

The Impact of Visual Merchandising Elements on Consumer Attention: A Case Study of Retail Stores in Malaysia's Domestic and International Markets

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ABSTRACT

Visual merchandising plays the largest role of influencing the consumer behavior and buying behavior in retail stores. This study looks into the influence of visual merchandising materials like color palette, design of the layout, lighting, signs, and arrangement of goods to the attention given by the consumer to the store outlets. The methodology of the study is a qualitative case study, and the researchers studied domestic and international retail stores present in the Malaysian market which is a diverse market. The research determined the visual characteristics ideal in attracting the attention of consumers through in-store observations, questionnaires (i.e. internal consumer's interviews) and focus groups (i.e. internal consumer's group discussions) on sensory stimulation to consumers. It is determined that the shops with the thoughtful color palette, correct locations of the products and the careful use of lighting increase the period of time the customers spend in the store. In addition, the layout of the store and effective signage are also important to direct the shoppers throughout the store thus they have a wonderful time spent shopping. The study is of great help to Malaysian retailers, given some of the strategies related to use of visual merchandising to attract and maintain customers, enhance the store design and remain competitive in the rapidly changing retail environment.

Keywords: *Consumer attention, In-store marketing, Retail store design, Store layout*

INTRODUCTION

The key issue that retailers have to address is how to attract the attention of consumers because competition in retail has become quite intense and requires them to draw more people to their stores and make more purchases (Lloyd, 2020). Visual merchandising forms a part and parcel of this process since it has the ability to shape how the clientele perceive products and how they make their buying choices (Underhill, 2009). Issues like store design, shape of lights, variations in signs, products, and carefully selected color schemes cooperate in a manner that catches the attention of the customers and maintains their attention as well (Underhill, 2009). All these visual elements combine and offer a beautiful and involving shopping experience, which has a direct effect on consumer responses (Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2016).

Research indicates that environmental cues help greatly influence the attention of the shoppers, and visual merchandising is one of the vital players that influence buying patterns (Lloyd, 2020). Moreover, it has been discovered that color has psychological strength as it evokes certain emotions which may directly influence the purchasing behavior (Labrecque & Milne, 2013). In addition, the store layout and the lighting systems are also important features, directing the customer on how to circulate through the stores enhancing the traffic flow and keeping the customers longer in browsing the products (Moller et al., 2018).

Though visual merchandising will always have a significantly important role in retail business, there does not seem to be any academic study that examines the set factors that sway the need of consumer visibility in the Malaysian retail market. The Malaysia retail sector is anticipated as multipurpose with domestic and international retailers that focus on a large segment of consumers (Mohd Noor, 2019). Even though visual merchandising strategy studies are widely researched in the international environment, there is a dearth of the local research available especially when the cultural likings of the customers are taken into consideration as consumers tend to notice it and think about it (Mohd Noor, 2019). Malaysian retailers need to realize that adjusting the visual merchandising management aspects according to the local needs and preferences would contribute to the improvement of the retails (Wahab et al., 2021).

This paper aims at filling this gap by examining the nature of the visual merchandising aspect, including the use of colors, displays product arrangement within a retail shop, light placement and strategies, influencing consumer focus in Malaysia. A qualitative research strategy in terms of a case study is used to explore how these factors affect the consumer behaviour in the local and international retail situations. The results offer viable suggestions to Malaysian retailers so as to refine their display techniques to create better interactions with the customer and help them to maintain a competitive edge in the current business environment (Tan et al., 2022). This study resulted in useful strategic knowledge that can be used by retail businesses in adjusting well with the growing needs of consumers and to build their reputation in the market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To control attention and purchasing behavior in retail facilities, retail businesses use visual merchandise as a basic concept. Current studies place particular emphasis on the fact that color, the layout of the store, lighting methods, signs, and the display of products are the major elements of visual merchandising that can largely influence customer feelings and directly contribute to purchase intentions (Shagyrov & Shamoï, 2024; Tan et al., 2022). These aspects combine in their synergy to produce enveloped shopping

experiences that not only draw consumer attention but also direct consumer behaviour towards products, resulting in their intent to buy the products (Lloyd, 2020; Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2016)

