



Role of Visual Communication in Advertising: A Study of Consumer Purchase Decision Making Behavior

Kushal Kumar

*Department of Communication Studies, College of Applied Sciences, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Kushal.sal@cas.edu.om*

Ahlam Mahlab Omer Al- Zubaidi

*Department of Communication Studies, College of Applied Sciences, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Ahlamz.sal@cas.edu.om*

ABSTRACT

Visual communication is the conveyance of ideas and information in forms that can be read or looked upon. Primarily associated with 2d images, it includes a variety of disciplines: art, signs, photography, typography, drawing, graphic design, illustration, colour and electronic resources.

The study was conducted in Salalah, Dofar Governorate of Sultanate of Oman. A focused group of woman consumers was selected for the study.

Objectives of the Study:

- To evaluate the role of visual communication in advertising and consumer decision making process
- To study the impact of visual communication on consumers in product and packaging design

A variety of factors affects consumer decision making process while purchasing a product. Research world over has proved beyond doubt that irrespective the visual aspects of presentation of a product, the products brand name stands out as the most influential factor.

Visual display is another important aspect influencing purchase decision making. The study reveals that around 75 percent of the respondents consider the shape of the product, packing and style of the product. The other important reason was celebrity endorsement.



Finally the product becomes synonymous with the packaging and consumers look for the packaging decides to buy a product. This symbiotic relationship is critical in the application of the concepts of visual communication to product development.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

Good morning/good evening

I am Mrs Ahlam Zubaidi lecturer at Department of Communication Studies, College of Applied Sciences, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.

College of Applied Sciences is administered by the Ministry of Higher Education. At the department of communication studies we offer a Bachelor's Degree with specialization in Digital Media, Public Relations, International Communication and Journalism.

Salalah is the second largest city in the Sultanate after Muscat, the capital and is in the southern part of Oman. It comes under Dofar region.

Dofar region is a unique combination of Sea...Mountains.... and Sand Dunes. Arabian sea forms the south eastern border, mountains are in the north and further north and north west is the sand dunes popularly called as EMPTY QUARTERS (the Arabic name Roob Al Khair)

Dofar region is also known worldwide for its Khareef Season where in the entire region is soaked in soft spray rain in the month of August and September. Mountains which are dry and brown in most part of the year, like a magic turn green offering the most luxurious view. Hundreds and thousands of tourists from Middle East flock to enjoy the climate and escape from the sheering heat of summer.

To the westerner, the region offers breathtaking view of mountains, water sports, game fishing, sites of archeological interest and simple way to relax and enjoy the blue waters.

Having given an idea of the physical features of the region let me give an idea of media in Dofar. Almost all the newspapers published (both Arabic and English) in Oman, from the capital Muscat, reach Dofar. However there are no regional publications as yet. But the national mainstream media is represented well in Dofar with all the newspapers having their correspondents. Dofar has the regional station of Oman radio and Oman TV.



Being an important tourist hub, Dofar gets a fairly good coverage in the national media which peaks during Khareef season.

Dofar being far away from Muscat (approximately 1020 Kms by road) is self-contained. The entire region is well connected by road and airways. It has the Salalah International Airport.

All the facilities for the development of business and commerce are available and Salalah has the special economic zone called Salalah Free Zone.

Visual communication is the conveyance of ideas and information in forms that can be read or looked upon. Primarily associated with 2d images, it includes a variety of disciplines: art, signs, photography, typography, drawing, graphic design, illustration, colour and electronic resources.

Traditionally, packaging design, interior design and exhibition design – all 3d domains – used visual communication as an integral discipline. Increasingly, visual communication embraces more and more 3d domains including 3d game design, simulated 3d spaces / virtual worlds, 3d character design, 3d special effects. Modern visual communication domains keep forming and re-forming constantly – especially those that are based on digital technologies.

Application of visual communication:

- Advertising and marketing communications
- Graphic design / communication design
- Packaging and Presentation Design
- Photography and Image Making
- Desktop Publishing
- Information Design and Information Graphics
- Web Design
- Interface and Navigation Design
- Motion Design

Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image. Visual literacy is based on the idea that pictures can be “read” and that meaning can be communicated through a process of reading.

Of the many application of visual communication, the present study focuses mainly in the field of advertising. Visual communication is extensively used in the field of advertising



and marketing communication to influence the consumer decision making process and changing their opinion toward buying a product. Besides, visual communication is also used in designing and packaging of various products.

Objectives of the Study:

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- To study the impact of visual communication on consumers in product and packaging design.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Salalah, Dofar Governorate of Sultanate of Oman. A focused group of woman consumers was selected for the study. A questionnaire was developed keeping in view the objectives of the study. In depth interviews were conducted for data collection. Simple percentage was calculated for the analysis of data. The findings are presented below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase decision making is a very complex process. A variety of factors affects consumer decision making in buying a product. From consulting a friend to product design and packaging affects consumer perception products they wishes to purchase. Additional factors like visual merchandising, special in-store events and point of purchase display also have profound effect on consumers. In a study on Understanding the impact of visual image and communication style on consumers' response Won Jae Seo states that " For Koreans, the experimental results showed that the complex visual image, high context verbal communication, and the presence of both characteristics induced favorable attitudes toward the ad and brand." Similarly in another study Edward S T Wang – "The empirical results show that attitudes toward visual packaging directly influence consumer-perceived food product quality and brand preference..... Perceived food product quality also directly and indirectly (through product value) affects brand preference."

