

Enhancing Visual Merchandising in Designing Commercial Spaces for Children in Jeddah

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Abstract:

This article discusses visual merchandising in designing commercial spaces, which is one of the most influential aspects of marketing. The process of designing visual merchandising for a commercial space is particularly complex if the consumer is a child. Therefore, this article aimed to come up with design principles that enhance visual merchandising in commercial spaces for the child category, to help create an interactive environment for children that enables them to determine their purchasing options. To contribute to achieving Vision 2030 of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to provide a vibrant society that helps instil positive values in the character of children ('Vision 2030' n.d.). The authors review the literature on visual merchandising, commercial spaces, and early childhood. The authors also provide a simplified analysis of three international case studies of toy retailers of the best children's commercial spaces, by investigating how these stores are concerned with aspects of visual merchandising. They discuss the importance of creating effective shopping environments through visual merchandising design. They also analyze the extent to which these stores are successful retail environments, adapted to the needs and desires of children. The authors contend that children's commercial spaces, properly designed to meet the needs and desires of consumers, can powerfully enhance the shopping experiences of this consumer segment. The article concludes with a comparison between the stores under study to reach the results. The results are expected to benefit commercial space designers and investors who want to increase their demand and who are interested in children.

Keywords:

Visual Merchandising, Commercial Spaces, Toy stores, Interior design, Children, Early childhood.

المخلص:

تتناول هذه المقالة التسويق البصري في تصميم الفراغات التجارية، وهو أحد أكثر جوانب التسويق تأثيراً. تعتبر عملية تصميم التسويق البصري لفراغ تجاري معقدة بشكل خاص إذا كان المستهلك طفلاً. لذلك، هدفت هذه المقالة إلى الخروج بمبادئ التصميم التي تعزز التسويق البصري في الفراغات التجارية لفئة الأطفال، للمساعدة في خلق بيئة تفاعلية للأطفال تمكنهم من تحديد خيارات الشراء الخاصة بهم. للمساهمة في تحقيق رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية ٢٠٣٠ لتوفير مجتمع حيوي يساعد على غرس القيم الإيجابية في شخصية الأطفال ('Vision 2030' n.d.). يناقش المؤلفون الأدبيات المتعلقة بالتسويق

البصري، والفراغات التجارية، والطفولة المبكرة. يقدم المؤلفون أيضاً تحليلاً مبسطاً لثلاث دراسات حالة دولية لمتاجر بيع الألعاب بالتجزئة لعدد من أفضل الفراغات التجارية للأطفال، من خلال التحقيق في مدى اهتمام هذه المتاجر بجوانب التسويق البصري. كما يناقشون أهمية إنشاء بيئات تسوق فعالة من خلال تصميم التسويق البصري. كما يقومون بتحليل مدى نجاح هذه المتاجر في بيئات البيع بالتجزئة، وتكيفها مع احتياجات ورغبات الأطفال. يؤكد المؤلفون أن المساحات التجارية للأطفال، المصممة بشكل صحيح لتلبية احتياجات ورغبات المستهلكين، يمكن أن تعزز بقوة تجارب التسوق لهذه الشريحة الاستهلاكية. ويختتم المقال بمقارنة بين المتاجر قيد الدراسة للوصول إلى النتائج. من المتوقع أن تعود النتائج بالفائدة على مصممي الفراغات التجارية والمستثمرين الذين يرغبون في زيادة الإقبال على متاجرهم والمهتمين بالأطفال.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التسويق البصري، الفراغات التجارية، متاجر ألعاب الأطفال، التصميم الداخلي، الأطفال، الطفولة المبكرة.

Introduction:

All commercial spaces aspire to attract shoppers to increase their demand but enabling children to determine their appropriate purchasing options is more complicated, where appropriate design can contribute to building the children's perceptions and skills by creating an interactive environment that enables them to determine their purchasing options. Thus, we must attach great importance to visual merchandising in toy stores to improve investment and make these stores attractive (Kiran and Mridula 2015).

Research Problem:

This study is considered one of the few studies in KSA of visual merchandising for the child category specifically, as previous studies are related to visual merchandising in general. There is a lack of studies that have examined visual merchandising from a child's perspective. Furthermore, merchandising for children's products is usually related to categories such as apparel, food products and other products but not toys (Kiran and Mridula 2015).

Research Objectives:

This article aimed to come up with design principles that enhance visual merchandising in commercial spaces for the child category, by identifying the most important elements of visual merchandising and employing them to design commercial spaces for children to enhance the child user experience.

Importance of research:

This study is important to:

- Support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's vision to develop child-friendly urban areas in line with Vision 2030, which seeks to provide a vibrant community that helps instil positive values and good qualities in the personality of children from an early age ('Vision 2030' n.d.).
- Build the children's perceptions and skills by creating an interactive environment that enables them to determine their purchasing options.

Literature Review

The article's literature review is divided into two main axes: Visual merchandising and early childhood.

Visual Merchandising:

A human perceives his or her surrounding environment through the sense of sight, the fastest of the senses transmitting external stimuli to the brain, so he sees it to recognize, and then the response comes to interact and merge with it (Ali and Al Shakhs 2015). Studies have shown that 80% of shoppers' impressions within commercial spaces are formed through visual communication (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). Visual marketing is a science and art in the method of displaying and presenting products in a visually attractive way (Al-Attar and Reda, 2015). As the art of presentation, visual merchandising puts the merchandiser in focus. It educates customers, creates their desire to buy, and ultimately strengthens the selling process, as confirmed in a study by Iqbal, Umer, Maqbool, Sunil & Pillai (2011) which found that a large group of low-income customers preferred to buy products with visually attractive brands rather than products with discounted in prices. The interior design of the spaces also relies on the sense of sight in influencing the consumer or the recipient through the perception of shapes, colours, and materials. Hence, to interact with the recipient, the interior designer has to understand the dimensions and determinants of that sense, and even influence them by taking advantage of the various visual effects and applying them within the commercial space where it operates (Ali and Al Shakhs 2015). Colours and shapes are the first way for customers to distinguish the product, and their psychological impact can provide a strategy to enhance the emotional response to the product. Moreover, visual aesthetics give the product a symbolic value that instils brand promises to customers and makes the product memorable, distinguishing the product from competitors' products (Albert, 2021). According to Tarța (2014), the visual element is a decisive factor in the purchase decision so designers should pay attention to everything shoppers see inside the space and understand how to deal with it, particularly the design of product display units to facilitate finding and purchasing products. She emphasizes the importance of using aesthetics as a marketing tool while focusing on one of the elements of visual marketing, colour, although other elements of aesthetics affect visual marketing, such as the meanings of line and shape, and their marketing applications, which may give competitive advantages to stores helping customers to identify the product more easily and faster (identity and brand), requiring an analysis of the relationship between the elements of aesthetics to integrate all elements of visual marketing at once (Tarța 2014). This is what this paper will address, by highlighting the most important elements of visual merchandising generally.

