

Emotional visual merchandising for fashion retail brands in Spain

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Abstract

Purpose: In the context of the theme “human- centered design and co-creation”, visual merchandising (VM) is a communication tool that helps to dignify consumption environment, emphasizing retail’s role as a third space between home and work places.

Methodology: Literature review and interviews with visual merchandisers from main fashion brands in Spain will show opportunities of VM strategies and elements to connect emotionally with consumers, reinforcing retail’s role for interaction and co-creation.

Findings: Implications of the strategic use of location, architecture, design, store windows, graphics, display and layout will exemplify emotion as a language with consumers, who can decode message in a conscious and a free way.

Research limitations: Challenge for VM applied in online retail has to be considered, as Ecommerce has reached a notorious growth in fashion retail industry in Spain. Internet has also understood the need to animate consumers through a simple and attractive design of website attributes in order to win a positive “word of mouth”, and to transfer the experience through offline retail.

Social implications: VM responsibility, emotional capacity of online stores, store design to value human being in an environment of visual saturation and consumerism.

Value: The innate ability of retail to produce strong emotions encourages the emotional identity of brands, and is associated with its interactive character and closeness to the consumer. The multisensory experience finds VM one of its main partners to provide a brand co- creation.

Keywords: visual merchandising, fashion, brands, emotion, retail, etailing, Spain, co-creation, interactivity, communication.

Article classification: Research paper

Introduction

In late decade a new approach of the store has been reached, mainly because of several factors: visual saturation, multiple channels and audiences, new technology and strong competitiveness. The store, as a brand itself, has showed the ability for deliver emotion and a strong experience of familiarity (Kent, 2007: 735, Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2009). In a context where rationality has been substituted by desire, textile retail has to satisfy an emotional experience (Burns and Neisner, 2006).

Previous research has demonstrated how store atmosphere influences on consumer attitude and behavior (Kotler, 1973, Davies and Ward, 2003). The emotional “is very useful in fashion sector” (Bregman and Willems, 2009: 352) because emotions and experiences are linked to success, not only from an academic point of view (Foxall, 1997; Sherman *et al.*, 1997; Wakefield and Baker, 1998; and Vlachos *et al.*, 2010) but also from the professional perspective of retail -as Carlos Aires, founder of consultant Marketing Jazz-.

The identity of retail textile per excellence is an emotional identity. That explains the emotional strategy of fashion brands. The role of brands has to be related to actual consumer profile – hedonist, sensorial and changeable-. Moreover it has to be considered the innate textile retail ability to communicate an emotional identity.

Emotions have an important role in making decisions (Damasio, 2012), because they allow consumer to decode fashion brands’ message. This is especially confirmed in complex and conflictive circumstances where subject cannot choose only guided by cognitive process.

Spanish fashion brands have understood the power of an emotional impact in the store, particularly through visual merchandising. The design of each element is thought for interaction with the consumer, as their visual merchandisers have confirmed.

Conceptual framework

Emotional space for an emotional consumer

Emotion is defined as “internal and subjective experience by an individual of a complex behavior of physical and mental changes in reaction to some situation” (Batey, 2008: 25).

From the first part of this concept it can be identified that emotion is associated with a personal experience of intimate and nontransferable features. This is due to invariable characteristics that connect with our collective subconscious, as a depot of innate and learned experiences. Emotion has the ability to activate associate networks relevant for memory, and to establish a position of individual in the environment, encouraging him to some people, objects, actions or ideas (Urrea,

2011). By its personal feature it is said that emotion gives sense to experiences. It is linked with something that actually happened to someone and meaningful for the subject. Emotions get a differentiation difficult to imitate due to fulfill the consumer need with a customized experience. Second part of the definition of “emotion” by Batey points out that emotion is a reaction to the impulse that provokes the action. Reaction -sentimental or affective, cognitive or behavioral- can be aroused to a situation associated with humor, temperament, personality or motivation (Urrea, 2011). Benefits in experience are referred to sensorial pleasure or cognitive stimulation (Park *et al.*, 1986).