Color and Consumer Attention

The sphere of wearable technology as well as that of the retail environment has embraced color as one of the tools that allow one to regulate emotional response of customers and manage their levels of focus. The recent researchers have found that the color is significant in influencing the consumer perception as well as behavior not only to the retail shopping but also to the use of the advertisements to market the product or commodity. As a case in point, Shagyrov and Shamoi (2024) carried out a study to identify emotional responses produced by a mixture of colors to the food beverage industry. They discovered that the color red and yellow brings happy and energized emotions and blue brings with it trusting and relaxed feelings in their test. Such emotions are essential since colors could be used to concentrate client attentions on a brand in order to form specific brand perceptions and generate the buying behavior (Shagyrov & Shamoi, 2024; Labrecque & Milne, 2013). In addition, the studies indicate that a similar issue pertains to the color applied in advertising since they could be used to attract the client attention and promote the emotional connection to form purchasing behavior (Lloyd, 2020). Thus, in the case of visual merchandising, the color is helpful both in drawing attention and provoking an emotional response with the aim of facilitating a general shopping experience and impulse purchasing (Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2016).

Store Layout and Consumer Behavior

Products that have been placed in properly structured shop floors play a great role in the navigation of a customer in a shop and the focus of the customers. Recently, research has proven to increase the customer satisfaction and improve the duration that customers stay in a store through strategically planned shop layout that is designed in such a way that ample space and opportunity to navigate in the store is provided (Kalantari et al., 2023). Conversely, an unstructured and unappealing store environment is likely to anger and distract a customer, vice versa suppressing their attention on the products on display and significance (Mehta & Shah, 2023; Van Rompay et al., 2011). The product placements with high visibility in the busy high-traffic areas readily offer the optimal situation of attracting the attention of the consumer, thus, improving the sales performance (Van Rompay et al., 2011; Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2016). The displays and location of items in the store are consequently the most important aspects of visual merchandising that directly influence the consumer behavior and the purchase decision (Shagyrov & Shamoi, 2024).

Lighting and Consumer Engagement

The way retail outlets just light up their shops is a key component of visual merchandising, which is one of the most important practices that can attract the attention of consumers and make the shopping experience more enjoyable (Wu et al., 2021). It is also possible to attract attention to the particular objects with the use of the lighting because such kind of bright and eye-catching constructions will create the mood of excitement and inspire the consumers to the specified products. On the contrary, low level lighting has a calmer effect as it causes customers to have lengthier visitations to area characterized by lower level of lighting and thus causes longer stay and perusal of the store (Areni, 1994). The global studies show that properly planned lighting systems enhance customer focus, which impacts not only the experiences of shopping but also the amount of time devoted to chosen store zones (Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, the increased use of lighting in retail settings, in particular in conjunction with other visual

merchandising tools, may influence the consumer's emotional reactivity and their buying behaviour very much (Shagyrov & Shamoi, 2024). When such lights are well utilized by retailers, layouts of the stores may be modified to increase attention bits, recognition, and eventual sales (Moller et al., 2023).

Signage and Product Display

It is crucial to have clear signs that will guide a customer through a store as well as publicize special offers and new displays of stock. According to research by One Door and Global Data (2024), consumers are usually confused and feel less satisfied when the signage is unclear or even absent. In addition, the juxtaposition of an interesting presentation, story-telling system that stimulates emotion creates a good pull to targeted consumers to merchandise highlighted (Visual Merchandising Company, 2024). Also, new studies of Smith and Lee (2025) point to interactive visual merchandising which can attract customer attention even more and make them more likely to buy the product due to an immersive atmosphere of shopping.

Technological Innovations in Visual Merchandising

The introduction of technology in visual merchandising has created new methods of involving consumers. Augmented reality (AR) mobile apps will enable the customers to see items in real-life environments, thus making the shopping experience more powerful and encouraging the customers to have more contacts with the brand (Expert Market Research, 2024). Also, the use of data-driven solutions that focus on customer desires has translated to more interactions with customers and improved conversion rates of the sales (ENDVR, 2025). To illustrate, IKEA and L'Oreal have effectively adopted AR when running retail stores to enable customers to see how furniture would fit in their home interior or wear the make-up virtually, which has helped to enhance customer satisfaction and improved sales (ENDVR, 2025). The review of research encompasses an in-depth analysis of the literature published in recent years concerning aspects of visual merchandizing and its impacts on the attention of consumers (ENDVR, 2025). It points at the necessity to create culturally oriented, market-specific approaches toward Malaysian retailing stores.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative case study design to explore the consequences of the visual merchandising characteristics to consumers' focus within Malaysian retailing industry. The use of the case study approach was due to the need to investigate the peculiarities of the consumer behavior that could be elaborated in the context changing the shopping conditions in the real situation which could be discussed in the detail to move to the details of the ways the visual merchandising elements that draw the attention such as the color scheme, layout design, signage, and the products display could affect the people themselves when they perceive them and consider their shopping behavior (Creswell, 2014). This study contributed data regarding how these were being drivers of consumer attention as well as how these visual initiatives were accepted in local shopping at home and at overseas retail environments in Malaysia.

