Research Paper

Visual Merchandizing and Consumer Buying Behaviour Among Retail Stores In Makurdi Metropolis

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the effect of visual merchandizing on consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. The specific objectives of the study were; to examine the effect of window displays, lighting and illumination and signage on consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. The study adopted the survey method. The population of the study was 152 (which comprised of 32 employees of the six prominent superstores in Mkaurdi plus 120 customers). Census sampling was adopted and all the 152 served as the sample size. A structured-self-administered questionnaire was adopted as the major instrument for collecting primary data. Regression analysis was used as a technique of data analysis. Study findings revealed that window displays, lighting and illumination and signage all have significant effect on consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. The study concludes that consumer buying behavior is significantly influenced by window displays, lighting and illumination and signage. The study also concludes that lighting and illumination is the strongest determinant of consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. The study therefore recommends among others that retailers should understand shopper's expectations and create the right display of their expectations in order to lure customers in to their stores.*

KEYWORDS*: Displays, Lighting, Illumination and Signage, Consumer Buying Behavior*

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Consumer behavior studies have confirmed that the lure of a beautifully done up show window and a tastefully decorated facade, more often than not, prove irresistible as they walk in to check out what is on offer (Khisa, Hoque, Hanif, Chaion, Rahman, Uddin, Siddika & Islam, 2020). With increasing competition, retailers are striving to make their store attractive to their target market (Merugu & Vaddadi, 2017). To arrive at this lure, retailers develop various strategies and utilize all available and as unconventional as possible tools (Gopu, 2019). They also ensure exclusivity since no two stores are expected to look alike (Widyastuti, 2018). However, the merchandise offered by retailers are found to be similar. As the merchandise offered cannot be differentiated, the retailers try to differentiate and manage the competition by Visual Merchandising (Mihić, Anić, & Milaković, 2018).

Visual merchandising encompasses 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 (Mba & Babu, 2016). 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 (Saricam, Okur, Erdem, Akdag,Kilikci & Widyastuti, 2018). By using various combinations of visual merchandising elements, retailers aim at creating an attractive sales environment that affects emotions and behaviour of buyers at the store (Naveena & Suganya, 2018.). High level of excitement and interest of the consumer reduces the ability to assess own actions rationally and enhances the probability of impulse buying (Gowri, 2015). The components and elements of visual merchandising that contribute towards creating an overall effective in-store environment and store image include window display, lighting, signage and store layout (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013; Merugu & Vaddadi, 2017).

Window displays are visual merchandize element that communicate style, content, and price and may also be used to advertise seasonal sales or inform passers-by of other current promotions (Naveena & Suganya, 2018). Lighting is the element that guides the customer's eyes, reveal the color and cut of the merchandise,

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show the styling and details and emphasize the good qualities of the outfit, helping the merchandise to be pre-sold to customer (Saricam, Okur, Erdem, Akdag, Kilikci & Widyastuti, 2018).Signage helps to publicize the various promotional schemes that might be running in the store. They are also used to indicate the facilities/services available at the store, such as washrooms, cafe, (Moayery, Zamani & Vazifehdoost, 2014).

Consumer buying behaviour involves all the activities that are related to the purchase, use and disposal of products and services, together with the consumer's emotional, mental and behavioural responses that lead, determine, or follow these activities (Kardes, Cline & Conley, 2011).Consumer buying behavior is assessed in form of consumer responses and consumer activities. Consumer responses refers to the mental or cognitive responses, which include a consumer's thought processes, opinions, beliefs, attitudes and intentions towards products and services (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). While consumer activities is the component of consumer buying behaviour that involve all the activities regarding the physical purchase, use and disposal of products and services (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007).

In Nigeria and Benue State in particular, the retail industry plays a very important role in life of most of the people. It satisfies the social needs of the people. So retailers try to attract the consumers to the store. The super market is a business line in which retailers should display the merchandise in such a way that customers get idea of arrangement of the same (Hefer & Cant, 2013). Supermarkets must facilitate the consumer that caters them with their needs and wants like a market place. Retailer are also expected display the merchandise creatively so that they know new ways of arranging the merchandise and coordinating new trend, new color, etc, (Pushpa, Rajakumar & Nagadeepa, 2017).

Looking at the significant growth in the number of superstores in Makurdi metropolis, it is very important to create good visual merchandising as visual merchandising plays an important role in influencing store patronage (Gopu, 2019). However, in spite of the relevance of visual merchandizing in influencing store patronage, there is scarcity of research that investigates the effect of visual merchandizing on consumer buying behavior in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study is undertaken to examine the effect of visual merchandizing on consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis.

