

A Study on The Merchandising Strategies of Grocery Stores

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the effectiveness of merchandising strategies of grocery stores and the consumer perception of the same. For the purpose of this study, the demography consists of consumers in Mumbai. **Research Implications:** Merchandising Strategies have an unconscious impact on the consumers and can influence the way they approach a particular product. With the help of these strategies, the retailers are able to attract customers and keep them engaged. It is essential to note that merchandising in itself does not guarantee the purchase of a product but simply influences the consumers to make an impulse decision. Merchandising, regarded as the silent salesman, in its simplest form can also create a significant impact in the way consumers approach products displayed in the store. The success of the strategies adapted by the retailer depends upon the audience and how he can alter these arrangements to meet their needs in a better way. It is also important to note that some strategies may prove beneficial while some may not have a positive impact on towards the same and hence, retailers need to personalise these strategies by identifying their audience. Therefore, this study aims at understanding a general perspective of customers and which merchandising strategy fits best.

Findings: The study has focused on two broad aspects i.e. 'Consumer Buying Behaviour w.r.t. Merchandising Strategies' and 'Consumer Perception towards Merchandising Tools and Stimulus.' The study concluded with the result that consumers have a positive response towards merchandising strategies and these strategies influence their buying behaviour. Due to the positive effect of the merchandising tools the consumer finds himself in a pleasant environment which leaves room for impulse purchase. Stimulus such as colour combination, smell, music, signage and physical layout have an impact on the minds of the consumers. Thus, the study concluded that Consumer Buying Behaviour is influenced by Merchandising Strategies.

Originality: This paper talks about the efficiency of merchandising strategies and the consumer buying behaviour towards these strategies, restricted to Mumbai. Very few researches have been conducted with respect to the consumer perception of merchandising strategies and how it leads to an impulse buying behaviour.

Keywords: Merchandising Strategies, Merchandising Stimulus, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Impulse Buying Behaviour, Physical Layout, Grocery Stores, Merchandising Tools.

2. INTRODCUTION

"Advertising moves people towards goods but Merchandising moves goods towards people."

- Morris Hite

With the rapid changes and increase in the number of competitors in the market the "survival of the fittest" is the principle that remains pervasive in most situations. In the end of the 19th century, production increased to such an extent that there was mass production which led to the opening of abundant shops of all types. Retailers have realised that in order to retain their loyalty customers and keep them

engaged they have to use various strategies. These little tricks do not really cost much but can increase sales significantly and hence retailers choose to adapt these strategies as per the likings of their customer and target audience. Merchandising is one such strategy which marketing offers and is very often referred to as the "silent salesman." Merchandising had come up on its own and with the change in time has proven its important to retailers and grocery owners with the advent of self-service. Since many customers do not like being bothered by salesman constantly and may hence react negatively, Merchandising does the job. Merchandising is a marketing strategy which aims to

increase the sales of products in the store using visual means. It is used to draw the attention of the customer and engage them so as to persuade them into buying a particular product. Merchandising has become unavoidable by retailers in the current environment as it affects the psychology of the customer and provokes them in making the choice of buying a certain product. The tool of merchandising is quite interesting because with modern technology and easy availability of the techniques of merchandising retailers have come up with many innovative ideas which works best with their target audience. The technique of Merchandising works in many ways which the customer may not notice but it indirectly leading to an increase in sale. When a customer pre decides the products he/she intends to buy but tends to make an impulse on-the-spot purchase, it is due to Merchandising. Merchandising can be used in many ways and even the slightest of change can lead a rise in the sales of product. The size of the basket may seem insignificant but plays a role to increase the sales of the store.

The first 10 feet determines the path the customer would choose to take and is when the shoppers ideally take a decision whether they would want to continue shopping in the particular store and are hence displayed in the best possible way. Organized product presentation merchandising makes shopping easier for time-strapped customers who appreciate an appealing retail environment. Effective merchandising throughout your store creates an inviting atmosphere that leads shoppers to buy.

2.1 Meaning of Visual Merchandising:

Merchandising can be defined as “the planning and promotion of sales by presenting a product to the right market at the proper time, by carrying out organized, skilful advertising, using attractive displays, etc.” (*Definition of Merchandising | Dictionary.Com, n.d.*) Visual Merchandising can also be defined as “The layout of products based on the image they create and how they are “viewed” by the shopper.” (*Visual Merchandising Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary, n.d.*) The study is confined to offline visual merchandising techniques used by grocery stores and how consumers react to these strategies of the retailer. The study focuses on how visual merchandising can lead to impulse buying behaviour of the customers and how effective are these techniques. The study consists of a questionnaire which presents the perspective of customers and what do they consider to the most important factor of merchandising.

Visual Merchandising can be done in many ways. The different stimuli that play a role in visual merchandising are store display, product layout, lighting of the store, sound and music, fragrance, signage, promotional offers and others. The study also gives a brief on how organic products and vegan products are displayed by retailers and what are the consumers view of the same. Since grocery shopping is considered as a task which needs to be completed customers

tend to always hurry and rush their purchases. It is the task of the retailers to turn this task into an experience which is done with the help of merchandising. 33% of the unplanned purchases are made inside the store due to the merchandising of products. (Buttle, 1984)

Some of the Merchandising techniques used by retailers are when the area of entry and exit are different. This reduces the risk of the customer leaving the store quickly. When the entry and exit doors are separate, customers are bound to make a purchase and can be turned into impulse buyers with the right merchandising techniques. Such strategic planning can prove very beneficial to the store and are also appreciated by customers.

2.2 How Merchandising Works:

There is no accepted structure or knowledge which is applicable in terms of Merchandising but the two main and successful factors that are common are:

- the more visible a product is, the more likely it is to be seen and therefore bought;
- the more appealing a product is made to appear, the more likely it is to be purchased. (Buttle, 1984)

2.3 Merchandising Techniques:

1. **Entrance:** The entrance is where the customer is most vulnerable and the right techniques acts as the deal breaker. When the customer first enters the store the first glance creates an impression of the store and what quality of the products the store includes. When the customer is at the entrance, he takes a minute to adjust to the environment and has a pre-decided list of products that he intends to purchase. Hence it is important to lure the customer in as many aisles as possible so as to relax the customer and block the ability to think with the help of overstimulation. (Bhakat & Muruganantham, 2013) The entrance is where the fresh products are placed to give the customers a “healthy” feeling leading the customer to believe that he has entered a natural environment. It acts as an escape from the mono-colour day to day life. Another psychology that comes into play is that when consumers buy healthy products at the beginning, they are more likely to reward themselves by spending on junk food. Every seemingly random thing in a grocery store is actually a research-backed method of selling optimal quantities of product. (*The Art of Grocery Store Merchandising (Tips & Techniques) | Instor India, n.d.*)
2. **The Aisles:** A major number of grocery stores are designed in a manner which provokes the best response from the customer. It is very important for aisles to look organised with an ease to navigate without the shopping baskets colliding into each other. Within the aisle the products should be

placed in the middle and an organised manner. When a customer enters the aisle of a particular category, the first few steps are taken into getting acquainted with the product and as the customer passes buy the other products the desired ones are kept in the middle.

3. **Product Layout:** Where the item of the store's shelves are placed can send subtle signals to the customer that impacts their decision making process. (*Grocery Store Merchandising Techniques | Small Business - Chron.Com*, n.d.) The product which are premium and the best sellers are placed at eye-level as it is clearly visible and customers tend to get attracted to these. The products that shoppers buy on impulse or the ones that are more expensive are kept at the eye-level so as to increase the sales. Products such as milk, bread and eggs are kept further away at the end of the store as consumers will have to pass by other categories in order to buy them which will lead to the purchase of additional goods. Retailers also tend to keep ready-to-eat products at the entrance so that the customer can grab those in a hurry. (*How Visual Merchandising Can Help Boost Supermarket Spending*, n.d.) Products like magazines and candy are kept near the cash-counter as customers wait in line to pay, these products distract them. While placing fresh food products it is important to place green products with fruits of bright colour as this will engage the customer's attention. Bakery products should be played with a black background in order to make the baked goods visually pop. (*Grocery Store Merchandising Techniques | Small Business - Chron.Com*, n.d.) These techniques can indirectly affect the mind of the customers and ignite curiosity in them. Studies have shown that most customers like to touch and examine a product before buying it as it gives them the satisfaction of making the right choice. A customer after turning would always turn right, this area is the "power wall" where retailers must place not the most popular but rather most attractive products further encouraging customers to go explore the store further. (*The Art of Grocery Store Merchandising (Tips & Techniques) | Instor India*, n.d.)
4. **Music:** Another aspect which retailers do not realise is the big effect that music can have in the shopping experience of the customer. The pace, tempo, volume and genre, all play a key role in setting the shoppers mood and can be used as a commanding tool if used correctly. (*The Art of Grocery Store Merchandising (Tips & Techniques) | Instor India*, n.d.). When the customer listens to music it can slow down their heart rates and makes them comfortable leading to an impulse buying

decision. When music is accompanied with options such as ability to touch the product, walk the aisle with the view of neat arrangements, these stimuli help the consumer get comfortable and hence blocking their ability to think clearly and tend to make decision without reasoning out whether it is needed or not.

