



ITINERANT VISUAL MERCHANDISING FROM A NEW CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR

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Abstract: *The points of sale are no longer a space where money is exchanged for a product or a service. The search for new sensations and engaging experiences is growing. In response to the consumer behavior indicated as a trend by the Trendwatching Latin America report entitled Retail Retold, in May 2014, this presents truck-shops as an alternative for retail. Truck-shops are moving trade models that use trucks or vans as point of sale. Since they consist in points of sale, they should follow visual merchandising projects as well. However, due the temporariness and mobility, there is a wider range of issues to be considered in the consumption experience in such spaces. Thus, we intended to approach how the premises of visual merchandising are applied to these trades without an established location. For that, we conducted: (1) a bibliographical research on visual merchandising and buying experience, (2) the Trendwatching's trend description and interpretation, on top of (3) exploratory surveys on visual merchandising's specificities applied to truck-shops. The study concluded that experimentation is magnified in truck-shops retail, since the locations' choice extends the sensory stimuli – visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile –, in addition to the generation of different surprise attributes at each new chosen location, creating new brand's memories. In contrast, as a negative aspect we point out inclement weather conditions can influence on the presence of consumers in open spaces.*

Keywords: *visual merchandising, consumer behavior, truck-shops, trend.*

1. Introduction

Space, that is commonly associated with the sale of products, receives the new role of promoter of consumer sensations. It is in such space that a consumer has a deep contact with the brand, where it is possible to explore hers/his senses and penetrate hers/his memory in order to consolidate an image. The consumer behavior is often studied by experts, given its relevance to the commercial and retail culture. When behavior is identified as an influencing potential and initiates a viral diffusion process it may be considered a trend. In addition to behavior trends, there are also background trends (CALDAS, 2004) that influence the market scenario - but not only - on several levels. Trends are commonly informed through bulletins (trend reports), which are translated and appropriated to the reality of institutions and companies. This paper is based on the May 2014 report organized by the trends research agency Trendwatching. The report indicates a predisposition to a particular buying behavior in Latin America. The called food trucks or truck-shops have been gaining attention in the Brazilian media recently; despite the existence in other countries for a long period of time. This retail model is characterized by not having a fixed point of sale, having the store adapted to a truck that gets the necessary customization to offer the brand's service or product. This paper will adopt the term truck-shops proposed by the Trendwatching.

This study aims to discuss how the visual merchandising premises are applied to this new type of business, including how the brand's expressions are adapted to these itinerant points of sale; given the absence of a

pre-set environment like a shopping center or a constant address. Also we aimed to present a comprehensive and updated overview on the growth of these business models; since, again, they are not points of sale always present in the same locations.

The study conducted can be defined as a theoretical review with a description and interpretation of the trend data. Stumpf (2012, p.51) classifies the bibliographic research as "a set of procedures that aims (...) to select documents related to the studied topic (...) with the purpose of subsequently use in the writing of a paper". Therefore, in the theoretical part of this paper, definitions of visual merchandising and consumer behavior are exposed. The descriptive stage of the research is grounded in the presuppositions of descriptive research reported by Vergara (2006) as the type of research that "watches, record, correlates and describes facts or phenomena of a given reality without manipulating them". The nature of this study can be classified as qualitative, in the organization proposed by Neves (1996), because we aimed to interpret how the truck-shops as a trend phenomenon was informed by the agency and interpreted by the business owners of these trades as a point of sale.

Therefore, it was decided to deepen a consumer trend given its profusion, which also reflects in the consumers' behavior given their interaction and interpretation of the point of sale in which the visual merchandising is applied. The popularization of this business model (truck-shops) raises the problem of this research, concerning the visual appeal that these vehicles have. Since they are points of sale, the proposed relationship with the theoretical background on visual merchandising intends to analyze the adaptation of the brand to the space and also to the aroused sensations, inducing emotional consumption (LIPOVETSKY, 2007). When the purchase act is no longer mechanical and has emotional ties, a new consumer connected to the brand arises. Author state that the decision-making ability would be vulnerable by the absence of emotions, since they are fundamental to the construction of value judgments and "present immediate information about the world" (NORMAN, 2008, p.30). In the case of truck-shops, consumers are literally followers of the brand and the business, as they will seek information about the location of the trade at a specific time and, consequently, they will become diffusers of that information, approximating new customers to the brand.