Researchers who analysed relationship between visual merchandising and impulse buying behaviour, explored this phenomenon in different contexts: some authors analysed the impact of visual merchandising on buying behaviour in the electronic space (Wu, Ju, Kim Damminga, Kim & Johnson, 2013), others chose traditional retail trade (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012; Chang, Yan & Eckman, 2014); part of the authors analysed the impact of visual merchandising on impulse buying of consumers in department stores (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003), others analysed it in the supermarket chain (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013), some others studied it in clothing stores (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012; Chang, Yan & Eckman, 2014) or shopping malls in general (Mehta & Chugan, 2013). In some researches of such kind the authors chose different buyer segments – they analyse the impact of visual merchandising on buying behavoiur in the youth or female segments. Studies of some authors cover a wider context: they analysed not only visual merchandising, but also other factors of store environment and various situational factors (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013; Chang, Yan & Eckman, 2014).

While reviewing these studies on the impact of visual merchandising on buying behaviour, it was noted that cultural differences are material too: not the same visual merchandising elements in all cases are recognized as making the highest impact in different countries with different cultures. Therefore, it cannot just be assumed that the findings of those foreign studies conducted under different cultures are completely valid in the Nigerian culture and specifically, in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. Therefore, this study aims at closing this gap by investigating what visual merchandising elements make the highest positive effect on consumer buying behavior for consumers in Makurdi metropolis when shopping in supermarkets.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine the effect of visual merchandizing on consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. The specific objectives are:

i.   To examine the effect of window displays on consumer buying behavior among shoppers in some selected supermarkets in Markurdi metropolis.

ii.   To evaluate the effect of lighting and illumination on consumer buying behavior among shoppers in some selected supermarkets in Markurdi metropolis.

iii.   To access the effect of signage on consumer buying behavior among shoppers in some selected supermarkets in Markurdi metropolis.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the stimulus-organism-response paradigm and the Persuasion theory.

2.1.1 Persuasion theory

Early beginnings of persuasion theory claim that successful persuasion hinges on three key elements, the credibility of the speaker (the source), the persuasiveness of the arguments (the message); and the responsiveness of the audience (the recipient) (Hovland Janis & Kelley, 1953). The theory assumes that exposure to information leads to a change in attitude which in turn leads to a change in behavior. Many past and recent public information campaigns are based on this 'information-deficit-model' where the underlying assumption is that people do not have enough (or the right) information, so if we provide more information this will enable them to change their behavior (or make 'the right' or reasonable decisions). Although it sounds plausible, empirical evidence fails to support this hypothesis and significant limitations of this linear model have been recognized (Petty, Priester & Brinol, 2002). On the contrary, evidence suggests that learning (i.e. change in behavior) can occur without any change in attitudes, and that attitude (and behavior) change can occur without any assimilation of the persuasion message (Jackson, 2005). Despite the limitations of this theory, the importance of the key elements still appears in behavior, in particular consumers behavior. For consumers it has been shown that the source of promotion and the persuasiveness of the arguments are just as important in purchase of a product taking up advice as other factors (Silgo & Massey, 2007).

2.1.2 Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm

The stimulus-organism-response paradigm developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) explains how physical environments influence individuals' internal and behavioral states. The stimulus refers to attributes (e.g. promotion, price, music, services) that are located in the environment and influence individuals' affective and cognitive states. This classic study by Mehrabian-Russel (M-R) is often used as reference by other researchers of environmental behavior. In Stimuli (S)- Organism (O)- Response (R), it is assumed that an environment filled with Stimuli (S/ Stimuli) can cause a change to the consumer's organismic state (internal state-O/ Organism) and can also affect the consumer's behavior (R/ Response).Individuals' affective and cognitive states affected by stimuli finally result in behavioral responses (e.g. approach or avoid behaviors).

2.1.3 Relevance of Theories to the Study

The two theories used in this study are considered relevant to the work. The theories have clearly pointed out how information or messages leads to change in behaviour of the consumers. The persuasion theory showed that exposure to information by consumers' leads to a change in attitude which in turn leads to change in behaviour. Applying the SOR theory to this study, the organism variable can be detected from three dimensions. Those three dimensions are pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Such approaching and avoiding behavior has four detailed processes in relation to retail. The first process of approaching and avoiding a store area comes from the desire of the customer on a basic level. The second process of approaching and avoiding is to search and explore the store. The third is to interact with the employees. The final process is dependent on the store's performance and the customer's satisfaction with respect to repurchase frequency and the amount of money spent during the duration of the visit to the store.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Concept of Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandising is communicating the product retailers' wants to sell by effective presentation of the same which creates an impact on the customers in terms of their purchase and builds a positive image of store in customer's mind. It is the science of shopping that tells one ways to use those tools, ways to design signs that consumers will actually read and ways to make sure each message is in the appropriate place. It also tells one how to arrange display that consumer can find comfortably and easily, so that they can reach every part of the store easily (Underhill, 2009). Visual merchandising is everything that customer sees both exterior and interior, that creates a positive image of the business and results in attention, interest, desire and action on the part of the customers (Passewitz, et al, 1991).