5. **Lighting:** Since consumers tend to touch products and examine the quality of the same it is important for the lighting over the product to be bright and attractive. The lighting of the product can make the customer feel lively and bring out the best features of the product displayed. A study suggests that consumers are less likely to enter a shop with less lighting when noticed from far away. (Nell, 2017) Lighting also has the ability to separate one product from the other to make it stand out in the process of merchandising. Retailers must ensure that the lighting must complement the product and create balance when displayed.
6. **Fragrance:** Another silent tool is the smell that the environment has in a particular section. The smell of coffee, for example, is very important when passing by an aisle of coffee products as it lures the customer deeper into the aisle persuading them to buy the product. A customer is more likely to buy bakery products from the smell of freshly baked cookies or bread even though they had no intention or pre decided intent of buying the product. Many grocery stores place such product near escalators or elevators as the customer is not thinking or engaged in anything and the smell will instantly catch their attention. Along with the advantage of smell, many retailers keep products that complement each other together so that when the customer is buying a product e may tend to purchase the complimentary product too. Generally, coffee mugs are kept next to the coffee powders or the aisle closest to the coffee so that the smell can attract the customer and hence more than just one product is purchased.

2.4 Impulse Buying Behaviour:

Impulse buying behaviour is when the customer has no pre-decided motive or objective of buying the product but makes the decision of buying the product to fulfil a particular need. Impulse buying is explained as the desire to buy a product without much reflection (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). Block and Morwitz (1999) enunciated the definition of impulse purchase as consumer buying an item with little or no deliberation after the result of a sudden, powerful urge. Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) defined impulse buying as a "sudden, compelling, hedonically complex buying behaviour in which the rapidity of an impulse decision process precludes thoughtful and deliberate consideration of alternative information and choices."

“In store browsing is the in-store examination of a retailer’s merchandise for recreational and informational purposes without an immediate intent to buy” (Bloch, Ridgway, & Sharrell, 1989). Jarboe and McDaniel (1987) found customers who browsed in a store made more unplanned purchases than non-browsers in a regional mall setting. Surveys have shown that impulse buying makes up 27-62% of the total buying at shopping centres (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008).

Impulse buying of the shopper is influenced by number of factors which could be either related to the shopping environment, shopper’s personal traits, product itself and the diverse demographic and socio-cultural aspects (Bhakat & Muruganatham, 2013). Generally, impulse buying is when the customer makes a purchase which he/she had not planned for. However, there is a difference between impulse purchase and unplanned purchase. Unplanned purchase can take place when the customer realises that the product is needful and might have forgotten about including in the list. Impulse buying on the other hand is a spur of the moment decision made by the customer and it is not necessary that the consumer is in need of the product. The stimuli derive the consumer to the decision of making purchase of a product which he may or may not want in the future. Unplanned purchases are made in response to a particular need but impulse purchase is made without regards to the cost or the negative consequences and are driven by need for instant self-gratification (*Consumer Behavior Shopping Habits*, n.d.).

2.5 Organic Products and Vegan Products:

“Organic products” are those products which are produced without use of chemical fertilizers, fresh or minimally processed, non-pesticide, free from genetically modified organism, having organic certificates, traditional/indigenous products, herbal product and naturally grown (Mrs Tejinder Kaur and Dr Gautam Bansa, 2019).

“Veganism” is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose (*Definition of Veganism*, n.d.).

A Vegan can be defined as “A strict vegetarian who consumes no food (such as meat, eggs, or dairy products) that comes from animals also: one who abstains from using animal products (such as leather)” (*Definition of VEGAN*, n.d.)

A vegan (strict vegetarian) does not consume meat, dairy products, eggs, honey, or any product derived from an animal. A vegan diet can (and should) be full of a wide variety of delicious, nutritious foods, including vegetables, grains, nuts, legumes, seeds, and fruits. Vegans don’t wear leather, fur, silk, or wool (*What Is a Vegan?*, 2010)

Studies have highlighted that India is a potential market for organic and vegan product however the consumption of these products is restricted to the people who have the knowledge

and are aware about that same. Many people are reluctant to try new products and tend to not experiment with the same but due to growing awareness and the health and environment benefits attached to the same. Consumers prefer treating organic and vegan products as other ordinary products and do not like it being distinguished as a separate category. This gives them a sense that the retailers respect their choices and does not want to differentiate.

Research has indicated that higher income group of individuals are more environment conscious and have the knowledge of a variety of product which is why they choose organic or vegan products. However, age does not play a significant role but the younger generation is more aware of the benefits and are willing to pay for the same.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the demographic profile of respondents.
2. To highlight difference between marketing strategies and merchandising.
3. To highlight significance of traffic building strategies to garner customer attention.
4. To study the relation between merchandising strategies and consumer buying behaviour in grocery stores.
5. To analyse merchandising strategies to increase customer traffic towards specific category of products.
6. To study transaction building strategy which encourages impulse purchase.
7. To study effects of turf decision strategies on consumer buying behaviour.
8. To highlight the role of high-quality formulations, international foods, increasing incidents of veganism and organic products contributing to the growing momentum of grocery stores.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The research design is a blue print, which specifies the statistical tools and techniques to be used in conducting the research. It helps the researcher in integrating the various components of the research process in a rational way.

4.2 Types of Research Design used in the study

The research design specifies the procedures in addressing the research problem through the formulation of the objectives. In the present study, Explanatory Research Design has been used by the researchers to study the Merchandising Strategies of Grocery Stores in Mumbai.

Explanatory Research-

Explanatory research helps in the problem identification and exploring the causes of the problem. It helps the researcher in developing research variables and formulating the hypothesis through extensive literature review. In the present research, the researcher has attempted to study the

Merchandising Strategies of Grocery Stores in Mumbai. The researcher has highlighted the core dimensions as Merchandising Strategies, Impulse Buying Behaviour, and Merchandising tools and has researched these variables through the literature survey using various books, articles, journals and websites. The development of research variables through the literature survey determined in formulating the hypothesis pertaining to Merchandising Strategies and Impulse Buying Behaviour of consumers in Grocery Stores.

4.3 Development of Research Variables

The identification of the research variables is significant for the study in formulating the hypothesis. The following are the research variables:

- Merchandising Strategies
- Impulse Buying Behaviour
- Traffic Building Strategy
- Transaction Building Strategy
- Merchandising Tools
- Stimulus

4.4 Sources of Data Collection

4.4.A Primary Data

Primary Data of the respondents was collected through a Questionnaire. The respondents were contacted personally through a Google link which was sent via E-mail which was designed for the study. The respondents who were frequent grocery shoppers in Mumbai and were motivated to fill the questionnaire to the best of their knowledge.

4.4.B Secondary Data

Secondary Data was collected through various sources such as books, journals, magazines, seminars and conference papers, thesis reports, website reports, published books, articles, published interviews and newspapers, etc.

4.5 Period of Data Collection:

The primary data required for the study was collected through the months of July 2020 to October 2020.

4.6 Sample Design:

A. Population(s):

A population refers to a predetermined set of potential elements or respondents of a geographical area. It aims to represent the common element and sentiments shared by the population at large (the universe) by studying the aggregate of the same.

For this study, the researchers will consider the universe to constitute all Indian consumers aged 16 years or older.

B. Sample:

A sample is a sub group of the population selected for the participation of the study. In this study, the sample consists of Indian consumers in the city of Mumbai.

C. Sample Unit:

A sampling unit refers to the basic units that consists of all the elements of the target population. For the purpose of this study, the information has been collected from consumers in Mumbai.

D. Sample Size:

Sampling size refers to the number of samples chosen from a target population. The Target population are Consumers from Mumbai. The researcher tried his best to maintain heterogeneity in the population. The sample size has been selected as 124 respondents in order to best cover the elements of the larger population.

E. Sampling Method:

The sample size consists of 125 respondents who shop from the grocery stores of Mumbai. For the purpose of the study, the researcher has used Stratified Random Sampling, Purposive Sampling and Convenience Sampling.

F. Research Area:

The study being exploratory in nature will cover the whole of the city of Mumbai with the total sample size of 125 respondents.

After selection of the above region, respondents were drawn from Mumbai on the basis of research hypothesis and objectives of the study.

5. HYPOTHESIS

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relation between consumer buying behaviour in grocery stores and their merchandising strategies.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relation between consumer buying behaviour in grocery stores and their merchandising strategies.

6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study features 125 respondents which were collected for the purpose of detailed research. The respondents include young adults and adults which is also inclusive of working women and housewives since grocery stores is widely done by many on a very regular basis. The study focuses solely on offline grocery shopping and how retailers and shop owners use different merchandising techniques to lure their customers into the store. The offline shopping consists of consumers physically visiting the store in order to purchase products. The required data is collected from consumers during the period of July 2020 to October 2020 through structured questionnaire.

The grocery stores which are encompassed in this study include stores like D-Mart, Nature's Basket, Society Stores, Mahavir Stores, Reliance SMART, among many others. These stores use merchandising techniques to attract customer attention and keep them engaged. The study focuses on those techniques of customers and their responsible to the same.

