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Window Display Compositions: Its Influences on Youths in Malaysia

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Abstract

Customer's expectations from retailers increase with the expanding market demand, where diversification in business strategies to satisfy customer's expectations has become a managerial concern. Window display is one of the marketing methods that sell in silence, help better decision making and improve the store's image. This paper will critically analyze the application of window displays at shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur. The investigation will help establish a better understanding of how the window displays work in conveying product meaning, value and quality correctly towards youth customer, while assisting in improving meaning transfer that leads to strategic merchandising messages and sales.

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1. Introduction

The ability of a store to attract customers through the projection of an inviting environment has been on debates for many years. Multitude pressures to compete in diverse market include price increase and challenges such as cost, expertise and time have limits the idea to apply a better merchandising strategy,

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especially to some small retailers. Through the execution of window display as a retail strategy, customer's attention and interest can be capture. The key to a successful window display to work effectively resides within its ability to establish its connotations and meaning of the niche market and through effective operation in terms of design composition, visual cues and the understanding of consumption culture.

2. Literature review

2.1. Window display, space and consumption

Studies relating to retail design have been linked with issues on how store environment can stimulate decision in buying activities among customer's (Kumar and Karande, 2000; Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006; Mattila & Wirtz, 2008). Better store environment also means higher shopping intentions, longer shopping duration and increase satisfaction among customers.

Located at the first primary space that makes contact with customers, Park et al. (1986) mention that window display act as medium of advertising where its main attention is to persuade, through the presentation and display setting. This will evoke customer's idea in decision-making by pleasing them with persuasive characteristics and afterwards increase desire to enter the store in visually manner. According to Kenneth et al., (1995) a good presentation could create interest, elicits customer's positive emotions, and emphasize the visibility of the merchandise. It could also help increase patronage and purchase behavior (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003). In addition to this, window display can enhance store images and differentiate the store from the other competitors (Klokis, 1986). As a result, they can attract more customers and enhance the attraction toward merchandise inside the store.

The visual stimuli also gives customer instant transmission of information (Sen et al., 2002). For example, customer can relate product fit with the usage of mannequin that help customer visualize the product would look on them (Klokis, 1986; Berman & Joel, 1995) and visual information that used by customer who seeks out clothes that congruent with their self-concept or identities (Klein III et al., 1993). Customer will combine the visual elements during the process of perception to form characteristics of the merchandise in an unconscious way. The process helps customer able to appreciate the overall design of the merchandise.

2.2 Window Display as Visual cues

Rose (2001) states visual images can react at the conscious and unconscious level. This is because human make instant judgment at the unconscious interference and only connected to features such as spatial configurations, the degree of openness and degree of complexity (Wimelius, 2004). Therefore, it could be established that visual images gained by the customer from window displays acts as stimuli to provoke the customer idea and desire to enter the store. According to Edwards and Shackley (1992), up to ninety (90) percent of environmental cues appreciate through sight. It is very important for window displays to acquire characteristics of instant transmission of information and connect with the customers clearly and rapidly in visually manner. Customers will combine the visual elements during the process of perception to form characteristics of the merchandise in an unconscious way. The process helps customer able to appreciate the overall design of the merchandise.

Acting as a non-verbal medium of communication, the message carried out by window display must be targeted to its customer. According to Aziz & Saruwono (2008) a wrong non-verbal symbols could affect the judgment towards personal preferences or good taste. It is very crucial for a design to be able to suggest the right signals for the audience to perceive them in a positive way. Crilly, Maier & Clarkson

(2008) claims that the design of displays that is related with either image or visual must be responsible to establish an image where the public will be able to understand the layers of meaning that are present within the display. A display must be able to project the characteristics of the featured product, in terms of its, usage, value and quality directly to the audiences. This is why it is important for the designer to ensure that the observer interprets the meaning of the design accurately to avoid misunderstandings or loss of meaning.

2.3 Youth and the Influence on Trend and Retail

The youth are easily influenced by the latest market trend, trendsetters and advertisements. This is because at this point of life, they are very frail in making decisions and evaluations. Suggestive and highly influential promotions by the media would be taken as the best solution to fulfill their current needs. Edgar and Sedgewick (2002) states that,

"More recent approaches to consumption recognize the utopian element inherent in shopping. An ideology of shopping may be analyzed, where shopping or consumption are perceived as solutions to the discontents of one's life"

The perceived conditioning system, which the logo (brand) driven market has dictates the behavior of youth. This environment has slowly drawn the youth to resort into an inclination of purchase products based on the brand rather than the quality and the real needs. The business moguls have taken this opportunity to manipulate the promotion of their product using popular media such as TV, billboards and the internet. Window displays are also sometimes manipulate to join the bandwagon in achieving better results in sales. King (2005) in his comment on the relationship between youth and consumerism claims that,

"[...] they (the youth) are preyed upon by a media due to their desire to become socially accepted. In today's world youth are a primary concern in our materialistic culture".

This is why a good suggestive display is needed to provide a fair and more accurate choice of products that accurately suits the needs of the customer. It is therefore the crucial responsibility of the retailers to suggest an accurate representation and depiction of the product to this group, rather than manipulating the facts and project distorted meaning of the product to their advantage in making profit.