Visual merchandising is defined as the presentation of a store/brand and its merchandise in a manner that will attract customers and motivates them to purchase through the teamwork of the store's advertising, display, special events, fashion coordination, and merchandising departments in order to sell the goods and services offered by the store/company (Mills, et al, 1995, Diamond and Diamond, 2007). Retailers try to create and develop the image with the help of visual merchandising/visual presentation which appeals customers and transforms it in buying behavior and loyalty towards the retail outlet. This can be done by planning the merchandise that are to be featured and location they are supposed to be placed (Diamond and Diamond, 2007). Visual communications that are exposed to the customers in the retail outlet affects more than 80% to the other sensory organs and hence it is an efficient and inexpensive way of marketing than other means of communications (Tullman & Clark, 2004).

In modern retail, visual merchandising is a key to encourage a customer to purchase the products. This idea has always triggered purchase decision as an oldest merchandising strategy (Gopal, 2006). Retailers gradually realized that selling the product wasn't only important but the customers should also have satisfaction and convenience of shopping. One has to sell the product by selling the ambience too. Visual merchandising

lures customers for shopping products with help of product display and shop's ambience (Iqbal et al, 2011). Stimulus in retailing includes space related, product related and people related aspects (Quartier, et al, 2008).

Window display is an important criterion of visual merchandising as it created first impression of the store on them (Mehta & Chugan, 2014, Mehta & Chugan, 2013). It attracts the customers inside the store (Bakarne, 2008).Like window display, store front also is the entry point of the customers which helps them decide whether to enter the store or not. So the arrangement of the merchandise in the store front should be impressive and it should motivate customers to enter (Schneider, et al, 2009). Signage is also an important aspect of visual merchandising; customers should be able purchase the product without any help of salesperson (Mehta & Chugan, 2013).

Visual merchandising is a tool used by companies or shopkeepers to attract the customers for unplanned buying (Widyastuti, 2018). In this the marketers and the shopkeepers arrange their shops or carryout promotional activities which attract the attention of shoppers by just having a look at the shop, their promotions, sign boards, atmosphere inside, shelf arrangements, section divisions, cleanliness and other factors which influence impulse or unplanned buying.

Pegler (2010) states that visual merchandising is not just a matter of making merchandise look more attractive to consumers, butit is all about the physical selling of merchandise through the means of a visual medium. It can therefore be inferred that visual merchandising is concerned with how the product/brand is visually communicated to the shoppers and if the intended message was correctly communicated to them. To create and sustain a store's physical and mental image in the consumers' mind, visual merchandising techniques can be used which can also provide support for the rest of the store's selling effort (Bell & Ternus, 2006). In other words, the merchandise in-store should be displayed and marked in such a way that it will be possible to sell itself, without the help of a sales assistant.

According to Berman and Evans (2010), various visual merchandising techniques can be used to establish and enhance the overall image of a store. The components and elements of visual merchandising that contribute towards creating an overall effective in-store environment and store image include window display, lighting, signage and store layout (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013; Merugu & Vaddadi, 2017).

2.2.1.1 Window Displays

Window display is refers to the decorated display of a stores window to attract customers to the products. Usually, the term refers to larger windows in a shop arcade displaying items for sale or otherwise designed to attract customers to the store (Pushpa, Rajakumar & Nagadeepa, 2017). A prospective customer when entering a mall is most attracted by the creative, elegant or stylish window displays. It often includes the merchandise displayed, props, theme display, fully dressed mannequins as well as accessories on plinths or hanging from special display equipment.

Window displays can communicate style, content, and price. Display windows may also be used to advertise seasonal sales or inform passers-by of other current promotions. The main goal of display is to showcase the products within the overall display area. Customers give three to five seconds of their attention to window display. The retailer's visual message should be conveyed to the customer in that short period of time. The arrangement of window display should go with the product and should not suppress them to make it discernable to the eye. Props are items used for display purposes like mannequins, theme based products and accessories. Highly specialized props fabricated from a variety of materials are available/created by experts for visual merchandizing. Mannequins are the most widely used props for visual merchandising in fashion. Today, one can choose from various types like abstract, articulated, custom, ethnic, headless or junior, to name just a few.

2.2.1.2 Lighting and Illumination

Lighting is used to highlight products. It creates excitement and has a positive impact on consumer purchasing behavior. A great deal of research has been undertaken on the impact of lighting on a customer's purchase behavior. Results clearly indicate that in general, stores that are brightly lit, with the lights cleverly blending with the interiors lead to higher customer comfort, and as such, more sales. Different types of lighting and interiors are used on different floors, the change reflecting the various products that are on display on a particular floor, the proposed target audience and the time of the year. The ladies floor, for instance, is most often subtly lit with soft lights or then again, in summers, cool bluish lights are used to impact an impression of coolness and comfort.