Immediate and subjective answers to our sensorial receptors are sensations. Interpretation and meanings of sensorial stimuli are built with feelings and beliefs. Feelings and senses are “universal experiences deeply from the childhood in our language and thought” (Heller, 2004: 17). Therefore, cultural influence prepares human being to perceive stimuli in a certain way (Batey, 2008: 51). Physiologic signs (somatic markers) and emotions evoked are associated with past benefits, impulse some behaviors (decision making) and avoid some others, according to Damasio (2012). The author proposed that “somatic markers direct attention towards more advantageous options, simplifying the decision process”.

Some criteria determine types of emotions. The context of brand meaning will help to distinguish the type of emotion and the dynamic language that describes it. Six basic emotions from classic Philosophy –love, hate, desire, happiness, sadness and admiration- can be completed with “social emotions” learned in public context –shame and proud – (Batey, 2008) and emotions that act as mediators of consumer answer to advertising and to attitude towards brand –relax, happiness, satisfaction, surprise, excitement and reward- (Holbrook and Batra, 1987; Dawson *et al.*, 1990; and Yoo *et al.*, 1998). Emotions are linked to main aspirations that impulse the action (García Ruiz, 2009).

Emotion can be considered a language in terms of what McCracken (1988: 57) describes it: those that let the consumer the freedom to decode the message. Therefore, visual language for example uses the influence of aesthetic based in color and light, evoking emotions and connections with consumer in a subconscious level.

The fact that consumer decisions are not based on the characteristics and advantages of a product, but guided by an experience, is due to consumer is attracted by the intuitive part of brain, according to Schmitt (2006: 46). The author asks companies “not to treat clients just as rational beings because clients desire to be attended, stimulated, emotionally influenced and

creatively provoked". Furthermore, Morin (2011: 134) explains that individual uses just 20% of brain consciously. It can be assured that experience is based on emotional brain.

As retail industry is highly influenced by consumer behavior, the research suggests determining some of his needs and desires. The interpretation of sensorial information and reaction of consumer from different countries depends on socio cultural rules. Cultural values influence on consumer motivation and consequently influence on product, brands and stores.

What values are predominant nowadays? Psychological research portrays a consumer profile that seeks for customization, positive experiences, and need of attention and feeling important: more subjective values that show an emotional and psychological shopping experience (Alfaro, 2011: 23, Carpenter *et. al*, 2005).

Taking into account the influence of consumer profile on retail' strategy and image, to answer a shopper that enjoys shopping, retail space must gather the following features: an emotional atmosphere (Williams *et al.*, 1985: 314), a multisensorial experience (Surchi, 2011), entertaining the consumer (Manlow and Nobbs, 2013) and provide a minimal level of functional value, showed in "proper product in place, time and price" (Carpenter *et al.*, 2005: 51). Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010) point out that fashion store atmosphere must be prepared to display new fashion product with physical and emotional elements, although those related to product are especially considered: windows, display and signs. Change in the experience is most based in bran communication that in manufacturing.

Retail's innate ability for interaction and experience

Main aspect of emotion in retail textile is sensorial experience because it constitutes "intern condition of feeling and the aware experience of emotions" (Batey, 2008: 51). Experiential marketing improves communication because it is client oriented. Retail space has been named "the third space (...) as serves a more abstract social purpose: the use and design of retail spaces in the store itself and their extension into the wider shopping environment, typically the street, mall or centre (...) as spaces for consumption, play or enjoyment, they provide an important medium for communication and interaction, as well as arenas for synthesizing leisure and consumption" (Kent, 2007: 737). "Store must be linked to clients through emotions: stories that allow consumer to find meanings as cultural values, significant communities and cultural necessities" (Kent, 2009: 18).

If brands want to deliver confidence and openness, the communication way per excellence is a dialogue face to face: the multisensory language of interpersonal communication (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

Retail is the business model that best communicates the brand -defined as “distinctive image perceived by a series of values that motivate consumer to act positively towards it” (Jackson and Shaw, 2001: 183)-. This trend named “retailbranding” “is one of the most important in retailing because it implies consumer loyalty” (Grewal, 2004: 9).

History of retail textile in Europe highlights the need for emotion in a context of “fashion consumer’s lost of choice” characterized by factors as: international competition, retailer’s new technologies to know consumers, big holdings and low prices, adaptation to informal lifestyles, socioeconomic change that impulse women and children as main characters of shopping decisions, new transparency of international price, value retailers pressure –new product at low price- and etailers- (Jackson and Shaw, 2001: 156).