As a result, this research is justified by the economic and market relevance of the topic, truck-shops, and its direct relationship to the studies on consumer behavior, consumption as leisure and visual merchandising. Still, it is justified that the subject itself is innovative and deals with a still exponent theme – both in the market and in the academy. The developed research proposed the analytical description of the trend as well as the interpretation of the trend's proposals to the premises of visual merchandising.

2. Visual merchandising and consumption behavior

New market branches come up at all times and with them new brands and proposals to consumers (TRENDWATCHING, 2014). Therefore, retail's task is not only to offer a new product, but also to create an unusual experience. Visual merchandising is strictly linked to the shopping experience provided to the users through sensations enjoyable at the point of sale. Among so many retail options, the consumer does not arbitrarily choose a store, she/he searches for new sensations. These are the searcher that the visual merchandising project must meet (SHEHTMAN, 2000 *apud* SILVA, 2002). If the project is poorly designed, the result can lead to a negative view of the business and, consequently, the brand. Thus, Blessa (2008) states that the environment that surrounds the product has great influence in the buying decision and should act forcefully in the face of consumer resistance.

From Silva (2002) and Blessa (2008) considerations regarding merchandising, combined with what Yoo, Park and MacInnis (1998) consider about emotional experiences in stores, it is possible to build a meaning for the term visual merchandising. One can affirm that visual merchandising is defined as a set of techniques that has aims to customize the point of sale's environment and to provide unique experiences and emotions to consumers by exploring the relationship between identity, brand management and architectural elements. Visual merchandising creates the environment responsible for motivating and

driving consumers to purchase. Therefore, it should complement and contribute to store and brand's image, strengthening the memories of the consumer (COSTA, 2008) and creating the brand's image. To know the commercialized product is a task inherent to the practice of visual merchandising. Therein lies much of the inspiration for the creation of the ambience, which is also complemented by the brand identity directions. Thus, to transform products into objects of desire; convincing consumers that they cannot live without it - or, at least, that their lives would be far more interesting with that product -; and to produce quality experiences to be associated with the brand's imaginary is a task of the visual merchandising's activity.

The production and the provocation of sensations determine new consumption behaviors that are identified by individuals' purchase intent. Noel (2009, p.12) defines consumer behavior as a "study of the processes involved when consumers buy, consume and dispose of goods, services, activities and ideas, in order to satisfy their needs and desires". With the intention of be competitive and to satisfy a customer it is not enough to offer a product of excellent quality, it is needed to bring out emotions and sensations in that customer; to make her/him live an emotion (MARRAZZO, 2012). Solomon (2008, pp.28) complements the proposed consumption process including "issues that influence the consumer before, during and after the purchase". Thus, the evocation of the senses and how the brand is presented at the point of sale determines how that individual will consume it and what memory she/he will save from that experience.

Underhill (2009, pp.26) states that the economy would not survive if a consumer went into a store just to acquire the necessary. The individual is not only submitted to surprises in the point of sale, as well as he visits it in search of surprises, as a leisure activity. This type of leisure was inaugurated by the emergence of large department stores in the mid-nineteenth century and is being enhanced until contemporary times (MORGAN, 2008), in which where retail has the role of offering not only products, but concepts and experiences, and also integrating consumers within a social context, making them feel like they belong to a group. Trough the course of history, the relationship with the consumer was changed. Facing the demands of an increasingly competitive market, consumer behavior researches reveal trends in which retailers can invest in order to meet emerging consumers' desires.

