

A study on impact of theme based window displays on increasing foot traffic of apparel retail outlet

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Abstract. Window displays are one of the most important elements of visual merchandising. The window displays contribute significantly on improving store traffic. There are different types of window displays and each window display create its own level of interest in a consumer and contributes to store traffic. The window displays can also be theme based. In this study, the impact of theme based window displays on store traffic is ascertained. The valentine theme was taken and a store window display and interior display was changed according to the theme. The open back window display type was used. After making changes to the display, a questionnaire was administered to 200 respondents without any age bar. The only condition was that these respondents should have viewed the earlier non theme display also apart from the theme based display. The answers from the customers were analysed to find out the usefulness of theme based display. The customers were asked about the display's influence, their perception about window display, their acceptability and the impact of window display on them. The changes done according to the theme in the interior display was required by 72% of the customers. More than 80% of respondents felt the theme based window display to be strong, clear and with full of life. The customers who felt theme based displays to be good and favourable were more than 70% compared to around 42% of them feeling the same with respect to non theme based displays. The theme based displays were found to be appealing for 81%, appropriate for 92%, effective for 79%, ethical for 95% and informative for 87% respondents whereas non theme based displays were found to be appealing for 38%, appropriate for 65%, effective for 38%, ethical for 98% and informative for 63%. It was found that the theme based window displays were preferred by the customers to a very great extent with 86.5% saying so. This study gives a good perspective about the importance of utilising theme based window displays in many apparel retail outlets in the future.

Keywords: Window display, Foot traffic, Theme, Visual merchandising, Apparel.

1 Introduction

Visual merchandising is a key aspect of apparel retail store. The store traffic and sales in apparel store increases based on the techniques of visual merchandising employed. Visual merchandising tools help in engaging and attracting a customer to visit a shop [1]. It also aids in generating more foot falls for a store where the customer visits just to see the exterior and interior of the store. The various elements of visual merchandising are window display, display of mannequin, floor merchandising, promotional signage and lighting [2]. The effect of visual merchandising on consumer behaviour and impulse purchase has been studied by various researchers where attempts are made to find the elements that mainly contribute for

influencing consumer behaviour [3,4,5]. A study by Mehta and Chugan stated that window display plays a very important role among all the elements in influencing a customer for impulse buying [6]. Many other works also report that window displays are an integral part of visual merchandising and more thrust can be given to that as it is the first interaction that the customer has with the store when he or she comes to the store or passes by the store. There are various types of window displays used to increase customer attention in an apparel retail outlet. They are closed window display, open back window display, semi-closed window display, open window display, corner window display, elevated window display, shadowbox display and island window display [7]. The interior display is classified as one time display, line of goods display, related merchandise display, variety or assortment display and build up display [8].

The window displays are also season based [9] and theme based [10,11]. The theme based displays involve setting the window display based on a theme relevant to the place, time, situation and context. The theme examples can be some important days like valentine's Day, mother's day, women's day, father's day, etc. It can also be based on some sports events happening or upcoming like cricket world cup, football world cup, Olympics. The other themes can be festivals like Diwali, Ramzan, Christmas; events in an area like local bull race, marathon; environment based themes like sustainability, greenery, nature; culture based, society based, etc. The theme based displays create some element of interest in a customer as they see something new and fresh breaking the monotony as customers look for more variety and assortment. However, it is essential that the theme is properly chosen as it should not offend any person, community, race, cast and creed. The theme should be relevant to the store and to customers who visit the store. It should also be relevant to window shoppers as there is a chance for them to become real shoppers when the display is liked by them.

Another main point to be considered is that the themes based displays should not be overdone as it may make the customer uncomfortable and may not visit the store. There should be due care taken while planning theme based displays. Its relevance, period, cost involved, efforts required and foot traffic expected should be clearly analysed before deciding to go with theme based displays. However, the theme based displays have lot of advantages as they generate huge traffic, creates interest in customers, makes window shoppers become real shoppers and also increases the goodwill of the store as the store is looked with respect for celebrating various events through theme based display.

Hence, in this study, it is attempted to study the impact of theme based window display in increasing foot traffic of apparel retail store. The theme based window displays are created and compared with non theme based displays on various aspects with the help of a questionnaires answered by the customers.