Visual merchandising is based on influencing shoppers through both external and internal displays. These must be coordinated to ensure that they follow the general design orientation of the place (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). A study by Tantawi and Al-Halabi (2021) aimed to find new ways to display products focusing on external display facades, which the study focused on as a visual welcome to the store for its potential customers who are considered "silent sales representatives" signalling the quality of the materials used, colours, and inexpensive goods or luxury products and services. They also emphasize that the optimal display method allows the customer to obtain as complete an overview of the store as possible, on entry, to help attract them to continue shopping. Their study confirmed the importance of visual merchandising, particularly the impact of external signs, and concluded that they must achieve maximum attractiveness in less than 10 seconds (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021).

Early Childhood:

This article deals with the early childhood stage, which ranges between (3 to 5 years) as a target age group. Many educational experts and psychologists have discussed the life of the child and all stages of their development. For Rita Murhij, a clinical psychologist, the issue of respecting and implementing children's rights is paramount. She discusses the age group considered as the years of exploration and play (0-6 years). She points out that many factors directly affect the child's physical development, including the influence and continuous interaction with the surrounding environment, and highlights the importance of the motor achievements of the child during the first years of his or her life in developing other abilities, such as social skills, intellectual competencies, and speech (Murhij 2012).

Many childhood specialists and educational consultants also discuss the child's behaviour in the early childhood stage. From an educational psychology perspective, Al-Nuaimi (2015) emphasizes that the first six years of a child's life play an important role in shaping the child's personality. At the age of three years, the child begins to understand the surrounding environment and becomes more curious to explore it. Thus, it is important to ensure that safe spaces are provided for them. When the child enters the fourth year, he or she needs to develop listening and participation skills, through activities and toys dedicated to developing imagination, visualization, and perception skills. At this stage, the child's attention does not focus on one stimulus for a long time and does not focus on all the details, as vision is still in the developmental phase until the age of 7 years. With the need to involve the child in choosing the appropriate activities to practice these skills (Al-Naimi, 2015).

The value of play is incontestable, in addition to supporting motor, neurological, and social development, it improves adaptation by encouraging to exploration of diverse perspectives and helping develop ways to deal with problems in a safe environment (Lee and Raziff 2021), especially children, as they are explorers. Play gives the child an opportunity to develop new skills. Moreover, the child's psychological and physical development is in turn linked to the nature and quality of the environment in which he lives (Al-Skeet, 2003). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of early childhood care, the global response to the challenges of early childhood challenges is small compared to the scale of the problem (Giese 2018). Casey (2007) highlights the importance of play environments as part of the childhood landscape. She refers to the lifelong negative effects of inactivity and stresses the increasing loss of play spaces for children due to increasing urbanization. Moreover, the restrictions and fears that limit children's opportunities to play, deprive them of basic childhood experiences and opportunities to deal with a full range of emotions, risk opportunities, adventures, and communication with the environment in which they live. She also recommends that children should be considered when designing play spaces and giving them access to play opportunities (Casey 2007).

Researchers have also studied the effect of using interactive interior design on children in different environments and its role in achieving different skills for the child. A study by Nofal, Mahrous, Abdel-Meguid, and Sayed (2021) recommended that the interior designer when designing any space for children should consider the needs and characteristics of the child at this age stage to determine what goals or skills are required to be achieved from this space (Nofal et al. 2021). Ashley Verbanic's master's thesis in architecture also discussed focusing on understanding how children perceive and interact with their environments.

As mentioned above, children use their physical environments for educational play to develop spatial understanding and motor skills in this thesis Verbanic discusses the importance of community involvement as an educational tool, especially with the decrease in the number of public spaces in which children can actively participate, as pointed out above (Casey 2007). Verbanic also dealt with the effects of the five senses in children on the perception of the environment and the concept of design. When designing for children, both the child's scale and angle of view, need to be considered, which changes the visual experience of the child. Thus, to link the individual and the environment when designing, the designer should seek to explore and anticipate what the user might feel inside the space (Verbanic 2010). Children need places that guarantee their natural growth and upbringing in the context of modern cities, and for this reason, it is necessary, before embarking on any construction, to conduct studies that consider children in the method of construction (Al-Amin, 2017). In marketing and displaying products for children it is recommended that there must be a play or display area so that children can interact with toys before buying them. Thus, in the design of commercial spaces for children, interactive interior design has a major role in influencing the child and how it relates to the space and achieving many of the skills required for the child (Nofal et al. 2021).

In children's toy stores, we need to focus on the importance of visual marketing and customer needs. In a study of visual merchandising and customer needs in a toy store, Kiran and Mridula (2015) pointed out that although visual merchandising plays an important role in retail stores in general, it is rarely associated with toys. The study concluded by observing that parents and children prefer to interact with toys and try some, before buying. Based on the previous literature review, conclude that there need to shed light on the application of some elements of visual merchandising in commercial spaces for children so that their need to play and practice their skills is considered, and this is what this article aspires to reach.

Methodology:

The authors analyse three international case studies that are good models of commercial spaces for children and compare the results. By investigating how these stores are concerned with aspects of visual merchandising. The selection of case studies was based on the need to consider the diversity of visual merchandising methods; the choice fell to the following toy retailer's outlets:

- 1) **Hamleys / London – UK**
- 2) **ELC- Early Learning Center / London - UK**
- 3) **Toys R Us / New Jersey - USA**

The article attempts to achieve its desired objectives by analysing some elements of visual merchandising, which were divided according to the following:

- 1.**Brand Identity**
- 2.**Exterior Design & Windows Display**
- 3.**Wayfinding**
- 4.**Interior space - (ceilings, walls & flooring designs)**
- 5.**Lighting**
- 6.**Circulations**
- 7.**Ways of Display & Display units**

• The first case study: Hamleys / London – UK

Store Information

The building is located on Regent Street/ London. It consists of 7 floors with an area of 4,500 square meters. It opened in 1760 (Oakley 2017) ('Hamleys' n.d.).