Effective lighting is a key in the sale of merchandise in helping to create that favorable first impression of the merchandise and its surroundings. Good lighting can guide the customer's eyes, reveal the color and cut of the merchandise, show the styling and tailoring details and emphasize the good qualities of the outfit, helping the merchandise to be pre-sold to customer. When the lighting used in the retail chain outlets is of good color, consumers are inclined to touch products to assess quality (Areni & Kim, 1994). Consumer's choice of store is moderately influenced by the lighting and store layout (Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007). Stores with proper

lighting, music, color, scent and displays will motivate the customers to visit the store again in the future (Yoo, Park, & MacInnis, 1998). The main purpose of using brighter lighting in retail outlets is to grab the customers' attention so that they start purchasing from the outlets due to their comfort.

2.2.1.3 Signage

Signage is used in providing a short cut for communication about a product. They are actually classified into two parts: store exterior signage and store interior signage (Pushpa, Rajakumar & Nagadeepa, 2017). Store exterior signage is used to identify a store, name various departments, and announce sales and sale merchandise, signage is the design or use of signs and symbols to communicate information, direction, identification, safety and regulation message to a specific group. It is communicated through banners, billboards, and murals or in digital or electronic displays forms. They include informational signage outside the store like the signage that displays promotional, seasonal offers, festive offers etc.

Store interior signage is a critical part of interior display and point-of-purchase promotion. The primary purpose of interior signage is to advertise vendors, colour, quality, and prices and also can explain customer benefits and describe merchandise features. Store signage that communicates a sales message to the customers can make up for lack of sales personnel. Signage related to various product sections are put up clearly to demarcate areas, allowing customers a clear understanding of what is stocked where.

With various brands having their own pull, brand signage are also put up within the product sections so that customers can find their favorite brands easily. Additionally, within the product sections, signage helps to publicize the various promotional schemes that might be running in the store. Stores also make use of signage's to indicate the facilities/services available at the store, such as washrooms, cafe, etc. Proper signage has been shown to increase the sale of an item by over 40%. As much as80% of all sales are generated at the Point of Purchase (POP) by signage, displays and events within the store.

Signage is the "silent salesperson" for the retailer and must reflect the correct brand image. There are various types of interior signage; promotional signage which informs the customer about off price events or schemes; Location signage which directs the buyer to specific departments or merchandise; Institutional signage which gives information on store policies, charitable events, etc., and Informational signage provides product related information like special features, benefits, sizes, price, etc.

2.2.2 Concept of Consumer Buying Behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour can be defined as the study of individuals, groups or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impact that these processes have on consumers and the society (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007). Consumer behaviour involves all the activities that are related to the purchase, use and disposal of products and services, together with the consumer's emotional, mental and behavioural responses that lead, determine, or follow these activities (Kardes, Cline & Conley 2011).

Organisations can do research on consumer buying decisions and their actual purchases in order to answer questions about what consumers buy, where they buy, when they buy, how and how much they buy, as well as why they buy(Cant, Brink & Brijball, 2006). However, learning about the why's of consumer buying behaviour is not so easy – the answers to these questions are often kept deep within the consumer's head (Zainbooks, 2008).By understanding consumers and their buying habits, organisations have the ability to create effective offerings to help them satisfy the consumers' needs and wants (Cant *et al.,* 2006). Organisations that truly understand how consumers might react towards different marketing stimuli have an advantage over their competitors (Zainbooks, 2008); therefore the study of consumer buying behaviour is of major importance to organisations.

2.2.3 Measures of Consumer Buying Behaviour

Kardes, Cline and Conley (2011) asserted that consumer behaviour involves all the activities that are related to the purchase, use and disposal of products and services, together with the consumer's emotional, mental and behavioural responses that lead, determine, or follow these activities. These are broadly categorized into consumer responses and consumer activities. According to Kardes, Cline and Conley (2011), the first element of consumer responses is an emotional response which reflects the consumers' feelings as well as their mood. The second element refers to the mental or cognitive responses, which include a consumer's thought processes, opinions, beliefs, attitudes and intentions towards products and services (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). These can also include a consumer's feelings towards a specific apparel retail store. The last element is behavioural responses, which include a consumer's decisions (approach or avoidance) and actions during the purchase, use and disposal activities (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010).

The environment of a retail store could also influence the consumers' purchase decision. For example, if a consumer wants to buy a new pair of boots, both pleasure and indecisiveness can form part of his/her emotional responses, as a number of decisions have to be made. The consumer must decide on a specific store,

brand product, style and colour, as well as on a payment method. As part of consumer responses, the consumer will possibly imagine wearing the boots, making a mental list of characteristics that the boots should have in order to enhance the decision-making process.