To the goal of sales -through goods displayed between 1960 and 1990-, it has been added the triple role of the store: to get information, to give information and to deliver brand image. The transformation of the point of sale is due to the innate ability of retail to answer three changes of the environment: multiple channels and audiences, new technology and strong competitiveness. It does it through customized information, experience managerial, interactive character and closeness to consumer.

Regarding to the change observed in the environment about multiple canals and audiences, the role of retail in communicating the brand has been revitalized (Surchi, 2011). New ways of shopping and social networks have changed the way consumers process the communications (Keller, 2009: 139). Sádaba points out how “our lives have been deeply affected by new technology of human communication”, and specifically how persuasion is affected. The author explains how Internet adapts traditional features of dialogue to adjust to its definition as “free interchange of experiences through which human being discovers by himself the cause of what surrounds him, the pleasure of reason and the knowledge of the world and the others (Sádaba 2005: 275).

Retail social ability answers to the search of more personal communications, against the mistrust and lack of clarity in advertising messages. Customization as a consumer demand is a fashion concept, as Sádaba suggests (2005: 274), regarding to the extended literature review written about it lately.

Interaction in direct contact between brand and consumer through the store delivers the information that the individual wants and the way he wants: brand experience. It is defined by the consumer ability to constitute his own ideas and emotions about the product and the brand. The author stands out that, beyond commercial goal, the activity that communicates associations between brand and consumer created by a shared experience, implies a value proposal and looks for influence on attitude and knowledge of target. It means an affective agreement with the store, defined as “the desire of maintain a relation that client perceives as valuable” (Sasinandini and Manohar, 2010: 35), and consequently, it generates loyalty (Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998; Collins- Dodd and Lindley, 2003).

There are some requirements to increase brand value through brand experience. Firstly, to implicate client in the whole process, because people learn more from the implication than from the passive observation (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2001: 298). Concerning to this, Segura and Sabaté (during a conference in 2008) points out that positive perception of consumer in every contact with the brand will turn him into a brand ambassador. Ballantyne confirms in an interview that experience comes from listen to the client, without forgetting to connect with him through five senses. “An experience that stimulates the five sense -sight, ear, smell, taste and touch- is the most memorable” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2001: 298).

Secondly, another requirement of brand experience is that message about the organization and its products connect with brand, according to Ballantyne. Multiple contact points that compose the experience reinforce emotional position of the brand. The creation of environments to build experiences has implied a key for the change of retail sector in Europe: has meant “a catalyst of growth in mature Economies of low increase of consumer spent” (Dawson and Frasquet Deltoro, 2006: 20 and 21).

In United States an example of success that turned the brand into the best retailer of America is Apple. Useem published in Fortune in 2007 that when Apple hired the ex executive of Gap, decide to design stores as products: around what can be one with them. However it was not enough and the company redesign its stores to offer a hotel service experience, because for 16 among 18 people interviewed, “the best experience was from those who help but don’t sell anything”. The company create a space as a club and interactive, with a bar where supply advices, an area for photographs or videos and another area for problems. As a result, Apple raised its sales more than Saks or Tiffany, increased the number of visits and improved the image among first ten companies of Fortune.

The way retail has adapted the second change in the environment, especially interactivity of games (Kent, 2003), is its ability to get and give information. This is due to retail position in supply chain, allow it to identify, interpret and satisfy consumer needs.

Retail, as a type of business closer to the client than to the provider, turns the store into “a tool of the communication strategy that wins a personality like human personality” (Kent, 2003). It also generates a good manage of client experience (Birtwistle *et al.*, 1999b). The fact that retailer communicates in a personal way with the consumer at the store, where decision making takes place as a result of the interaction, the retailer can influence on brand value (Ilonen *et al.*, 2011: 414).

Pine and Gilmore (1998: 99) affirms that interactivity of new technologies (through chats, Internet, simulators or virtual reality) is based on real life. At the same time physical store is influenced by Internet to look for a nearer link with the consumer and adopt new technologies. New online stores have extended interactivity of virtual space characterized by immediacy, symmetry and active, personal and direct role in a new conversation where consumer preferences are considered.

Examples of this are the virtual changing room of Pull and Bear, the tablets to buy Mango’s product not available at the store, or the interactive windows of Nike that allows consumer to buy through devices without entering the store. Another example according to George Homer - in an interview- is Vittorio and Luchino’s store at Madrid that creates a consumer profile through a program accessed by dial telephone number.

