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### IMPACT OF PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES IN EVALUATION OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ELEMENTS AMONG WOMEN

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#### ABSTRACT

Most of the researches on visual merchandising are concerned in defining and measuring its impact on impulse buying. Studies have proved that majority of the customers decide their purchases inside the store due to the in-store stimuli, and sometimes because of customer's personality traits. Personality is the set of characteristics or traits which differentiate individuals among them and elicit certain reactions to the stimuli coming from the environment. The individual traits of a customer influences his/her perception of visual merchandising elements this can arouse customer in-store merchandise exploration or interaction with products/environment which encourages their purchase intentions. However, the combination of topics, visual merchandising and personality traits remains relatively unexplored. Hence, the present study aims to explore the relationship between big five personality traits extraversion, Openness, conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism and specific impulse buying cues (Visual merchandising) namely Window display, Product display and signage display. A Survey was administered using a structured questionnaire among 250 women shoppers visiting retail outlets at various shopping malls in different parts of Bangalore. The results of the study indicated that there is significant difference in impact of personality traits on evaluation of store/mall in terms of visual merchandising.

#### INTRODUCTION

Visual merchandising is a tool to convey a message about goods to the buyers by employing various visual styles and themes. Authors (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003) stated that visual merchandising is concerned with both how the product or brand is visually communicated to the customer and also whether this message is decoded correctly in this context affecting a positive psychological or behavioral outcome, ultimately leading to purchase. Ebster and Garaus (2011) described visual merchandising as the art and science of presenting products in the most visually appealing way, emphasizing on the communication with the customers through images and presentations. Retailers have acknowledged the importance of visual merchandising as a tool for market differentiation. Visual merchandising elements as the physical surroundings of a store, is made up of many elements, including lighting, layout, directional signage and human elements, this can also be divided into as exterior and interior of a store. From retailers' point of view, store atmosphere is designed to create a buying environment that produces specific psychological effects on buyers to enhance the probability of purchasing (Kotler, 1973). Subsequently, brick and mortar retailers need to be conscious of the idea that shopping is not just an economic activity but rather is also a process that is linked to various social psychological factors that help to define a person's sense of being. This suggests that there is a dreadful need for empirically examining the interface between the various retail displays and various psychological orientations of the shopper. The individual traits of a customer influences his/her perception of visual merchandising elements this can arouse customer in-store merchandise exploration or interaction with products /environment which encourages their purchase intentions. However, the combination of topics, visual merchandising and personality traits remains relatively unexplored. Hence, the present study aims to explore the relationship between big five personality traits extraversion, Openness, conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism and specific impulse buying cues (Visual merchandising) namely Window display, Product display and signage display.

#### VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Studies have shown that among the visual merchandising elements displays are the forms of techniques which are more widely implemented by retailers and are found in a variety of retail environments. Visual merchandising displays are viewed as visual features that enhance desire and liking in a store known as feature areas. Essentially the displays are used to beautify and embellish a store by adding additional fixtures, props, posters' materials, colour, frills and objects to a store. Visual merchandising displays use creative techniques in order to save the sales person's and the shopper's time by making shopping easy. The effects of visual



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merchandising elements could be multifaceted. While many of these elements influence shoppers' behavior through their effects on shoppers' emotion, and physiological state, some of these elements could elicit more direct response from shoppers with very little impact on their thinking, feeling or body comfort. Most of the researcher's focal interest is on the relationship between emotions induced by a particular environment and behaviors in this environment, rather than how the emotions or behaviors are related to the characteristics of the environment (Donovan and Rossiter 1982). In the present study specific impulse buying cues (Visual merchandising) namely Window display, Product display and signage display are considered.

### Window Display

It refers to the decorated display of a store's 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. A prospective customer when enters 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.

### Product display

It refers to presentation of a store's products to attract and entice the customers to buying. The products for sale must be visible, easy to access, and there must be a range of merchandise to choose. Display should allow consumers not only to "buy what they see" but should be able to tangibly engage with the physical product. Product display includes shelf display, point of purchase display, and mannequin display.

### Signage display

signage is the design or use of signs and symbols to communicate information, direction, identification, safety and regulation message to a specific group. It can be store interior signage or exterior signage. Exterior signage is communicated through banners, billboards, and murals or in digital or electronic displays forms. The present study has considered only the informational signage both outside and inside the store. The purpose of signage is to advertise vendors, colour, quality, and prices and also can explain customer benefits or describe merchandise features or display promotional, seasonal offers, festive offers etc.