2 Materials And Methods

This study was carried out among 200 people who were customers of a family retail store in Coimbatore. There was no age restrictions followed in customer selection. The customers chosen were frequent visitors. The customers who answered the questionnaire were the ones who visited the store in January and February. In the month of January, normal window display without any theme was kept in the shop. In February, window display was based on the valentine's theme. The customers were given a set of questions to answer on how

they felt and reacted to displays and the impact of theme based window displays. The two types of displays are explained below:

Window display based on product and not theme

The selected store was using window display effectively as they had a large front facing in the first floor of the shop where they had a series of glass windows which were viewable by public moving in the streets. Behind the window, mannequins were arranged with dresses for all age groups. Some of the best dresses they had were put on display. The window display is shown in Fig 1.



Fig 1. Window display

This window display had bright lightings, 8 mannequins creatively dressed and displayed. There were attempts to ensure focus is on the right areas for the customers.

Theme based display

Another window display was created in the month of February based on the valentine day theme. Many websites were browsed to analyse the images of window display of shops which were done based on the Valentine's Day theme. Finally with the idea gained, a window display was implemented in the apparel retail outlet. For this window display, the foam sheets were cut into heart shapes. 50 hearts were cut, it was based on the size of the window and a huge heart shape was formed by attaching these small hearts. The colors that were selected to make the hearts were red, pink and white as our theme was Valentine's Day. In addition to the above white color, foam sheets were cut and placed at the top of the huge heart shape. It was placed in a circular shape with 3 sheets at the centre. The white colour was chosen since it is of a neutral color. The color harmony that was followed was monochromatic. There were 5 mannequins placed in the window display which were set within the huge heart shape. The garments put on the mannequins were empire line garments which were of red, pink and maroon color. It took a week to complete and implement the valentines theme based displays. The display shown in Fig 2 was kept for three weeks. The type of display was open back window display i.e., displaying same kind of merchandise in different colors and styles.



Fig 2. Window display based on valentine day theme

The display in the store interior was also changed to suit the theme with two different set up for first and ground floor. The ground floor set up is shown in Fig 3 and first floor set up is shown in Fig 4.



Fig 3. Ground floor interior display



Fig 4. First floor interior display

Questionnaire preparation and administration

The questionnaire consisted of two sections in which the first section was about collecting the demographic data of the customer. The average amount spent by customer for clothing purchase in a year, age and gender were asked. The second section consisted of questions related to the window displays. The questions asked are as follows: 1. Is the store window presentation thought provoking? 2. Do many thoughts come to the mind when looking at the store presentation? 3. Does the presentation made the customer imagine more than that was presented? 4. Did the display take more time to be understood?

The next set of questions was to find how the customers felt when looking at the window display. The following attributes were asked about the window display. The customer was asked to select one of the two options of different attributes. They are Appealing-Unappealing, Inappropriate-Appropriate, Ineffective-Effective, Unethical-Ethical and Uninformative-Informative. The next set of question was on feeling about window display whether customer felt a. Good-bad, b. Like-dislike, c. Favourable-Unfavourable. The next set of questions was on the thoughts that came to the customer when looking at the window display. The attributes were Weak-Strong, Unclear-Clear, Lifeless-Full of life. The customer had to choose either one of the attribute for all the above questions from the extreme pairs. The last two questions were a. Does theme based displays attract customers more than normal window displays? b. Do customers like interior displays to be also done according to the theme. The same questionnaire was filled two times for the two displays.

3 Results And Discussions

The survey questions answered by the customers were analysed and based on the responses, the following results were interpreted. The age of customers who answered the survey ranged between 18 and 56. The number of male respondents was 86 and female

respondents were 114. The average amount that was spent by the customers for purchase of apparel in a year was Rs.22,000.

Influence of window display on a customer

The answer for the questions on the influence of window display on a customer is shown in Fig 5. The theme based display was regarded as more thought provoking by 71% people whereas only 32.5% found the non theme based display to be thought provoking. This is because the theme creates interest in customers to check the products in the store. It kindles the customer and thereby it is more thought provoking. Only 20% felt that many thoughts come to their mind while looking at the non theme based display whereas 78% felt otherwise. This is because the theme based display creates more avenues of thinking to the customer especially about the theme and the background behind it. Normally the themes depend on some good events or festivals and so the thinking of the customer gets oriented towards it and they would try to connect with the theme more. 61.5% people felt that they imagined more than that was presented with theme based display whereas only 40.5% felt so with respect to non theme based display. The window displays should be clear enough for the customer to understand and any cluttering in that would affect store traffic. It was found that less than 14% of the people only had problems in understanding the display quickly. The results show that theme based window displays influence the customer to think more and imagine more. It also provokes the thoughts of the customer and connects it with good events and activities of the past.

