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Impact of Visual Merchandising on Consumers' Behaviour while Buying Apparels

In the 2/2013 issue of the journal "Konsumpcja i Rozwój", there was published the article based on the literature review concerning the impact of visual merchandising (VM) on consumers' behaviour, containing theoretical considerations on this issue.

This article is a continuance of these problems and presents findings of empirical research on impact of visual merchandising on consumers' behaviour in their natural environment, which are exemplification of the theoretical contents presented in the previous article.

Introduction

An aim of the article is to identify the factors and mechanism of visual merchandising's impact on consumers' behaviour when buying apparel as well as description of consumers' behaviour and growth of motivation to buy leading to apparel purchasing.

The put forward main thesis, that visual merchandising motivates customers to buy in shops owing to presentation of products in compliance with its rules, was verified by means of the following auxiliary hypotheses:

1. visual merchandising motivates more efficiently women than men to buy apparel,
2. visual merchandising motivates more efficiently younger people than elder to buy apparel,
3. visual merchandising motivates more efficiently individuals with higher incomes than those with lower incomes to buy apparel.

Visual merchandising as an element of marketing communication is aimed at encouraging consumers to buy through a relevant exposure of merchandise. The growth of customers' motivation to buy, leading to an increase of the sales volume in firms, is the principal purpose of visual merchandising. As J. Blythe remarks, "Visual merchandising, shortly speaking, is a way of presentation of goods at the point of sale" (Blythe, 2000, p. 184), whereas the conscious use of visual merchandising techniques is based, to a large degree, on learning from achievements, *inter alia*, of such disciplines as essentials of psychology, sociology, what is used by large concerns in order to achieve the intended goal.

The market for apparel in Poland after the year 1989 was undergoing many dynamic changes leading to entering the market by new foreign brands of apparel, earlier inaccessible in the Polish market. In the epoch of great competition of clothing firms, visual merchandising is today one of many forms of distinguishing, maintaining the competitive advantage. Being an important element of activities carried out by a firm in the market, it decides attraction of a new group of consumers and, at the same time, it is able to retain the previous customers, by way of meeting their needs and setting forth an adequate atmosphere at the point of sale.

In her article, the author presented the research method, the course of empirical survey and its findings verifying the put forward research hypotheses.

The research method

The research purpose was to learn and determine the factors and mechanism of visual merchandising's impact on consumers' behaviour in their natural environment (Fig. 1).

Visual merchandising's impact, which affects the growth of motivation to buy apparel, is a multi-stage process. The first stage of the process is acting by way of visual merchandising techniques and means on consumers, where the key role is played by sight. It makes noticing the apparel and feeling the need to have it. The second stage of the process is creation of a definite consumer's attitude towards the specific apparel. The third stage of action of visual merchandising is the growth of consumers' motivation to buy and the desire to buy apparel. The last stage of the process is purchase of apparel, which is an effect of visual merchandising's action and it finally meets the consumers' needs.

To achieve the intended research objective, the author used the method of quantitative research with elements of the qualitative method. The choice of this complementary research method allowed provision of coherent conclusions on efficiency of visual merchandising while buying apparel.

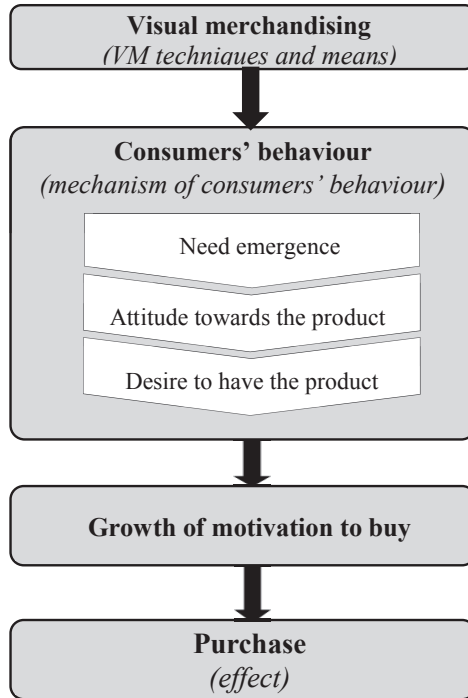
All the hypotheses were verified on the basis of an experimental research allowing determination the cause and effect relations between visual merchandising and consumers' behaviour as well as a survey questionnaire which made it possible to obtain from consumers in a direct way the information how they perceive the phenomenon in question.

The carried out experimental research was based on the quasi-experimental procedure without the initial measurement, what is presented in Fig. 2.