3. Consumption trend: *truck-shops*

The word trend has as etymological origin the Latin word *tendentia*, with meaning of "tend to or lean to". In other words, it is the direction in which something tends to move (Campos; Gomez, 2014, p. 189). The word is most commonly associated with practices of the fashion and apparel market and it infers specific fashion information – such as colors, prints, shapes and style – based on studies conducted in the cultural and social fields. Thus, significant social behavior changes can provide striking aspects of reality that will most likely impact in the future; aspects that are directed to different sectors and adapted for the trend's "utilization".

The centralization of the trends' expertise is contemporaneously divided by events and fairs and *bureaux de style* and trend forecasting agencies. In the last category there are several specialized companies, among them: WGSN, Trendwatching, BOX 1824, Future Concept Lab, Nelly Rodi, etc. These agencies study trends and implement methods in order to decode the culture, trying to anticipate consumers' new realities and desires" (Marins, 2008, pp.6).

3.1 Retail Retold and truck-shops

One of the aforementioned agencies, *Trendwatching*, presented in May 2014 a report entitled "Retail Retold". According to the publication, the points of sale have become increasingly less interesting, less transparent and poorer in options. As stated in the 2nd item of this paper, the consumer is constantly searching for new experiences and – therefore – it sounds paradoxical that stores cannot offer what consumers want. If the user is no longer satisfied with having excellent service and now searches for spaces that deliver him more than that, it is required for retail to meet these new requirements. Thus, it lays on

the visual merchandiser to adequate the points of sale to this new experiential requirement, maintaining the constant pursuit of differentiation and highlight in contrast to the competition.

The Retail Retold trend presents five narratives for retail in the upcoming years. They are: (1) brands on wheels; (2) brands on the road; (3) off-on-off; (4) social stores; and (5) edu-commerce. Among them, the chosen concept for this paper is the first one – brands on wheels – which consists in traders in movement. The hectic routine of big city centers request for convenience and customization of services offered to customers. Therefore, it is suggested that companies will abandon their fixed addresses and will go where this consumer is located. This causes a drastically fall of the requirement of the client's motivation to relocate to the shops, since they will be attended by truck-shops in the area by them frequented (TRENDWATCHING, 2014).

Markets on wheels derived from Mexican food-trucks that operate in the United States and in Mexico itself. In these countries the activity is commonly developed within the food industry. According to Hermosillo (2012), sedentary habits caused Mexicans to open this type of businesses. According to the author, this type of service, on the other hand, offers pedestrians a vital necessity, food, to which they would not have access – at least not so easily – otherwise.

One of the food trucks' strategies is seeking point of sale opportunities in remote locations, where there are not many eating options. Another point in their favor is that they present an alternative to the inhabitants of large cities by allowing them to avoid driving long distances in the search for food and they also serve more easily people who have physical limitations and who prefer to be less dependent on motorized transport.

Inspired by this business model, brands have staked this physical approach with the consumer. Today, it is possible to list itinerant businesses, from florists to thrift stores that lead their services out to the street. In Brazil, restaurants with fixed addresses opt to have traveling branches in order to conquer the empathy consumers avid for novelty (BRAUN, 2014)¹. Since it is a new behavior and, consequently, it generates interest; the experimentation is a central part of this phenomenon or trend. As much as there are already “trades on wheels” that serve Brazil for several years, this is a moment that brands marks glimpse businesses opportunities because, now, the experimentation and playfulness of truck-shops effectively add value to products and services. So, the new trend highlights the urgency of adequacy of visual identity, visual merchandising and experience in intenerating mobile spaces.



Figure 1: Exemple of truck-shop: clothing

¹ BRAUN, S. (2014). *Food trucks movimentam as ruas de São Paulo*. Available at: <<http://vejasp.abril.com.br/materia/lei-comida-de-rua-food-truck>>. Accessed in: Apr 4th, 2014 at 13:27 hs.



