



THE IMPACT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN COMPARISON WITH LUXURY AND RETAIL BRANDS

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Abstract

This study aims to find out how and to what extent outlets incorporate visual merchandising that appeals to the customers and lead to a potential purchase. Retail business in India is booming and there is a fierce competition between the retailers. Fashion retailers cannot always depend on the Price, Place, Promotion, and Product cannot always win.

An empirical study is aimed to find out the impact of visual merchandising on customer preference analysis in malls in Delhi. The study was based on a primary data and which was done through a questionnaire. The survey data was collected from 100 respondents in retail brands and 60 respondents in Luxury brands between the ages of 18 – 60 years in DLF Emporio, DLF Promenade mall, Ambience Mall Delhi. The dimension of visual merchandising i.e. window display, instore mannequin, floor merchandising promotional signage, proper lighting and good music in stores are an important visual merchandising element. These elements are studied and results reveal the importance of visual merchandising in fashion stores and its comparison in visual merchandising between retail and luxury brands.

1. Introduction

Indian retail industry is going through a transition phase. Most of the retailing in our country is still in the unorganized sector. Today's competition and the similarity of merchandise force each segment of the fashion industry to utilize visual merchandising to improve the desirability of products. Apparel retailers, especially, place more importance on visual merchandising to differentiate their offerings from others'. This paper is intended to present the comparison in retail brands and Luxury brands to find out impact of various dimensions of visual merchandising on consumer behaviour of the different customers visiting the retail stores and Luxury stores across the Delhi region.

2. Visual Merchandising – The Indian Way

The key objective of this research is to connect the gap between traditional Indian luxury and the Indian Luxury retail market. Unlike the western countries, where Visual merchandising receives highest priority in commercial planning of a product, the Indian industry's understanding and practice of the concept of VM is inadequate. Retailers do not understand how much visual merchandising can actually help them. Many retailers believe that they have been doing business for many years without the visual merchandising strategy. But retailers need to look at the perspective that the foreign competition is entering in its full swing and at this moment Indian retailers need to catch up the play to be successful.

Today, we notice many Indian retail projects are being designed by international design firms, who apply their superior technology, techniques and methodology. However, Visual merchandising by international designers may be efficient but Indian designed features today have the advantage of reaching the soul of the consumers.

3. Brand Experience

According to the 'Journal of Marketing' "Brand experience is conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments." . Shopping has become a brand experience rather than merely a transaction. The moment a real purchase takes place at the point of purchase where the decision on how much to buy is made. The store's future depends on what the consumer sees and experiences at the store.

4. Visual Merchandising

Visual Merchandising is defined as everything the customer sees, both exterior and interior, that creates a positive image of a business. It plays a major role in retailing which enhances products, support brands, increases traffic and sales and adds visual excitement. Ashish Jaiswal, Area visual merchandiser said 'The floor layout at the Zara store in Delhi was carefully planned. A display of folded products, act as an anchor or a focal point at the centre while sufficient space has been left around for the customers to circulate'. 'In result, attractive displays, visuals, and promotional items have the greatest potential impact on consumer behaviour. It gives the business an edge over competition. Sabeena, area visual merchandiser, Max Fashion, 'Changing the window display may not generate sudden sales, and that the long term effect of how its brand is evolving through the use of consistent goods, windows and instore display is more important.' Hina Hira, Assistant visual merchandiser, 'The first step when designing a window is to define a theme and the spirit in which you want to put things forward.' Sachin Rana, Visual Merchandiser Shoppersstop, 'These stores have a zone levels - A B C, where A being the



wall, B being the display table, and C being Gondola's. On A they display their latest merchandise, B they display their bestselling merchandises, and C they display their cut sizes.' Anshul Khandelwal, Visual Merchandiser Marks and Spencer, said 'All design elements of visual merchandising are important. Lighting is one of the most fundamental aspect of design. Bad lighting can change the appearance of the product, a yellow light on a brown bag can make it look red.

5. Consumer Behaviour

The world consumers live in is rich with ambience. When entering an apparel retail store, consumers act differently to the sensations and stimuli around them; they either pay attention to it or they ignore it. Each and every message created by an apparel retailer is done with a specific purpose in mind. Consumer behaviour can be defined as "The study of individuals, groups or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impact that these processes have on the consumer and society.