The research model based on the quasi-experimental scheme, where the independent variable was added to the presentation of apparel collections of the tools and principles of visual merchandising, and the dependent variable was consumers' as-

Figure 1

The factors and mechanism of the process of effect of visual merchandising on growth of motivation to buy apparel

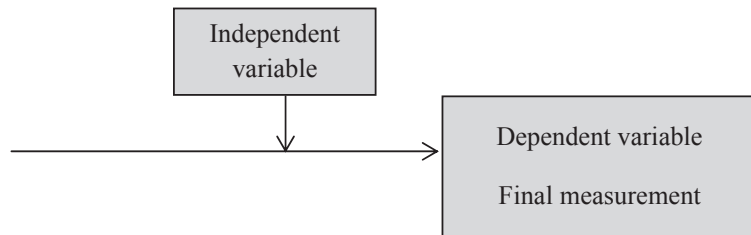


Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 2

Quasi-experimental scheme with one group and the final measurement

Experimental group (E)



Source: Maison, Noga-Bogomilski (2007, p. 207).

assessment of the apparel presentations, allowed determination of the impact of visual merchandising on consumers' behaviour in their natural environment.

The research was carried out in June 2013 on the sample of 1000 individuals in a shop of one of the international apparel brands having their branch in Poland. For the purpose of correct carrying out the research and elimination of errors, one week before the actual research, in the same place there had been carried out a pilot survey preceding the experiment on a group of 100 respondents. The actual research lasted 4 days in the two subsequent weeks. One week was devoted to survey of the collection for women, the second week – to examination of the men's collection. During every day, there were surveyed 250 individuals (125 women and 125 men). The research was conducted on Wednesday and Thursday as the semi-annual observation of the average number of customers' visits and sales on those days in the place of research being carried out was very much similar.

There was purposely selected for the research the brand which is not recognisable in Poland in order to avoid the situation that the people participating in the survey visited the shop because of their identification with the brand.

Course of the research

The individuals taking part in the experiment were watching two collections: for women and for men. The same women's collection was presented on one day with the use of principles of visual merchandising, while on the second day without the principles of visual merchandising. The men's collection was presented in the same way. The persons who had watched the women's and men's collection were asked to fill in the questionnaire on evaluation of that presentation.

The behaviour of the individuals taking part in the research was video recorded in order to verify the time spent at the presentation as well as of a detailed analysis of clients' behaviour. Clients were not informed that they were recorded having in mind their behaviour should remain natural. The customer's awareness that he or she is observed often causes that they 'modify' their behaviour.

Moreover, the research was supplemented with a photographic documentation and a statement of the daily turnover on sales of the collections of apparel used in the research. Calculations were made with the use of the software STATISTICA PL.

The research consisted in comparison and assessment of the presentation of both women's and men's collection, making use of the principles of visual merchandising and not applying those principles. While preparing the presentation of the women's and men's collection, applying the principles of visual merchandising, researchers focused primarily on the presentation of the collection on the height of eyes of the average customer, on the frontal and not on the side presentation of apparel, on showing a ready set of apparel to be bought, on a consistent selection of accessories, on acces-

sibility of the products on shelves as well as on the metal elements, on arrangement of mannequins and torsos facing forward the customer, on light arrangement enabling emphasis of the crucial points in the presentation, on stylization of the mannequins and torsos encouraging to buy the whole proposed set of apparel, on the use of colours of the collection in construction of the presentation and on the use of podiums to mannequins in order to increase clients' attention on the products exhibited thereon.

In order to verify whether better assessed by clients is the collection presented in compliance with the principles of visual merchandising or the presentation, which does not apply those principles, as well as which apparels are sold better, the author used the main tools of visual merchandising such as mannequins, torsos, floor furniture, podiums, metal elements for wall presentation.

In the experiment, there were applied various techniques of visual merchandising such as stylization and proper setting up of mannequins, presentation of the collection on walls, tables and on the floor furniture, manipulation with light and colour as well as presentation of the merchandise at different heights.

It needs to be emphasised that the collection of apparels, which was used in the research, was the same on the day when it was presented in accordance with the principles of visual merchandising and on the day when the collection was presented not implementing those principles. The stock of apparels sold on the research day was replenished in the same amounts on the next day. This concerns all apparels, both from the women's collection and the men's one. This means that clients were evaluating the same collection of apparels, and only the way of its presentation changed.

Research findings

The analysis of research findings was based on the scheme of experimental survey taking into consideration the theory of consumers' behaviour in the market. The psychological and sociological sciences allow deepening the knowledge on marketing research in the area of consumers' behaviour and interpretation of consumers' behaviour towards the products being offered to them.

To verify the earlier mentioned dependence that visual merchandising motivates clients to buy in shops owing to presentation of products in compliance with its principles, it was considered that it would be proper to compare the evaluation made by the clients of the women's and men's collection presented without the use of principles of visual merchandising and the evaluation of the collection with those principles.

