic, visual interest and direct people deeper to other parts of the store. It helps to provide a comfortable yet welcoming environment for the customers.

H5: There is a significant relationship between the lighting and customers' impulse buying behavior.

Customers' Impulse Buying Behavior and Visual Merchandising

Impulse buying behavior can be considered as a sudden purchase. Not much evaluation has been made on the process of impulse buying (Karbasivar & Yarahmadi, 2011). According to Bhatti and Seemab (2013), impulse buying is a very quick process that does not involve any pre-thoughts or intentions. The customer would have no plan at all to obtain the product before being affected by some attractive factors and decision is usually made on the spot. As mentioned by Mehta and Chugan (2013), this kind of purchase behavior does not involve much evaluation from the aspects of need, affordability, price, and others. Some researchers have proven that impulse buying behavior exists when there are some internal states and external factors that influence the customers, not due to any specific purpose (Kim, 2003). Customers would choose to do impulse buying or unplanned buying when they are not familiar with the store, are running out of time or when they remind themselves what are available in the store (Xuefei & Peiwen, 2014). Studies have proven that impulse buying process involves 27 percent to 62 percent of all department store purchases and almost 40 percent of customers have experienced this type of behavior. (Priyanka & Rooble, 2012; Minal, Sanjay & Urvashi (2012). Impulse buying behavior is normally unplanned, involving rapid decision-making and a subjective bias in favor of the immediate (Ekeng, Lifu & Asinya, 2012). Impulse buying has always been an unplanned or unintended act in which the satisfaction comes from the shopping behavior (Hokkanen, 2012). Impulse buying can be associated with the consumers' immediate response to the external stimuli, regardless of the product category and this does not involve the buying of common items or products (Lo & Lin, 2013). External stimuli refer to the way the shopping environment is arranged such as the servicescapes; ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, signs, symbols and artifacts (Heizer & Render, 2017). These refer to the physical surroundings in which a service takes place and how they affect customers buying behavior. In other words, the visual is merchandising.

Conceptual Framework

According to Churchill and Peter (1998), the impulse buying process starts with product awareness. Not all buyers have the intention of purchasing without being exposed to the stimuli. When the customers have the desire to buy, they will make the purchase decision. The post-purchase evaluation will be made after the purchase on impulse. Through this process, customers are affected by the internal factors (mood/need/desire, hedonic pleasure, cognitive/affective evaluation) and external factors (visual merchandising, window display, in-store form display, floor merchandising, promotional signage). Churchill and Peter's (1998) model has been modified for the purpose of this study to describe the impulse buying process by omitting several steps, such as need recognition, information search and alternative evaluation and reclassifying influencing factors. This model is adapted for this study to examine the impulse buying process that is influenced by external factors, namely the visual merchandising. The investigation focuses only on the visual merchandising that comprises the window display, mannequin display, floor merchandising, promotional signage and lighting. Relationships between the elements of visual merchandising and customers' impulse buying behavior are presented in Figure 1.

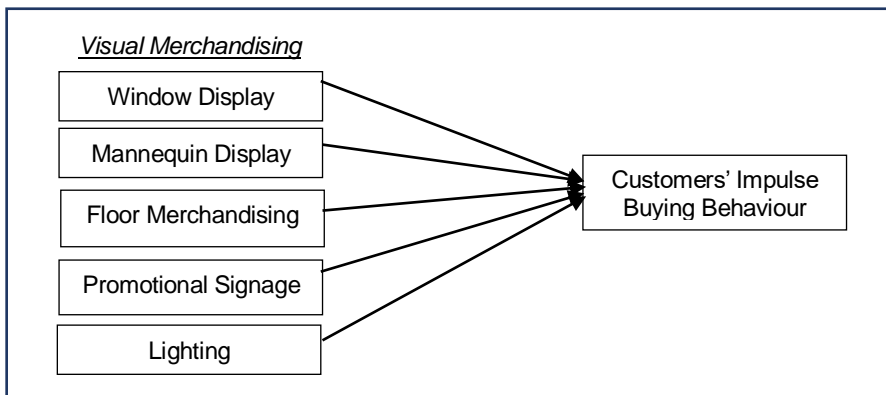


Figure 1: Relationship between Visual Merchandising and Customers' Impulse Buying Behavior