6. Retail Brands

The retailing industry in India is worth around 300b\$ (Indian Management-January 2007. According to a report compiled by Ganguly (www.indiaonestop.com/retailing.htm), there are around 5 million retail outlets of all sizes and styles. Lifestyle in India is changing from soberness to hedonism due to dual-income nuclear family unit, a steady shift towards an ambition of a global lifestyle. Each of the fashion stores competes to each store in order to make the customer enter the store and make a purchase. Archana Varma, Visual Merchandiser, Lifestyle, 'The Indian Customers spend mornings surfing in stores looking for latest styles or deals. In the large urban centres, apparel retailers like Shopper's Stop, Pantaloons, Lifestyle and others have popularized their private labels which have attracted urban shoppers. As new players emerge in the market to satisfy customer demand by placing themselves in attractive shopping malls. Successful visual merchandising displays have an effect on consumer emotion; consumers sometimes purchase products unconsciously depending on their current mood. Retailers want their stores to attract consumers by assisting them to find the merchandise they desire and to motivate them to make planned, unplanned and impulse purchases.

7. Luxury Brands

The concept of luxury has been present in various forms since the beginning of civilization. Although, the luxury industry is somehow small in terms of number of companies in this world compared to other industries, luxury fashion industry has been a multi-billion dollar industry in the world. The definition of luxury was fairly clear. Whatever the poor cannot have and the elite can was identified as luxury. A big brand like Chanel launched its 2012 Paris-Bombay Collection in December of 2011 and Hermès put out a limited-edition line of saris, which instantly drew the world's attention to the glamour and glitz of India. Luxury brands have thoroughly considered the significance of understanding India's spending power and times like weddings and festivals which are prime times for offering high-end, luxury items.

7.1 Entry of Luxury Brands in India

The last couple of years have seen a profusion of luxury brands into the Indian market: from stand-alone stores in five star hotels to luxury Malls, these labels which were previously only seen in international fashion magazines and high streets abroad, were now household names in India. With one of the highest levels of disposable incomes, the well-travelled Indian luxury consumer is being wooed by all. India's impressive growth story in luxury goods sales has been the result of a number of factors. Firstly, the traditional Indian custom of personal adornment has led to strong demand for luxury accessories, luxury jewellery and timepieces, and designer clothing and footwear. Louis Vuitton, Prada, Canali, Michael Kors, Armani, these brands are more successful in the metro cities in India. . Certainly Delhi and Mumbai display different consumer reactions and buying patterns for luxury brands.

8. Literature Review

Brand experience is conceptualized as "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Brakus et al., 2009). Visual merchandising is defined as "the presentation of a store/brand and its merchandise to the customer through the teamwork of the store's advertising, display, special events, fashion coordination, and merchandising departments in order to sell the goods and services offered by the store/company" (Mills, Paul, & Moorman, 1995, p. 2).. Kotler (1973) was the first one that used the "atmosphere" term described it as the design of store environment that can stimulate buyers' emotions and ultimately affect their purchase behaviour. This technique is defined as "Any kind of visual presentation of merchandise in the façade level in order to attract attention and ultimately to enter the store (Jiyeon, 2003, p. 5).Creating beautiful and inspiring windows is a great way to attract customers and draw into the (Swati Balla and Anurag's 2009). According to Hoyle (2003), a successful lighting at any retail store and business environments has the potential and probability to dramatically affect sales since lighting can increase the floor traffic, create visual interest, bring effect to the colour of merchandise and able to direct the customer going through the store



either deeper. Signs, labels, shelf tags, and other identification sign to provide direction, prices, or information on merchandise or policies is referred as a signage. It helps customer to understand information about offer and promotions (Swati Bhalla and Anurag 2009). Mannequin helps to fetch positive response and approval as one can see the design and entire outfit and can also empathize how the apparel will look like on them. Hence, mannequin industry also plays a major role in visual merchandising (Clark, 2007).

Retail store atmospherics may impact shopper behaviour. According to *Chain Store Age* (2004), the majority of consumers (63%) remember occasions when the store atmosphere caused them to buy more or spend more time at a store. Moreover, among those influenced by store atmosphere, almost half (45%) report that they spent not only more money in the store but, more time. Kapferer and Bastien (2009), the luxury goods are not perfect, but an affecting goods. It is the price, not the product that is sold to the customer. At this point, people want to own luxury goods just because it is expensive. They are not concerned much about quality. Sometimes they are not very happy with the function of the purchased luxury goods. Retail brand personality and values should be evident in the visual design of flagship stores (Nobbs, Moore, and Sheridan 2012). Carefully considered design and brand communications, such as signage, in the in-store environment differentiate a retailer from their competitors.