The tool for comparison was the survey questionnaire and the question in it: "While coming with the intent to do a specific purchase would you buy anything from the presentation even though you do not feel such a need now?"

Table 1

**Intent to buy apparel taking into account the type of presentation
(% of indications)**

Type of presentation	YES	NO
without VM principles	21.7	78.3
with VM principles	52.3	47.7

Source: Author's own surveys, June 2013.

As the carried out research findings show, the number of individuals who would have decided to buy the apparel presented in compliance with the principles of visual merchandising (52%) is definitely higher than those who were watching the collections without those principles (22%) - Table 1.

The research findings also indicated the dependences between some traits of the surveyed respondents such as sex, age and income situation and the desire to buy the presented collection with the principles and without the principles of visual merchandising (Tab. 2).

Table 2

**Intent to buy apparel taking into account the type of presentation
and traits of the respondents surveyed (% of indications)**

Specification	Intent to buy apparel			
	Presentation without VM principles		Presentation with VM principles	
	yes	no	yes	no
Sex:				
woman	35.3	64.7	91.2	8.8
man	8.1	91.9	13.2	86.8
Age:				
up to 25 years	29.2	70.8	90.5	9.5
more than 25 years	20.6	79.4	48.8	51.2
Income situation:				
low income	8.7	91.3	35.2	64.8
high income	30.6	69.4	100.0	-

Source: As in Table 1.

The analysis of the research findings confirmed the importance of sex as the factor differentiating market behaviour.

On the basis of obtained results one may ascertain that significantly greater interest in a purchase was displayed by women (91%) than men (13%). One may also notice that the women, who were presented with the collection with the use of principles of visual merchandising, were more prone to buy (91%) than the women who were watching the same collection without the use of those principles (35%).

And among men, one may observe a minor dependence in this respect (probability at the level of $p=0.06$). The men watching the collection with use of the principles of visual merchandising would more readily buy those products from the presentation (13%) than the men who were watching the same collection without the use of those principles (8%).

The hypothesis that visual merchandising motivates more efficiently to buy apparel women than men is, therefore, verified in the research positively.

In the research, there was also taken into account the age criterion as consumers belonging to different age groups have the same needs and desires, and with age there are changing the preferences of buying many products.

Taking into account the question of motivation to buy, one may notice that among the people who saw the presentation complying the principles of visual merchandising more persons motivated to buy is at the age below 25 years (90%) than elder people (48%). This is a highly statistically significant dependence, and the group described as 'younger' means persons at the age of ≤ 25 years, whereas the group described as 'older' was individuals at the age of > 25 years.

As the findings of the carried out research show, younger people are more prone to buy the apparels presented in accordance with the principles of visual merchandising than elder people. This evidences that visual merchandising motivates more efficiently to buy apparel younger people than elder ones and, at the same time, does verify the hypothesis put forward (hypothesis 2).

The next criterion specified in the research was respondents' income as one of the basic factors shaping consumers' behaviour is their financial situation. Table 2 presents the results concerning the impact of visual merchandising on individuals with low and high income.

The individuals taking part in the research were describing in the questionnaire their material status as very high, high, average, low and very low. For the purpose of analysis, it was assumed that the persons, who described their level of income as low, are the individuals with very low or low incomes. The individuals, who described their level of incomes as high, are the persons with very high and high incomes. In the analysis, there are not taken into account the level of incomes described as the average, in order to avoid an erroneous qualifying it to the above-mentioned groups and thus having strong impact on the research outcome.

On the basis of research carried out one may also state that individuals motivated to buy products during presentation of the collection with the principles of visual mer-

chandising are more affluent. Individuals with higher incomes would definitely more often buy the products from the collection presented according to those principles (100%) than those persons who achieve incomes at the low level (25%).

At the same time, the individuals with high incomes, watching the same collection, but without the principles of visual merchandising, would buy it more seldom (30%) compared to the same collection presented with the principles of visual merchandising (100%). Also the people, who have low income, were less interested in a purchase of products from the same presentation without the principles of visual merchandising (3%) than from the same collection making use of those principles (8%). The research confirms the thesis that visual merchandising motivates more efficiently to buy apparel individuals with higher incomes than those with lower incomes.

Therefore, the obtained results indicate a strong dependence between visual merchandising and the traits of the respondents surveyed such as consumers' sex, age and income. They confirm a greater motivation to buy apparel in case of women, younger people and those with higher incomes. Apart from determination of the impact of visual merchandising on motivation to buy, an aim of the carried out empirical surveys was to check if visual merchandising has actually its impact on the level of sale of the presented products.