Consumer activities as the second component of consumer buying behaviour involve all the activities regarding the physical purchase, use and disposal of products and services (Kardes *et al.*, 2011). It is useful to categorize consumer behaviour according to the type of activity, because the consumers' responses to stimuli can be different, depending on whether they are purchasing, using, or disposing a product or a service (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007). To use the example of the consumer buying boots (referred to above), the consumer will start by comparing the different stores and brands with one another, paying attention to various advertisements, trying on different boots and gaining opinions from friends and family. If the consumer is not totally satisfied with the store environment, he/she will most probably make a mental choice not to enter the store and decide not to purchase the boots in that store. All of these actions can therefore explain the way in which consumers behave.

2.2.4 Effect of Visual Merchandizing on Consumer Buying Behaviour

Visual Merchandising elements such as window displays, signage lighting and store layout today form a critical element of retailing. To sum it up one can state that the usage of visual merchandising elements in a proper and inventive way may increase the number of impulse buying and attract more potential buyers. Sreedharan and Prakash (2019) while examining the effect of store atmosphere on consumer buying behavior stated that displays are significantly related to consumer buying behavior in retail stores. Pushpa, Rajakumar and Nagadeepa (2017) found that in-store signage scored the p-value which denotes that it has a significant relationship with impulse buying behavior. The study partly coincides with the results of Shah Minal (2012) that elements of visual merchandising window display, mannequin display, floor merchandising and promotional signage has strong relationship with impulse buying behavior of consumers.

Madhavi and Leelavati (2013) proved sufficient evidence that retailers can utilize visual merchandising elements such as signage, window display and store layout to increase desirability of products and to help customers being aware of the products as well as to create favorable attitudes. Whereas Gudonaviciene et al. (2015) reported that the highest positive impact on impulse buying is made by windows displays but that promotional signage did not show any significant relationship on customers' impulse buying behavior. However, Sarmistha and Sarma (2014); Raja Irfan Sabir (2015) opined that promotional signage has a significant influence on impulse buying behavior. A study by Pushpa, Rajakumar and Nagadeepa (2017) concluded that there is no significant relationship between window displays and consumer buying behaviour. This study did not restate the results by Sonali Banerjee (2012) but is consistent with the result of Bashar and Ahmed (2012).

A survey by Gudonaviciene and Alijosiene (2013) proved that window displays and in-store design make the highest impact on impulse buying while promotional signage and store atmosphere did not significantly lead to customers' impulse buying behavior. Moreover, the results confirmed the opinion of the authors (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012; Mehta & Chugan, 2013; Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013; Chang, Yan & Eckman, 2014) that the impact of visual merchandising elements may be dependent on the features of the purchased product, cultural differences and situational factors.

Bhatti and Latif (2014) proved that the consumer impulse buying behavior is significantly influenced by the window display, forum display, floor merchandising or even with the brand name. According to Meenakumari (2013), most customers are influenced of visual merchandise namely promotional signage, floor space, entrance of the outlet and fixtures used from different merchandise in supermarkets. Atham and Mohan (2014) in their study entitled that "role of visual merchandising on consumer buying decision concluded that visual merchandizing elements such as fixtures, ceiling, lighting, and signage are positively related to consumer buying behavior.

Effective illumination and lightning was found to increase the sales up to 20% where the light blends with the interiors (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013). Besides, it was carried out that more items are handled by the consumer under bright lightning than soft lighting (Fiore, Yah & Yoh, 2000). Actually, different lightings are proposed to be selected indifferent parts of the store considering the target consumer group. As a general concept it was added by some researcher that the main principles of design display should be to create balance, emphasis, proportion, rhythm, color, lighting and harmony where these principles should be applied for both window display and interior displays (Saricam, Okur, Erdem, Akdag & Kilikci, 2018). Prasad and Vetrivel (2016) carried out an empirical study on visual merchandising and its impact on consumer buying behavior. The result showed that window display, fixture, signage, mannequin, colors and lighting were significantly associated with consumer buying behavior.

It is from the above review the following null hypotheses have been formulated by the study:

H0₁: Window displays have no significant effect on consumer buying behavior on shoppers in some selected supermarkets in Markurdi metropolis.

H0₂: Lighting and illumination has no significant effect on consumer buying behavior on shoppers in some selected supermarkets in Markurdi metropolis.

H0₃: Signage has no significant effect on consumer buying behavior on shoppers in some selected supermarkets in Markurdi metropolis.

2.4   Empirical Studies

Khisa, Hoque, Hanif, Chaion, Rahman, Uddin, Siddika and Islam (2020) examined the effect of visual merchandizing on customer buying behavior in apparel stores in Chittagong Bangladesh. Survey design was adopted with Questionnaire for Customer as the major instrument for collecting primary data. The researchers randomly picked 20 customers at each store under study. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the variables. The result of the study showed what are the noteworthy key attributes of visual merchandising affecting consumers buying behavior in that region.