Regarding the store as a point of sale that gets information, Interbrand’s report (*Best Spanish brands*, 2011: 3 and 48) highlights its role of brand manager because “predict and answer consumer desires and expectations”. For instance, the recruit of personal data allows customizing offers and establishes a special relation with clients, improving the shopping area.

Birtwistle *et al.*, (1999a) point out that the success or failure of a store depends on retailer ability of understand consumer perceptions about store image. Martínez Barreiro (2007: 71) explains the organizational process of Zara that allows the retail brand to “stimulate to share data in order to access easily to the system in real time”. The Spanish company is a paradigm of the store as “the main channel of getting information about products, shopping environment demanded by consumers and the marketplace” (López and Fan, 2009: 281).

The information between the store and central services is delivered through the following channels: till, products sold and warehouse daily); telephone, fax and mail; PDA Casiopea software system for Inditex; and visits of executive from central departments that allow to photograph forms and ask for orders to logistic center (Martínez Barreiro, 2007: 78).

According to Adolfo González, Creative Chief of digital agency of marketing and communication WYSIWYG (“*What you see is what you get*”), “the point of sale is the most interactive channel because of the face to face relation with the consumer” (*Estrategias* magazine in 2006). In store, the interactivity is showed in the use of interactive technologies or in the animation. Living windows are joined, consisting in the use of living mannequins or the use of windows as a benchmark. Out of the store the interactivity of architecture promotes the name of the brand as if it were a tridimensional advertising. The company made illustrations for Springfield website.

Retail is considered the ideal space to show the promise of the brand, according to *Report Best Spanish brands* (Interbrand, 2011). Main feature associated with fashion brands is emotional feature (Brenngman and Willems, 2009: 535). This is due to the influence that design and store image have on a type of consumer. And it is reinforced in a historic moment where it is essential to provide “spectacular, experience, technology, high quality, brand image and personality” (Kozinets *et al.*, 2002: 24).

Visual merchandising, mediator of emotions

The role of affects in evaluation of retail stores has been widely recognized in literature review (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Donovan *et al.*, 1994; Fiore *et al.*, 2000; Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003; Workman and Caldwell, 2007; and Cohen *et al.*, 2008). Store image as “a combination of emotions and knowledge coming from store perceptions” (Porter and Claycomb, 1997: 14), is key in shopping choice and retailer success. Burns and Neisner (2006) associate an emotional role especially to the store image psychological features, based on consumer affective perceptions, not consciously controlled.

Fiore *et al.* (2000) consider that if entertainment at the store improves shopping, is due to sensorial and cognitive experience influence on consumer. Although it's true that retail environment is not an isolated factor; thus, for instance the increasing production and purchase of fast fashion also has contributed to the expense. Some studies have already linked store perception, in particular store attributes, with shopping attitudes and shopping behavior, through the mediation of consumer positive or negative emotions felt in the store. Marsha Richins is quoted by Schmitt (1999:131) as the researcher that best has developed the measurement of

emotions experienced in different consumer situations, included clothes consumption, because of the reliability of the scale. Sherman *et al.* (1997) study the role of retail environment as mediator of consumer emotions.

On one hand, Gilboa and Rafaeli (2003) assess the parameters of pleasure, arouse and behavior tendencies that cause aesthetic elements of food retail. In particular, they value the relation between order and pleasure or arouse. On the other hand Zimmer and Golden (1988: 287) assure that in the process by which consumers assess the store image, affective play a key role.

Literature assure that affection participate in the creation of image and memory, depending on the type of relation that exist between image and affect. “The nature of product offered in retail determines the consumer attitude towards the store (Yoo *et al.*, 1998: 261). In particular in textile retail, VM, first in windows and afterwards inside the store, provided the opportunity of applying creativity and lifestyle to retail, becoming an interaction and communication way, in front of the functional goal of some sectors (Ilonen *et al.*, 2011). The elements used are visually attractive shopping environments, product display and sensorial layout, according to Kent (2007). This author points out that the store as an spectacle and a theater creates the of being part of a something bigger, remembering the consumer his participation in a brand community.

