



# The influence of sweet positioning on shelves on consumer perception



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## ABSTRACT

The article focuses on how the position of sweets on shelves is perceived by generation Y consumers. The required data were obtained through eye-tracking using the SMI RED 250 device. Additionally, in-depth interviews and short questionnaires were included in the experiment to obtain complementary qualitative data. The research took place during spring 2014 in the Eye Tracking Laboratory at Mendel University. In total 55 respondents representing generation Y participated in the experiment.

Various sweets were placed on 7 shelves. Every shelf was different. The prices, the size of packages and the tools of sales promotion were different too. The main goal of this research was to recognize how the various shelf elements and the positioning of the sweets were perceived.

The research shows that the most important factors are the price and discounts on the products. Customer habit and experience are also important. Men's attention is focused on the middle of the shelves. The behavior of women is different and they focus on every element of the shelves, product by product. The creativity of the sweets as a product has a strong influence on the consumer's attention. Different behavior and priorities among various segments were discovered.

The results provide valuable insights to create customized, eye-catching shelves for customers.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most important components of the consumer's buying decision process is the decision-making at the point of sale. Despite the fact that the buying decision process begins at the household of each consumer, different factors and elements at the point of sale can strongly influence the consumer's final purchase.

The goal of the selling environment is to evoke positive emotions which would act as an incentive to buy.

Understanding the consumer behaviour, which is the topic of this article, is a necessary prerequisite to effective marketing.

The basic motive for the performance of the survey presented in this paper was to verify the assumptions about consumer behaviour at the point of sale and to identify the effect of individual in-store communication tools on the consumer's attention.

## 2. Theory

Each stimulus is perceived by the consumer through the senses, interpreted based on the consumer's capabilities and evaluated

either positively or negatively based on individual reasons (Koudelka, 1997). To understand consumer behaviour, it is vital to observe above all the psychological processes of perception, attention, learning, memory, forgetting, needs and motivations. The growing effort of marketing staff to understand these processes influencing the consumer has led to the emergence of the so-called neuromarketing. It is a new approach which interconnects findings from neuropsychology, cognitive psychology and neurosciences with the environment of marketing decisions (Vysekalova, 2011).

According to the study by POPAI (2010), a full 76% of consumers make their buying decisions directly in the store. From this data, it would seem that the attention of salespeople should be directed particularly to in-store communication.

Retailers do not maximise the opportunities presented by in-store communication. Though customers spend less time in shops these days, they spend more than before. For this reason, it is important to influence the customer in more places. In 1997, 47% of promotional displays were used also as a form of secondary promotion aside from the primary placement in the appropriate category. In 2011, the number was 60%, as salespeople realised the importance of cross-promotion (POPAI, 2010).

Promotion, or communication, at the point of sale includes a large number of tools which are as a whole called POP (point of purchase) or POS (point of sale) materials. The most important POP

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materials include stands, placards, posters, shop windows, price tags, floor graphics, TV screens, product models etc. Partially, packaging also falls within this category (Karlicek & Kral, 2011).

Good visibility or high concentration of customers are the basic criteria for the placement of POP materials. Their task is to clearly identify and promote a store, product or service (Clow & Baak, 2008) and stimulate buyers to unplanned purchases (Karlicek & Kral, 2011). Promotion at the point of sale is directly tied to the individual tools of sales promotion.

POP materials along with merchandising are often the last chance to influence the consumer during the buying process and make him/her buy a certain brand or category of products. Distinct promotional materials, however, can also leave an impression on the consumer even after the purchase is finished. Clow and Baak (2008) state that more than half the money the consumers spend in the store falls within unplanned purchases. When buying food, up to 88% of consumers make decisions about their purchase in the store.

Consumers are not oversaturated by this type of promotion. They evaluate the current intensity as acceptable, and in some cases, they would even welcome an increase. Moreover, research from 2014 shows that the majority of buying decisions is made at the point of sale (PPM FACTUM, 2013; Češi a reklama v roce, 2014).

Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, and Young (2009) have carried out an eye-tracking study in order to refute or confirm certain hypotheses regarding shelf layout and the attention of the consumers. Their research has shown that the effect of in-store communication stimuli at the point of sale is stronger than the effect of out-of-store communication stimuli (stimuli and promotion affecting the consumer before shopping itself). Out-of-store communication has the greatest influence on the consumer before the shopping itself.