Photo 1: The store interior design in Hamleys. Source: ('Hamleys - London' 2021)

Brand Identity

Hamley's interior store design is dominated by the colour red on the walls and most of the display units, which is the main colour for its trademark with a golden touch in the frames of the paintings, decorations, at the edges of the display units and in the stars of the floors, which is a reflection of its logo (**Photo1**). Hamleys has adopted a successful marketing strategy based on colour to convey the desired image of the brand, reflect its identity, communicate its values, and recognize its products, to add symbolic value and competitive advantage commensurate with its desire to create unforgettable memories for its customers, as discussed by Tarța, 2014 in her study of the main applications of colour in marketing, where she emphasized the need for accuracy in choosing an appropriate colour to have a positive impact, as does the red colour in attracting attention. Choosing red reflects the goals and marketing mission of Hamleys which encompass fun, magic, experience, memories, interaction, and performances, in line with the concepts associated with red in the psychology of colours, such as energy, activity, enthusiasm, warmth, love, and passion and strong feelings, designs in red reflect love and s (Al-Jack et al., 2019).

Exterior Design & Windows Display

Approximately 75% of first-time customers remember the entrance to the store, as it provides the first and perhaps the last view inside the store (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). The store's

external façade is designed to blend in and be consistent with the building's heritage structure. There are three main entrances (one large entrance in the middle for entry, and two less wide for exit, left and right). The façade contains side service doors, 5 red awnings bearing the Hamleys logo were used in the exterior facade. These properly designed awnings or balconies provide an ideal solution to protect customers in bad weather through the protective feeling provided by walking under an awning and even add to the aesthetics of the building. This was confirmed by (El Halaby & Tantawy) in their study of visual marketing and its role in the visual attraction of commercial spaces (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). The perpendicular red flags with the Hamleys logo on the facade enable passers-by to read from a distance. Three words are written in a row: (Toys - Hamleys -Toys) above the awnings to reflect the theme of the products sold by the store. The interactive shows at the entrance of the store add a welcome message to visitors. Cladding the external façade of the second floor with transparent glass containing the brand logo and the graphic character of William Hamley.

The Windows display is the information link for the potential customer. Whereas one out of every four sales is a result of a good display window (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). Of the four glass windows display two are designed with rounded corners towards the entrance to enhance the attraction of pedestrians entering the store. The toys are displayed in a theatrical manner commensurate with the concept of magic that Hamleys aims to achieve. Font sizes have been considered when writing on the windows so that large fonts were used at the top of the windows to facilitate viewing from a distance, and the small lines of writing below the display window to be readable from close up. The windows display reflects general themes and celebrations if any.

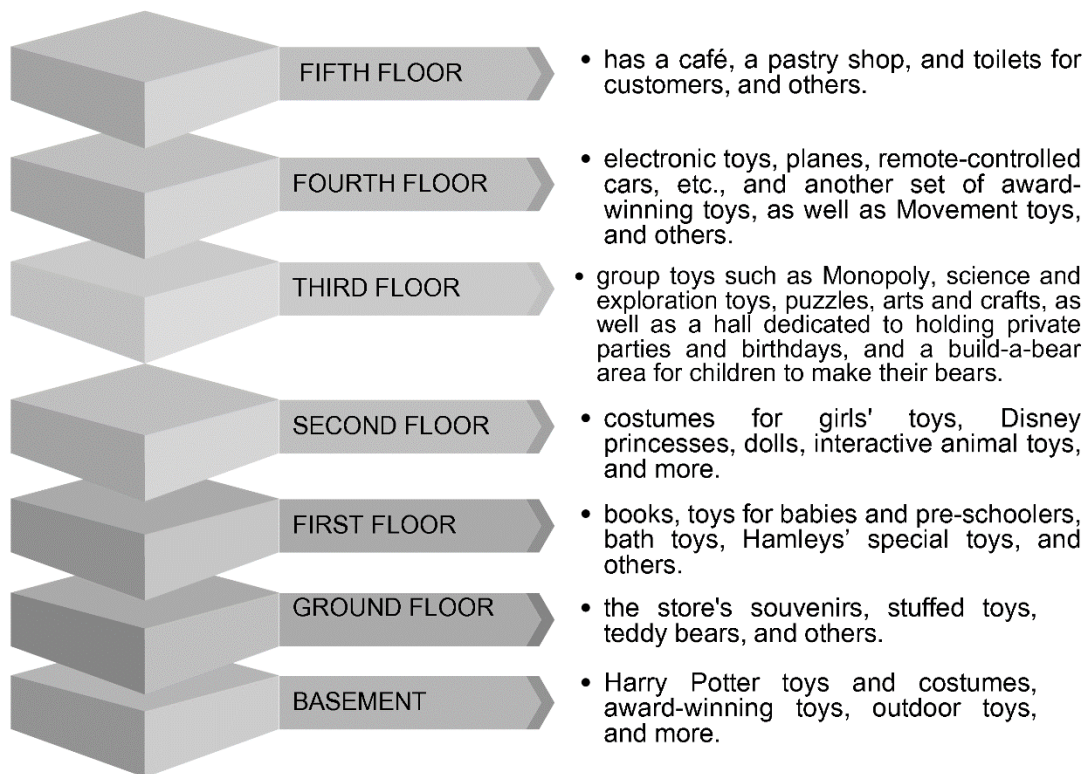
Wayfinding

External signage for stores provides information and direction and helps in communicating effectively, particularly for some stores with poor locations. Therefore, the size of the letters should be no less than 8-12 inches, that is, large enough to read from 200-250 feet (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). The large red flags serve the far vision range and there is a small white side panel that serves the close vision range. The designs of the internal panels varied, with several signboards achieving their functional purpose, providing information about the departments, floors, and toy categories. Although panels do not guide inside the store easily without relying on salespersons (Kanupriya 2017).

When entering the store, there is a signboard above the escalator area guiding the customer to the service areas for the rest of the floors. Signs and panels enable shoppers to have a preview of all the departments from a distance before reaching them, especially with the density of inventory in the store. There are also indicative wall panels for all floors, distributed near the service areas in addition to the use of guiding symbols and signs, with some cartoon drawings and signs suitable for children. There are also floor-standing and suspended banners carrying advertisements for price offers and discounts. There are many internal department signs in the store highlighting the different categories of toys available and some of these can be seen from a distance due to their size, location, and lighting (Kanupriya 2017).

Interior Space – (ceilings, walls & flooring designs)

The seven floors of the building are classified on the official website of the store according to the most popular types of games ('Hamleys' n.d.), as shown in **(Graph 1)**.



(Graph 1): Contents of seven floors of the Hamleys building in Regent Street – by the authors.