Yoo *et al.* (1998) identify the emotional characteristics of retail experience. Authors add that emotions are socially oriented by social benefits of retail environment. They verify that while most of attributes – variety and product value, ambience, guarantee period- affect emotions, and emotions affect shopping attitude (referring to attributes affect indirectly to shopping attitudes), in the attribute “location” emotions don’t play a mediator role, and that explains that location affect directly to shopping attitude. Some other conclusions are also interesting. For instance, some elements only provoke positive emotions. And “store atmosphere don’t provoke emotions when stores do not have perceptible atmosphere” (Yoo *et al.*, 1998: 261).

To understand emotional brand value, emotions can be measured associated with brands by consumers, according to Birtwistle and Shearer (2001), Ahuvia (2005) and Maehle *et al.* (2011). A way of measure them would be through focus group among different target –age, sex-. Consumers would be asked to define emotion reflected and to assign emotional features to chosen brands in a free way. For instance some authors study what brand personality is attributed by consumer, how perception is constituted and its differentiation from other brands.

In Spanish literature a similar research has been carried out by Rodriguez Arenas (2003) to determine emotions and experiences that consumers from Chile had about twenty brands among

Retail Ranking of brands in shopping centers. Focused on those brands that are expected to sell clothes adjust to trends, there are results about Zara and Mango. The author made surveys to find the retail brands positioning. In a first stage of pretest, the author asked 112 people (18-49 years old average) about associations with store image: personality of the store attributed when thinking about the store and emotions felt at the last visit of the store. At final survey consumer is required to assess in Likert scale a series of emotions felt when visiting the store. Among the conclusions, Zara is one of the best perceived brands because it is remembered as “unique” and “introverted”. And Mango is one of the most associated with “appearance”, “quality” and “closeness”.

Other proposals to assess emotions are participating observation in the store (as Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2010) and surveys to clients at the offline store or online buyers from the company database. A quantitative approach would allow finding the combination of lasting features assessed by test of personality. Authors like Groeppel-Klein (2005) propose the measurement of emotions from systems that collect more than what consumers say about VM. It would be through an electronic system linked to consumer movement at the store. And they conclude that the store named “experimental” delivers more happiness than the store named “controlled”.

If emotions are strong mediators in the process by which consumers receive messages, taking into account the difficulty of traditional research methods about register subconscious components as feelings (Morin, 2011: 134) and the saturation of 10.000 messages, neuroscience has been the best way of know clients and optimize our brain.

Alfaro (2011: 24) explains that emotional link implies for brands to get faster decisions to its clients, who cannot explain rationally the cause that motivated them to purchase. Nowadays 70% of shopping decisions are taken with emotional brain and 3.000 times faster than rational elements (Alfaro 2010: 45).

To observe and understand shopping behavior of fashion consumer from the brain perspective is the value of neuromarketing. Neuroscience is connected to psychology and economy to study how the brain is affected by marketing strategies. Morin (2011) assign the academic origin to professor Read Montagne, who affirms that different parts of our brain are activated depending on awareness of the brand bought.

Madan (2010: 34) describes the discipline of neuromarketing, defined as “the use of neuroimage and neuroscience techniques applied to a behavior process to reach a commercial goal”. On one

hand, the author highlights the ability to measure consumer answer through a more scientific method, going in depth in its attention, emotional condition and feelings such as trust.

For instance, neuromarketing would allow designing a kind of advertising that lead the consumer to some product preferences. This kind of research acquires a special value in periods of high pressure to assess the return on investment in advertising (Morin, 2011: 133). Madan also emphasize the social value of this science, due to its ability for detecting clinic disorders as compulsive consumption.

Kyriaki (2012) also suggest that neuromarketing could understand better human behavior and solve a problem. Guessing what the consumer needs and giving him the perfect product that appeals to the ideal that want to get when buys a symbol, it will contribute to complete him. For the author, psychology and emotions play a key role in decisions when products are bought by what the mean, because “the nature is constituted from social and cultural impacts” (Kyriaki, 2012: 21).

Ariely and Berns (2010) also support this research. Firstly, because it makes easier the decision consumer due to knowing a kind of information (the emotional, kept in subconscious (Fugate, 2007) not available by other methods (because the consumer do not know how to give opinion when required to do it in a explicit way). Secondly, to use a method is cheaper, faster and previous to any campaign (even of VM), which also would save money.