Figure 2: Exemple of truck-shop: record store

4. Visual merchandising and itinerating markets

The brands' attribution to a point of sale has its essence interpreted by visual merchandising. Visual merchandising, in turn, consists in offering a shopping experience that follows the characteristics of the brand's identity – by many considered its DNA (GOMEZ; STODIECK, 2013) – translating that identity in diverse sensations in order to involve the consumer in that space. Solomon (2008) complements the state by affirming that the impulses captured by our senses start the perceptual process by generating memories, welfare, longings and desires. Also regarding the senses, Pradeep (2012, p.16) reports that human being captures 11 million pieces of information per second; whereas the greater part from that comes through the eyes, all the other senses contribute to complete the message. In any case, it is generally agreed that the stimulus to the senses in a point of sale allows the consumer to receive from several sources the message that the brand seeks to transmit.

When the point of sale does not have a fixed address, the stimuli merge with the urban landscape. In the case of trucks that sell food, the visual appeal is complemented by smell; union that, according to Lindstrom (2009, p.125), makes the brand image much more effective to the consumer. Smell specifically allows acquiring more customers depending on where the vehicle is located; for the invasion of aromas can instigate curiosity and invite consumers to explore, bringing them to the point of sale for that they have a complete brand experience. Underhill (2009, pp.44) points out that the places where consumers go, what they see and the resulting responses determine the nature of their experience. In the case of the food-trucks, consumers can renew their experience depending on where the truck-shop is parked.

It is evident that when one visits a fixed store more than once, new information is added to the initial experience, but the fact that the on wheels point of sale brings a whole new environment to the subsequent experience has a much greater character of novelty and brings many more new qualities to the experience. As the vehicle is incorporated in the surroundings from where it is stopped, the sensory stimuli act according to the space, presenting variation of noise, time and temperature, for example.

Carrilho, Larcher and Gomez (2012) report that a space is endowed with meanings that have changed over the years, not only changing the sale, but also changing consumption. Even for brand's loyal consumers and connoisseurs, itinerant trades would be advantageous because they aggregate a surprise component, in contrast to what is expected in indoors points of sale. The truck-shops fit into the changing market by presenting a new form of trade and, hence, further experimentations by the consumer.

One needs to consider that the guidelines designed for the visual merchandising of a particular brand often can be transported truck-shops. In some respects, these types of businesses are subject to phenomena on

which one may have no control. In terms of sensory stimulation, factors such as meteorology, for example, influence directly the experience, since the point of sale is open. However, the merge with the environment that surrounds can be an advantage to general stores. As shown in figure 3, a flower shop adapted to a truck-shop chooses the ambiance where it wishes to be camouflaged; a park or in the woods; which is not necessarily contemplated by an ordinary fixed flower shop. This example evidences an example of the extension of the point of sale, where the truck-shop takes advantage of the natural attributes to promote the natural value of its products and expand the brand experience.