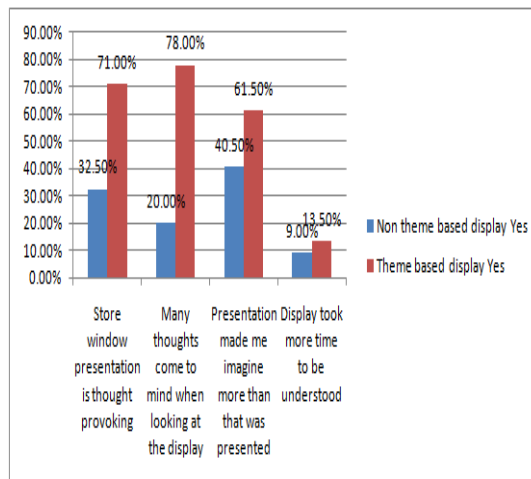


Fig 5. Influence of window display on a customer

Consumer perception towards window display

The consumer perception towards window display is shown in Fig 6. It is found that the theme based window displays outscored the non theme based display with respect to being appealing, appropriate, effective, ethical and informative. Both theme and non theme based displays were considered to be ethical by more than 95% people. However, the theme based display was found to be effective by 79% people whereas only 38% felt so with respect to non theme based display. 81% people felt theme based displays to be appealing whereas only 38% people felt non theme based displays to be informative. Another interesting finding is that 63% felt that non theme based displays were also informative while 87% felt theme based

displays to be informative. It looks like the window displays are informative and as it goes theme based, it becomes more informative. 92% felt theme based display to be appropriate and 65% felt non theme based displays to be appropriate more or less communicating that theme based displays do make customers relate to the events or festivals and connect better. Overall, theme based displays are preferred by customers as it attracts them more.

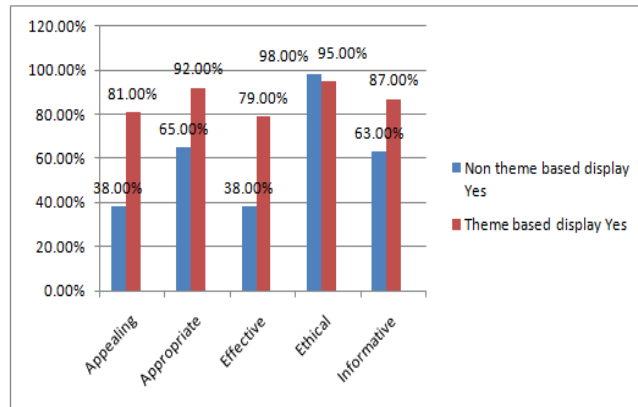


Fig 6. Consumer perception towards window display

Consumer acceptability of window display

The consumer acceptability of window display is shown in Fig 7. It is observed that majority of customers felt theme based displays to be good as 72% said so and 42% felt good about the non theme based display. It means 30% more felt that theme based displays are good. This is because of the interest created in a customer based on themes. Around 85% customers liked theme based display and only 58% liked non theme based display. So theme based displays are liked by more people as they are very attractive and have lot of new elements in it. The theme based displays were favoured by 83% which is 37% more than the non theme based display thereby signifying the importance for going about creating a theme based display.