The study involved the in-store observations, the semi-structured interviews, as well as the focus group discussions which were all integrated in order to achieve a broad scope of the consumer reaction to the components of the visual merchandise. In-store observations were run to collect information about the physical structure and design of the stores about how customers are interacting with some displays about their merchandise. The consumer's preference towards product and service was examined through the

semi-structure interviews so as to have an overall reflection on the line of thinking of the consumers, as focus group discussions enabled a keen perspective of the means of execution of the various merchandising strategies (Yin, 2018).

A total of 12 retail stores were identified and two (6 domestic, local and 6 international, global) only retail stores were chosen together with their market segment namely: fashion, electronics and food. These are segments that have been provided so as to provide a detailed report procedure with respect to the differing approach of the visual merchandising strategies to the different category of the products as well as the different consumer demographics. The sample size provided can be considered as the result of the attempt to introduce diversity and, at the same time, get into more detail, describing the stores. This research entailed dealing with retail organizations (local brands stores) which are local stores in the case of the country and retail organizations (global brands stores) which are international stores established in Malaysia, enabling that the comparison between retail stores were made and the description of many other differences in the visual merchandising strategies of the different cultures was made.

They have observed every retail outlet with at least 4 to 5 hours to take. Through this period, researchers managed to have sufficient time and carry out the customer observations with the merchandizing displays at different hours of the day bearing in mind the potential traffic patterns and the introduction of the peak hours. Moreover, it was the aim to conduct 8-10 semi-structured interviews with the consumers in each of the stores to retrieve information about how they valued the visual strategies. To understand more of how consumers are responding to visual merchandising factors so far as emotions and cognitive thoughts are concerned was to be learned through these interviews. 6 participants were to be utilized in each focus group and demographic group which included e.g., age, gender and shopping habitisms were to be represented by each focus group. This number was chosen so as to guarantee a vibrant discussion and different opinion. Every store underwent 2 focus groups but it is possible to compare/contrast them and learn more about the consumer opinion.

The research also focuses on such emerging technologies as augmented reality (AR) and digital signage, which are of particular interest to the retail industry. The technologies have portrayed that they increase the level of consumer engagement and provide enhanced shopping (Hernandez, 2024). The shopkeepers who managed to put the utilization of AR and interactive display elements in practice in their stores stated that this process not only heightened the extent of customer contact and involvement but also led to prolonged presence in stores and augmentation of buying fervor (Expert Market Research, 2024). These are some of the technological factors examined in the study in assessing the effect of their impact on the consumer attention with regard to the diversity of the retail environments in Malaysia.

This method of case studies enabled one to know a lot about the influence of visual merchandising on consumer behavior in the real world. After contrasting the stores of different classes in the different markets, the study was in a position to display the primary course of action that the retailers could apply in making the stores more optimally arranged, attractive and the process of shopping more fulfilling.

FINDINGS

The following section is a description of the study outcomes that analyzed the effects of visual merchandise factors L color scheme, layout design, lighting schemas, signs, and product display structures that captured the attention of consumers and made them buy products offered in the retail stores in the Malaysian domestic and foreign markets. The information acquired during observation in the

stores, interviews, focus group discussion provided an important insight into consumer choice and their associations with visual merchandising items.

Table 1. Color Scheme Influence on Consumer Attention and Purchase Intent

Color Scheme	Attention (min)	Purchase Intent (%)
Warm color	30	60%
Cool color	45	40%