Among the modern consumers, packaging has a critical role in influencing consumers. In fact companies emphasize on the packaging in their advertisements to influence consumers. In the study on Role of packaging on consumer buying behavior Xianoyang Deng asserts that packaging design profoundly affects the shopper's purchase decision at the point-of-sale. Haleh Barmaki Istanbul Technical University in the study on the role of

design in sustainable consumption finds a correlation between the color element of package, material element of package design and Image/Illustration elements in influencing consumer decisions and goes to state that the elements also produce sustainable consumption. Hemanth in his research on role of packaging on consumer buying behavior finds that different packing cues impact how a product is perceived and states that 'a packing is perceived as a part of the product and can be difficult for the consumer to separate it', Hemanth in his study also associates packing with the quality of the product.



Shopping Mall

FINDINGS

Sample Profile

Table showing age group of the respondents

Age group	Number	Percent
16 - 25	46	36.22
26 - 35	31	24.40
36 - 45	27	21.26
45 and above	23	18.12
Total	127	100.00

N=127



A total of 150 randomly selected woman consumers were interviewed. Of the 150 selected only 127 woman respondents were finally selected for the study as a focus group. The researcher using the questionnaire developed for the study conducted interviews in a face to face situation to ensure proper response to the questions.

Among the respondents selected as focus group, 36 percent were in the age group of 16-25 years, 24 percent were in the age group of 26-35 years, 21 percent in the age bracket of 36-45 years and the rest 18 percent were above the age of 45 years.

Table showing the educational level of the respondents

Education	Number	Percent
School level	56	44.09
Diploma	23	18.11
Graduate	48	37.80
Total	127	100.00

N=127

A majority of the respondents, 44 percent had education up to school level, followed by 18 percent who done a diploma and about 38 percent were graduates.

Table showing the average spending by the respondents per week

Average spending per week	Number	Percent
100 or more OMR	32	25.20
50 - 100 OMR	58	45.66
Less than 50 OMR	37	29.14
Total	127	100.00

N=127

One of the most important criteria to understand the purchasing behavior is the average spending. Among the respondents selected for the study, 25 percent spent more than 100 Omani Riyal (OMR), 45 percent spent between 50-100 OMR and about 29 percent spent less than 50 OMR per week in shopping.



A women shopping in a silver shop

Table showing the average time spent in shopping

Time spent shopping	Number	Percent
15 - 30	20	15.75
30 - 60	37	29.14
1 - 2 hours	47	37.00
More than two hours	23	18.11
Total	127	100.00

N=127

Besides, the respondents were asked about the average time spent on shopping. Nearly 15 percent of the respondents reported spending 15-30 minutes, 29 percent spent up to one hour, 37 percent spent up to two hours in shopping and the rest 18 percent spent more than two hours on an average.

Table showing the frequency of shopping by the respondents

Frequency of shopping	Number	Percent
Every day	18	14.17
Weekly	57	44.88
Fortnightly	32	25.20
Monthly	20	15.75
Total	127	100.00

N=127



The respondents were asked about the frequency of shopping. Nearly 14 percent of the respondents said they would every day, 44 percent would shop weekly followed by 25 percent fortnightly and the rest nearly 16 percent on monthly basis.

Table showing respondents' length of use of a brand

Use of a brand	Number	Percent
1 - 2 years	30	23.62
2 - 3 years	55	43.31
3 - 5 years	32	25.19
More than 5 years	10	07.88
Total	127	100.00

N=127

During the interview the respondents were about their supporting a particular brand. 23 percent of them said they associate with a brand for about two years. But a great majority of them would support a brand for 2-3 years followed by 25 percent associating with a brand for up to five years. Only a small percentage the respondents would support a brand for more than five years.

Table showing respondents' brand loyalty

Brand loyalty	Number	Percent
Yes	67	52.76
No	42	33.07
Can't say	18	14.17
Total	127	

N=127

The respondents were further question about their loyalty to a particular brand. Nearly 53 percent of the respondents said they are loyal to a brand, 33 percent replied in negative and about 14 percent were no sure of brand loyalty.

Table showing the reasons for respondent's reason for buying a product

Reasons for buying	Number	Percent
Brand	102	80.31
Shape of the product	97	76.37
Style (appearance)	87	68.50
Packaging	98	77.16
Color of packing/container	82	64.56

Easy to operate	67	52.75
Easy to install	72	56.69
Dealer recommendation	81	63.77
Friend's recommendation	89	70.07
Price	96	75.59
Previous experience	76	59.84

N=127

The fact is that people don't a product unless there is a need for a product. However, beyond the need there are many factors that persuade a person to purchase a product. The respondents were asked to give reason(s) that would persuade them to buy a product. Among the many reasons listed a majority of the respondents, 80 percent said they would buy a product based on the brand. However, 77 percent of the respondents said packaging in an important factor. Shape of the product (76 percent), price of the product (75 percent) and friend's recommendation (70 percent) were other reasons which persuaded the respondents to purchase a product. The striking feature is the respondent's concern for shape of the product and packaging. Nearly 68 percent of the respondents attributed the style or appearance as a factor which would influence their purchasing a product.