The study being explanatory will cover the length and breadth of Mumbai. The sample for the proposed study is limited only to the city of Mumbai, and its suburbs. Since the respondents included in this study are based in the suburbs of Mumbai, they consider making many of their shopping selections from the grocery stores listed above. The reason listed by many respondents is that these stores provide a variety of option with a large layout so that consumers can browse through and consider a variety of the option which is available at their disposal. Many respondents range from middle class to higher middle class and hence the pricing of a products affects the purchase decision of the consumers. Many of these stores provide consumers with loyalty points or season sales so as to keep them loyal towards their stores.

The reason why many people choose to shop in grocery stores is that with a hectic lifestyle in the city of Mumbai a number of them do not have the time to spend of grocery stores. Research papers highlighted that grocery store shopping are considered as tasks and do not give a pleasant sensation to the consumers. This proves to be the biggest challenge for the retailers as it is important to make consumers shopping experience delightful.

Grocery stores which include all the products along with various options can be viewed in a sense as a “one stop shop” where consumers find every-thing they are looking for at just the one shop. This has proven to be very useful for many consumers and hence prefer such grocery stores.

Along with price of the product, consumers buying behaviour is affected by many other factors. The packaging of the product, the aisle in which it is placed, the position in which the product is showcased, the light that reflects on the product are all the factors which unconsciously affect the consumer when making a decision. Merchandising plays careful attention to these small factors and earns those golden points for the store. For example, many grocery stores place fresh fruits and vegetables at the beginning of the store so that once the consumers pick up a few of these products, they feel that they can now rewards themselves by picking up chocolates and the other junk food.

The research paper aims to study how these techniques are perceived by consumers and how much of an affect does it make to influence their buying behaviour. It also aims at understanding how the consumers respond to the merchandising techniques and which is considered to be the most effective. It also explores the possibility that whether offering many options can kindle an impulse buying behaviour among consumers. Along with these factors’ other psychological states such as the mood of the consumers also play a key role in the decision-making process. All of these factors will be examined in the research paper to evaluate the effectiveness and understand the consumers perception of the same.

7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In a world where the consumer is considered the “king” of the market, retailers need to find better ways to turn those browsers into repeat consumers. It is the experience which exceeds the expectations that the consumers remember most and hence merchandising is the tool which helps to turn the product into more than just a product.

Since grocery shopping a part of our day to day life it is regarded as important by many retailers so as to attract their customers. Merchandising as a tool is used globally as well as locally as it plays a key role in the decision making of the customers. Even the smallest of brands use the tools of merchandising which are available at their disposal to attract consumers and provide them with the best possible experience. The consumers will decide to buy the product only if they are convinced without a shadow of doubt and this can be done with the help of Merchandising. The research paper specifically focuses on virtual merchandising which mainly focuses on product display, layout, colour, lighting around the product, music and the fragrance, as well as promotional strategies used by grocery stores.

This topic is important for consumers as they have an idea of the what techniques are used by retailers and grocery store owners in order to avoid unwanted purchases. The research paper is also significant for retailers and grocery, supermarket owners to use techniques which works best in their favor. The research paper also aims at giving a holistic idea of what most consumers prefer as the best merchandising techniques adopted by retailers and how they can further improve as to the likes and comfort of the consumers.

Among the various techniques of Merchandising the one commonly used by retailers is Transaction Building Strategy. In this, products which complement each other are placed together so that there is a possibility that the consumers will make an impulse choice of buying the complementary product as well. For example, a cup or a coffee filter will be kept right next to the coffee beans or the coffee powder so that the consumer tends to browse through it and in turn ends up purchasing the product. Thus, Transaction Building Strategy can in turn lead to impulse buying behaviour. Along with this, retailers also use Traffic Building Strategy where they lure the consumers into the store, then towards a particular product, then the aisle and then the category. By the consumers may have picked at least a few items they did not intend to purchase. Stores also place products like milk, eggs and other dairy products at the end since consumers will definitely go to those sections as the products are used every-day and consumers will have to pass through the other section in order to buy them.

The study is focused on getting a holistic approach of how it takes so many minor details and other factors to target consumers. Generally, the light or colour would not be something that the consumer would notice on the first go but

it does play a silent role in the subconscious minds of the consumers and hence this particular topic was chosen for research. Another path breaking discovery was that at the time of shopping along with the eyes there are other parts of the human body that also affect the way the consumers think. For example, a consumer may not have intended to buy bread or freshly baked cookies but may feel the urge to do so just from passing by the bakery aisle smelling these cookies. A cafeteria along the coffee aisle may urge the consumer to have a cup of break and take a break from shopping. However, these particular stimuli have been under explored and can be looked at with a broader perspective including the consumers perception regarding the same.

Along with the advantages it is important to note that retailers have to incur into large costs in order to get the merchandising of products right and even then, there is no guarantee of it working in the favor of the retailers. This is why many retailers are reluctant to try new techniques and tend to stick with what has suited them best for a long time. This too has its drawbacks as the consumers may get bored of looking at the same and would appreciate a few changes as it will catch their eye on the first go.

The study will be useful to academicians, researchers and marketing professionals as it provides a systematic and pragmatic approach of merchandising and its strategies. It explains how the tools of merchandising can be used by retailers and improve their store layout to make it more attractive and appealing.

The study is also significant for retailers, grocery shop owners, entrepreneurs that intend to try these techniques to lure in more customers into their stores. The more time a consumer spends inside the store the more likely he is to make an impulse purchase. The research also states that consumers prefer touching a product and examining it before making a purchase. The retailers can use this to their advantage by altering the store display as per the needs of the customer. This research can also prove important for start-ups as they can review it to get their store layout right and improve accordingly.

The research paper also includes how organic products have been merchandised and what is the consumers opinion regarding the same. However, there haven't been many studies conducted on organic products and vegan products and their merchandising techniques. Most studies suggest that consumers prefer the organic and vegan products right next to the normal ones but like it in a green container as it indicates towards a healthier option. This is still an under explored area of research and can be studied in more detail.

Since it is unclear how effective the merchandising strategies are and to what extent does it derive consumer attention the retailers can try different techniques on a trial and error basis as the consumers would be restricted to a particular region and on the basis of the same the retailers can gauge the expectations of the target audience. For example, people

living in Mumbai or an urban city have a short span of time for patience and like things which are available quickly. On the basis of this the retailer can modify the products that he would be willing to showcase will be satisfy the customer and will also increase sales.

Allowing customers to try new products shows a significant rise in the purchase if the same product as trying the product gives the consumer the satisfaction of the quality of the product. If a new product is not displayed out of the order then the consumer may be reluctant towards the same. A wider range of products is also preferred by a consumer as it leads them to try new options which they might actually not need but are intrigued to find out what really is the difference. A good background music can also change the mood of the customer and may lead to a better shopping experience. A study suggests that over stimulation blocks the thinking ability of the consumers and this leads to an increase in the impulse buying behaviour.

Hence it can be said that merchandising techniques and strategies increase lead to impulse buying behaviour of the consumer. The consumers tend to respond positively to the various merchandising strategies that have been used by retailers and this makes the competition even more intense as many consumers believe in word of mouth publicity. A bad experience may affect the consumer enormously and hence retailers need to keep reassuring the customers of the quality of services that are provided.

8. LIMITATIONS

Despite of all sincere efforts put forwards for this research in order to collect the relevant information and data there are some inherent limitations. The study is restricted only to the consumers based in Mumbai and other parts of the state of Maharashtra are not included which has acted as a limitation for the study. Due to money and time constraint a more detailed approach has not been possible. The study had to be completed in a time span of 3 months, hence an elaborate study could not be conducted.

The study took place at the time the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world at large hence it has restricted the collection of data or other possible options that could have been availed if it wasn't for the pandemic. This has proved to be a limitation as the collection of data was not easily accessible.

A physical copy of the questionnaire could not be given to the respondents since the research and the collection of data from respondents was during the time of lockdown. This has restricted the collection of data to only those that are available on the phone through a soft copy of the questionnaire which was shared through google forms. The study may also suffer from cognitive respondent biases as there is a possibility that the consumer may favour one brand or store over the other which may cloud their judgement. During to a comprehensive questionnaire the respondent may experience fatigue which may lead to random marking

of answers or the possibility of not understanding the question as a whole. All of these factors may influence their decision whilst filling the questionnaire.

The research mentions how consumers tend to respond to a particular set up with a certain feeling. There is always a possibility of feeling two emotions at the same time. This has been a limitation to the study as this aspect has been under explored.

The research also highlights how merchandising strategies are effective and attract consumer attention. However, it seems to be unclear how significant these strategies are and to what extent are they effective. Since all the consumers are not alike, the way the strategy works may differ from consumer to consumer. For example, with regard to vegan products, a consumer who is a dedicated vegan food consumer would like the products to be kept next to the other products with just a tag stating it to be vegan. Whereas, for a consumer who is new to the concept may prefer a separate aisle so as to examine the product well and get a comprehensive understanding of the product and the concept of veganism as a whole.

9. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Relation between Merchandising and Consumer buying behaviour

- **Dennis W. Rook and Meryl Paula Gardner (1993):** The research paper analysis how a mood can impact the buying behaviour of an individual and how merchandising enlightens the mood of the consumer. It highlights that the mood state "pleasure" is a state where the consumer is very likely to buy impulsively as the consumer allow themselves, only briefly, to indulge in a state of "seeking pleasure." Respondents who indicated that they were likely to impulse buy in a bad mood would do so in order to feel better. In order to get the consumer's mind off negativity, impulsive buying has proved therapeutic as it takes their mind off the current strain. When experiencing a powerful mood, the consumers are under the impression that they can by whatever they want which in turn leads to impulse buying and these consumers are known as "power buyers."
- **Smith and Burns (1996):** suggests that merchandising strategies can affect the consumers perception of price. The study opined that it is not only important how to present the merchandise but quantity plays a vital role as well. An aisle comprising of a larger quantity of an item will create an illusion of a lower price than an aisle comprising of smaller quantity of a product.
- **G. Surrender (2001):** in his article, 'Visual Merchandising: the synergy to show, tell and sell', cited that it is Marketing which brings horse to water but Visual Merchandising that makes the

horse drink. Commercial and Aesthetic- were the two aspects given by him. The paper also highlights that the aesthetic aspect gets a shopper's attention; it is the functionality of a display that will convert a potential buyer into a customer.

- **Karthik Ramamurthy and Ankur Hazarila (2009):** in the article "The new science of retail" mentioned that the real challenge is to convert the "footfalls" into "sales." Footfalls in the term which is used for the people that enter the store, however, they may or may not make a purchase just by entering or visiting the store. If they do not enter the store they cannot be considered as "footfalls" as their foot did not fall inside the store. An increase in number of footfalls indicate that the store has a better exposure of merchandise and an even better chance at sales.
- **Solomon et al. (2010):** Explain that retailers are paying more attention to how information is presented within the store and also in which amount, since more customers make their purchase decision while being in the purchase environment. To attract attention in the store environment retailers commonly use in-store displays. It has been estimated that when using an appropriate display, impulse purchases increases by 10 percent.
- **Wiid (2012):** Points out three important function. Firstly, the visual display of products should draw customer attention. Secondly, the display should arouse and hold customers attention as merely making them aware is not sufficient. Lastly, the display should increase the consumers desire to examine the product and purchase it. It also explains different merchandising display strategies that are used. **In-store display** is where there is maximum exposure to the customer, for example, entrance of the store or near payment points. **Point-of-purchase display** is where merchandise is displayed for sale and can include banners, video screen and so on. **Window displays** plays an important role to indicate to the customer what the store offers.
- **S Madhavi and T S Leelavati (2013):** The research paper mentions how a "plan-o-gram" depicts an overall picture of the store layout. The speciality of this is that it makes the retailers consider research and buying behaviour of customers and evaluate which product goes where and how should it be depicted. The store also changes the merchandise as per the season that is prevailing at the said time. Clear passages are provided for products that need to be touched and felt so that consumers make an impulse purchase without any hindrance. The store stimuli serve as a type of information aid for those who go to the store

without any predetermination of what they need or buy, and once they get into the store, they are reminded or get an idea of what they may need after looking around the store.

- **Amélie PLURIEL (2015):** The author is the research paper states that the display of products in a grocery store if placed in a way that is good enough to eat and offers an experience full of visuals it delights both the eyes and the stomach. It mentions that the customer grows through three stages before making a decision which is given by Solomon. The perceptual process includes exposure, attention and interpretation. When the customer is exposed to a variety of options, he accepts certain stimuli and ignores the rest. Attention refers to the phase where of all the information what the customer chooses to pay attention to which is later interpreted. Interpretation can lead to various factors relating to the outside world or the customer's own biases, experiences, needed and preferences.
- **Huddleston et al. (2015):** Found that customers tend to be attracted towards products that provide signs with product information rather than signs with product price. The authors found a positive relation between visual attention to price on the display sign and the likelihood to make a purchase but an inverse relation between visual attention to information and likelihood to buy.
- **Mr. Ajay Jamnani and Mr. Prasad Daddikar (2015):** Visual merchandising, also regarded as a "silent salesman", is the science and art of suggestive selling by display and presentation. Visual merchandising focal points are placed strategically in the store and communicate the features and benefits of the merchandise. An effective window display will attract the passer-by and convert them into browsers and spenders through the process of "conversion." Customer's expectations changes periodically and retailers must realize the significance of these expectations and offer them a congenial environment to attract and retain the customers.
- **Mr. Chand Saini et al. (2015):** Came up with an important outcome that the store not only derives much of its identity from the physical contours but also from the product it houses and the individuals that manage the transactions there-in. It also stated that liking the atmosphere does not determine purchase but it increase the likelihood four times. It can be concluded that there is a relationship between merchandising and consumer buying behaviour.
- **Adu Danso and Dr. Kofi Poku (2018):** The paper suggests that in order to find the right blend of

merchandising to attract consumers psychological factors have proved to be affective and hence it should be used as a "vehicle" to convey the message to the minds of the customers, which in turn draws their attention inside the stores and subsequently make a purchase. It should be noted that business owners need to identify what makes the purchase, the factors that influence the purchase and how business owners need to respond to the changing dynamics of the customers.

2. Impulse buying behaviour

- **Joseph Weishar (1995):** In his book stated that the decision to purchase is made to the response of a stimuli. In order to increase sales, retailers need to identify these provocations and act on it. He also stated that 60% to 90% of the decision to buy is made at the time of purchase and merchandising is what provokes the urge of making these impulse decisions. He also revealed that what the eye sees, that the body follows.
- **Abu Bashar and Irshad Ahmad (2012):** Stated that merchandising is used to differentiate their offerings from others' as well as to improve the visibility and desirability of products. Despite the negative impact of impulse buying behaviour which results from the lack of a behavioural control, impulse purchases accounts for a significant sale across a variety of product categories. The research paper analysis through primary data that the consumer is exposed to stimuli which suggests that a need can be satisfied through the purchase however the purchase is not predetermined. The consumers decision whether to enter the store or no is determined by the display of the store. Research findings have asserted that 90% of the respondents have made grocery purchases impulsively.
- **G. Muruganatham and Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013):** Suggests that external stimuli and store environment play a key role in the impulse buying behaviour of the consumer. The factors such as lighting, floor coverings, odours influence the customer. Product appearance and background music are also important in determining the customers impulse buying behaviour. The research paper also stated that high arousal and overstimulation would lessen people's self-regulation and ability to think which would in turn increase the chances of impulse buying. Depending on the size of the store the stimulus varies. For example, the stimuli for a larger store would be product display whereas for a smaller store it was product pricing. The paper also highlights that consumers seek variety in the product which would lead to buying impulsively.

- **Khurram L. Bhatti and Seemab Latif (2014):** The key discovery of this learning was that the visual merchandising positively manipulates or influence consumer impulse buying behaviour. The study suggests that consumer impulse buying behaviour has a strong relationship with displayed products because when the customers sees something displayed innovatively, they have the urge to buy that product even if they did not intend or plan to purchase it. It also mentions that once the customer makes a connection with the brand they don't like to be disturbed or feel offended when bothered because the disturbance causes their concentration and interest to lose in shopping.
 - **Begzod Nishanov and Umidjon Ahunjonov (2016):** Highlights that promotional signage helps to create a positive impact on the customer and thus leads to impulse buying behaviour. It indicates that increasing number of in-store promotions and discounts are more likely to influence positively on impulse purchase intentions of customers. Furthermore, it is important to mention the presence of pleasant smell in order to attract customers. For instance, customers passing by bakery section of the store are more likely to decide on the spur of moment to purchase biscuits, cookies and breads due to their pleasant smell.
- ### 3. Transaction Building Strategy
- **Karl McKeever (2009):** in his article mentions that grocery stores place ready-to-eat snacks opposite entrance of the stores or at the “dwell-zone” so that customers can grab those in a hurry and it is easily visible to the customer’s eyes. Stores tend to keep dairy and fresh food section towards the end so that consumers tend to scan through the other aisles before reaching the section which in return increases the sales. There are many nutritious food items kept before getting to the end section which makes the consumers feel guilty if they simply sweep through the section without picking up anything. Stores also strategically place similar items together so as to confuse the consumers and persuade them to take both the products. Store place items that together right next to each other so that they complement each other and the customers is persuaded to purchase it. For example, keeping corkscrew next to wine bottles, strainers next to tea bags, paint brush next to paint.
 - **Shakuntala Sarkar (2017):** States that one of the effective merchandising strategies is “traffic building strategy” where customers attention is draw to the store, then to the aisle and then to the category. The objective is to catch the consumers undivided attention and is used for products that are regularly used in the household and are price sensitive. The article also talks about how “transaction building strategy” helps in an increase in sale due to the impulse buying behaviour of the customers. When a mother wants to buy crayons for the child, the writing slate and colouring book is kept adjacent to it so as to encourage to buy the complementary product as well.
- ### 4. Merchandising Importance in Store Layout
- **Bellizzi et al. (1958):** The research paper lays emphasis on how a colour can influence the mind of the consumer during the buying process. The results indicated that despite colour preferences, subjects were physically drawn to warm colour (yellow and red) environments, but they paradoxically found red retail environments to be generally ungraceful, negative, tense, and less attractive than cool colour retail (green and blue) environments. It also indicates that consumers touched more products and picked up more products under additional display lightening.
 - **Laurent and Beyhan (2012):** Mentions the importance of product presentation and states that if products of similar packages are kept side by side the customers tend to pick the products placed right int the middle of the shelf. This is because of a tendency that central positions receive more attention from buyers. The fact that products of higher quality are placed on top shelf is the reason why consumers tend to choose products from the top shelves when they make a purchase among unfamiliar brands. It also highlights that large variation in the shelf space has a big impact in the minds of the consumers even if the price and location remain unchanged.
 - **Ivana Štulec et al. (2016):** Highlighted that store design is rather a difficult task for grocery stores as the consumers when go out for grocery shopping consider it a task and not an experience. They are in a hurry and aim to make it smart, hassle free and would want to spend the shortest time as possible. However, if the customers are not looking for a shopping experience, they will identify the lack of it since they have a minimum expectation from the store. The retailers that provides the customer for precisely what they want gains the competitive advantage.
 - **Ms Anshu Singh Choudhary (2016):** Highlights that customer behaviour studies have shown that a well done up store window and a tastefully decorated front proves irresistible to the customer and the customer is inclined to check what the store has to offer. The customer will repeat visits only if the first visit is memorable. The paper states that a retailer has roughly seven seconds to gauge a passing customer’s attention and factors like an

