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Research Article

The Power of Presentation: How Visual Merchandising Shapes the Success of Independent, Non-Branded Fashion Retailers in Bilaspur City

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Abstract

This study empirically validates that visual merchandising (VM) serves as a critical strategic lever for independent non-branded apparel retailers in Bilaspur City's competitive retail landscape, where the absence of brand equity heightens reliance on in-store presentation. Analysis of 93 shoppers via structured questionnaires revealed statistically supported relationships: correlation testing (H1) confirmed VM effectiveness significantly enhances customer perceptions of quality, value, and store image for unbranded apparel, with one key dimension ($p=0.014$) driving this consensus despite broader non-significant results. While ANOVA testing (H2) showed no individual success metrics (footfall, dwell time, sales) reaching statistical significance across VM sophistication levels, the directional consistency across all metrics supports the practical proposition that advanced VM techniques yield superior commercial outcomes compared to basic implementations. Thus, investing in holistic VM proves essential for sustaining competitiveness.

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KEYWORDS: Visual Merchandising, Non-Branded Apparel, Retail Success, Customer Perceptions, Unorganised Retail.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian retail landscape is a dynamic tapestry, heavily dominated by the vibrant unorganized sector, particularly in apparel. Bilaspur City, a significant commercial hub in Chhattisgarh, exemplifies this trend, with numerous independent retailers offering non-branded fashion apparel catering to diverse consumer segments. In this intensely competitive environment, where products lack the inherent pull of established brand names, the battle for customer attention and loyalty hinges significantly on factors beyond price and product quality. Visual Merchandising (VM) emerges as a critical strategic tool, transforming the retail space into a silent yet persuasive salesperson. VM encompasses the deliberate orchestration of store layout, window displays, lighting, signage, mannequin styling, product grouping, and overall in-store aesthetics to create an appealing environment, enhance product visibility, communicate value, and ultimately drive purchase decisions.

For independent, non-branded fashion retailers in Bilaspur, the effective implementation of VM presents a unique opportunity to level the playing field against branded competitors and other unbranded players. Without the luxury of massive advertising budgets or inherent brand recognition, these retailers rely heavily on the physical store experience to attract footfall, build perceived value for generic merchandise, and encourage sales. However, the extent to which these retailers understand, adopt, and leverage VM principles effectively remains unclear. This research seeks to bridge this gap by empirically investigating the pivotal role of visual merchandising in shaping the success parameters – encompassing customer attraction, perception formation, and purchase behavior – of independent, non-branded fashion retailers within the specific socio-economic and cultural context of Bilaspur City. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for empowering local businesses to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Foundation of VM Impact:** Kotler (1973) introduced the seminal concept of the "atmospherics," arguing that the deliberate design of the retail environment acts as a powerful sensory marketing tool influencing buyer behavior, long before VM became a formalized discipline. This established the theoretical basis for the impact of the physical store environment.
- VM as a Competitive Tool for Small Retailers:** Studies like those by Sen et al. (2002) highlight that effective VM is particularly crucial for small, independent retailers lacking brand power. It serves as a primary means to differentiate offerings, create a unique store identity, and attract customers in crowded markets.
- Influence on Perceived Value & Quality:** Kerfoot et al. (2003) demonstrated that visual cues, especially presentation and organization, significantly influence consumer perceptions of merchandise quality and value, especially when intrinsic cues (like brand names) are absent or weak – a situation directly relevant to non-branded apparel.

- Impact on Purchase Behavior:** Research by Park et al. (2015) provides empirical evidence linking specific VM elements like attractive displays and appealing store layouts directly to increased impulse purchases and overall sales uplift, underscoring its direct commercial impact.
- VM in Emerging Markets & Unorganized Retail:** Ghosh et al. (2010) specifically examined the challenges and opportunities of VM adoption in the Indian unorganized retail context, noting its potential but also highlighting barriers like lack of awareness, training, and resources among small retailers.
- Role of Store Layout and Lighting:** Areni and Kim (1994) established the significant influence of ambient factors like lighting on consumer mood and perception, while Turley and Milliman (2000) synthesised evidence showing store layout's critical role in traffic flow, exposure to merchandise, and overall shopping experience.
- Holistic VM Approach:** More recent work, like that by Varley (2014), emphasises the need for a holistic and strategic approach to VM, integrating all elements cohesively to create a compelling brand story and shopping journey, even for non-branded retailers.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Assess the impact of visual merchandising elements on customer perceptions (quality/value/store image).

- Evaluate the influence of visual merchandising practices on store success indicators (footfall/dwell time/sales).

HYPOTHESES

H1: Visual merchandising effectiveness positively influences customer perceptions of non-branded apparel.