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to assess significant relationships between identified aspects of visual merchandising which eventually resulted in customers' impulse buying behavior. The research is a cross-sectional study that applied minimal degree of interference from researchers. The data was collected in 2018 and continuous observation had been conducted since 2015. The results remain relevant as the store has sustained its business model and layout without any change till the present time. The primary data was collected using questionnaire survey and on site observations. First, in order to capture the experience of the customers, a set of survey questions was distributed. The study adopted non-probability sampling techniques in selecting 150 respondents who have visited and shopped at selected stores. The respondents were customers of a traditional fashion specialty store located at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur which sells Muslim women fashion goods and has been in business for more than 50 years. Interviews with store managers affirmed that the store receives approximately 240 customers per day. Given the limitation in identifying the total number of customers for a period of an operating year, this study has considered the average number of customers that shopped on per day basis as the targeted population for this study. According to Sekaran (2016), the appropriate sample size for a population of 240 is 148. Distribution of survey was done in a manner that each of the customers was approached upon completion of purchase at the store payment counter. Secondly, observation was conducted using a checklist to describe the physical conditions of the store such as the ambient conditions, cleanliness, signage, spatial layout, facilities and mannequin display, and shopper's behavior in the store. Four rounds of observations were done in the store to collect a narrative description of how the layout of the store was arranged and managed.

The questionnaire was divided into seven sections. Section A identified the demographic profile, Section B addressed the window display, Section C checked the mannequin display, Section D referred to floor merchandising, Section E assessed promotional signage, Section F explored the lighting and finally Section G looked into the customers' impulse buying behavior. The scale of response was the 5 Likert Scale and the questions were adopted from various studies on visual merchandising and impulse buying behavior (e.g. Kim, 2003; Karbasivar & Yarahmadi,

2011, Upadhyaya et al., 2018). Some of the questions were modified to suit the nature of the operations in its environment and questions were added based on the reliability and validity. Sources of secondary data were downloaded from official websites, such as Facebook page, Foursquare, the customers' comments and complaints page. These data provided extensive information in understanding the issue under investigation.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of statistical analysis used to investigate the five relationships and determine elements of visual merchandising that affect customers' impulse buying behavior at the fashion specialty store which sells Muslim women fashion goods. The following section presents results on the determinants of buying behavior in the unorganized layout of the fashion specialty store. The discussion explains how the factors influence customers' impulse buying behavior.

Demographic Profile

Demographic profile of a total of 150 respondents reflects a fair collection of samples for a targeted population of 240 customers per day at the selected fashion specialty store as summarized in Table 1. Most customers were female (92%) while the remaining 8% were male. In terms of age, only 1.3% of respondents were between 35 to 49 years old; most of them were between 15 to 34 years old (98.7%). All respondents were Malaysians. With regards to the occupation, majority of the respondents were students (59.3%). Others were private employees (10%) and housewives (10%), government staff (16%), the unemployed (2.7%) and businessmen/women (2%). Majority of the respondents (59.3%) earned less than RM1000. Those with income level between RM1001 to RM3000 made up 18.7% of the respondents, 14.7% earned between RM3000 to RM5000 while the remaining respondents (7.3%) earned more than RM5000. Majority of the respondents (44%) visited the store for the first time. 34 percent were frequent customers who visited the store one to five times in a year while the remaining (22%) visited the store more than five times in a year. In sum, the number of female respondents was very high compared to male and most of them were young middle-income customers who were mostly students.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variables		Research Sample (n=150)	
		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	12	8.0
	Female	138	92.0
Age	15 – 34	148	98.7
	35 – 49	2	1.3
Citizenship	Malaysian	150	100.0
	Others	0	0.0
Occupation	Businessman/woman	3	2.0
	Government Employee	24	16.0
	Private Employee	15	10.0
Visit to Fashion Specialty Store	First time	66	44
	2 – 5 times	51	34
	More than 5 times	33	22

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 provides the summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables in this study. The mean of the variables is centered very close to 4 with a standard deviation of 1.

Table 2: The Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Window Display	3.74	0.98
Mannequin Display	3.45	0.96
Floor Merchandising	3.66	0.98
Promotional Signage	3.87	0.90
Lighting	3.81	0.92
Impulse Buying	3.60	1.06

Overall, customers were more likely to agree on the tendency of impulse buying behavior due to promotional activities conducted and tended to buy more when seeing good deals and offers. The customers agreed that promotional signage was attractive and informative while the lighting was sufficiently bright for shopping activities (very close to 4). Window display has a mean value of 3.74 (close to 4) indicating that customers would enter the store due to the eye-catching window display. However, customers were fairly agreed (3.66) on the spacious arrangement of the store and the ease of finding goods between the aisle and brackets. This reflects the cramped and messy arrangement of the store's layout due

to poor floor merchandising. Similarly, customers were fairly agreed (3.45) that they were attracted to the mannequin display due to the mannequins' unusual facial expressions.