This study will provide information as to why visual merchandising should be considered an important component in terms of the comparison between retail brands and luxury brands. The paper tries to explore the dynamics of marketing programs by analysing significant perceptions that buyers have towards visual merchandising strategies. Demographic variables such as age, gender, occupation, income, analysed thoroughly for inference purpose.

9. Methodology

The study was intended to focus on the Impact of comparison of Visual Merchandising between retail brands and Luxury brands. The survey administered two sets of questionnaires; one set for the visual merchandisers and other for the customers. The questionnaire consisted of influence of visual merchandising and demographics. The method of research used in descriptive study, generally is survey method for collecting information related to the demographic and behavioural variables of the respondents. The first half part of the survey consisted of questions to determine the respondents demographic factors such as nationality, age, gender, income, and about how often you shop were studied. The other half included questions measuring visual merchandising practices in terms of apparel segment as a product category that was expected to influence the buying tendency.

The sampling technique was mall intercept method as customers who had purchased from retail and Luxury outlets were surveyed as they moved out of the store post their purchase. A structured questionnaire was developed for retail customers and Luxury Customers to collect data and distribute to a convince sample of 100 customers for retail and 60 customers for Luxury brands, both male and female whose age ranges from 20 – 60 years residing in Delhi. The questionnaires were highly structured and included multiple type questions. The customers were asked to choose any one option which they felt were apt. Percentage average method was used as statistical tool for data analysis. The survey was conducted in DLF Promenade mall, Ambience Mall, DLF Emporio Mall in Delhi.

10. Sampling Design

Target Population

The group was divided into three segments:-

1. Students/Graduates: Students in the age group of 18-30years who were fashion conscious. Shoppers in young age groups seem less seeking to visit stores to acquaint themselves with new ideas. The employability, income level were found to be less.

2. Middle Aged Category: Shoppers in the age group of 31-40 years are most controlled in their buying behaviour. Most probably with their household responsibilities and children in the family they exhibit more control in their buying content.

3. Working People: Shoppers at the age of 41-60 years are much are planned in their purchases than shoppers in other age group. Shoppers here are career oriented. Planned buying behaviour is reflected in this age group as their sense to dress and a possess wardrobe that matches their personality. These shoppers display high seeking and are open to seek ideas and wear private labels.

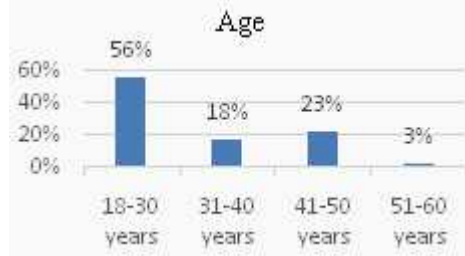
Study 1

Empirical Support for the Questionnaire:

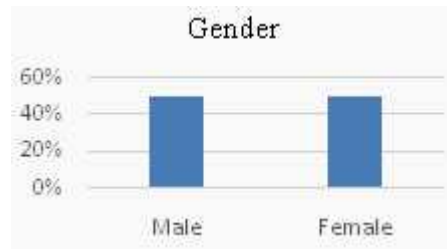
The Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Profile by Significant Factors on Retail Brands. Demographic profile of Retail brands of respondents is summarized as follows.

This survey for the retail brands is made up of 100 people, ranging from 18 – 60 years. The respondents were chosen among customers from Ambience Mall, Delhi.

Table 1: Demographic Profile (Age, Income, Gender, How Often do you Shop) of Retail Brands of Respondents



The study depicted, most of the respondents in the retail category were aged between 18 – 30 years (56%). Many of the respondents were teenagers, graduates or employees in various organisations followed by the age group of 41 – 50 years who were working class people. The least number of respondents in this group belonged to 51 – 60 years.



Segmentation of the population of the respondents for the purpose of the survey was based on gender was carried out as the outlook for both male and female respondents on various issues regarding merchandising and purchase decisions are different. According to the survey, the number of respondents for both male and female was equal in number (50%).