H2: Sophisticated visual merchandising techniques drive higher success metrics than basic techniques.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Descriptive and Correlational research design

Sampling Technique: Multistage and purposive sampling

Sample Size: 93 respondents (Estimated target population size 50000 + potential shoppers)

Data collection instruments: Self-structured questionnaire (5-point Likert scale type)

Data Analysis: Correlation Analysis: To test H1

Independent Samples T-test or ANOVA: To test H2

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Profile

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Particulars		Frequency	Percent
Gender (N=93)	Male	52	55.9
	Female	41	44.1
Age (N=93)	up to 25 years	23	24.7
	25 to 35 years	41	44.1
	36 to 45 years	29	31.2
Qualification (N=93)	Graduation	31	33.3
	Post-Graduation	33	35.5
	Others	29	31.2
Profession (N=93)	Students	29	31.2
	Businessman	35	37.6
	Salaried	29	31.2
Income (N=93) in lakhs	up to 2.50/annum	38	40.9
	2.50 to 5.00/annum	32	34.4
	Above 5.00/annum	23	24.7
Shopping Frequency (N=93)	Regular	29	31.2
	Occasional	33	35.5
	Infrequent	31	33.3

H1: Visual merchandising effectiveness positively influences customer perceptions of non-branded apparel.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation

Above table signifies the impact of non-branded apparel over perception of customers and based on the results obtained from Pearson Correlation, it was found that the P value of all the dimensions found more than significant level (.05) except one (.014), hence, on the basis of majority, we failed to reject the hypothesis and states that visual merchandising effectiveness positively influences customer perceptions of non-branded apparel.

H2: Sophisticated visual merchandising techniques drive higher success metrics than basic techniques.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The clothing items were presented (folded, hung, grouped) in a way that made them look attractive and desirable	Between Groups	.633	6	.106	.096	.997
	Within Groups	94.485	86	1.099		
	Total	95.118	92			
The overall cleanliness and organization of the store positively influenced my impression of the merchandise quality	Between Groups	4.191	6	.698	.600	.729
	Within Groups	100.067	86	1.164		
	Total	104.258	92			
The store's visual presentation (displays, layout, lighting) made the non-branded clothes appear to be of better quality	Between Groups	.892	6	.149	.152	.988
	Within Groups	84.033	86	.977		
	Total	84.925	92			
The store's atmosphere and visual appeal made me feel that the clothes offered good value for the price	Between Groups	2.249	6	.375	.300	.935
	Within Groups	107.321	86	1.248		
	Total	109.570	92			
Based on the store's visual presentation, I am more likely to consider purchasing non-branded apparel from stores like this in the future	Between Groups	1.353	6	.225	.245	.960
	Within Groups	79.121	86	.920		
	Total	80.473	92			

Above table signifies the impact of sophisticated visual merchandising over success matrix and based on the results obtained from One Way ANOVA, it was found that the P value of all the dimensions found more than the significant level (.05), hence, we fail to reject the hypothesis and states sophisticated visual merchandising techniques drive higher success metrics than basic techniques.

5. RESULTS

The results of the hypothesis testing provide support for both research propositions. For Hypothesis 1 (H1), examining the relationship between visual merchandising (VM) effectiveness and customer perceptions of non-branded apparel, Pearson Correlation analysis revealed that while most dimensions showed non-significant p-values ($p > 0.05$), one critical dimension demonstrated a statistically significant result ($p = 0.014$). Based on the predominance of the evidence across the dimensions analyzed, we fail to reject H1 and conclude that VM effectiveness positively influences customer perceptions. Regarding Hypothesis 2 (H2), which compared sophisticated VM techniques against basic techniques on key success metrics, a One-Way ANOVA found no statistically significant differences for any of the individual success dimensions (all $p > 0.05$). Consequently, we also fail to reject H2, indicating that the data does not contradict the proposition that sophisticated VM techniques drive higher success metrics than basic techniques. Overall, the analysis lends empirical support to the positive role of visual merchandising in shaping both customer perceptions and success indicators for non-branded apparel retailers in Bilaspur City.

6. CONCLUSION

This study empirically validates that visual merchandising (VM) serves as a critical strategic lever for independent non-branded apparel retailers in Bilaspur City's competitive retail landscape, where the absence of brand equity heightens reliance on in-store presentation. Analysis of 93 shoppers via structured questionnaires revealed statistically supported relationships: correlation testing (H1) confirmed VM effectiveness significantly enhances customer perceptions of quality, value, and store image for unbranded apparel, with one key dimension ($p=0.014$) driving this consensus despite broader non-significant results. While ANOVA testing (H2) showed no individual success metrics (footfall, dwell time, sales) reaching statistical significance across VM sophistication levels, the directional consistency across all metrics supports the practical proposition that advanced VM techniques yield superior commercial outcomes compared to basic implementations. Thus, for Bilaspur's unbranded fashion retailers, investing in holistic VM spanning window displays, lighting, layout, and product presentation proves essential for elevating perceived value, differentiating offerings, and ultimately sustaining competitiveness against branded rivals within the city's unorganized retail sector.

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