Reliability

Table 3 shows an overview of Cronbach's Alpha for the six variables. Table 4 shows that the values are above 0.60 which is considered as acceptable. The promotional signage has the highest Cronbach's Alpha which is 0.808, representing good reliability. The lighting scored the lowest at 0.662 and projected a moderate reliability at minimum level which may be due to insufficient elements and questions addressing the dimension.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Window Display	0.784	5
Mannequin Display	0.745	4
Floor Merchandising	0.738	6
Promotional Signage	0.808	5
Lighting	0.662	3
Impulse Buying	0.784	9

Correlations

The results in Table 4 explain the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. With p value less than .01, it shows that all the variables are positively correlated with the customers' impulse buying behavior. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). For this reason, all the variables are tested as predictors for the regression model.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

	Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)
Window display	0.429	0.000**
Mannequin display	0.393	0.000**
Floor merchandising	0.275	0.001**
Promotional signage	0.403	0.000**
Lighting	0.252	0.002**

Note: **correlation is significant at p value less than .01

Multiple Regressions

A multiple regression analysis was done to test H1 to H5 and the result is presented in Table 5. The model is significant with the value of R squared at 0.274 or 27.4%. This indicates that the dependent variable – customers’ impulse buying behavior can be explained by the five independent variables in this study (window display, mannequin display, floor merchandising, promotional signage and lighting). The adjusted R squared shows that 24.9% of the variance in customers’ impulse buying behavior is significantly explained by 1% changes in the five independent variables. This value indicates a fair model fit. Meanwhile, the remaining 75.1 % variation in customer satisfaction is explained by variables which are not included in this model.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis, Model Summary

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.524 ^a	.274	.249	.5588

a. Predictors: (constant), Window Display, Mannequin Display, Floor Merchandising, Promotional Signage and Lighting

Table 6 shows the coefficients for the model tested. Notice that not all variables are statistically significant with P value less than .05 ($p < .05$) which indicates that three out of five predictors have contributed to the dependent variable.

Table 6: Multiple Regressions

Model		Unstandardize d Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.474	.333		4.424	.000
	Window Display (B)	.226	.087	.245	2.602	.010**
	Mannequin Display(C)	.202	.083	.227	2.425	.017**
	Floor Merchandising (D)	-.126	.097	-.126	-1.303	.195
	Promotional Signage (E)	.272	.091	.286	2.999	.003**
	Lightings (F)	-.002	0.82	-.003	-.029	.977

a. Dependent variable: customer impulse buying behavior ** $p < .05$

It is obvious that there is no significant influence of floor merchandising and lighting on customers’ impulse buying behavior even though the descriptive analysis shows a high level of agreement on these

elements. The beta for standardized coefficient for floor merchandising is $-.126$ and lighting is $-.002$. Thus, H3 and H5 are not supported. However, window display, mannequin display and promotional signage are positively related to customers' impulse buying behavior. This gives support for H1, H2 and H4.

DISCUSSION

Based on the statistical analysis results, there are three determinants of customers' impulse buying behavior. First, window display is vital in attracting customers to the store. It was observed that the store implemented an open back window display. The window display was not covered by any back wall allowing the interior of the shop to be seen from the street. This type of window display exposes the interior and tempts passersby to enter and explore the store. The colorful window display was purposely arranged with lots of products to have an overcrowded and a slightly cramped condition in order to show volume and varieties of choice. Window display acts as two main mediums which are to introduce new products and to entice the passersby to enter the store. The findings concur with those of Somoon and Sahachaisaree (2018) and Mehta and Chugan (2016) on factors affecting consumer buying behavior, stating that window display needs to be eye-catching, attractive and compelling for customers to enter the store.

Second, a fashion store may not do without mannequins. Observations found numerous mannequin heads with different facial expressions were arranged in various corners and places around the store. The store was only using the full round head displayer to minimize cost and space usage. A total of 132 mannequin heads displayed attractive scarves worn in many different styles to attract customers. Feedback from the customers has proven that the mannequin display strategy is effective implying that they were attracted by the products displayed on the mannequins. The creative visualization of product arrangement affirmed the desire to have and subsequently bring about the intention to purchase the product. A recent study on one of the lifestyle retail outlets in Ahmedabad Central by Mehta and Chugan (2016) similarly noted that mannequin display is essential in apparel buying behavior.