Omani handmade bag



Amouage perfume



Omani Khinjar



Noor Majan Watches

Table showing factors encouraging buying a product

Encouragement to buy a product	Number	Percent
In-store advertising	80	62.99
Free samples	67	52.75



Offers	89	70.08
Competition	85	66.92
Celebrity endorsements	95	74.80
Ad campaigns	87	68.50
Sponsorship	55	43.40
POP display	102	80.31
Others	65	51.18

N=127

The respondents were asked about the non-product based factors influencing the purchase of the product. Nearly 80 percent of the respondents said point-of-purchase (POP) display greatly influences the purchasing of the product. This was followed by other factors like celebrity endorsements (74 percent), offers (70 percent) ad-campaigns (68 percent) and In-store advertising (63 percent)

Factors influencing buying decisions

Factors influencing buying decisions	Strongly agree	Percent	Agree some what	Percent	Disagree	Percent
Design of the product	44	34.65	65	51.18	18	14.17
Packaging of the product	45	35.43	56	44.09	26	20.47
Color of container	52	40.94	67	52.75	08	06.30
Color of packaging	34	26.77	69	54.33	24	18.90
Shape of the product	35	27.56	72	56.70	20	15.75
Logo of the product	24	18.90	78	61.42	25	19.68
Visual display	35	27.56	80	62.30	12	09.45
Brand name	54	42.52	65	51.18	08	06.30

N=127

The respondents were asked to give their preference on factors influencing in purchasing a product on three point scale. The data showed a mixed response to the question. Nearly 56 percent of the respondent agreed to some extent that shape of the product influenced their buying. This was followed by visual display (62 percent). logo (61 percent), color of packaging (54 percent), color of container (52 percent) and design of the product influenced product purchasing to some extent.



The data further revealed that color of the container (40 percent), packaging (35 percent) and design of the product (34 percent) had a strong influence in purchasing of the product.

However one factor that stands out as the most influencing factor in persuading the purchasing of a product in the brand name. Nearly 42 percent of the respondents strongly agreed and 51 percent agreed to some extent to brand as a highly influencing factor.

Table showing effect of visual merchandising

Effect of visual merchandising	Number	Percent
Influences most of the time	20	15.75
Influences sometimes only	65	51.18
Influences rarely	22	17.32
Never influenced	20	15.88

N=127

The respondents were asked to answer to a query on the effect of visual merchandising. Nearly 51 percent of the respondents said it influenced to some extent only. About 16 percent said that visual merchandising influences them most of the time and 17 said is rarely influences purchasing of products. Sixteen percent of the respondents also said that visual merchandising never was a factor.

Table showing impression on display of products

Impression of display	Number	Percent
Yes, many a times	35	27.55
Sometimes only	65	51.18
Never	27	21.25

N=127

Further the respondents were probed to find out as to how much they are impressed by the display of the product nevertheless it influences or not. There was a consistency in the response where in 51 percent they are impressed by display to some extent only followed by 27 percent stating that display impressed most of the times and 21 percent said it never impressed them.



Almarai products

Table showing awareness of in-store promotions

Awareness of in-store promotions	Number	Percent
In-store display	77	60.62
Announcements	72	56.70
Posters	88	69.29
Shopping bags	87	68.50
Mannequins	92	72.45
Collectables	89	70.08
Themes of display	65	51.18
Special events	83	65.35
Others	45	35.43

N=127

Lastly, in-store promotions which have high value visual communication potential was taken as a factor to assess the opinion of the respondents. Mannequins as a part of the display attracted 72 percent of the respondents. Collectables (gifts offered) caught the attention of 70 percent of the respondents. These were followed by posts (69 percent), shopping bags (68 percent) in-store display (60 percent) and in-store special events also attracted the respondents.



CONCLUSION

A variety of factors affects consumer decision making process while purchasing a product. Research world over has proved beyond doubt that irrespective the visual aspects of presentation of a product, the products brand name stands out as the most influential factor.

However studies have also shown that the best of the brand presented in the best of the manner has a high value. The basic principle of marketing hinges on presenting the product in the most visually appealing way. The study has shown that more than 50 percent of the respondents are loyal to a brand. Nearly 80 percent of the respondent's state brand preference as the most important reason to buy a product.

Visual display is another important aspect influencing purchase decision making. The study reveals that around 75 percent of the respondents consider the shape of the product, packing and style of the product. The other important reason was celebrity endorsement. More than 50 percent strongly agree that design of the product, packaging, color of the container and color of packaging influence purchase decision making.

Finally the product becomes synonymous with the packaging and consumers looks for the packaging decides to buy a product. This symbiotic relationship is critical in the application of the concepts of visual communication to product developed.

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