The inventory density of the Hamleys store is high, with more than 50,000 toys available for sale (Oakley 2020), which increases the importance of utilizing the internal space of the store. Most stores focus on managing the floor space to create the atmosphere desired by the customers while it is also important to give sufficient attention to the ceiling area, because the walls are not a flexible space, as the area must be allocated to the products required according to customer expectations (Iqbal et al. 2011). In Hamleys, most of the store's internal walls are used to store products, and a large number of separate display units and shelves are used to increase the capacity. The more options/units that can be fitted into a certain amount of space, the greater the potential returns (Iqbal et al. 2011). While the ceiling space is allocated for lighting, hanging decorative units, informative panels, and interactive screens that reflect the type of games set in a specific area, most of the display units are used for an aesthetic and functional purpose at the same time, such as the huge model bus at the entrance to the store on the ground floor, which was designed to cover the escalator area, in addition to using it as storage units for games and dolls.

Dark violet is used for most of the ceilings, while the floors vary in colour between grey and shades of red, gold, blue, pink, and green, among other others. Particularly, the mixture of colours used in the store's interior designs supports the younger age group's preference for bright colours over dark colours (Badghish and Al-Aslani, 2020).

Lighting:

The store generally uses spotlights, which distribute lighting in general and equally to all spaces, with a few directed lights to shine more light over each of the shelves for each product to be visible from a distance. Hamleys has recently replaced its legacy traditional halogen lamps with (Constant colour CMH Ultra lamps) from (GE Lighting), the next generation in retail lighting, providing efficient solutions that provide optimal light quality, colour and efficiency. These lamps have achieved several benefits including exceptionally superior colour rendering, extended maintenance cycles, long-term cost savings, and superior illumination, which Hamleys/London Operations Manager Keane Herman confirmed: “These light sources provide superior illumination, conveying the quality and richness of our merchandise. Colour, which is very important in an environment designed with children in mind” (‘The Leader in LED Lighting Solutions’ 2013).

Circulation:

The movement paths start from the entrance of the store, which was designed in a way that attracts visitors inside, in addition to considering the large size of the doors to facilitate the flow of visitors into the store. Separate entrances were also designated for entry and exit to avoid crowding. Hamleys receives more than 5 million visitors annually (Oakley, 2020), and in the latest maintenance of the store design the escalators were re-installed. Therefore, the main circulations were carefully considered. Hamleys used part of the main circulation floor as a free space for live shows and also planned it as racing tracks to allow children to try out their cars before buying them. This helped expand the circulation of children by playing and running. The separate display units were not placed far apart, so that it appears distant but far enough to allow ease of movement, (Kanupriya, 2017).

Ways of Display & Display Units:

The methods of displaying products in the Hamleys store vary greatly. Hanging displays are used to display the brand logo; others are interactive. Tiered display tables are used at the entrance and centre of the store to display toys, books, and promotions for discounted products. The tiered display tables are ideal for standing in front of the store where they are eye-catching and serve as a focal point for product displays, (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). Hamleys has dedicated the ceiling area to hanging display units that provide shoppers with information on the toy category of each area.

The store follows different product presentation methods that allow for taking pictures, which is an attraction factor for adults and children. It also uses display units aesthetically and functionally such as the large bus in front of the entrance that allows children to play inside, as well as a storage unit for toys. Many areas allow the employees to stand in during their demo presentations of toys. To create an attraction factor and provide multiple viewing angles for shoppers, the upper areas of the wall shelves are used for decoration, children's drawings and product information as the upper area is ideal for educational and decorative items impact and provides information about the type of merchandise displayed and also entices customers to go to the back of the store, (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021).

What distinguishes Hamley's presentation methods is that they pay attention to the user experience, as it allows children to try toys before purchasing them. For example, the store

provides a race track to try toys with control devices and interact with them, water platforms to experience water toys, a puppet theatre to present shows for children, and panels for drawing and colouring near the area for drawing tools. The basement is allocated for horror-themed toys and costumes, with appropriate themes (such as Harry Potter), while the candy selling area is designed like a huge candy house. All fixtures and fittings are consistent with the Hamleys brand identity and rarely reflect the branding of the product they supply (Kanupriya 2017).

• The second case study: "ELC- Early Learning Center" / London – UK Store Information

It is located on Ravenside Retail Park, Angel Road (Early Learning Centre 2012). The building area is 30,000 square feet (BIANCA 2012). It is a two-story retail store; the ground floor is allocated to Mothercare. The first floor is dedicated to ELC (Early Learning Centre) (Early Learning Centre 2012). ELC is specializing in interactive toys that help youngsters learn and develop skills while having fun ('Early Learning Centre - YouTube' n.d.) ('Early Learning Centre' n.d.).



Photo 2: The store interior design in ELC. Source:('RCI Projects' n.d.)

Brand Identity:

As Tarța mentions, colour applications help create a unique environment for stores to fulfil the desire of their customers who see shopping as a way to relax and entertain themselves and enjoy spending time in Stores (Tarța 2014). The green colour and the phrase: "It's playtime " was perceived as a motivator for children to interact with toys and go through the experience, it can be seen that the floor was marked with a circle reflecting the green logo. There are two circular white and orange fixed seats and two movable seats for children, as well as two green display units and toys for children to try (**Photo 2**).

Exterior Design & Windows Display:

The external façade was designed simply and clearly. History to the attention of customers, as the website (mothercare.com) writes under the name and in smaller font sizes. The left area of the name is designed, with five panels, which are the largest containing the Mothercare logo, followed by four other panels of equal size, the second panel is for the (ELC), the third for (Clarks Kids), the fourth for (Costa Café), and the last for (Pixifoto). Next to the car parks, is a shaded area designated for shopping carts.

Windows display of the store relied on the design of the glass facade, so multiple windows displays were taken from it. Pictures for children and mothers are used to reflect the theme of the store and its products. Clear graphics attract attention by communicating the brand visually. These graphics, when combined with the correct signage, become a complete instruction manual (Iqbal et al. 2011). The entire glass area of the facade was not used as a window display, sometimes it is left unused to avoid dimming natural lighting during the day. Passers-by were allowed to have a quick look inside the store as a kind of motivation and encouragement to enter.