Jampla, Lakshmi and Naik, (2019) examined the effect of visual merchandizing on sales of retail stores. Stratified reviewing technique is used. The data were collected in picked retail stores at Vijayawada. A composed Questionnaires of Likert's five point scale was used for the survey. 200 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who were met shopping in picked retail stores. With the help of SPSS data was analysied using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) instrument. Findings indicated that visual merchandizing has significant effect on sales of retail stores.

Gopu (2019) examined the impact of online visual merchandising in fashion industry affecting the Generation Z customers. Further, the study tried to understand the influence of these factors on their consumer behaviour. The primary data was collected through questionnaire method. A sample size of 203 is taken for the study and the sampling technique used was convenient sampling. The data collected through questioners was analysed using regression analysis in SPSS software to derive the main factors affecting the online visual merchandising. The result revealed finding that online visual merchandising has a significant effect on impulse buying behaviour of generation Z customers.

Ajith, Reni and Vipinkumar (2018) examine the impact of visual merchandising with reference to the retail sector. The research was descriptive in nature. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information and to assess the impact of visual merchandising, on impulse buying behavior of customers. A random sampling technique was used in the study and care was taken that the respondents were as diversified as possible. A sample size of 100 respondents was taken from Cochin and Kottayam. To draw conclusions easily, the data was converted into XY (Scatter) diagrams. Research findings suggest that that all the four visual merchandizing factors affect the impulse buying behavior, but the effect of promotional signage at the entrance is comparatively very high.

Saricam, Okur, Erdem, Akdag and Kilikci (2018) The aim of this study is to analyze and to compare the selection of design elements of different type of retailers such as fast fashion retailers, luxury apparel retailers, sportswear retailers or the retailers presenting products for women, men or both. To this aim, a content analysis was applied among 36 apparel retailers acting in Turkey. The findings showed that the visual merchandising elements were inarguably well employed by the luxury brand retailers, which was followed with the retailers selling high price fashion products.

Naveena and Suganya (2018) studied visual merchandising influence on buying behavior in retail store. The study was conducted in Coimbatore city with 220 respondents comprised of consumers. Other important aspects of visual merchandising that were identified were the positioning of displays and the use of space, lighting as well as the neatness of displays. The collection of data was analyzed and tabulated by the use of SPSS which help to analysis the percentage, Likerts five-point table, Reliability (Cronbach Alpha), ANOVA, Ranking. The findings indicated that a prominent visual stimulant and important aspect of visual merchandising displays was colour, which creates visual attraction and stimulation.

Pushpa, Rajakumar and Nagadeepa (2017) made an effort to identify the various visual display techniques and the order by which they influence women impulse decision making in India. The study was an exploratory research undertaken through survey method. The study intended to focus on the impact of various forms of display as a visual merchandising technique in fascinating women to grab their attention towards the products thus leading impulse buying. Also the study aimed to find out the association between impulsive buying behavior of women and display. Through Convenience sampling method the data was collected using structured Questionnaires, distributed to 150 respondents. Five hypotheses on window display, exterior signage, product display, form/mannequin display and store interior signage, was tested for correlation and regression analysis by using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Findings confirmed that women' impulse buying behavior is highly influenced most by the exterior signage among the five other display elements of visual merchandising followed by the form/mannequin display, in-store signage and product display.

Dadras, Hematian and Sadeh (2017) studied components of visual merchandising impact in store design on impulsive women's buying behavior with a focus on recognition of their preferences. The study used

primary data and source of the data was Kano's questionnaire which was filled by the respondent. Target population of the research study was those people who were coming for shopping in malls, retail stores in Bandar Abbas city, Islamic republic of Iran. The study only focused on the quantitative research. Data analysis was done through SPSS software. The study results of Kano's model show the wide range of customer preferences towards store design which can provoke the impulse buying behavior of women's.

Sathyanarayana Harshini and Gargesa (2017) carried out an analytical study on the impact of visual merchandising on impulsive buying behaviour in shopper stop in India. Main objective of the study was to examine the major determinants of visual merchandising on the impulse buying behavior. The data was collected from a structured questionnaire from 260 respondents. The validity of the questionnaire was adjudged, using Cronbach's coefficient (α) was calculated to test the reliability and internal consistency of the responses. Regression results showed that the major determinant's that influence the respondents were Attractive product display, Ambiance inside the store, new product arrival in the store and Offers for the day.