inviting entrance, and unmistakable storefront go a long way. It also mentions that the more the customer browses through the store to more chances are of an impulse purchase. Customer's impulse buying behaviour is responses made by being confronted with stimuli that provoke a desire that ultimately motivate a consumer to make an unplanned purchase decision upon entering the store. The initial step to encourage a customer to make a purchase is to get them in the door.

- **Aditya Upadhyay et al. (2017):** The research paper highlights how Merchandising can be used in different ways in order to garner customer attention. Different stores have to use different strategy so as to draw customer attention. It is stated that factors such as colour, lighting, display and mannequins add to the beauty of the store.
- **Dr. Pratima Merugu and Dr. Krishna Mohan Vaddadi (2017):** The paper revolves around the broad tools of merchandising which include props, signage, colour, store layout, product display and so on. The study opines that these aspects garner customer attention and analyse the impact of impulse buying decision of customers. The paper opines that display is not the only aspect but atmosphere also plays the role of a salient feature at the time of purchase decision making of customer.
- **Elsa Corinne Nell (2017):** The research paper suggests that not all consumers are moved by the merchandising strategies used by the stores however it did incline them to stay longer. It also mentions that lighting of the store is very important as the customer who sees a dark store from far away would not tend to move towards the direction of the store. It can be concluded that merchandising has a limited and an unconscious effect over the minds of the customers.
- **Komaldeep Randhawa and Rajni Saluja (2017):** Revealed that store layout plays an important role in attract the customer towards the product. The research paper stated that customers tend to ignore one third of the products that are kept in packages and on the shelves. This highlights the importance of displaying the products that the store would like to sell the most. Consumers tend to dislike products that are cramped up or jumbled. While browsing the customers are more attracted towards products that are displayed in eye-catching displays. This is exactly why products of top brands are placed on the top shelves so as to draw customer attention.
- **Neha P. Mehta and Pawan Kumar Chugan (2017):** States that it is important and vital for a store to provide and layout and easy access so that consumers feel invited to search and scan through the entire store. Consumers desire to browse is

affected by the interior of the store. Another important aspect highlighted in the study was that window display is the key to attracting customers and should be revised periodically so as to attract new eyes. Consumers often prefer to see and touch the product before making a purchase and displaying of the products provide them with an opportunity to do so.

5. Organic Products and Merchandising

- **Ming-Feng Hsieh and Kyle W. Stiegert (2011):** It is identified that organic shoppers have stronger quality perception, which in turn affect their willingness to pay and price sensitivity in their choice of store format.
- **Alma Bolmstedt Svanqvist and Malin Carlén (2015):** The study shows that the colour green is something most supermarkets use today to make the organic alternative stand out. It also explains how organic food is placed next to the non-organic products so as to show the customers that the store has a variety of options that they can choose from in order to satisfy their demand. Due to the growing awareness of consumers, grocery stores find it imperative to distinguish organic and non-organic products. The study also mentions that organic meat is preferably kept in green shelves so as to highlight it from the other products and the colour green promotes the "organic" alternative.
- **Christopher Bryant et al. (2019):** The study is a comparative study of consumer acceptance of plant-based and clean meat in the countries of USA, China and India. The total sample size consisted of 3,030: 987 in the USA, 1,024 in India, and 1,019 in China. The survey was conducted online and suggested that India and China re the potential future market for these products as compared to the USA. The study stated that In India, we find omnivores and those who eat more meat are again more likely to eat plant-based meat. Higher income groups in India expressed more interest in plant-based meat, as did more educated and more politically liberal consumers. Familiarity with the products was strongly predictive of purchase intent, and food neophobia predicted lower purchase intent. The research concluded that all three markets are substantial, with India and China showing more initial interest.
- **Mrs Tejinder Kaur and Dr Gautam Bansal (2019):** The research paper states that one of the important factors that have led to the increase in organic food consumers is the fundamental knowledge that consumers have and the increased health awareness. The ability to purchase also depends the money the consumer is willing to buy

since organic products fall under the ambit of premium priced products. Since people are realising their role and responsibility towards the environment, they are willing to pay a little extra towards green products.

- **Roshny Munshi (2020):** Explains that nutrition consciousness was the most motivating factor for consumers to opt for organic products. The increase in quality and safety of the products is why consumers are willing to pay a higher price. Since organic food products do not have any artificial element in their production, they have a natural taste which is distinguishable and desirable as compared to conventional food products. Organic food products are currently considered to be a premium good as a result of which it is mostly targeted towards the upper middle classes.
6. **Veganism and Merchandising**
- **Melaina Juntti (2013):** In the article mentions that consumers appreciate when products are labelled or shelf tags are used in order to demarcate the vegan products. This not only makes potential purchases more visible, but it signals that a retailer respects and promotes meat- and animal-product-free diets—which many have chosen for reasons beyond just health.
 - **Katrina Fox (2018):** The article talks about how most vegan shoppers have a planned shopping occasions and the customer is mostly aware of the product they would intend to buy. The merchandising technique adopted by retailers is that they shelf the vegan products next to the healthy lifestyle options so that it makes the consumer's shopping trip easier. The article emphasises that vegan meat products should be kept alongside the meat section itself because luring customers into a separate section for meat would lose an enormous number of customers. The reason for this was that if it has the same or equivalent nutrients, tastes the same, it's presented in the same way then it should be called meat and hence should be placed in the same section.

10. RESEARCH GAP

Research Gap is the area of research which previous research papers have not explored or is under-explored. This could arise due to a population or sample (size, type, location, etc), research method, data collection or analysis, or another research variable or condition. Sometimes, there is a possibility that a question or problem has not been answered by any of the existing studies or research within a field.

The literature surrounding merchandising has a limited scope as the level of satisfaction that a customer feels is not very clear in any of the studies. The level of satisfaction is very

vague and differ from retailer to retailer and hence cannot be considered as uniform for every aspect. It needs to be altered according to the needs and the wants of the customer keeping in mind the target audience.

Many research papers have mentioned about stimuli and how it impacts the buying behaviour of the customer. For example, excitement may arouse them to buy impulsively because they are excited and want to pick up products which they do not have but research papers do not talk about a customer feeling pleasure and excitement at the same time. It is explained that the stimuli help retainers get customers into the mood which gets them relaxed and have a good shopping experience. However, it is possible for a customer to feel more than one sensation at the same time but there has been no research in this field.

The research papers which were reviewed had used primary data to analyse their research however there is a high possibility that while answering the questions the respondents recalled the mood state which followed the purchase rather than the mood which preceded the impulse buying. After shopping the customers must have felt satisfied but before making a purchase the customer would be feeling a different mood and there is a chance of them interchanging these moods while answering the questions.

Since Merchandising is mainly done in order to persuade the customer to make an impulse purchase there are no research papers which state that Merchandising will assure buying. Retailers use Merchandising to influence customers to buy more but there no significant research which suggests how effective the results of merchandising are and does not assure buying. There are many stages that follow such as gauging the customer attention, making them browse through various categories and Merchandising is merely a tool which is used by all retailers.

There are no uniform ways in which a particular display which affect the minds of the customer or the level of significance a particular display has. For example, people that are hard-core vegans would appreciate vegan food among the other product shelves and a tag which mentions the food is vegan. However, contrary to this, the customers that are not hard-core vegans would prefer a different section denoted for vegan food so that they can explore and get more information about the different products which are displayed but this not assure a purchase as they are just inquisitive to find out more. This is not practical from the aspect of a retailer as merchandising takes a high margin of the profit made.

Another important aspect was that many grocery stores may make small margins and small margins do not justify for a high cost of merchandising which was also a limitation. Small margins often require tight costs control which leads to the negligence of merchandising and hence the merchandising does not turn out to be fruitful or do due justice to merchandising and its advantages.