The results of daily volume of sales of apparel in the course of research show that visual merchandising has greater impact on sales of the women's collection than men's. At the same time, one may see that presenting the ladies' collection in accordance with the principles of visual merchandising yielded sales of those apparels were 2.5 times higher compared to the presentation of the collection without application of those principles.

Interesting is that in case of the men's collection there is not so apparent growth of sales, and using the data one may state that presenting the men's collection in accordance with the principles of visual merchandising gave sales of apparels only insignificantly higher than in case of the presentation of the same collection without the principles of visual merchandising.

At the same time one may, therefore, state that visual merchandising affects the volume of sales of apparel in the shop, whereas the daily growth of the volume of sales of the ladies' collection is considerably greater compared to the growth of the volume of sales of the men's collection.

In the empirical research, there was also analysed a further important factor that influenced the research findings, i.e. the time spent by the respondent in the shop with the presented collections of apparel (the time was reported in seconds). The findings analysis allowed determination of the respondents' interest in the presentation of the women's and men's collection, making use of the principles of visual merchandising as well as the presentations without use of those principles.

Table 3**Average time spent by the respondents by apparel taking into account the type of presentation, type of collection and sex of the respondents (in seconds)**

Specification	Average time spent by respondents by the presented apparels
Type of presentation: without VM principles	10.27
with VM principles	81.36
Type of collection: women's collection	74.03
men's collection	52.25
Sex: woman	55.26
man	66.93

Source: As in Table 1.

Table 3 presents the average time spent by the respondents by apparels, taking into account the type of presentation, type of collection and the respondents' sex. This allows noticing that definitely more time all respondents spent by presentation of the collection complying with the principles of visual merchandising (81.36 seconds) than by the collection without the use of those principles (10.27 seconds), but, what is interesting, irrespective of the sex, the respondents spent more time by the ladies' collection (74.03 seconds) than the men's one (52.25 seconds), and on average the man spent not much less time by the presentations (55.26 seconds) than the woman (66.93 seconds).

One may notice that both women and men spent more time by the collections presented in accordance with the principles of visual merchandising than without those principles (in every case), while the greatest attention they paid the collections addressed to them, e.g. women most of their attention devoted to the ladies' collections complying with the principles of visual merchandising, while men – to the men's collections with those principles.

Summing up, the findings of the research carried out by the quantitative method with elements of qualitative research confirm that to more motivate clients to buy apparel and to extend the time of clients' interest in the presented collections and, finally, to raise the volume of sales of apparels in shops, it is proper to present apparel with use of the principles of visual merchandising, though addressing it to customers taking into account their age, sex and level of income.

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Summary

In her article, the author presented the findings of the research on impact of visual merchandising on consumers' behaviour while buying apparel. In the research, there is used the method of the quantitative nature with elements of qualitative methods; the research was carried out on the sample of 1000 individuals in June 2013 in one of the Warsaw shopping centres.

On the basis of the carried out research one may state that there is a strong dependence between visual merchandising and consumers' behaviour while buying apparel. One may also say that the presentation of products complying with those principles directly affects an increase of sales and it has a stronger impact on women than on men, on younger people than elder ones as well as on individuals with higher incomes than on individuals having lower incomes. Moreover, the presentation of apparel, which takes into account the principles of visual merchandising, keeps the client for longer in the point of sale as well as raises their greater interest in the presented products.

Key words: visual merchandising, merchandising, marketing communication, consumer's behaviour.

JEL codes: M31

Wpływ *visual merchandisingu* na zachowania konsumentów przy zakupie odzieży

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badania dotyczącego wpływu *visual merchandising* na zachowania konsumentów przy zakupie odzieży. W badaniu wykorzystano

metodę o charakterze ilościowym z elementami metod jakościowych, które zostało zrealizowane na grupie 1000 osób w czerwcu 2013 r. w jednym z warszawskich centrów handlowych.

Na podstawie przeprowadzonego badania można stwierdzić, że istnieje silna zależność między *visual merchandisingiem* a zachowaniami konsumentów przy zakupie odzieży. Można też powiedzieć, że prezentacja produktów zgodna z tymi zasadami bezpośrednio wpływa na zwiększenie sprzedaży, przy czym mocniej oddziałuje na kobiety niż na mężczyzn, na osoby młodsze niż starsze oraz na osoby z większymi dochodami niż na osoby mające niższe dochody. Ponadto prezentacja odzieży uwzględniająca zasady *visual merchandisingu* dłużej zatrzymuje klienta w miejscu sprzedaży i wzbudza jego większe zainteresowanie prezentowanymi produktami.

Słowa kluczowe: *visual merchandising*, *merchandising*, komunikacja marketingowa, zachowania konsumenta.

Kody JEL: M31

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