Third, the promotional signage influenced the decision made by the customers on impulse buying. From observations done at the store, it was found that the manager used attractive signage which displayed attractive keywords such as “buy one free one”, “clearance sales” and non-rounded big price tags. The colorful promotional signage was located at every corner of the store and almost on every mannequin and product displayed. The utilization of numerous numbers of signage at eye-level and above the head level has evidently conveyed the message that directly affects customer buying behavior. Relevant literature explains the promotional signage as one of the most important variables in influencing customer buying behavior, as evidenced in the fashion specialty stores in Hyderabad (Memon et al., 2019).

However, floor merchandising and lighting were found to be insignificant in influencing impulse buying behavior. Observations on the physical condition of the store on both elements found them to be less organized and maintained. Observations on floor merchandising noted that overall, the store tended to mix and overload the wagons with products. Products were improperly arranged into box racks, bin units and bracket to display stock. The width of the aisle was about 2 feet, arranged narrow and long into the store, making the space inflexible, restricted in-store traffic flows and led to unclear navigation. These findings are in contrast with the notion of convenience arrangement, easy accessibility and spacious environment that influence buying behavior (Thomas, Louise & Vipinkumar, 2018). Lastly, it was found that the store used the combination of compact fluorescent lamps and regular fluorescent bulb lighting for energy efficient and cost-effective reasons. However, the dim lighting with some dysfunctional lights have made it difficult for the customers to verify the quality of products such as color and shades. The poorly maintained lightings have made it an insignificant factor to buying behavior which is in contrast with some literature noting the importance of brightness (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013; Kouchekian & Gharibpoor, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This study was designed to examine five elements of visual merchandising which are the window display, mannequin display, floor merchandising,

promotional signage and lighting and its influence on customers' impulse buying behavior. This study has rendered better understanding on the practical issues in offering fashion products at traditional fashion specialty stores by focusing on window display, promotional signage and mannequin display. Unlike fashion boutiques which may offer one to one consultation on customers' image and required products, the traditional fashion specialty stores gain sales volume by selling products in big bulk and less likely to offer one to one consultation. Hence, customers' impulse buying behavior is deemed essential in sustaining the existence of this traditional fashion specialty stores.

From a managerial viewpoint, the authors suggest that retail managers invest in improving the store environment to increase the level of impulse buying in their stores. Specifically, they need to focus on enhancing friendliness of store employees, presenting appropriate window display, designing proper promotional signage and having well-arranged mannequin display to encourage impulse buying. The results are encouraging in helping managers to grab the opportunity in gaining better sales volume with proper arrangements of products. To a certain degree, in a chaotic shopping environment, floor merchandising and lighting are less likely to affect impulse buying behavior. In this study, floor merchandising and lighting were insignificant in influencing customers impulse buying behavior but equally relevant to entice customers into the store as they were positively correlated and were equally important in many other studies.

From the perspective of service management and sustainability, this study provides some theoretical and practical implications. This study points out some new perspectives to be considered and highlights the peculiar characteristics of a traditional fashion specialty store which sells Muslim women fashion goods, and is located along the popular streets of Malaysian fashion houses at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur. The results contribute to an in-depth understanding of relevant literature that not only general fashion retailers, but also a fashion specialty store, to a certain extent, may predominantly engage in low-cost/low-risk entry methods. In line with a study carried out by Shaari and Hong (2018), this paper extends the understanding on Malaysian retail environment. Instead of focusing on flagship luxury stores such as Uniqlo, H&M, ZARA and other multinational apparel companies, the Malaysian traditional fashion

specialty stores are significant in explaining the landscape of retail environment in downtown areas. The local traditional fashion specialty stores share a common criterion which is brick & mortar stores with some online presence, mainly targeting fashion followers that seek fashion of mid-to-low price range. The local traditional fashion specialty stores do constitute the main retail players in the local industry and can be found in every town in the country. It explains the type of retail service management that remains sustainable over 50 years, retaining a niche market for the low and middle-income group of customers.

The study has some limitations in terms of scope of the study which focused on a fashion specialty store in the main traditional fashion street in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Even though the subject of the study was chosen from a store in one location in Malaysia, the results are significant to understand customers' behavior towards similar types of stores in other areas. It is proposed that further studies are carried out on the applicability of the determinants in relation to the fashion industry in other locations and/or types of stores.

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