A significant research gap with regards to organic products

Personal Income of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
No Income	73	58.4%
Less than 5 Lakhs	28	22.4%
More than 5 Lakhs	24	19.2%
Total	125	100

was that not many consumers had complete knowledge of the product and what it curtails and the benefits involved and were hence not convinced to pay a premium price for the

Family Income of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 Lakhs	65	52%
More than 5 Lakhs	60	48%
Total	125	100

product. Many studies suggest that 40% of the customers are still unaware of the quality standards associated with organic products and misinterpret or misunderstand the entire idea of organic products.

11. DATA INTERPRETATION

Demographic Factors:

The following are the frequency distributions that were conducted on the demographics namely age, gender, occupation, personal income, family income, family size and the frequency of grocery shopping of the respondents.

Age of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	73	58.4%
21-30	17	13.6%
31-40	5	4%
41-50	13	10.4%
Above 50	17	13.6%
Total	125	100

Gender of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Male	68	54.4%
Female	57	45.6%
Other	0	0%
Total	125	100

Occupation of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Student	78	62.4%
Professional	13	10.4%
Salaried	25	20%

Housewife	9	7.2%
Total	125	100

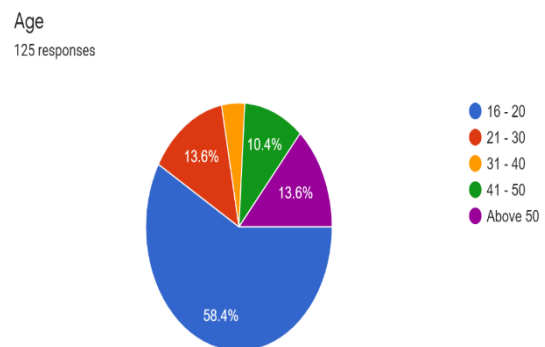
Size of Family of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1-2	8	6.4%
3-4	80	64%
5-6	29	23.2%
More than 7	8	6.4%
Total	125	100

Frequency of Grocery Shopping	Frequency	Percentage
Always	45	36%
Occasionally	65	52%
Rarely	15	12%
Total	125	100

11.1. Demographic Information of Respondents

The researcher has made all efforts to make the respondent base identical to the universe. However, due to limitation of resources and time constraints, the results may not reflect the same.

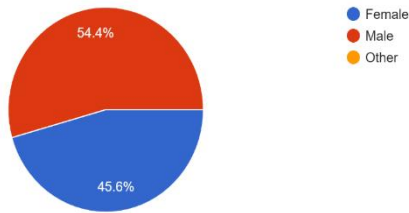
Exhibit 1.1: Age of Respondents



Majority of the 125 respondents lie in the age group of 16-20 years, constituting 58.4% of the sample, followed by 21-30 years which amount to 13.6% of the sample. The age group of 31-40 years contribute to only 4% of the sample, whereas, 41-50 years constitute to 10.4% and age group of 50 and above constitute to 13.6% of the sample.

Exhibit 1.2: Gender of the Respondents

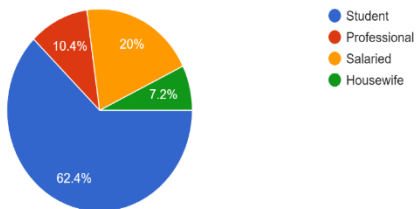
Gender
125 responses



In the given study, 54.4% of the 125 respondents were male which is 68 men out of the 125 respondents. The remaining 45.6% were female respondents, which are a total of 57 females out of the 125 respondents.

Exhibit 1.3: Occupation of the Respondents

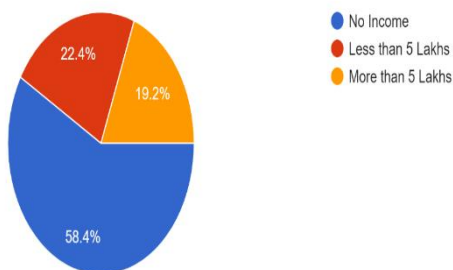
Occupation
125 responses



Out of the 125 respondents that were surveyed, 62.4% were students who were pursuing their education, however contributed to the study by giving a very modern and refined approach to the study as their approach towards merchandising is different as compared to the older generation. 10.4% of the respondents were professionals and 20% were salaried. There were 7.2% respondents that were housewives which consisted of 9 individuals out of 125 that were surveyed.

Exhibit 1.4: Personal Income of the Respondents

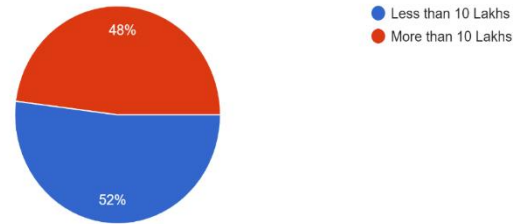
Personal Income
125 responses



Since most of the respondents were students, 58.4% had no income and were dependent on the family. The above diagram shows that 22.4% of the respondents have a personal income of less than 5 lakhs while 19.2% of the respondents have a personal income of more than 5 lakhs, which are 28 and 24 individuals respectively.

Exhibit 1.5: Family Income of the Respondents

Family Income
125 responses

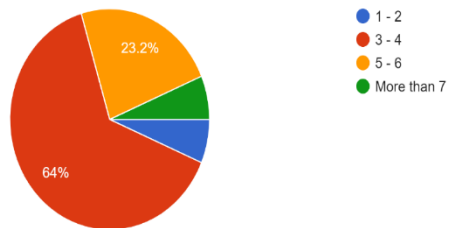


The study also highlights the family income of the respondents, 48% of which have an income of more than 10 lakhs while 52% of the respondents have a family income of less than 10 lakhs.

It is important to note that the income is on an annual basis and not monthly basis.

Exhibit 1.6: Size of Family

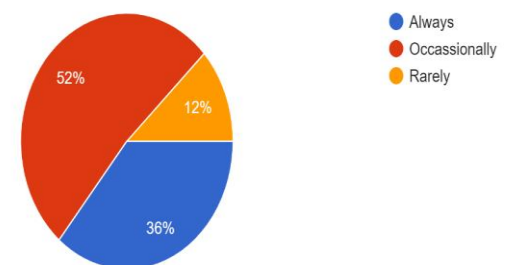
Size of Family
125 responses



From the above study we can see that majority of the respondents have a family size of 3-4 persons which constitutes to 64% of the total respondents. 23.2% of the respondents have a family size of 5-6 individuals. Both the categories of 1-2 family size and more than 7 individuals in a family have contributed to 6.4% of the total respondents.

Exhibit 1.7: How often do the Respondents Grocery Shop

How often do you Grocery Shop?
125 responses



For the purpose of this study, the researcher aims to find out the frequency of the respondents shopping in a grocery store. A significant number of respondents shop occasionally which is 52% of the total respondents. 36% of the

respondents shop in grocery stores on a daily basis, whereas, 12% of the respondents rarely shop at grocery stores.

11.2. Merchandising w.r.t. Physical Layout

Name	--	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I choose to enter the store on the basis of the creative window display which catches my attention, creates interest and invites me in.	F	6	18	48	45	8	125
	%	4.8	14.4	38.4	36	6.4	100
I feel that the arrangement of the entrance helps me gauge the impression of the store and thereby compels me to enter in.	F	4	15	27	65	14	125
	%	3.2	12	21.6	52	11.2	100
I would prefer a good space and proper layout inside the store as it would make a comfortable environment for me.	F	3	2	7	57	56	125
	%	2.4	1.6	5.6	45.6	44.8	100
I am influenced by the way of presenting items and decorations as it increases my interest in purchasing the product.	F	3	6	24	64	28	125
	%	2.4	4.8	19.2	51.2	22.4	100
I would tend to make an impulse purchase due to the availability of multiple options.	F	3	23	23	48	28	125
	%	2.4	18.4	18.4	38.4	22.4	100

Observation:

Out of the 125 respondents, only 53 respondents (42.4%) responded positively to that statement that they choose to enter the store on the basis of the creative window display that catches their attention. 24 respondents (19.2%) reacted negatively to the statement while 48 respondents (38.4%) were neutral to the statement.

1. Out of the 125 respondents surveyed, 79 respondents (63.2%) stated that the arrangement of the entrance helps them gauge the impression of the store which in turn compels them to enter in. 19 respondents (15.2%) disagreed with the statement and 27 respondents (21.6%) were neutral to the same.
2. Among the 125 respondents, a considerable number i.e. 113 respondents (90.4%) responded positively to the statement that they prefer a good space and proper product layout which would make a comfortable shopping environment. 5 respondents (4%) have responded negatively to the statement whereas 7 respondents (5.6%) were neutral to the statement.
3. Out of the 125 respondents, 92 respondents (73.6%) have shown a positive reaction to the way products are presented and decorated to increase the sales. 9 respondents (7.2%) have reacted negatively while 24 respondents (19.2%) have a neutral reaction to the statement.
4. Of the 125 respondents, 76 respondents (60.8%) responded positively to the statement that availability of multiple options would lead to impulse buying behaviour. 26 respondents (20.8%) seem to believe that multiple options may not lead to impulse buying whereas 23 respondents (18.4%) were neutral to the statement.