On the other hand, Madan (2010) and Murphy *et al.* (2008) do not hide the critics of a method ethically controversial. Both researches propose ethic codes that control consciousness and privacy of participants, and consumer autonomy protection, especially of vulnerable consumer, for instance children and people affected by psychological disorders (to be manipulated in terms of make the shopping impossible to resist, but also in terms of create anxiety, fear or distrust).

The authors argue that this new science of consumer behavior permits to improve marketing efficiency without request cognitive or conscious participation of consumer (Morin, 2011: 131) to obtain commercial. To end the controversy, Fisher *et al.* (2010) explain that this research area is valid to understand science, although it implies the risks of attempting to individual autonomy and social damage –as provoke consumption or something negative for the consumer-.

Interviews to visual merchandisers of fashion brands in Spain

Once literature review is completed, interviews with visual merchandisers from main fashion brands in Spain show opportunities of VM strategies and elements to connect emotionally with consumers. These are the professionals interviewed in 2011:

- Alberto Criado, Director of Visual Merchandising at Zara.
- Richard Gum, Director of Sales at Cortefiel Man (Cortefiel) who was before Director of Visual Merchandising Department and Manager of Cortefiel for Portugal.
- Juan Manuel Gil, Director of Visual Merchandising at Hoss Intropia and was before Director of VM in Cortefiel. Gil worked with Gum in Cortefiel, and formed Windows Department for Marks & Spencer and Trucco.
- Iván García, Director of Visual Merchandising at Las Rozas Village (Value Retail). García took part of VM Department in Zara, Urban Outfitters and Selfridges (London) before.

The quotes of the interviewed are chosen from the approach where VM consists in the “display, coordination, attractive exposure that makes easier the relation between buyer and shopper” (Bou, 2008: 10) or VM is considered “everything that makes change or settle shopping orientation because makes closer that product to the client in the best possible conditions” (Macías Rodríguez, 1972: 16-17).

Taking into account the description of emotion and specially its link with senses, from the interviews there has been selected some visual merchandising elements that makes easier the shopping and provokes interaction or value co-creation:

- Architecture, facade and location- Zara first positioning is through the spectacular and spacious buildings, small entrance, heavier doors of design, important facades and use of historic buildings: “a philosophy of excellence”, according to Criado. The renovation of the store is 80% of Zara investment. The flagship new movement in London was supported by brands as Zara (Kent, 2009).

Location is also a key for Hoss Intropia, according to Gil: “the company chooses different locations in London: Regent Street, Sloane Square and Covent Garden, to adjust to its clients: the last one for the youngest”.

- Display- Zara recognizes that the brand seems a fashion magazine because provides a complete look for his clients through the walls in store. Among the most valuable emotions by consumers it is recognized the ability of brands for solve their problems (aspect traditionally measured in parameters as high quality of the product and staff qualification). The brand creates a friendly relation with the client and a position of trust, reinforcing its role as image consulting and excellence.

Zara and Cortefiel bet for mannequins and tables. They imply more quality because it is required to fold the clothes again.

Hoss Intropia claims to use clothes horse more feminine that facilitates a “more human and organic movement of clients that facilitates the natural walk at the store”. This strategy remembers that mannequin has a symbolic role. Academics from Manchester Metropolitan University and College of Art from Edimburgo propose to overtake a kind of mannequin of a skinny size that influences negatively on clients self esteem. Spanish lingerie brand, Sardá, assures that mannequins of big sizes are the less requested, but Displaysense, a manufacture of mannequins, recognizes having sold more mannequins between sizes 14 and 16 lately. Zara also remembers how its mannequins at Germany changed due to clients request to be identified with normal figures.

- Windows- The goal of VM at Cortefiel implies transparency and facilitate to enter the store. García highlight the creative windows of Zara and Cortefiel. Gum remembers that old windows from the nineties in Spain that wanted to show everything.

Brand image of 110 brands at Las Rozas Village can be transmitted through a global concept based on themes, such as “the traveler” of the “The Art of Detail”. The name of the VM campaigns emphasize brand image and brand experience in the outlet. Every brand adapts the theme to their window, and set some suitcases or show photographs of trips for the example of “the traveler”.