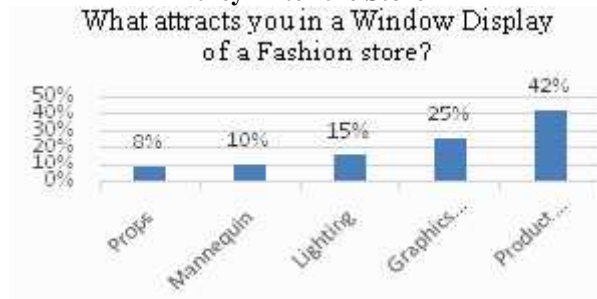
The average income was Rs. 20,000 – 40,000 and this justifies the rise of middle class and their aspiration for branded merchandise.



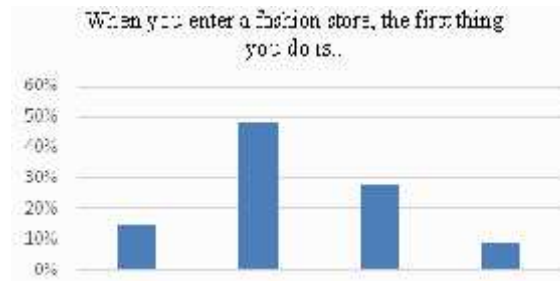
About 67% of the customers would shop on weekly basis as the teenage or graduate crowd would always want something different to wear ever week. 17 % of the other customers would shop monthly.

This table indicates that the descriptive statistical analysis for the consumer decision with respect to visual merchandising.

Table2: Customers Rating on What Attracts them in a Window Display and the First Thing a Customer does when they Enter the Store



From the table it is observed that about 42% of the respondents were attracted to product displays in the window of the fashion stores. The study denotes that the consumer behaviour has a strong relationship with the window display because when the consumers picture the display products it not only attracts the customer's attention but also arouses their urge to buying a product that is being displayed in the window.

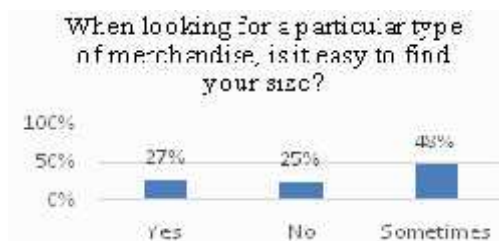


48% of the respondents do not follow any pattern but walks through the store as it leads them. This has very strong impact on the consumers because when a customer enters a store and sees a variety of products displayed on the shelf, it innovatively forces the customer to walk around the store and purchase something which they haven't planned for.

Table 3: Factors Affecting the Store Size and Looking for a Particular Type of Merchandise

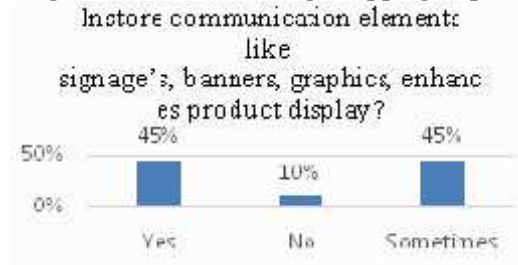


About 54% of the customers are not affected by the size of the store. Those who are loyal to a particular brand, the size of the store does not matter, but the look and feel and the merchandise displayed inside the store matters to them. Whereas for the 46% of the respondents the size of the store affects their buying behaviour as a few of the customers do not enter the store if the store is small

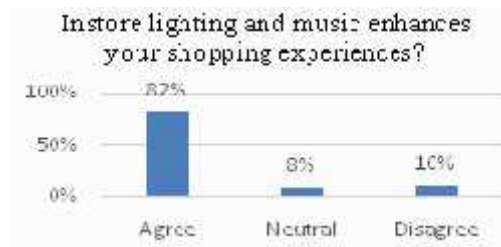


48% of the respondents sometimes find the exact size they are looking for, whereas 27% of the customers could easily be able to find their size. Moreover the orderly arrangement of the various items on the display was considered a great significance as it helped the respondents to go about their shopping easily with the least obstacles on the shop floor.