11.3 Merchandising Tools

Name	--	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I feel that the product placed according to different colour combinations catch my attention.	F	5	16	30	62	12	125
	%	4	12.8	24	49.6	9.6	100
I feel the use of lights in different brightness highlights the product and draws my attention.	F	3	17	17	66	22	125
	%	2.4	13.6	13.6	52.8	17.6	100

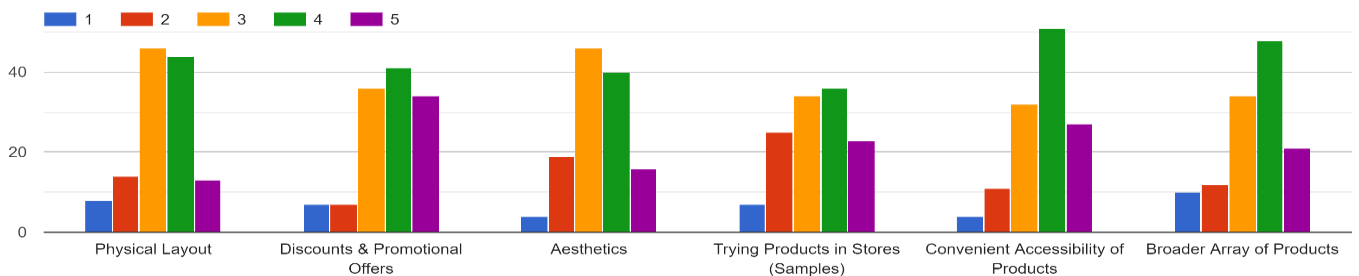
I am influenced by the use of music and it leads to spending more time and making choices freely.	F	9	21	28	47	20	125
	%	7.2	16.8	22.4	37.6	16	100
I am attracted towards a product due to the smell.	F	2	9	22	57	35	125
	%	1.6	7.2	17.6	45.6	28	100
I feel that the use of signage makes it easier for me to shop.	F	2	2	29	70	22	125
	%	1.6	1.6	23.2	56	17.6	100
I feel that the physical examination of the product leads to a positive buying response.	F	2	2	19	66	36	125
	%	1.6	1.6	15.2	52.8	28.8	100

Observation:

1. Out of the 125 respondents, 74 respondents (59.2%) responded positively to the statement that different colour combinations catch the consumers attention. 21 respondents (16.8%) have responded negatively to the statement while 30 respondents (24%) were neutral towards the statement.
2. Out of the total 125 respondents, 88 respondents (70.4%) responded positively to the statement that lights have a different way of highlighting the product and can make a difference when used in different brightness. 20 respondents (16%) disagreed with the statement while 17 respondents (13.6%) were neutral towards the statement.
3. Out of the 125 respondents, 67 respondents (53.6%) agreed with the statement that they were influenced by the music and tend to spend more time in the store while making choices freely. 30 respondents (24%) disagreed with the statement whereas 28 respondents (22.4%) were neutral towards the same.
4. 92 respondents (73.6%) out of the total 125 respondents reacted positively to that statement that they are attracted towards a product due to the smell. 11 respondents (8.8%) reacted negatively to the statement while 22 respondents (17.6%) were neutral towards the statement.
5. Out of the 125 respondents, 92 respondents (73.6%) agreed that the use of signage makes it easier for them to shop whereas 4 respondents (3.2%) disagreed with the statement. 29 respondents (23.2%) were neutral to the statement.
6. 102 respondents (81.6%) out of the 125 respondents surveyed agreed that physical examination leads to a positive response towards a product. 4 respondents (3.2%) reacted negatively towards the statement whereas 19 respondents (15.2%) were neutral to the statement.

11.4. Consumer Perception towards Merchandising

Rank in order of preference the Merchandising factors that influence your buying behaviour. (1 being less likely and 5 being more likely)



Observation:

Out of the total 125 respondents, it is observed that 13 respondents (10.4%) deem to consider that the physical layout of the grocery store plays an important role as a merchandising tool and influence consumers. 34 respondents (27.2%) have revealed that they are influenced by the

discounts and promotional offers that the stores offer to the consumers.

16 respondents (12.8%) have highlighted that aesthetics play an important role in the merchandising of the grocery store and can have a positive impact on the consumers' mind.

23 respondents (18.4%) have stated that the samples of the product or trying the product in the store will give a better understanding of the product to the consumers and hence they can make a better judgement whether to buy the product or not.

A total of 27 respondents (21.6%) have highlighted that the merchandising strategy are deemed to be effective when the products are easily accessible or noticeable to the respondents.

Out of the 125 respondents, 21 respondents have stated that a broader array of products is a significant tool in merchandising as it provides a wider scope of options for the consumer and they can check various products before making a purchase decision.

12. FINDINGS

12.1 Merchandising Strategy and Demographic Factors:

A. Age:

There is a significant relation between Merchandising Strategies and the age of the consumer. For the purpose of this study, majority of the consumers belonged to the age group of 16-20. This is because the researcher aims at understanding the approach of the younger population towards these merchandising strategies. A younger age group tends to research or read a lot before making a purchase decision. They do not hesitate to experiment with different products. However, they are dependent of their parents and hence have to find ways to fit their needs within the spending limit. Thus, this research paper aims at understanding their perception towards merchandising strategies and how retailers cope up with these difficulties in order to entice consumers to make a purchase.

The population between 20-30 and above are working class and hence consider grocery shopping a task and not an experience. This makes it challenging for the retailers as they need to turn this tedious task into an experience for the consumers. (Štulec et al., 2016)

Another significant relation was that an older generation does not read or explore more as compared to the older generation. This is because of the easy availability of technology and reading of various articles. A comparatively younger generation has a broader idea of why is merchandising used and how is it used and may respond to it accordingly. Whereas an older generation may not even identify these merchandising techniques that have influenced their buying behaviour.

B. Personal Income:

The buying behaviour of a consumer is determined on the basis of their spending capacity. This can be understood by identifying the personal income of the consumers. A consumer with an income of less than 5 lakhs would tend to prefer promotional offers or products which lie in the middle of the pricing range however, a consumer with an income of

more than 5 lakhs would look at different attributes while making a purchase decision. The different aspects that an individual with a higher income would consider may be quality if the product or a premium range of the same product. The consumer may be more open to various options since the spending capacity would be comparatively more.

C. Family Income:

The family income of a particular individual plays a significant role as the family income and the size of the family are two variables that are inter-related. A family with an annual income of more than 10 lakhs would not make a purchase decision solely based on the promotional offers and would be open to the idea of trying new products and then making a future decision of whether to purchase the same product or not. A family with an annual income of less than 10 lakhs would not be very inclined in buying extra products on a trial and error basis since grocery shopping includes buying essential and not luxury products hence consumers do not spend large amount of money on the same.

D. Occupation:

The buying behaviour of an individual is dependent on various aspects, one of which is the occupation. Since most of the respondents were students, it can be concluded that the buying behaviour of the consumers followed with a limit to spend. However, salaried people do have a limited range of spending it was noted that professionals have a higher spending limit and hence prefer products depending on the attributes and are not very driven by the price. Hence with an increase in the spending limit the approach towards buying products is evidently affected. This is also influenced by the consumers personal preference and the influence of the circle of the respondents.

12.2 Merchandising and Physical Layout:

The survey conducted by the researcher observed that majority of the respondents i.e.; 113 respondents (90.4%) prefer to have a good space and layout of the grocery store so that they can check different products and spend more time in searching for the right product. This is positive response of the consumer is due to the frequent use of grocery products and how everyone uses it in their day to day life. Hence it is essential to browse through a variety of options to choose for the best fit.

The reason why store display plays an important role is because the merchandising strategies do not guarantee that it will have the same impact on all consumers however, a good layout can entice the consumer to stay longer hence leading to the increase in the probability of buying. (Nell, 2017) This leads to the conclusion that merchandising when used in the right sense can have an unconscious effect on the minds of the consumer.

Another research paper highlighted that a well displayed layout will lead to consumers browsing more products and

feel invited to look for other products. (Mehta & Chugan, 2016)

Hence it can be concluded that consumers tend to prefer physical layout over other aspects as it plays an evident role as a merchandising strategy as compared to the others.

Along with Physical Layout, consumers also preferred to physically examine the product which included sample, touching and feeling the product which gave them time to gauge whether they would like to make the purchase or not. 102 respondents (81.6%) responded positively to the statement that physical examination of the product would be a preferred choice. Physical examination of the product could also remove the hindrance in their mind causing to an impulse purchase. A clear passage along the aisles lead to a better environment to shop which in turn urges the need to touch and feel the products. Hence a good display and the physical touch are interrelated. (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013)

The research paper also mentioned that changing the layout of the store depending on occasions or decorating certain areas depending on the products that are displayed there turn out to be an effective merchandising stimulus. (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013) In the study, the researcher observed that 92 respondents (73.6%) have a positive response to the way products are decorated and believe it to play an important role in increasing sales.

An example of which would be decorating the area of mangoes with the yellow and orange colour giving it the summer season look will instantly grab the customers attention. These merchandising tools play an effective role to attract customers and influence their buying decision.