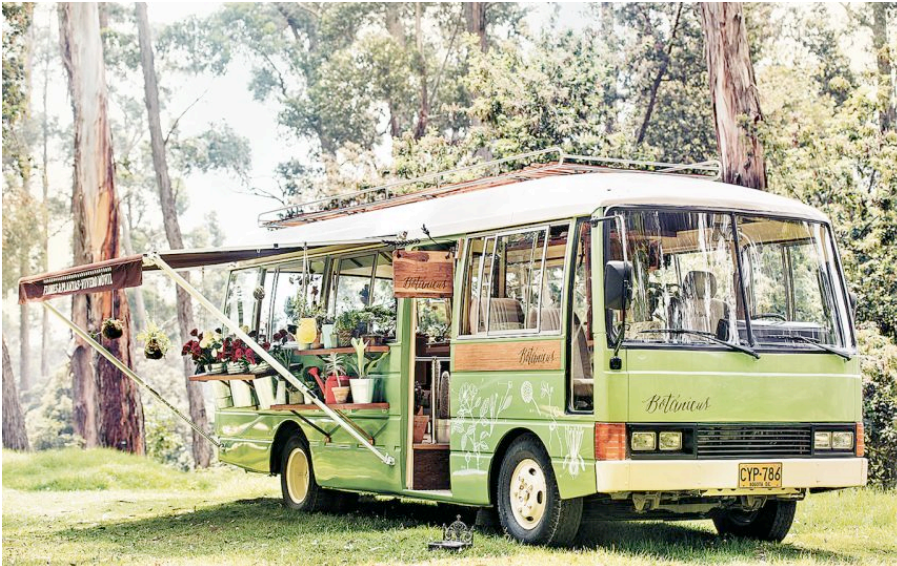


Figure 3: Flower shop adapted into a truck-shop

Another favorable point, presented in Section 3.1, it is the ease of movement for the trucks take the brand to the consumer and not the contrary, as often happens. The lack of mobility of major city centers greatly increases the needed time to complete a purchase, which causes consumers to rethink the act. If the access to the store is – for some reason – difficult, one consequence may be the loss of the customer and trade, as a consequence. In the case of the truck-shops, they are the ones going to the public, bringing the product, as well as a load of emotions and sensations generated by direct contact with the brand. And, in the case of satisfying experience, consumers can come to exchange their preference of a traditional brand and trust this experience suggested by the new brand.

One of the most relevant aspects of visual merchandising is the showcase, which Morgan (2008) defines as an essential tool to instigate the entrance of the consumer into the store and, thus, make him stay longer and fulfill purchases. For truck-shops, the vehicle itself is the showcase, as it contains – or should contain – the visual treatment and the disposal of products accordingly to the brand's identity in a way that it attracts eyes, incites experience and culminates in the sale. Even in transit or closed, the brand experience in truck-shops is continuous through the visibility that the vehicle has wherever it goes. This can generate curiosity in potential consumers.

5. Final considerations

Over time, consumer behavior undergoes adaptations and changes whether by the desire of the new, whether by underlying forces for some called *zeitgeist* – spirit of the time. It is due to the visual merchandising to interpret these new vectors and translate them into the point of sale in order to conquer more and more consumers and to promote an updated brand version to the market. The practice has trend research's collaboration with the necessary material of consumer behavior studies, which results in benefits for brands and for consumers themselves. As a consequence, both the consumer sees his/hers wishes

fulfilled as the brand sees opportunities for growth and innovation and positions itself more assertively in the market.

The concept of this study addressed the intangible range of sensorial stimuli by visual merchandising. Authors such as Underhill (2009), Pradeep (2012) and Carrilho, Larcher and Gomez (2012) reinforce the idea that in order to offer a broad brand experience and purchasing factor it is required to attend all five senses. Thus, the truck-shops stand out by assembling scents, sounds and visual appeal in the integration of the mobile space with the environment. With that, the point of sale's experience is always renewed, varying according to the contextual space, which should be chosen based on the experience that the brand wishes to convey.

The visibility of this new model of trade was recently highlighted in the Brazilian scope, although it does not configure a new practice. The consumption trend – today – finds room for expansion and for consumer acceptance, gaining prominence for the experimentation and for the facilities of mobility; which run the central aspects of today's consumers: lack of time and consumption as leisure. This business model can be adopted as a differentiation factor in several other niche markets, surpassing the floral and food sectors. However, this study limited to present the trend and relate it to the experience of space proposed in visual merchandising.

The human being experiences the world through the five senses, but these are enhanced through the power of imagination, conceptualization, intellectualization and rationalization of the world (UNDERHILL, 2009, p.190). By adapting the consumption trend Retail Retold, visual merchandising appropriates the tools needed to stimulate individual and utilizes the new model for itinerant business with the intention that sensations are always renewed, inciting curiosity and mobility of the market to the novelty. This paper consisted of theoretical and analytical studies of visual merchandising responsive to consumer trends. In future researches, the relationship between trends and the experience at the point of sale will be deepened by conducting empirical research with consumers.

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