Table 4: Customer’s Preference on Instore Communication like Signage’s, Graphics Enhancing Product Display and Lighting and Music Enhancing Shopping Experiences



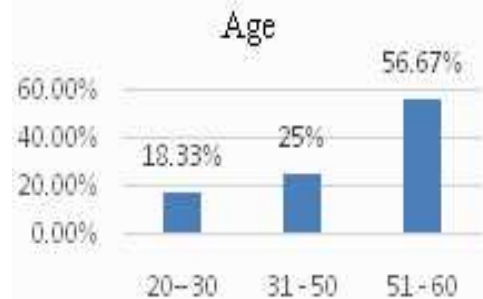
45% of the respondents agreed that the instore communication elements like signage’s, banners, graphics, enhance the product display. They considered it better as they were enough signage’s around the store and didn’t have to waste time looking for a particular product or knowing in detail about that particular product.



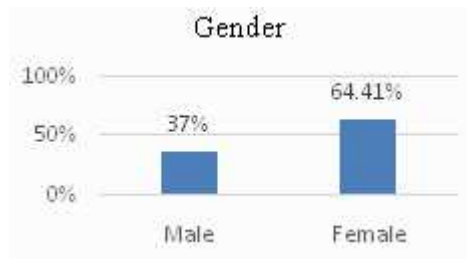
Around 82% of the respondents agreed that lighting and music enhances shopping experience. With good lighting concluded that the respondents had more favourable attitude towards merchandise displayed in the lit area of the store. With good music the respondents ended up staying in the store for a longer time with got them interested into more shopping.

The Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Profile by Significant Factors on Luxury Fashion Products. Demographic profile of Luxury brands of respondents is summarized as follows.

Table 5: This Survey Sample is Made up of Total of 60 Customers Ranging from 20 – 70 Years. The Respondents were Chosen among the Customers from DLF Emporio and DLF Promenade



According to the study the consumers buy luxury products were at the age of 51 – 70 years (56.67%) who are the working people. Respondents at this age group provide greater shopping ease than the shoppers in lower age group. It is because at this age most of the respondents already have their own career and also a stable financial planning. This confirms that age has a greater effect on shopper’s evaluation of store environment. The least number of respondents were at the age on 22 – 30 years who are teenagers and seem less to visit stores to acquaint themselves with new ideas and display inhibitions in purchasing private labels.



Most of the population who shop in luxury brand are females with a percentage of 64.41%. Besides that, females are more into fashion shopping than compared to men.



In luxury brands, the highest income is about above Rs. 80,000 (37.29%) which generally results in a shopping basket comprising goods of better quality and is also expected to have a wider selection of assortment in buying. These respondents with higher pay are more likely to visit stores to seek ideas, buy private labels, seeing buying as a mean to reflect one and take pleasure in shopping.

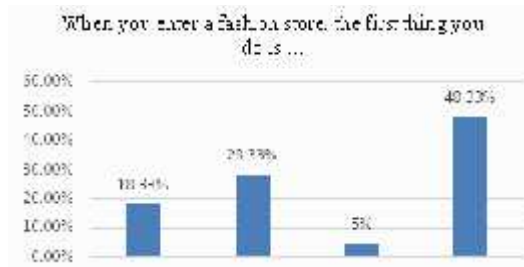


53.33% of the respondents shop weekly as there is likely that every week a new product comes to the store, and the respondents always want to be one of the first ones to get the products before anyone else.

Table 6: Customers Rating on what Attracts them in a Window Display and the First thing a Customer does when they Enter the Store



From the above table it is observed that about 63.33% of respondents felt the minimal display is luxury brands is attracted them more and 15% of the respondents felt the product display attracted them. Luxury brands keep their window display minimal is because they do want to be in the face of the customers and want to keep it as simple as possible. As their merchandise is for the sophisticated high-class people, they want to give their window a sophisticated feel as well. This makes Luxury brands stand out from the retail brands.



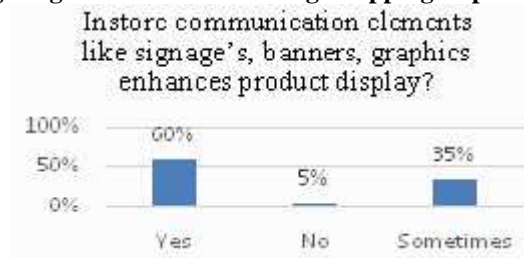
48.33% of the respondents usually seek help from the sales staff because they do not want to spend time looking for a product as these respondents know what they want to shop for and do not waste time looking for a product.