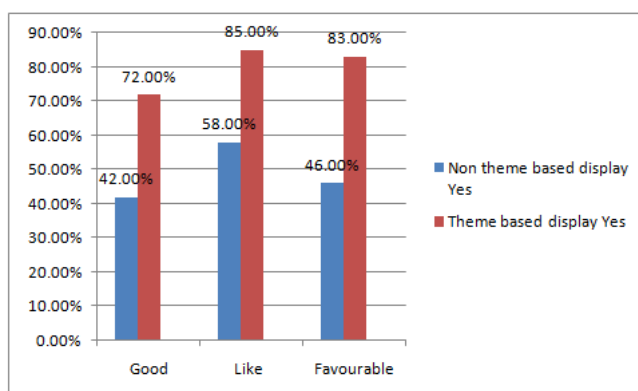


Fig 7. Consumer acceptability of window display

Impact of window display

The Fig 8 shows the impact of window display. The questions were asked on the strength, clarity and energy of the window displays. It was found that 90% of respondents felt theme based window displays to be strong which was 40% more than non theme based displays. This can be due to the message associated with theme based displays. They drive across the messages very promptly and engage the customer. So they are felt to be strong. Even 75% of people felt non theme based window display to be clear and there was no much difference between the two with 87% saying theme based window display was also clear. However with respect to energy or having more life in the display, 84% felt theme based displays to be full of life whereas only 41% felt non theme based displays to be full of life which signifies the influence of theme based window displays to a very great extent.

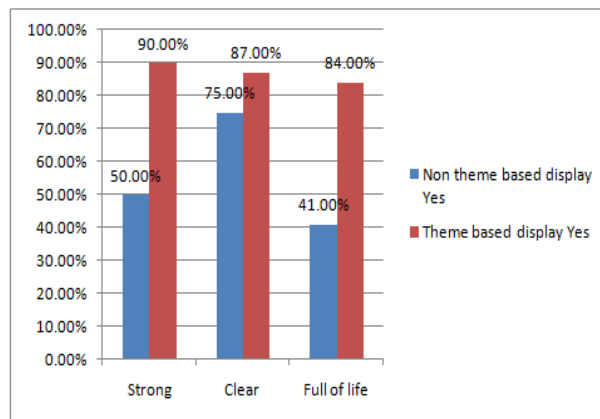


Fig 8. Impact of window display

Customer acceptance level of display

The last two questions were on the customer acceptance level of display. There were changes made to the interior display of the store based on the theme. So a question was asked whether customers like interior display also to be according to the theme and it was found that 72% of the respondents felt that the interior should also be arranged according to the theme. This is because, it creates more engagement for the customer and will make the customer dwell in that theme for sometime thereby making the customer feel comfortable.

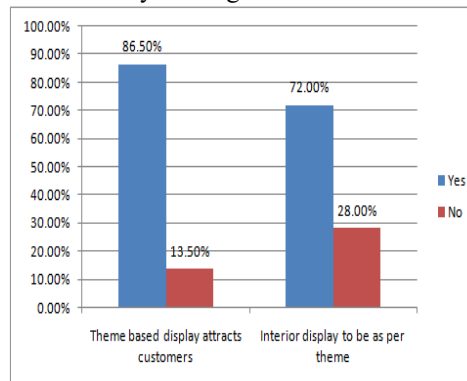


Fig 9. Acceptance level of display by a customer

The most important question was a straightforward one in which the customer was asked if the theme based display attracts them and it was very significant to note that 86.5% felt that theme based displays attract them. It gives a clear message that the apparel retailers should look for theme based displays to create more interest to the customers. However, it should be ensured that it is not over done and is appropriate to evoke the interests of the customer.

4 Conclusion

This study focused on analysing the importance of theme based window displays on store traffic. The study involved creating window display based on valentine day theme and also creating interior displays according to the theme. The customers were given a questionnaire to rate the theme based display and the non theme based display that was displayed during the month of January. Only customers who have seen both the displays were asked to fill the questionnaire and 200 respondents filled it. The age of respondents was between 18 and 56. The average amount utilised for apparel shopping was Rs.22,000. The influence of window display, consumer perception towards window display, consumer acceptability of window display, impact of window display on a customer and customer acceptance level of display was studied with the help of respondents' answers. It was observed that the theme based displays were found to have more influence among the two displays as 71% felt that to be thought provoking. It was also found to be more appealing, appropriate, effective, ethical and informative. The theme based displays were considered to be full of life by 84% customers. The theme based display was attractive to 86.5% customers on a whole thereby indicating its competitive edge over non theme based displays. This study has given a clear idea on the importance of theme based window display on increasing the store traffic and attractiveness of an apparel retail store. It is a main focus area for apparel retailers in the future to generate more business especially after the corona virus pandemic as many retail outlets are going to compete against each other. The innovation is going to be a key for creating and sustaining business in the future.

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