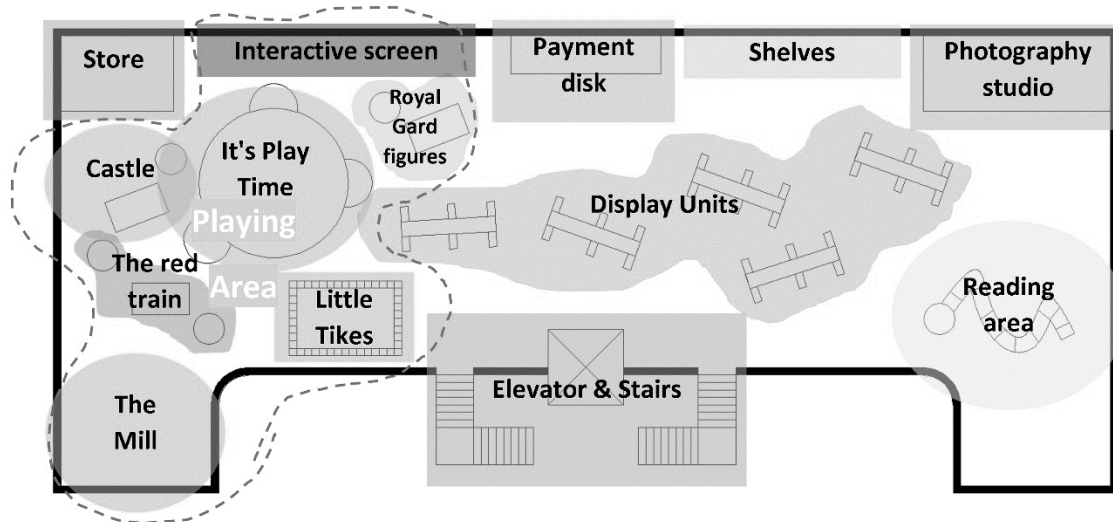
Wayfinding:

The store provides five small-sized indicative internal panels for the brands near the main entrance for close-up vision. At the top of the stairs there is a signboard containing the ELC trademark in a large size which can be seen from the entrance area. Since this area is visible above the ground floor elements, it allows the consumer to see what can be found in this section, therefore, this area is suitable to be used for section posters or brand images (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021).

Many cartoon characters were also distributed around the space, bearing advertising boards, some of which displayed welcoming phrases (such as: welcome to happy land). The classification of toys according to their types and age range is displayed above each unit. The payment area is marked with a motivational phrase: "Let's play" instead of "Let's pay" (Early Learning Centre 2012). The marketing message of ELC was also emphasized by writing on the sides of the display units in bright and colourful text suitable for children, with a message confirming that all of its products help children develop their skills through playing, with the placement of the twelve icons of the skills that it works to enhance.

Interior Space – (ceilings, walls & flooring designs):

The ELC store building in North London regards itself as a beacon of best practices in the sector ('Mothercare's Revamped' 2012). It first introduced features where mums could gather for playgroups alongside the café which resulted in a 30% increase in sales (Gemma Goldfingle 2012). The management believes an ELC toy store is a different kind of toy store as they are marketed in categories, so that finding the right toy for the right child is much easier ('Early Learning Centre' n.d.). The entire interior space of the first floor dedicated to ELC is distributed as in **(Drawing 1)**.



(Drawing 1): The interior space sketch of the first floor of ELC – by the authors.

ELC has exploited most of the internal wall space to display the products to avoid a large number of obstacles on the floor and a large number of display units and separate shelves were used to increase the capacity, while the ceilings were allocated for lighting, air conditioning vents, and surveillance cameras. Most of the display units were used for aesthetic and functional purpose at the same time. So, it was designed in child-friendly shapes, in addition to being it as shelves to display products.

The interior colours of the first-floor design are varied like orange and pink in their pure and clear tones and the wood texture in its woody colour, but the floor was covered with parquet in natural white and wood.

Lighting:

Displaying any brand always means creating unique shopping experiences, and light is one of the dimensions of this, using different lighting levels and light distributions. Combining indirect lighting with accent lighting may allow for visual comfort in the space (GmbH n.d.). ELC applied the visual comfort of indirect lighting, as it relied on general artificial lighting in lighting the store through directed spotlights distributed equally throughout the entire space, allowing wide spaces between the hangings to be illuminated. Visual comfort is a crucial aspect of store lighting. Direct glare from poorly aligned luminaires or excessively wide light distribution negatively affects the shopping experience (GmbH n.d.). As for natural lighting, it was limited to the simple part of it leaking from the glass facade of the building. Light not only presents the products but also sets the atmosphere and thus strengthens the direct shopping experience. The unique presentation of the space and its products using light provides an essential component in its dialogue with customers (GmbH n.d.).

Circulation:

The entrances to the building were designed in a size commensurate with the density of customer flow to facilitate the entry and exit process, as the entry and exit gates were combined. At the entrance area, opposite the gate, there is an indicative signboard for the contents of the store, which helps visitors to the ELC towards the back area of the store, where there are stairs

in both directions, right and left, and the elevator in the middle and all leading to the first floor. Hollow iron handrails with narrow spaces were used for the stairs for the safety of children and to enable visual communication from a distance, as the eye involuntarily turns when entering upwards to the mezzanine level to attract children of any age ('Mothercare's New Store' 2012). The elevator was designed in the shape of a space rocket, which is a wonderful feature inside the store (Early Learning Centre 2012) and is also a visual attraction for the back service area of ELC. As for the circulations, their width was considered and their floors were not planned or divided to increase their flexibility to accept any modification of the display units or changing their arrangement. If necessary, this also provides a good space that enables children to run and play without hindering visitors' movement and comfort while shopping. The widening of the corridors allowed for several interactive toys to be placed on the floor so that children could try them out, play with them, and interact with them, such as the music toy (The Giant Keyboard), and separate display units were distributed far enough apart to allow easy movement between them.

Ways of Display & Display Units:

The Edmonton store provides customers with a more interactive and enjoyable experience (John Ryan 2012). There is a strong sense of quality in the store ('Mothercare's New Store' 2012). There are many methods of displaying products in ELC, but the huge space rocket with two connected display units at the service area is considered the most important, as it is considered a visual attraction to the back area of the store from the moment of first entry, while its choice and design idea are in line with the functional purpose of the elevator which finds it heading upwards in correspondence with the ascent to the first floor.