Table 7: Factors Affecting the Shopping Behaviour of the Size of the Store



About 53.33% of the respondents are not affected by the size of the store. Signage is the help tool in the fashion store to make customer know the information about the product and merchandise sold in the fashion store.

Table 8: Customer's Preference on Instore Communication like Signage's, Graphics Enhancing Product Display and Lighting and Music Enhancing Shopping Experiences



60% of the respondents agreed the instore communication elements like signage's, banners, and graphics enhance the product display. These signage's often used colour and bold font to draw customer attention. As the signage shows the effective and easy utilization of a product, this engages the sense of sight instantly drawing the respondent in for further inspection of merchandise. They look in for the product quality in a store more than the size of it.



70% of the respondents agreed that the lighting and music enhances shopping experience. In terms for lighting, Bright lights are best for completing a task, like examining merchandise up close, while mood lighting is better for crafting a relaxing shopping environment. With good lighting the respondents tend to stay longer in stores. . The volume and tempo of the background music can significantly affect the traffic flow within the store, directly affecting how much time shoppers spend in a store. When the store play fast-tempo or loud background music, it can cause customers to move more quickly around



the shop, but without reducing the volume of sales. Slow music can often cause shoppers to move slower around your shop, encouraging them to take their time shopping and buy more.

11. Suggestions

Marketers must use this findings efficaciously to increase sales of their store and innovate themselves in terms of display. Since, window display is the first touch point of store with the customers. Hence, it should be very attractive which should be able to generate impulse buying. Retail brands shouldn't stack all the products on the floor, but instead keep a few out and rest inside. This makes the store look clean and welcoming. The triangular method for the mannequin in the window to be followed by retail brands. To give a good impression, the right size of the merchandise to be worn on the mannequin. Oversize garment to be pinned from inside. The best way to display a product, is to place it colour wise (i.e. light to dark or dark to light) as this would be very appealing to the customer's eyes and easier for them to choose the right colour. Racks, gondolas, focal point, walking space to be arranged creatively in a way to give enough space for the customers to walk by. During the sale, retail brands must arrange the clothing hangers facing one side with evenly finger spacing. Majority of customers respond to the lighting more positively. Therefore the brands can select appropriate lighting system that creates satisfaction of psychological needs of customers. The background music which should be soft and classic is highly recommended than other types of music. Luxury brands offer a limited range of products and they do not follow the seasons that come to India. And due to this, the Indian luxury customers opt to buy from the stores abroad instead. These luxury brands should get many of their products to India for the Indian customers. India is becoming one of the emerging countries housing for luxury brands. The luxury stores in India are limited to only 5star hotels or high street malls in the metro cities only. However the right location or ambience for any brand is crucial. These brands should increase their stores more around India. The entire store should be clean and hygienic in order to enable the customers to easily access the products without any complaint.

12. Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was to investigate the relationship of the importance of visual merchandising elements for retail brands and luxury brands in fashion store. An important finding of this study was that these elements certainly influenced the consumer purchase intension. These result demonstrated that there was a significant relation between the elements when it is linked partially. In their attempts to enhance their store atmosphere, retailers are required to develop and implement strategies and action plans regarding their retail setting to attract customers and sell them merchandize This study provided information about the influence of visual merchandising on impulse buying. According to our findings, among the four studied visual merchandising techniques, these elements have significantly influence young customers' buying behaviour in retail brands and working people (50 – 60 years) for luxury brands.

As the conclusion, in retail brands, 42% of the respondents were attracted to product displays in the window of the fashion stores. 48% of the respondents do not follow any pattern but walks through the store as it leads them. About 54% of the customers are not affected by the size of the store. Those who are loyal to a particular brand, the size of the store does not matter. 48% of the respondents sometimes find the exact size they are looking for, whereas 27% of the customers could easily be able to find their size. 45% of the respondents agreed that the instore communication elements like signage's, banners, graphics, enhance the product display. Around 82% of the respondents agreed that lighting and music enhances shopping experience. In Luxury brands, 63.33% of respondents felt the minimal display is luxury brands is attracted them more and 15% of the respondents felt the product display attracted them. 48.33% of the respondents usually seek help from the sales staff. About 53.33% of the respondents are not affected by the size of the store. 70% of the respondents agreed the instore communication elements like signage's, banners, and graphics enhance the product display. 70% of the respondents agreed that the lighting and music enhances shopping experience.

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