Merugu and Vaddadi (2017) examined the effect of visual merchandising on consumer impulsive buying behaviour in Greater Visakhapatnam City. The study mainly focused in knowing the customers insights on visual merchandise and its effect on customers buying decision while shopping. The study adopted the survey design. A sample of 400 respondents was selected from Visakhapatnam City. A structured questionnaire was used, data analysis and interpretation was carried out using SPSS. Convenient sampling technique was used for selecting the respondents. Statistical tools such as chi square, cross tabulation and frequency tables were applied to interpret the data. Results reveal that visual merchandising plays a significant role in influencing customers purchase decision.

III.   METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design. The population of this study consisted of the employees of the 6 supermarkets selected in Makurdi metropolis. The study also targeted 20 customers from each selected supermarket. In all, the population of the study is of 152 (32 employees and 120 customers) as presented in Table 3.1.

Table 1: Population Breakdown

Supermarket	No. of employees	Sampled customers
1. Sudo Pee Supermarket	7	20
2. Nobis Supermarket	6	20
3. Togos Supermarket	5	20
4. Titus West supermarket	4	20
5. Dobiac Supermarket	6	20
6. CBI Supermarket	4	20
Total	**32**	**120**

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Where the population is within a manageable limit, it is advisable to study the entire population (King, Horrocks, & Brooks, 2019). Therefore, the sample size for this study is the overall 152staff and sampled customers of the selected supermarkets. Primary data from questionnaire administration were used for this study. The questionnaire was carefully developed by taking into consideration both the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the various key variables and or items necessary for analysis. Questions are designed using a four-point Likert (1961) scale for measurements ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. To ensure validity of the instruments, the face validity was carried out by the experts who read, analyzed and approved the instruments before they were used for data collection. For reliability of the measurement instrument, a pilot test was done on $^1/_3$ of the sample size (0.333 x 152 = 51). This was necessary to ensure the consistency of the results. The Cronbach's Alpha for each of the constructs is expected to be greater than .70 before all the constructs. The reliability result as shown in the Table 2 was considered reliable was used in this study as recommended by Fraenkel and Wallen(2000).

Table 2 Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Window displays	0.842	4

Lighting and illumination	0.854	4
Signage	0.756	5
Consumer buying behavior	0.772	4
Average	**0.806**	**17**

Source: SPSS Output, 2021.

This study employed the use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21). Multiple regression analysis was used in testing the hypotheses formulated in this study at 0.05 level of significance.

The regression model for the study is thus:

$CBB = \beta0 + \beta1(WD) + \beta2\ (LI) + \beta3\ (Si) + \varepsilon.$

Where CBB= Consumer Buying Behaviour

WD= Window Displays

LI= Lighting/Illumination

Si= Signage

α = Intercept of the Model (constant)

β_1 to β_3= Parameters of WD, LI, Si respectively

ε = error term

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the outcome of the data analysis. The results obtained from the distribution of the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS version 21. The questionnaires were distributed to 32 employees of the selected retail stores in Makurdi and 120 customers of the selected store. The researcher administered the questionnaires face to face and followed up to ensure that they were answered and retrieved. However, from the 152 questionnaires administered, a total of 125 were completed and returned.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.725[a]	.526	.518	.842	1.572

a. Predictors: (Constant), Signage, Lighting/Illumination, Window displays

b. Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behaviour

Source: SPSS Output of Field Survey, 2021.

Regression was used to determine the extent to which a set of independent variables (window displays, lighting and illuminating and signage) predicted the dependent variable (consumer buying behaviour). The results from Table 3 showed that a combination of window displays, lighting and illuminating and signage significantly predicted up to 52.6 % of the variation in consumer buying behaviour indicated by ($R^2 = .526$). The remaining 47.4 % unexplained variation in consumer buying behaviour is caused by other variables outside the regression model. The result from Table 3 also indicated the value of adjusted R-Square. The adjusted R-Square value was calculated which took into account the number of variables in the model and the number of observations the model was based on. The adjusted R-square value (.518) gave the most useful measure of the success of the model. It also gave an idea of how well the model could be generalized, which implied the closer it was to R-square, the better. Also, Durbin-Watson statistic was employed to determine the presence or absence of auto-correlation. For this model, the value of Durbin-Watson statistic was computed to be 1.572, which was reasonably closed to 2. This implied that there was no auto-correlation.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	138.000	3	46.000	64.820	.000[b]
	Residual	124.190	121	.710		
	Total	262.190	124			

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Signage, Lighting and Illumination, Window Displays

Source: SPSS Output of Field Survey, 2021.

The result in Table 4 shows the results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test which revealed that the combined independent variables have significant effect on consumer buying behaviour. This can be explained by the F-value (138.000) and p-value (.000) which is less than 5 % level of significance. The valid regression model implies that all the variables are related.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.376	.293		1.285	.201
	Window Displays	.170	.056	.174	3.050	.003
	Lighting/Illuminating	.457	.057	.461	7.947	.000
	Signage	.331	.057	.321	5.792	.000

Source: SPSS Output, 2021.