ELC is keen on the quality of the user experience, so the methods used vary between product display units, in the form of animals such as camels and colourful frogs, for example, and the availability of surfaces with the world map, and between small tables for playing and shelf units with distorted vision mirrors to arouse the curiosity of children and attract them. Interactive display screens are also available, and some toy carts are used. Fixed units are exploited functionally as display and storage units for products, in addition to some life-sized Happy Land characters spread among the play areas, where children can take pictures near them. In addition to the giant worm at the reading area which was designed with a face wearing glasses to enhance the concept of reading, in a welcoming way facing the elevator to greet children and provide a comfortable place to read (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021). Most of the display units were designed in child-like shapes full of colours with eyes and different facial expressions, some of them were designed with legs, and their design varied functionally, so some were designed for large-sized toys, others for small-sized toys, and some were for hanging, and so on. ELC puts toy models near their storage shelves to make it easier to see them up close before buying them, (Early Learning Centre 2012) as a teaser and marketing method for the product. Small snail-shaped units are provided for storing small manual shopping baskets that are suitable for the showroom space. Small shopping baskets with trolleys that can be towed are provided. There is also a display unit in the form of a bird standing up and holding advertising magazines for ELC near the elevator. As a kind of exciting interactive display, the giant keyboard of the foot piano has been placed in one corner of the showroom to allow children to experience and interact with it. It is an exciting way for a child to explore music. Collaborating with friends to

play together helps improve a child's social skills. Creating sound on such a large scale is great for developing confidence ('Giant Keyboard' n.d.).

ELC has also allocated a play area that simulates village life and contains a group of outdoor toys such as playhouses, cars, a gas station, and slides ('Mothercare's New Store' 2012), which can be sold and available to be experienced by children. As well as a playing area has been designated for children so that customers can shop quietly while the children are busy exploring the windmill and the castle (Margot 2012). All these methods make the overall atmosphere of the store a unique experience, which children will want to visit more than once. The addition of a play area and a café makes the store a destination. Instead of just having shelves for toys, the focus was on play and experience ('Mothercare's New Store' 2012). In designing the payment desks ELC considers its height and suitability for children. It also drew a set of drawings devoid of fine details, where the whole is perceived before the parts are realized. The simpler and clearer the external borders of the shape, the easier it is to recognize and perceive (Ali and Al Shakhs 2015), especially for a child.

• The third case study: Toys R Us / U.S.A - New Jersey

Store Information

It is located inside the American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, New Jersey (NJ.com 2021). It has been in the toy industry for more than 65 years (Lee and Raziff 2021). The store has two floors and spans 20,000 square feet ('Toys "R" Us Flagship Store' 2021), it has 10,000 toys. The store aims to be dynamic, and merchandise is changed seasonally to keep up with trends such as movie releases and product launches (NJ.com 2021).



Photo 3: American Dream-Toys R Us Store Displays. Source: Photo by the Photographer/Charlie Meyer ('Toys "R" Us | OPTO' n.d.)

Brand Identity:

The main trademark colour (blue) dominates the interior design of the store, the same colour group was adopted for the logo, consisting of four clear colours attractive to children, and reflect the younger age group's preference for bright colours (Badghish and Al-Aslani, 2020). The design of the store also featured a symbol inspired by its logo, through the different-sized yellow and orange stars that cover the entire floor of the store, inspired by the star that is central to the trademark logo of Toys "R" Us (**Photo 3**).

Exterior Design & Windows Display:

The store has three main entrances; two entrances on the lower floor and one on the upper floor. The entrances are designed in white with sharp angles inclining inwards carrying the brand's logo and are not isolated from the display windows or the external storefront. The entrances are merged, so that they are not separated in design, for more sense of fluidity in movement and transforming movement, thus attracting pedestrians to enter involuntarily (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021), while the rest of the façade comprised glass display windows containing several attractive points, which are an important attraction that invites pedestrians to explore.

To increase the visual connection with the inside of the store, there are some semi-transparent star graphics on some areas of the windows display, interactive points of attraction, and corners that allow customers to take pictures with Geoffrey the Giraffe. Some short animations were designed for screens in Windows display. The video clips of the Windows display screens were designed and executed by graphic designers (Logan LeBuis n.d.). The display method used in the windows display was square bases with different sizes and colours with some animal dolls distributed on them, in a simple style, devoid of innovation or the store's icon (Geoffrey the Giraffe). The focus in the Windows display was on screens and interactive points of interest rather than the method of displaying the products. The display method did not reflect the existing products. It reflects only the brand logo, its visual identity, pictures of Toys R Us children, and some billboards.

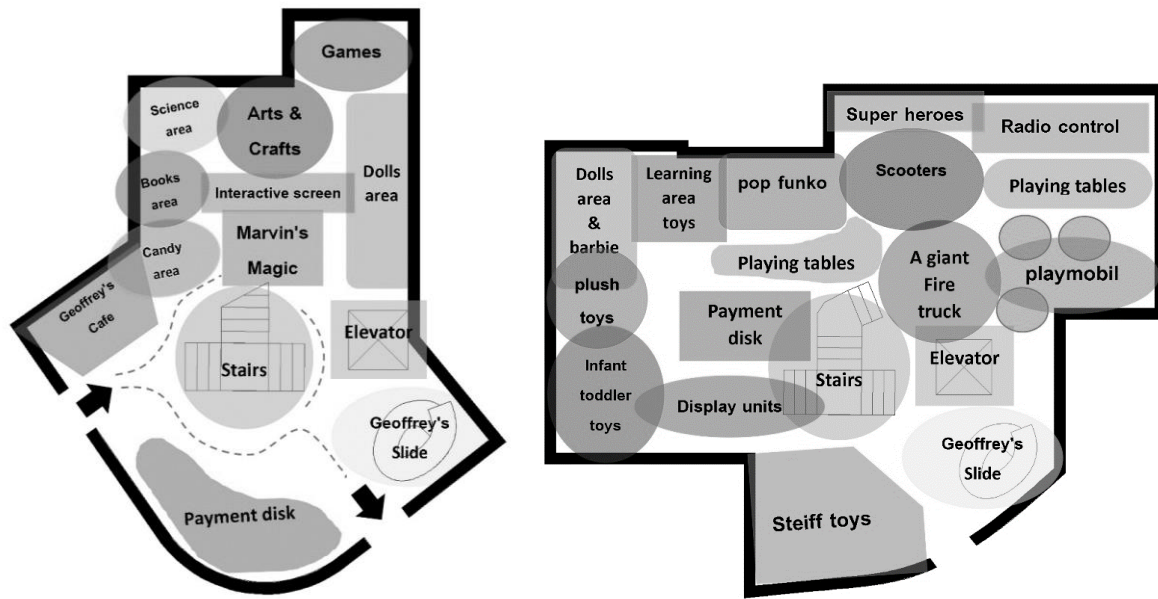
Wayfinding:

Although the store is a non-independent building, Toys R Us has attached great importance to its external panels and signs, it distributed a large number of external panels and signs of different types and sizes. The panels and signs inside the store are designed simply, and the illuminated guiding panels and exit panels are distributed on the ceiling, giving them clear viewing angles. Each one of the wall display units contains the name of the product being displayed, along with some banners on which innovative phrases are written such as: (Let's Learn, Arts & Crafts, Create...) and so on. Remarkably, the toys are not distributed according to the age groups of children, but rather according to the brands available in the store and their types, unlike the usual in most toy stores. There are no guiding boards inside the store indicating the elevator and the service areas.