Gil assures that planned windows without clothes to emphasize values and being more attractive for clients. “Visual merchandisers have more freedom to work emotional values beyond the product, such as optimism. A creative VM oriented to the client in a imaginative way creates curiosity”.

- Atmosphere- Best strategy in store is to combine elements that influences on every sense, showing a more comfortable space for shopping.

Cortefiel reflects a familiar and friendly store though the following elements: less illuminated, more luxury materials, smaller stores, homely details such as paintings or couches, order, living colors and good temperature.

Store atmosphere at Zara generates loyalty: “we are perceived as a boutique, related to discreet, elegance, sobriety –neutral colors-, minimal but warm”, assures Criado. The brand has also been renowned for control the brand creation due to factors as low prices, high quality service and fashionable clothes, but also due to an attractive commercial environment.

Hoss Intropia differentiates for its aroma and lighting (at the back of the store, opened and direct to display), which relates the brand with the following values, according to Gil: “eclectic, different, colorful, sophisticated, peaceful, premium and traveller”.

- Although the staff is not considered an element that depends on VM Department, it has to be mentioned regarding to the important role in VM. Criado underlines that every employee at the store is a visual merchandiser, in terms of gather up clients' input in a close and open way. They also think adapting the brand to local market. This explains that Carlos Aires, founder of VM consultant Marketing Jazz, point out that “Zara has created its brand through the store”. Lea-Greenwood, in an interview with the author, also suggests that image concept of Zara “hope to create a easier shopping experience”.

Social implications

-Retail in fashion industry contributes more to create a symbolic value (Breneman and Willems, 2009). Social aspect of consumption, understood as “a relational experience where influence of others at the time of consumption is a key”, is predominant (Fenollar 2003: 205). García Ruiz (2005: 260) names “mediators in consumer experience” to the objects or brands that the consumer shares with a community of users. On one hand it materialize human aspect of consumption –because the relations of solidarity as a result-. On the other hand it turns the community into a source of information and social recognition.

-Visual merchandising dignifies consumption environment. Bou (2008: 7) highlights that window “transmit a series of subliminal messages as desires, dreams, hopes or attitudes of life (...) leading through the set design the way of life we could have inside it, reaching our needs and desires (...) through a garment or object perceived as indispensable to face the requirements that every day are made by society”.

-Visual merchandising makes simpler the brand. To assess VM effectiveness it is crucial the ability to understand the brand, simplified and recognized as an operative element. For example, Stephen Doyle affirms that a brand began to sell when showed what offered in the store window. The way of assess VM effect could be as Kerfoot *et al.* (2003) does, through six

questions to consumers interested in fashion but not students of fashion. Authors prepare a presentation of photographs to check some questions: is the brand recognizable? What positioning and price are given by consumers? Does it like them? Is it attractive, and if so, why? What reasons explain to pay attention on them? Will the consumer buy them? Lea-Greenwood (1998) explains that in fashion retail brand represents the shopping experience by itself. Authors Mills *et al.* (1995) realize that VM lead consumer through five steps: to get attention in few seconds, to create desire, to win trust in the store and in the product and to generate shopping decision. Once all these barriers have been broken, the consumer makes the purchase. As Portas (1999) sum up, the window reveals the soul of the store

-It can be said that a VM works looking at the relations generated turning the store into a meeting place. Some studies have already demonstrated how stores, as flagship stores or pop-up stores, increase consumer activity, searching new opportunities of attract clients to the store and create new (Kozinets *et al.*, Moore *et al.*, 2010: 151; and Surchi, 2011: 259).

Limits and further research

This research is focused on offline retail and five Spanish brands. But online retail is more demanding with brand transparency (Fulberg, 2003) and more power to determine trends and proper places of distribution through virtual communities. For instance, Boyd *et al.* (2007) show how *Myspace* is changing the way in which fashion information is been learned and shared. And specifically, they conclude that there are six categories of information that influence in fashion marketing: style, personnel, brands, designers, advices and retailers.

VM gives opportunities to deliver information to consumers at point of sale through intelligent retail environments. In them electronic innovations customize shopping and, mainly, understand better to consumers.

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Acknowledgements: Carlos Aire, Gaynor Lea-Greenwood, Ronnie Ballantyne, Alberto Criado, Richard Gum, Juan Manuel Gil and Iván García.

ISBN: 978-989-20-5337-0