2.4 Window Displays in the Malaysian context

The growth of economy, population, urbanization, industries and tourism has been identified as the boost factors of the retail sector in Malaysia. In 2009, the retail sector from store based retailing has contributes a staggering amount of RM 79.7 billion (PEMANDU, 2010). These trends have attracted numerous multinational chains open in shopping malls to penetrate the middle class market of youth population.

According to Martin (2009), the youth in comparison to all the other age group, have the most buying power. This fact is constituted due to their spending pattern where the majority of their disposable incomes are focused on typical and conventional items such as clothing. The result could evidently see from the number of shopping malls built close to institutions of higher learning. This is crucial evidence in proving the important role of youth played in contributing Malaysian retail industry. Omar, W. & Ali, M. (2009), further claims that Malaysia young customers are more of brand conscious and respond to latest style when making shopping decision. This is because they are at an age level where they have the capability and are economically able in making decision of their own in terms of what, how, when and where to buy (Omar, W. et al.,2009).

Based on an observational process conducted on a few retail outlets in Malaysia, it is discovered that window displays play a crucial role of a as a selling strategy in the country. Its significance is evident where they are found to be applied most in stores and shopping malls located in both urban and suburban area. The perception of good ambience and store interior lead to expensive brand make people feel intimidated to enter their store has become major concern. The concern on domination of international store, money, expertise and time has always been challenges and limits the idea of application of better merchandising strategies for local or small retailers.

3. Methodology

This study employs the observational and visual analysis on window display practices among the retail store and boutiques. The approach to the observational research is random based within the shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur. Total of one hundred sixty (160) window displays images were collected from September 2009 until May 2010. Based on the findings, all images taken were gathered and categorized to identify possible elements and display techniques. The categories were compared after extracting all the data and explore linkages among categories. Finally, a table contains four major types of display techniques was produced that grouped the types of display practices most. From the table, about fifteen (15) photos were selected that represent best of the display to be analyzed. The retail format selection is based on the most popular employed category of window display, which; clothes and fashion stores. The selection of this area of study is in response to the clothes industry being the most competitive industry and contributes highest sales value, which is 23.1% of total retail sector in 2009 (PEMANDU, 2010).

4. Results and Discussions



Fig. 1. Display setting with mannequin

Figure 1 shows the combination of display setting with the aid of mannequins. From the images, there are two types arrangement of the mannequins; grouped and separated. The settings of mannequins within the separated mannequin arrangement are located in the middle of the composition of the display while the latter arranged to utilize the overall composition of the display. These configurations setting arranged

as a narrative, in order to describe and help interpret the use of the product. Props used within the display complements the narrative describing the merchandise. The mannequins are used as selling aids to help customers to physically visualize on how the merchandise are to be used and a suggestive situation where they are best employed or used.



Fig. 2. Display setting without mannequin

Figure 2 shows display setting without mannequins. For this configuration, the actual merchandise are primarily used to promote the range and styles available at the store. The adjacent photographs exemplify several configurations employed by the retailers in displaying the products using this configuration. As shown, most of the products hanged within the setting of a simple or neutral background. The settings are very straightforward and used in order to highlight only the product, making them the focus of the composition. The setback to this configuration is that the customer would find it quite hard to relate or visualize on how to merchandise turn out on them when worn, due to the absence of a clearer suggestive display aid, such as the mannequin.



Fig. 3. Display setting with graphic

Figure 3 shows window display that uses graphic images as prop settings. The images used are in the form of graphic posters, super graphic photographs and typography. The text present within these configurations provides suggestions to enliven or help suggest the mood and feeling (ambiance) to audience when viewing the window display. This method gives greater flexibility for retailer to explore the images using colors, typography, props and photographs in the composition.



Fig. 4. Display setting with graphic images and mannequin

Figure 4 shows setting with combination of graphic images and mannequin. The adjacent photographs show two primary types of graphics used in this configuration, which are super graphics photographs and stylized drawings. These graphics also use as a background and frame the outfits. These configurations are used to highlight the suggestive fashion, mode and lifestyles suggested by merchandise. The mannequins placed in front of the graphics exemplify ways on how the merchandise could be styled in line with the suggestive mood and relevance.

5. Conclusions

From the observation research conducted, it is found that all four window display configurations focuses on the framing the suggestive lifestyles and mode to attract their potential customer. The elements used such as photographs, super graphics, pictograph and mannequin, which acts as texts to the narrative of the display, aids customers to visualize the relevance of the use of merchandise. The clues given within the display suggests the appropriate time, situation and trend that the merchandise should relate to. These suggestions are very much associative to the needs and behavior of the youth in making decisions to make purchases. Among four configurations mentioned, it is discovered that the compositions or configurations as shown in figure one (1) and four (4) suits the most appealing and receives the highest response among youth. This is probably due to the energetic and suggestive clues that were present in them. They clearly state and suggest the mode, lifestyle and trend that are associative to the products display. The clear signifies that imbued meaning resides within the displays have successfully been transferred to the targeted audience. Therefore, it could be concluded that the study has proven the need to set up a good

window display to help sell a product better. The study also indirectly signifies the important role of the designer to produce window displays that are able to convey clearly of product meaning, value and quality, using the right elements and configurations. The suggestion can help youth to purchase fairly and not only influenced solely by the logo (brand). This will open up an avenue for a fair decision making to the audience when committing to purchase the desired displayed merchandise, in terms of physical and metaphysical meanings. This knowledge is also invaluable to help improve the quality of window displays available in the market today.

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