Interior Space – (ceiling, wall & flooring designs):

The toys are classified on the official Toys R Us website according to three categories: First, according to the age groups, second, according to the category of toys, and third, according to the most popular toy brands ('The Official Toys" R" Us Site' n.d.). The interior space of the

store is divided into two floors connected by an elevator and stairs. The following sketch shows the contents of each floor and how they are distributed (Yee 2021) **(Drawings 2&3).**



(Drawing 2): The contents of the Ground floor of Toys R Us– by the authors.

(Drawing 3): The contents of the First floor of Toys R Us– by the authors.

Toys R Us relies on dividing the interior space of the store by managing the floor and wall space to reach the maximum capacity of the store but without giving the ceiling space sufficient attention, as Toys R Us has exploited all the internal wall space to classify and store products. In addition to distributing display units on the floor area of the store, where most of it is used for aesthetic and functional purposes at the same time, sometimes the toys are arranged and stacked on top of each other on the floor without hindering the shopping movement inside the store. However, this does not allow the creation of wide corridors and does not achieve a sense of simplicity, but rather gives the impression of overcrowding. The ceilings are used for lighting, air-conditioning openings, cameras, directional panels, and exit panels. The location of the payment areas, elevators, and staircases, and their proximity to the gates, are considered to facilitate movement.

The colour scheme is vibrant and has a visual "rhythm" ('Toys R Us Logo' 2022). A grey colour has been chosen for the interior floors of the store, while the ceilings are a mixture of black and grey. The rest of the store's equipment and interior fixtures varied between the main trademark colour (blue) and a variety of colours including orange, red, and green.



Photo 4: The interactive ice cream area. Source: ('Toys "R" Us – Sordoni Construction Co.' n.d.).

Lighting:

Lighting is a critical element in product branding and positioning, and the overall lighting effect should complement the design of the entire retail store. Contrary to popular belief, more lighting does not create visual comfort to highlight the product. The quantity and quality of lighting will create a final impression on customers and should help them decide whether or not they will return to the store in the future creates visual interest or enhances the details of a particular product and can define a retail store's lighting scheme ('Toys R Us Fourways | Regent Lighting Solutions' n.d.). As for the Toys R Us store in the American Dream Mall, Sordoni Construction Company managed the furnishing of the Toys R Us store there, and among the works included in the furnishings was new lighting work (Toys 'R' Us Fit-Out – Sordoni, n.d.). General industrial lighting was adopted in the store, distributed in the form of long random lines, in addition to spotlights and directed lighting distributed equally throughout the entire space. As for the display windows, spotlights were used to illuminate them, in addition to several illuminated display units suspended from the ceiling. There were also some illuminated shelves for several display units; separate products for some brands.

Circulation:

Toys R Us store at American Dream has two floors of toys and in-store shopping movement ostensibly arranged in an organic way where path movement flows through the store from one brand or product to another until it reaches the payment desk (Yee, 2021). The movement paths

begin at the store entrances in a welcoming way that invites passers-by and attracts shopping movement inside. Toys R Us also considered designing its store with a large size of entrances to facilitate the flow and number of visitors, so it allocated three main entrances and exits, two on the lower floor and one on the upper floor. The widening of the movement paths was considered in a manner that allows customers to shop comfortably and smoothly, as the product display units were distributed in an organized and thoughtful manner in a way that did not hinder the shopping movement within the store. However, specific and clear movement paths were not defined in the design of the floor, which gave an organized randomness and expanded the internal space of the store.

Ways of Display & Display Units:

For decades, Toys R Us has been a mainstay of the American shopping market (Yee 2021). As an effect of interactive play, the buying trend may change as consumers tend to choose their toys through digital browsing, so customer engagement is one fundamental aspect that retail companies need to consider. Meeting customer expectations during the customer experience is what direct customer engagement is all about and is what Toys R Us has struggled to do (Lee and Raziff 2021). The methods of displaying products inside Toys R Us store varied since the entrance of the store, which initially contained figures of Geoffrey the Giraffe, allowed visitors to take pictures close to them. A window was also designed at the entrance for the ice cream area overlooking the outside of the store. The biggest attraction was the double-decker slide that allowed children to slide from the upper floor to the second floor (**photo 4**). The stairs were placed in the area opposite the entrance to the lower floor, which attracts attention to the presence of an upper floor, designed in bright colours inspired by the colours of the brand's logo, and each step containing a phrase inspired by the famous theme song of the brand. In addition to many Children's play tables distributed among the departments of the store, there are also display screens for some brands. The designs of the wall units for displaying products do not vary greatly. Section titles or categorization of toys, where the upper area is ideal for educational items with far-reaching impact and provides information on the type of merchandise offered (El Halaby and Tantawy 2021).

The designs, and shapes of the separate display units are varied so that some of them have on top illuminated figures and others have dolls, toys, or names symbolizing the brand products contained in these units. There are also play tables for one of the toy brands with seats that allow children to experience these toys and many shelves. In addition, a giant Playmobil fire engine allows children to play inside it. Toys R Us does not use ceiling display units, except in one area, for the brand name Playmobil beside the giant fire engine. Finally, the payment area was designed in blue, the primary colour of the Toys R Us brand. The background design of this area reflects the originality of the brand through the Statue of Liberty of New York. Plus, a giant, uncompleted face of the Toys R Us icon's Geoffrey the Giraffe with "Let's Play" written on it.