The table 1 indicates the results of the effect of various color schemes on consumer attention (measured as a time spent in-store) and the purchase intention. Color schemes affect consumer attention and buying behavior. The use of color schemes was determined to be very influential to the attention of consumers as well as their buying patterns. The warm and cool colors produced various reactions in response to Malaysian retail stores which affect the amount of time to be spent in retail stores and possibility of getting a transaction. Warm colors (red, orange, and yellow): The warm colors (red, orange and yellow) were also applied mainly in the promotional zones and on sale tags. Customers took more attention to objects whose labels were red and yellow, which was connected with a feeling of sultriness and eagerness. Insight sample: One of the respondents has mentioned, 'I am more prone to the red sign because it seems that I can be left without a bargain'. Effect on buying: Warm colors promoted the impulse buying habits, whereby the consumers took less time to make decisions but made buying decisions faster. Cool colors (blue, green and purple). Conversely, the cool colors made the whole shopping environment more relaxed and therefore, resulted in a longer browsing and more conscious shopping. For example, the blue color used in the shop helped me relax and I could engage myself in more products. The effect on buys, cool colors stimulated conscious shopping and the purchasing of things of greater value. Warm colors greatly provoked increased attention and even impulsive purchases whereas cool colors led to more careful shopping act and prolonged search

Table 2. Color Scheme Influence on Consumer Attention and Purchase Intent

Layout/Signage Type	Satisfaction (%)	Time Spent (min)
Clear signage	80%	30
Unclear signage	45%	20
Grid layout	75%	35

The role of store layout and store signage in consumer movement or inspiration: There was close association of consumer movement with the retail stores through layout and signage that helped in determining the amount of time spent in a store and or emotional responses. Neat signage and improved layout of the stores enabled the consumer to feel their presence in the space and consequently have a superior shopping experience. Clear indications, stores in which customers could find his or her way around in different departments with the help of directional signs were more satisfied and spent more time on it. For example, the signage that reads that this is a fashion shop with men's products or new products would tell me why I was able to go round the store without undoing the waste of time. Shopping behavior effect, the shopper could easily locate or reach products which he wanted to obtain, through appropriate signage, so it did not only increase the satisfaction but also the likes to purchase. Store layout, stores with circular or grid types of layout did not make a consumer develop a sense of congestion and, therefore, he or she could freely follow through the store. This gave a superior impact to the consumers. Example insight, 'I was not scared that I would be lost between the aisles and I noted that I spent more time in the store to capture the products of the experience'. Interpretation, great impact on satisfaction and duration of stay, the regular customers understood the necessity of clear signs and the planning of an optimal store structure.

Table 3. Impact of Product Display Configuration on Consumer Attention

Display Type	Attention (%)	Likelihood of Purchase (%)
Thematic display	80%	75%
Colour-coordinated	70%	60%
Generic display	50%	45%

The table 3 reflects how thematic displays and ways of color-coding display of products influence their concentration and potential buy. The very product display configuration and the impact on consumer focus, the display of the products really made a difference in the concentration of the consumer. The bulk of the displays that had been designed strategically in either narrative or thematic way achieved the high level of engagement as well as purchases. Theme displays, displays of products that have generated a story or a theme (e.g. seasonal or even lifestyle based) had more of an effect in attracting the consumer. Way to go, as an illustration, a Christmas or a product grouping plan implemented caused emotion and longer time in looking at products and hence better inclined to making a purchase. Lesson of the example, 'the Christmas show prompted me that I should buy presents to my family members'. It all had nothing to do with what they were selling but the experience. Color coordinated displays, the people took a greater interest in the color-coordinated displays and in the display of products that were related to fashion and lifestyle products since they could get a glimpse as to how the product could be integrated in their lives. Insight example, 'I liked so much how they put the clothes according to their colors. It made me imagine my outfits and picture what exactly I wanted'. This is interpreted to mean that thematic displays have achieved a high degree of attention and probability of purchase by a good margin and it becomes a point that visual storytelling and causing a response through structuring of products can trigger an increase in conversion.

Table 4. Influence of AR Technology on Engagement and Purchase Intent

Interaction Type	Emotional Engagement (%)	Likelihood of Purchase (%)
AR interaction	90%	80%
Traditional display	60%	50%

Comparative offline and online interaction in augmented reality: The table 4, compares the effect of AR interaction compared to traditional displays, on consumer engagement and purchase intent. Technological engagement through AR and interactive screens: There was also research on how technology such as augmented reality enabled consumers to enjoy high levels of interaction. This aspect was most especially famous in trendy shops where one could imagine how they could appear wearing those items. Another tip regarding the AR mirror: 'Trying on jackets of various colors was a great experience, and I could immediately see how it seems on me'. Influence on consumer activity, the interactive AR enhanced the emotional connection in the viewer in monumental proportions by the report that stated that it was also much more likely to spend several minutes more out of their way and make a purchase. Interpretation, emotional engagement benefited greatly with an AR technology, which was reflected in increased consumer activity and purchasing intention as compared to traditional displays.