This research has also shown that previous experience with a brand has a significant effect on attention. In addition, previous experience influences the assessment and selection process. The study also shows that in-store communication is more effective on the younger, more educated and more occasional buyers. In this case, however, there is no difference in the attention gained when compared to other categories of buyers (that metric was the same in all cases) but in the fact that these categories of buyers are more willing to consider or choose brands of products which they have been made aware of via in-store promotion (Chandon et al., 2009).

The results of this study also show that brands located in the centre or close to the centre of the shelving unit have shown greater likeliness of gaining repeated attention. Both right and left side as well as top and bottom shelves were faring considerably worse when compared to the central area. No significant difference was observed between the right and the left side of the shelf. Price has not proven to be a significant factor in the amount of attention gained according to research (Chandon et al., 2009).

Vysekalova (2011) includes the results of an eye-tracking study which confirms that the optimal area is at or below the eye level.

Scott Young (2014) in his study presents some significant results which have been recorded by his company during many years of eye-tracking research. In the case of routine purchases, customers show typical behaviour, where they do not dedicate much attention to the shopping and buy their preferred products. To attract attention during such shopping, distinctiveness is essential, e.g. in packaging or display.

In the case of purchases where the phase of obtaining information and comparing alternatives also has to be included in the process, that is, in non-routine shopping, it has been shown that consumers obtain information about products primarily from POP/POS materials, if these are available. These are the first source of attention and also the “driving force” behind decisions. On the other hand, products without this more distinct promotion are

mainly being assessed based on packaging, which is then used to compare alternatives. The study has also shown that a large amount of displays has reached the point of “wasting resources”, since consumers pay more attention to unusual shapes of displays and tend to ignore the extremely extensive ones (Young, 2014).

The last part of Young's (2014) study points out the ineffectiveness of promotional materials located on the ceiling. Promotion placed above the eye level is perceived by the customers when getting their bearings between the aisles. In the aisle with products, almost no customers pay any further attention to it regardless of creative design.

Different displays can be very effective for smaller or lesser known brands when creating visibility and gaining attention. In combination with price and the perceived value of the display, these support impulse purchases. A significant factor in the creation and use of these displays, however, is simplicity and pragmatic content. Complex displays are almost always ignored.

It is also important to note that packaging is also essential in in-store communication. Each packaging and POP/POS material design has its specific strengths and weaknesses. In this context, the most effective packaging and materials are those with unique design which convey emotion and are at the same time simple, facilitate the buying process and are located above the floor (Young, 2012).

Young (2014) recommends to not waste resources on a large amount of promotional displays. Tobii (2013) study, performed in pharmacies, on the other hand, speaks of a 15% increase in sales of products which were provided with a larger amount of promotional materials. The larger amount of promotional materials in this category also attracted larger amount of attention to prices and the products themselves.

### 3. Material and methods

For research purposes, the SMI RED 250 eye-tracking device was used. SMI RED 250 is a dedicated device for taking eye-tracking measurements. It is a static type device which can capture eye movements with frequency of 250 Hz per second. Previous research has allowed the formulation of research assumptions about in-store communication and shelf layout. These assumptions were subsequently tested on seven slides presenting graphically created shelf layouts. The full-size shelf layouts were presented to the participants in random order using a projector against an empty wall distanced 2.5–3 m away from the respondent. The image of the shelf layout was available to the respondent for 20 s. After each image, the respondent was asked supplementary questions in the form of an in-depth interview. The questions were directed to the respondent's buying decision, memorization of the individual elements, preference and perception of packaging, brands and prices.

Each shelf layout was compiled with the aim of assessing the attractiveness and effectiveness of the following attributes of shelf layout:

- TOP cards (upper promotion within the shelf display)—1st shelf;
- Creative and distinct packaging—1st shelf, 5th shelf;
- Price tag view rate and ease of remembering—2nd shelf, 3rd shelf, 5th shelf, 6th shelf, 7th shelf;
- Discounts—2nd shelf, 3rd shelf, 4th shelf, 6th shelf, 7th shelf;
- Shelf stoppers and cross-promotion—3rd shelf, 4th shelf, 6th shelf;
- New goods and associated special offers—3rd shelf;
- 2 + 1 offers—4th shelf;
- Larger packaging—4th shelf;
- Gifts to the displayed goods—6th shelf;
- Visual style—5th shelf, 7th shelf.

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