Comparison:

After analysing the three case studies, we will discuss the comparison between them to reach results that support the objectives of the article. All three cases participated in applying some elements of visual merchandising and differed in their application of some, as will be detailed in the following table discussions (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Similarities and Differences between the three stores under study in applying some elements of visual merchandising– by the authors.				
SN#	Similarities	Hamleys	Early Learning Center	Toys R Us
1	Reflection of brand’s visual Identity, values, and mission on interior store design.	Adequately reflected	Adequately reflected	Adequately reflected
2	Managing interior space and utilizing walls, display units, and shelves to store products to increase capacity.	Adequately utilized	Adequately utilized	Adequately utilized
3	Providing free passages.	No obstacles on the floors.	No obstacles on the floors.	No obstacles on the floors.
4	Providing adequate interior signage.	Provided	Provided	Provided
5	Diversity in ways of display.	Presented	Presented	Presented
6	Exterior design and entrances	Adequately suitable	Adequately suitable	Adequately suitable
SN#	Differences	Hamleys	Early Learning Center	Toys R Us
1	The Store	Independent building	Non-dependent building	Non-dependent building
2	Most innovative windows display	The most innovative displaying methods	non-innovative displaying methods	non-innovative displaying methods
3	Providing free passage.	No obstacles on the floors.	No obstacles on the floors.	No obstacles on the floors.
4	Utilizing Ceiling space for display	Adequately utilized	not Adequately utilized	not Adequately utilized
5	Providing adequate exterior signage	Provided	Not Provided	Provided

The following table summarizes the result of the comparison between the three international case studies that were analysed based on a scale of (A, B, C) whereas the letter A indicates the highest application of the elements of visual merchandising within the store, and the letter C indicates the least application (**Table2**).

SN#	Elements of visual merchandising	Toys R Us / New Jersey - USA	ELC- Early Learning Center / London - UK	Hamleys / London – UK
1	Brand Identity	B	C	A
2	Exterior design & windows Display	B	C	A
3	Wayfinding	B	C	A
4	Interior Space	C	B	A
5	Ways of display	B	C	A

From the above results, we conclude that Hamleys applied the principles of visual merchandising to the greatest extent, followed by Toys R Us and then ELC.

Discussion:

This article's results will benefit designers interested in designing commercial spaces for children, investors who want to increase their demand, and those interested in providing for the needs of early childhood. There are a few aspects that we need to take care of when designing a commercial space for children to enhance user convenience and provide a unique user experience as will discuss. The process of attracting shoppers, especially children, starts from the facade of the building that welcomes visitors from the large and attractive external signs and panels, and the external display windows that distinctively display their products through attractive designs. In addition, external innovative methods of displaying are the most merchandising elements that must be considered when designing a space. The style followed in the design of the external windows display is one of the most important types of display when designing commercial spaces for children. A good display point and the availability of customer experience are among the important factors for achieving user satisfaction and positively influencing the purchase. There are many types and methods of displays such as interactive screens, hanging displays, and large display models - that children can play inside or take pictures beside. These display models are used both aesthetically and functionally aspects, for display and store products. Displaying samples of products near the display units positively affects the purchase decision. Also, innovative methods of displaying products and interactive points of attraction may contribute to distracting shoppers from the high stock density inside the store. Encouraging children to experience the products and interact with them, enhances the attractiveness of these spaces designs according to their innate need to experiment and play. In addition, the availability of clear guiding signs and panels inside the store helps to facilitate movement, speed up the purchase process, and reduce crowding. If it is possible, the availability of more than one payment area inside the store facilitates the shopping process, by reducing crowding while purchasing, which make user satisfied. It is important to be careful when

selecting motivational phrases to name the areas within the space, to give a positive impression to users when reading them. The availability of more additional activities, such as an ice cream vending area or candy selling area inside commercial spaces designed for children is an advantage.

Results:

- 1.The process of attracting shoppers, especially children, begins with welcoming them through interactive external windows displays that shows the store products by creating attractive designs.
- 2.Interactive in-store displays create great attraction by having a positive impact on shoppers and increasing the length of their stay in the store, increasing the probability of purchases.
- 3.Multiple innovative methods of displaying products are the most important elements of visual merchandising that must be taken into account when designing a commercial space for children.
- 4.Providing signs and information boards inside the store help facilitating movement during purchasing and thus reducing congestion.
- 5.Deep thinking about product presentation and customer experience are the important factors for achieving user satisfaction and impact positively the purchase decision.
- 6.Reflecting the brand's logo, values, and identity through the store interior design is one of the methods of applying the principle of visual merchandising.
- 7.Providing interactive play areas that enable children to try products and interact with them before purchasing enhance the attractiveness of commercial space design according to the child's need for experience, play and explore.
- 8.Providing additional services (such as a photography studio, an ice cream area or café, etc.) inside the commercial spaces for kids, enhance the user experience.
- 9.Combining the use of natural and artificial lighting (direct and indirect) inside the store in a balanced way helps achieving visual comfort that positively affects the shoppers and increases the length of their stay in the store and increases the probability of purchases.
10. Following a design methodology that drives movement paths within commercial spaces facilitates the flow of visitors into the store and helps shoppers pass through most of the store's internal sections, increases the possibility of purchasing.
11. The visual merchandising elements in the design of commercial spaces are an integrated system that contributes to creating an interactive environment for the customer with a distinctive shopping experience, and the weakness of one of them reduce attractions.

Conclusion:

This article aimed to come up with design principles that would enhance visual merchandising in commercial spaces for the child category, to help create an interactive environment for children that enables them to determine their purchasing options. Therefore, it was important to mention a range of previous studies on this topic and to analyse international case studies. By investigating how these stores are concerned with aspects of visual merchandising, and analysing the extent to which these stores are successful retail environments, adapted to the needs and desires of children. Analysis of the interior designs of the three stores (Hamleys, Toys

R Us, and ELC) concludes that the effectiveness and attractiveness of their designs helped improve the quality of service provided to their users. This involved providing a good user experience, creating a suitable environment for children, and creating (efficient, user-friendly, and aesthetically pleasing) shopping environments through visual merchandising design. By analysing some of the visual elements used in their interior designs, ideas that work with each other, and applying merchandising principles in designing spaces for children, the store can contribute to building the children's perceptions and skills and enabling them and their guardians to determine their choices by creating an appropriate environment for them. finally, children's commercial spaces, properly designed to meet the needs and desires of consumers, can powerfully enhance the shopping experiences of this consumer segment.

Recommendations:

- 1.To involve the child in unique experiences to create unforgettable memories by applying visual merchandising elements within the child's commercial spaces.
- 2.To consider the child's target age group needs when designing commercial spaces to meet their purchasing needs.
- 3.To create a visual attraction factor for the brand in the case of non-independent buildings to ensure the fulfilment of its demands.
- 4.Pay attention to the ceiling space and use it in the most innovative presentation methods, especially with limited floor space and a high inventory density.
- 5.To ensure that the visual identity of the store's icon is not violated. For example, in Toys R Us, a giraffe should always refer to Geoffrey the Giraffe.
- 6.To provide playing spaces that enable children to experience and interact with the toys to determine their purchasing options.
- 7.To provide all possible services that help customers feel comfortable inside the store while shopping.
- 8.To study the benefits and importance of visual merchandising in designing commercial spaces for owners and shopkeepers to increase their business profitability.

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