## PERSONALITY TRAITS

Each individual is made up of her/his inherited characteristics and the interactions with environment and moderated by situational conditions. It is the composite total outcome of an individual's psychological make-up, intentions, beliefs, attitudes, habits, and overall outlook. Personality is defined as a set of characteristics or traits relatively durable, which distinguish individuals between them and trigger certain reactions to stimuli coming from their environment. Seounmi Youn and Ronald J Faber (2000) stated that personality traits are related to different types of cues that trigger customer's behaviour. Individuals when they seem to experience high level of negative feeling state or stress-reactive people are more responsive to their feeling states. For highly absorptive people, environmental and sensory cues such as sounds, sights, and smells play an extensive role in influencing their impulse purchases. They are more absorbent with visual elements, physical and ambient factors of the store. (LaBarbera, Weingard and Yorkston, 1998) Individual differences in personalities have been shown to affect peoples' processing strategies. Individuals with different personality types reacted to and processed advertising imagery in different ways. The history of psychology shows that researchers have attempted to develop a universal and systematic personality framework to explain individual differences. One of these frameworks is the Big Five Model. The Big Five model of McCrae and Costa (1990) is regarded as one of primary benchmarks in the trait theory of personality. Although individuals can exhibit all five dimensions, they may score quite highly on one or several dimensions and lower on others (Mulyanegara, R.Z., Tsarenko, Y and Anderson2009). The Big Five Dimensions can be summarized as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience.

Extraversion assesses an individual's quantity and strength of relational interface and activity level. The higher values refer to be sociable, talkative, active, person-oriented, positive and loving. Agreeableness assesses quality of an individual in relational positioning along a range from sympathy to dislike in thoughts, feelings, and actions. The higher scores shows to be soft-hearted, outgoing, helpful, forgiving and straightforward. Conscientiousness the extent of organization, determination, and motivation in goal-directed behavior is assessed by this factor. The higher scorers are likely to be organized, consistent, and hard working. Neuroticism an individual level to psychological suffering, idealistic ideas and excessive needs is assessed by this trait specifically. The higher scorers show to be worried, emotional and nervous. Openness an individual's pre-

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emptive seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake, toleration for, and investigation of the inexperienced is known by this trait. The higher scorers are likely to be enquiring, imaginative, original, creative and unconventional.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies infer that in terms of visual display- the window display, in-store form or mannequin display, and promotional signage are very essential dimension to be studied in visual merchandising. The personality factors, which are conceptualized as a factor affecting how a situation is being defined, are expected to determine the manner in which a person's sense of presence affects perception of the visual displays in the store. This paper focuses to point out the influence of personality traits on evaluation of visual merch and ising elements namely window display, product display and signage display and the criteria that woman consider in evaluating the stores, and expectations that they form towards stores.

### OBJECTIVES

- To identify and analyze the various personality traits
- To analyze the significance difference between each personality traits and the visual merchandising displays

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

In view of the above mentioned objectives, the following hypothesis is framed and investigated:

**H0:** There is no significant difference between "Big five personality traits" and evaluation of visual merchandising elements

**H1:** There is a significant difference between "Big five personality traits" and evaluation of visual merchandising elements

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the descriptive research design. The data is obtained using a structured questionnaire from 250 respondents in a mall survey conducted in Bangalore. Responses were collected from women respondents based on random sampling who visited various mall. Explanatory Research is adopted as the aim is to investigate the impact of "big five" personality traits on evaluation of visual displays by women. The self-administered questionnaire consists of two parts. The A part measures the demographic profile of respondents like the age, income, marital status, and occupation. Part B consists of questions measuring the visual merchandising elements (viz., window, product and signage display) and the personality traits of women using the TIPI scales adopted from Gosling (2003) who developed a ten item measure of the Big five personality dimensions- 2 items measuring each of the 5 dimensions viz., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. A five point LIKERT scale, ranging from never=1 to frequently=5 was used to measure each variable. The following table shows the demographic profile of the respondents

*Table 1: Demographic profile*

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	93	37
26-35	105	42
Above 35	52	21
<b>Income</b>		
Less than 30000	48	19
30001-40000	61	24
40001-50000	112	45
Above 50000	29	12
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	69	28
Employed	147	59
Unemployed	34	14

Marital status		
Married	118	47
Unmarried	132	53

Source: Primary data

The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1, it is understood that most of the respondents are in the age group of 26 to 35 years (42%), majority of the respondents' income is in the category of 40000-50000. Most of respondents are unmarried i.e., 53% and the occupation status of the respondents reveals that most of them are employed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting and scrutinizing the questionnaires, the data of completed questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. The reliability of the scale is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. This is applied to calculate the internal coordination of the measurement instruments. The overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.823 which is more than the standard value 0.7. Further to investigate how the individual traits of women influence their perception and evaluation of visual merchandising elements five hypothesis was framed and tested using ANOVA. The results are shown below:

*Table 2: Extraversion and visual merchandising elements*

Factors of visual merchandising	Extraversion	Mean	SD	F-value	P value (Sig)
Window display	High	3.41	.706	8.375	.000
	medium	3.23	.711		
	Low	3.04	.695		
Product display	High	3.34	.787	11.814	.000
	medium	3.09	.842		
	Low	2.81	.959		
signage display	High	3.42	.800	17.701	.000
	medium	3.21	.855		
	Low	2.74	.949		

Source: Primary data

The table shows the ANOVA results measuring the variation in evaluation of the three elements of visual merchandising. The result of the study showed that window display, product display and signage display (p value is less than 0.01 at 1% level of significance) had a significance difference in perception of the visual merchandising elements among women with extravert personality. Comparison of mean scores reveals that woman with high Extrovert attitude seems to be evaluative and perceived the visual merchandising elements differently as they are characterized as sociable, talkative, active, person-oriented, positive and loving. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