The general multiple regression model this study was: $CBB = \beta 0 + \beta 1(WD) + \beta 2 (LI) + \beta 3 (Si) + \varepsilon$. Thus, the researcher obtained the parameters $\beta 0$ to $\beta 3$ from Table 5, and the model was presented as: $CBB = 0.376 + 0.170x_1 + 0.457x_2 + 0.331x_3$

From Table 5, it was evident that at 95 % confidence level, the variables produce statistically significant values for this study (high t-values, $p < 0.05$). A positive effect is reported for all the variables under study hence affecting consumer buying behavior in a positive manner. A look at the t values and p values from the regression coefficients table shows that lighting and illuminating has the highest contribution to variations in consumer buying behavior as a result of change in visual merchandizing (t= 7.947; P= 0.000), followed by signage (t= 5.792; P= 0.000) and lastly window displays has least significant effect on consumer buying behavior (t= 3.050; p= 0.003).

4.2   Test of Hypotheses
The three hypotheses were tested using regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance as follows:
4.2.1   Test of Hypothesis one
The regression analysis as presented in Table 5 showed that window displays significantly predicted consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis ($\beta = 0.174$, t = 3.050, P < 0.05). This implies that there is statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0₁).
Decision: Since the P – value (0.003) is less than 0.05 level of significance (P < 0.05). The researcher rejected the null hypothesis (H0₁) and concluded that window displays significantly affect consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis.
4.2.2   Test of Hypothesis two
The result of regression analysis from Table 5 indicates that lighting and illumination is a significant predictor of consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis ($\beta = .461$, t = 7.947, P < 0.05). This suggests that there is statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0₂).
Decision: Since the P-value (0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance (P < 0.05), the researchers reject the null hypothesis (H0₂) and conclude that lighting and illumination has a significant effect on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis.
4.2.3   Test of Hypothesis three
 The result from Table 5 also revealed that signage is a significant predictor of consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis ($\beta = 0.321$, t = 5.792, P < 0.05). This implies that there is statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis (Ho₃).
Decision: Since the P – value (0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance (P < 0.05), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis (HO₃) and concluded that signage significantly affects consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis.
4.3   Discussion of Findings
The general finding of the study revealed from data collected that visual merchandizing significantly affects consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria. The specific findings of the study were presented according to the objectives of the study as follows:
4.3.1   Effect of window displays on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis
The result of data collected and the analysis carried out revealed that window displays have significant effect on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.003) was lower than the significance level. This can

be statistically given as P-value 0.003< α = 0.05. This result disagrees with Pushpa, Rajakumar and Nagadeepa (2017) who found that there is no significant relationship between window displays and consumer buying behaviour. However, the study is supported by Shah Minal (2012) who found that elements of visual merchandising window display, mannequin display and floor merchandising have strong relationship with impulse buying behavior of consumers.

4.3.2 Effect of lighting and illumination on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis

The findings of the study indicated that lighting and illumination have significant effect on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.000) was lower than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value 0.000< α = 0.05. This result supports that of Madhavi and Leelavati (2013) which revealed that effective illumination and lightning stimulate buyer behavior and increase the sales where the light blends with the interiors.

4.3.3 Effect of signage on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis

The analysis of the data collected from the respondents also revealed that there is significant effect of signage on consumer buying behavior in retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.000) was lower than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value 0.000< α = 0.05. The finding of this study agrees with Madhavi and Leelavati (2013) who proved sufficient evidence that retailers can utilize visual merchandising elements such as signage and store layout to increase desirability of products and to help customers being aware of the products as well as to create favorable attitudes. The finding also agrees with Meenakumari (2013) who found that most customers are influenced of visual merchandise namely promotional signage, floor space, entrance of the outlet and fixtures used from different merchandise in supermarkets.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Visual merchandising is a retail strategy that maximizes the aesthetics of a product with the intent to increase sales. Visual merchandising can also play a role in the look, feel and culture of a brand. This study examined the effect of visual merchandizing on consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. Success factors of visual merchandising include the window displays, lighting and signage. The study concluded that consumer buying behaviour is significantly influenced by the window display, lighting and illumination and signage. This suggests that visual merchandising like window display, lighting and illumination and signage serve as strong stimulus for purchases at retail stores. That is to say when each of these elements brings together in a retail setting they showcase a brand and enriches the customer experience, leading to a positive shopping experience. The study also concludes that lighting and illumination is the strongest determinant of consumer buying behavior among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis. The study recommended that; retailers should understand shopper's expectations and create the right display of their expectations in order to lure customers in to their stores; retailers stores in Makurdi should endeavour to ensure the light blends with the interiors as this situation has been found to increase purchase and lastly, retailers should evaluate the different forms of signage and concentrate on the most effective of all.

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