The form of analysis utilized in this paper provides meaningful insights into the manner in which the visual merchandising elements attract consumer attention as well as the purchasing behavior. Nevertheless, the hint given by the reviewer to study the interdependence of the color schemes and consumer purchase preferences also offers an important chance of exploring the issue further. Although the research talked about the relevance of warm and cool colors in guiding consumer attention behavior and decision about the amount of time spent on the store, a further and deeper insight into how these colors affect specifically purchasing intentions and choices would add more insight to the research.

As an example, it has also been established that warm colors include red and yellow because they give a feeling of urgency and excitement and this is attributed to impulse buying behavior (Expert Market Research, 2024). This is in line with the study that indicated warm colors cause the consumer to move faster in making decisions during purchases. Moreover, cool colors such as blue and green are also associated with the feeling of trust and relaxation that is likely to help make more considered and thoughtful shopping choices (ENDVR, 2025). This relationship implies that cool color can lead to a new focus on the purchases, and higher value items can be chosen as in the case of the study.

Moreover, the analysis of color preference in the light of cultural context would complicate the process more. As emphasized by Yin (2018), cultural influences of the aspects of visual merchandising play a significant role when it comes to the interpretation of consumer reactions to visual merchandising in various markets. In Malaysia where culture is a factor in consumer decision-making, the psychological representations of the colors may not be the same in all consumer categories, and this might affect the preferences of the consumer within the fashion industries, electronic industries and the food industries.

Using the phenomenon of color associations between certain products being placed in a particular place and some people buying them, the research may also demonstrate how visual merchandising may be adjusted to suit consumers in different retailing environments due to specific color associations.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how the visual merchandising factors such as choice of colours, store design, use of signs, product presentation displays and technology played a role in attracting consumer focus within the Malaysian retail market. The research provides considerable insight into the influence of these factors on consumer behaviour and purchasing behaviour by using a qualitative case study method which combines in-store observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion.

The results reveal that colour schemes are indispensable when attracting the attention of consumers, where warm colours stimulate impulsive purchases and cool ones help make more rational purchase decisions. This complies with the previous literature in case other researchers argued that colour psychology influences the emotion of a consumer and may affect the buying process (Expert Market Research, 2024). Moreover, the arrangement and labelling were determined to be the critical variables in guiding the consumer passage in stores, augmenting the shopping experience, and the probability of the purchase, which is in agreement with the previous studies on store navigation and buyer interaction (ENDVR, 2025).

Augmented reality (AR) was introduced as a major influence in the retail store to enhance brand-consumer interaction since customers are enabled to evaluate their products in real-life conditions, increasing the recognition of the brand (Visual Merchandising Company, 2024). Such level of technological involvement does not only make customers interact more but also maximize on their purchase intent, and this confirms that interactive technologies are gradually becoming an indispensable aspect of the contemporary visual merchandise approaches (Creswell, 2014).

As an industry insight, these have shown that strategic investment in visual merchandising is the way to go to achieve an immersive and emotionally evocative retail universe. With the help of colours psychology, store designs, and technological devices such as augmented reality, retailers receive the opportunity to involve customers and create a more engaging experience both in-store and online, prolong their stay in the store, and purchase more. The strategies can then be adapted by retailers operating in

Malaysia specifically who can take into consideration the cultural and demographic peculiarities of their consumers and thereby enhance customer retention and brand loyalty.

Academically, the study will provide input in the broad literature that is available on consumer behaviour and retail design with particular regard to the effect that the visual merchandising component has on shopping behaviour in the Malaysian scenario. It is important to note that this research showed visible limitations in cross-disciplinary studies because the relation between ecological stimuli and consumer behaviour is rather difficult to understand and, therefore, it is necessary to combine the knowledge of marketing, psychology, and retail management in this field of research (Yin, 2018).

The complex connectivity between colour schemes and the purchase wants could be studied further and the research may consider the cultural influence in Malaysia on purchase wants. Expanding the scope of the psychological effects of visual merchandising through different retail industries, including fashion, electronics, and food, future studies could provide even more specific answers to retailers interested in improvement of their stores and customer experience (Yin, 2018).

To summarize, this paper contains not only important practical implications of this work in terms of optimizing the strategy of store design by retailers but also has great importance in the academic area of visual merchandising. Due to the ongoing development of the retailing environment, which keeps pace with new technologies and a shifting set of consumer preferences, additional study into the psychological impacts of visual merchandising will remain imperative not only to the professionals in the industry, but also to scholars.

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