*Table 3: Agreeableness and visual merchandising elements*

Factors of visual merchandising	Agreeableness	Mean	SD	F-value	P value (Sig)
Window display	High	3.45	.718	14.306	.000
	medium	3.16	.642		
	Low	2.88	.947		
Product display	High	3.35	.817	13.113	.000
	medium	2.96	.831		
	Low	3.04	.999		
signage display	High	3.13	.822	14.635	.058
	medium	3.10	.823		
	Low	3.12	.642		

Source: Primary data

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The result shows that the p value is less than 0.01 at 1% level of significance indicating that there is a significance difference in perception of the visual merchandising element (product and window display) among women with agreeableness personality. But the signage display does not show any significance difference because the p value is more 0.05 at 5 percent level of significance. Comparison of mean scores reveals that women with high agreeableness attitude are highly influenced by the product display and window display but promotional signage was perceived uniformly among women irrespective of the various levels of agreeableness possessed by women. Hence the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 4: Conscientiousness and visual merchandising elements**

Factors of visual merchandising	Conscientiousness	Mean	SD	F-value	P value (Sig)
Window display	High	3.34	.699	6.472	.002
	medium	3.27	.729		
	Low	2.71	.686		
Product display	High	3.24	.840	3.523	.030
	medium	3.07	.810		
	Low	2.82	1.286		
Signage display	High	3.28	.846	9.534	.000
	medium	3.26	.872		
	Low	2.35	.931		

Source: Primary data

The result shows that the p value is less than 0.01 at 1percent and 0.05 at 5percent level of significance indicating that there is a significance difference in perception of the visual merchandising element among women with conscientiousness personality. It means that different opinion lies in between the levels of conscientiousness trait. Women with high level of conscientiousness evaluate all the elements of visual merchandising before they could decide their purchases as they are characterized as organized, consistent, and hard working. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected

**Table 5: Neuroticism and visual merchandising elements**

Factors of visual merchandising	Neuroticism	Mean	SD	F-value	P value (Sig)
Window display	High	3.45	.686	19.020	.000
	medium	3.14	.665		
	Low	2.87	.844		
Product display	High	3.31	.866	11.548	.000
	medium	3.03	.752		
	Low	2.74	.978		
Signage display	High	3.35	.855	7.700	.001
	medium	3.18	.827		
	Low	2.79	1.044		

Source: Primary data

The one way ANOVA carried out to confirm the difference observed within the personality trait is found to be significant. From the table the mean score for the elements of visual merchandising at three levels of Neuroticism personality namely low, medium and high indicates that the mean score differ. Women with high level of neuroticism tend to be more worried, emotional and nervous. Hence they prefer staying a long time in the store and to rejuvenate or enhance their mood by evaluating each of the elements of visual merchandising before they could decide their purchases. Hence Null hypothesis is rejected.

*Table 6: Openness and visual merchandising elements*

Factors of visual merchandising	Openness	Mean	SD	F-value	P value (Sig)
Window display	High	3.42	.702	9.498	.000
	medium	3.16	.686		
	Low	3.06	.827		
Product display	High	3.28	.881	6.905	.001
	medium	3.08	.767		
	Low	2.79	.960		
Signage display	High	3.36	.861	6.981	.001
	medium	3.17	.823		
	Low	2.82	1.074		

Source: Primary data

The test is found to be significant. The result indicates that the mean scores of women with openness approach demonstrate significant difference in observing the different elements of visual merchandising. The p value of the elements is less than 0.01 at 1% level of significance at all three levels of openness temperament. Hence alternate hypothesis is accepted. Women with high openness attitude were more attracted towards the visual merchandising elements, they filter the store seriously therefore they are more likely to be aroused by the store environment. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

## CONCLUSION

Retail industry has fierce competition. There are lots of player's domestic and international, branded and non-branded, catering same kind of products. The only differentiation retailers can do is in terms of display. Major retailers have alleged, for a long time, that consumers choice is often influenced by personality. Personality traits differentiate individuals among them and elicit certain reactions to the stimuli coming from the environment. Visual merchandising here plays a vital. The individual traits of a customer influences his/her perception of visual merchandising elements this can arouse customer in-store merchandise exploration or interaction with products /environment which encourages their purchase intentions. From the study it is found that perception towards the various elements of visual merchandising is different with different personality traits. It is concluded that there exists a moderate relationship between personality attributes and visual merchandising. This study proves that out of all personality attributes, four personality types i.e. extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness influence the customers perception of visual merchandising elements this can arouse their in-store merchandise exploration or interaction with environment which encourages their purchase intentions.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study proves various visual merchandising factors have been affected by personality attributes. Retailers can work on variables that have been identified and analyzed. They can focus on its impact for better future results. If any retail outlet falls short in any of the dimension of visual merchandising, impact of that dimension on consumer which will induce purchase will not happen. It is a factor which helps customer stay long in the shop. The more a customer stays in the shop, more that person purchases. Hence, the visual atmospherics of retail store should be best and making consumers comfortable in the store.

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