It is also observed that the creative window display and the arrangement of products at the very entrance helps the consumers gauge the impression towards the store. In the survey that was conducted, 53 respondents (42.4%) believed that the window displays play an important role in the minds of the customer towards a particular store. Out of the 125 respondents, 79 respondents (63.2%) reacted positively to the statement that the entrance of the store is where the customer can gauge the further course of action and hence plays a crucial role in the path of leading the customers inside the store. Hence it can be concluded that the first impression of the store plays a key role in creating an impression in the minds of the consumers.

12.3 Merchandising and Stimulus:

Merchandising as a tool does not guarantee a purchase however it is used to create an impulse buying behaviour or can be used to influence the consumers to make a purchase. Merchandising plays a significant role when the consumers do not have a predetermined notion of what they want to buy and merchandising plays the role of an information aid to remind the consumers what they need. There is various stimulus that play significant role in the consumers mind however, each of them may affect every consumer in a different way.

In this study, the researcher aims at identifying how the consumers perceive each stimulus and which can prove to be most affecting depending on the crowd that the retailers have to serve.

Out of all the stimulus of merchandising regarding which the consumers were questioned, the most effective were smell and signage with a positive response of 92 respondents each i.e. (73.6%) of the total sample size. However, the area of research regarding smell is underexplored, the smell of a particular product can entice consumers to buy the product more even if the consumer did not intend. Also, this works as a silent salesman as no efforts are really required for the same since smell is an element which the consumers cannot avoid. (Nishanov & Ahunjonov, 2016)

Signage as a merchandising tool is very affecting as it creates a positive impact in the minds of the consumer leading them to make impulse buying decisions. The study also shows that consumer that have a larger family size prefer signage and promotional offers as the volume of purchase is comparatively more. This clearly highlights that promotional offers can increase sales if used evidently and attractively in the grocery stores.

74 respondents (59.2%) believed that the colour combinations attract their attention and 88 respondents (70.4%) highlighted that the use of lights and different brightness bring out the positive aspects of a product. A study suggested that light plays an important role in attracting consumers as a place with darker light releases negative reaction and hence a well-lit store would attract more consumers towards them. (Nell, 2017)

Music as a background filler had a positive impact on the consumers. 67 respondents (53.6%) believed that their shopping experience was better with the help of music and would help consumers calm down after they entered the store and adjust to the surrounding. Music leads to high arousal and overstimulation which would people's self-regulation and ability to think which would in turn increase the chances of impulse buying. (Bhakat & Muruganatham, 2013)

13. SUGGESTIONS

By focusing on the aspect of consumer preference and the merchandising strategies of grocery stores there are certain aspects that still require attention.

1. While putting up signages, retailers could incorporate the latest trends so that it catches the consumer attention. This makes the consumer aware about the efforts put in by the retailers and differentiates him from his competitors. These trends can turn out to be a word of mouth publicity and have a positive impact on the consumers.
2. Even though grocery shopping is regarded as a task but retailers try to convert this task into an experience. While consumers appreciate assistance whenever necessary it should be noted that certain

consumers do not like to be disturbed while they are shopping. Hence the availability of a friendly staff is very essential. Retailers could provide consumers with baskets that have two types of labels which suggest that one group prefers assistance while the other would not. This would help the retailers in focusing their attention where it is most necessary and avoid the consistent interruption during shopping.

3. Along with the attractive packaging, consumers tend to dislike products with excess packaging. Instead, retailers could provide clear instruction regarding the product aside from the one already mentioned on the product. This would be an easier version of the instructions and would give a personal touch to the consumer.
4. While the consumer is interested in what is inside the packaging, it is the exterior that does the talking hence products with aesthetics are given importance to. The products which appeal to the eye may create a positive impact on the consumer and attract the attention even if the consumer did not intend to purchase it. If the packaging is attractive enough the consumer will remember the same and purchase the product eventually.
5. While focusing on the target audience, the consumer must research about the basic difference between certain product as this will prove to an effective strategy for the consumer. For example, all candies may be the same however there are fewer halal options and hence can be a place of improvement for the retailer. These small details prove to be effective in the longer run.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to understand the consumer perception and what influences the purchase behaviour of consumer a detailed can be conducted on the basis of region, culture, aesthetics. Adding these aspects would give the consumer a more personalised touch. It is important for the retailer to identify the audience that he is expected to cater to and alter arrangements according to their needs. Consumers in the city of Mumbai are habituated to getting quick access or responses to their needs however this may not be the same for other regions. The customer base in Rajasthan may or Northern States prefer a more cultural approach and hence identifying the needs of the audience is very important. Many merchandising tools discussed in the paper are based on the general principle and hence there is a further scope of detailed work.

Many research papers spoke about smell to be an important factor in merchandising however, certain people may be allergic to a particular product or may have a bad experience attached to the same. This factor should be taken into consideration when opting for smell as a tool and detailed

research is very important. However, retailers can play safe by going for general products like tea or coffee and providing a separate section for the same so that only those consumers that have a liking towards the product can identify and locate the same.

Along with the availability of many options retailers tend to crowd the aisle which creates a negative impact in the minds of the consumers. Hence it is advisable for retailers to sub-categorize section so that it is easier for consumers to move. Retailers must realise that the more time the consumer spends the more likely the consumer is to make a purchase however, if the consumer cannot locate the product, they may get disheartened and may probably not return. Hence, along with the availability of a variety of products it is important for the consumers to have easy access to the same.

Retailers could also provide points or cards for regular customers so that they will have a personal touch with the store depending on the scale of the operation. Stores with larger area can display product more efficiently whereas, stores with lesser areas can focus on pricing. Hence it is essential for the retailer to realise the strategy that will prove beneficial.

15. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

With the increase in competition in the market, the grocery stores however simple are a lot more complicated. In order to make the consumers experience one that they will remember and influence the consumers, retailers have to adapt the merchandising strategies and time and again revise the same depending on the target audience. A display which may seem do different has a lot of research and reasoning as to why it is displayed in a particular pattern. These little details are paid attention to with the help of the merchandising tools. Merchandising is a silent salesman which helps the consumers to make a buying decision or influence them and entice them into making an impulse purchase.

In this study, the researcher aimed at understanding the consumer perception towards merchandising strategies and which out of all the strategies is the most effective. The study also suggests future area of research that are underexplored and can be studied in dept.

It can be said that merchandising has an unconscious effect on the consumers' mind. It has a very limited effect however it changes the atmosphere in which the consumer will continue shopping. The main aim of merchandising is to draw the consumer's attention and attract them towards a product. This does not guarantee a sale however it does increase the probability of the same. Merchandising strategies influence a mind which has not pre-decided what to buy. Hence, when the consumer sees a product the merchandising tools persuade the consumer to make the purchase without having to reason it.

In the survey which was conducted, a total of 125 respondents shared their perception regarding merchandising strategies. It was highlighted that demographic play an important role in the consumers' approach. The region where the consumers belong, the occupation, the income, the family size, all of these factors influence the consumers buying behaviour. The paper also analysed whether merchandising strategies can lead to impulse buying behaviour in consumers.

It can be concluded that the physical appearance of the store plays a vital role in the minds of the consumer. A well displayed entrance and store layout invites the consumer in, in order to explore the store and spend more time between the aisles. The most important merchandising tool is the store layout and display as highlighted by the majority of the respondents. A good space would make a comfortable environment for the consumer and they would be free to check the variety of products and make an informed decision.

Merchandising Stimulus like colour combination, light and brightness, smell of the products, signage, music has proved to influence the consumers and make them comfortable. From the study it can be concluded that consumers prefer products that are placed with proper colour combination keeping in mind the background and other aspects. The consumers believe that the colour pop up and are evidently visible to the eye making it difficult to ignore. These aspects influence the minds of the consumer and they are compelled to continue browsing.

Studies have suggested that use of lights bring out the important features of the products and the survey concluded that consumer prefer a good light and different brightness to make the products look more appealing. The bright colour has a positive impact on the consumers mind and the product and instruction regarding the product are easily available.

Most of the respondents agreed that the smell of the product influences them and attracts them towards the product. This is because smell is an aspect which human cannot control and it naturally plays a role thus inviting the consumers towards them. The fresh smell also makes the consumer want the product even though he may not have a pre-determined notion of buying the product. The on the spot impulse decision is possible with the help of merchandising.

Many a times consumers are in a hurry and find it difficult to locate products and hence signage plays an important role while consumers shop. They not only help consumers locate the product but also provide them with various options in the same category, highlighting the attributes of different products so that the consumer can decide the best option for himself. Promotional offers also have proven important to increase sale. This is because even though the consumer may not need excess quantity of a particular product, the consumer is in two minds whether to buy the product or not which increases the probability of the purchase to increase. Most consumers look for promotional offers and then make

purchases or decide to enter the store on the basis of the promotional offers being offered at the store.

From the above study we can say that there is a significant relationship between Merchandising Strategies and Consumer Buying Behaviour, proving the alternative hypothesis of this study(H1). The majority of the respondents surveyed for this study were clearly influenced by the Merchandising Strategies and reacted positively to the different merchandising tools and stimulus mentioned in the questionnaire. Thus we can conclude that Merchandising has a significant role in the sales of a product and can play an important role to increase sales.

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