INTRODUCTION

The study aims to establish the impact of visual merchandising on customer buying behaviour in Apparel Stores.

**Visual merchandising** is focused on the presentation of products in retail outlets and emphasizes on combining visual and other sensory elements to capture attention, that awaken the senses and provide the customers a wonderful buying experience to achieve more sales, which is contributory to the main goal of merchandising itself.

It has the power of communicating to a larger set of people and can bring about the USP (Unique Selling Proposition) of the store’s value and products through the way the products are displayed and the store atmospherics created.

“What you see is what you buy” through visual merchandising can either make or break the image of the brand. It is the visual merchandising of a store which makes the store most interesting and appealing when the products are similar with the competitors. It will encourage the customers to spend more time in the store and result into an impulse buying decision. It

Visual Merchandising is everything the customer sees, both exterior and interior, that creates a positive image of the business and results in attention, interest, desire and action on part of the customer.

Visual Merchandising is much more than functional configuration of space, layout and customer flow, it also is a powerful communication and an experience enhancer and differentiator of the displayed merchandise even when product similarities are overwhelming.

There is a growing recognition of the need for an effective Visual Merchandising in retail stores but even as it continues to grow, the understanding of Visual Merchandising impact and effectiveness is still in its infancy. The research deals with components of Visual Merchandising and its influence on customer purchasing decision.

**Customer Buying Behaviour** is the scientific study of the processes customers use to select, secure, use and dispose of products and services that satisfy their needs. Retailers can satisfy those needs only to the extent that they understand their customers.

Consumption is the soul and the purpose of all production. Customer is one who does some physical activities and deliberates to take decisions concerning purchase and to dispose off on to evaluate products and services. Customer is “an individual who purchases products or services for his own or his family’s personal use.
Impulse buying behaviour of the customer needs to be understood so that can be used in visual merchandising to influence the decision to purchase the products. Visual merchandising delves a lot deeper, focusing on the psychology and motivations of the target customer. Entire store concept must be built around target customers. If displays are not consistent with what customers desire and expect, then the effect will be lost.

**Visual merchandising and Customer Buying Behaviour**

There are many visual merchandising variables or elements eg merchandise colour, manner of presentation, awareness of fixtures, path finding, sensory qualities of materials and the effects of lighting which can affect and turn customer in or out of the store. These variables need to be identified and implemented.

In every area of Mumbai, we have shopping malls, stand alone stores, traditional stores which have the identical merchandise even at the same price in a multiple of stores. There are more choices out there for customers than ever before, so retailers must continually work at capturing the customer’s attention. Poor exterior presentation may lead customers to assume that the product is poor quality as well. Storefront must build image and tell the right story about the retailer. Sameness and mediocrity are ubiquitous in most retail store designs today. There is a distinct lack of innovation and creative flair. Too many retailers look at a successful store chain, and then just try to copy its look.

Store layout and merchandise displays and presentation have become key differentiating factors. It can not only impact immediate sales, but can also help create a unique identity and ambiance that will contribute to building a loyal clientele.

In today’s competitive retail environment retailers consider visual merchandising as 'frills'. They fail to understand that after investing money on important priorities such as a high traffic location, great merchandise, quality staff, insurance and advertising, financial success depends upon whether or not the store measures up to customer expectations. To keep the customers from walking right past the door it is essential that visual merchandising and displays have a reasonable budget allocated. Retailer needs to understand to measure the success of visual merchandising season after season.

The outcome of the study will help the retailer to understand the buying decision of the customer better and help to redesign the visual merchandising to improve its efficiency by studying the problems and challenges faced.