THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ELEMENTS IN FURNITURE AND

HOME FURNISHINGS RETAIL STORES

by

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(Under the Direction of Lilia Gomez-Lanier)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify which visual merchandising factors in the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores are important to millennials. In the rapidly evolving retail environment, multichannel operations are becoming increasingly significant as retailers try to market to today's most attractive consumer: millennials. As millennials implement the new online mediums into their shopping behaviors, traditional shopping patterns, motivation, and perception of retail design are changing. As a result, consumer perceived values are changing as well. Therefore, the current study attempts to contribute to academic literature by exploring the interaction between millennial motivation to shop in the brick and mortar store, despite the presence of online mediums, and brick and mortar store design in efforts to determine how to provide a valuable shopping experience.

INDEX WORDS: Visual Merchandising, Retail Design, Consumer Motivation, Millennial,
                 Theory of Valuation

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B.B.A., UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA, 2017

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2019

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DEDICATION

This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my parents, for their love and endless support.

To my father, who has been a source of encouragement to me throughout my life. His positive outlook has always pushed me to keep moving forward.

To my mother, who encouraged me to pursue graduate school for my master's degree. I would not be here without her. She gave me strength when giving up was near and encouraged me to continue when times were tough. I am forever grateful for her continuous love and assistance.

You both have been my biggest cheerleaders. I am truly thankful for both of you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 contains the following sections: a) background of the study, b) purpose of the study, c) significance of the study, d) objectives.

Background of the Study

In today's competitive retail environment, visual merchandising is an integral component in differentiating among competitors in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar retail stores (Lee & Seock, 2009). Visual merchandising, in general, involves the creation of a brick and mortar store environment that adheres to consumers wants and needs. Through its selection of specific elements, visual merchandising is used to attract the consumer, motivate them to make a purchase and, ultimately, provide them with a positive shopping experience (Santosh & Sharon, 2017). In some industries, a strong visual merchandising display can be more influential to the consumer than the product itself (Kotler, 1974). In furniture and home furnishing stores, a robust visual display provides consumers with a visually gratifying experience, reinforces positive feelings towards the products and store and thus, influences their value perception of the experience (Kotler, 1974). The effects of visual merchandising and perception of design, however, vary depending on the consumer's perceived motivations for entering the brick and mortar store (Wakefield & Baker, 1998; van Rompay, Tanja-Dijkstra, Verhoeven & van Es, 2012;).

Consumers ultimately evaluate their shopping experiences based on how the shopping activity fulfilled their motivations and they then form a value perception of the overall worth of the shopping trip. (Babin & Darden, 1995; Davis & Hodges, 2012). In making shopping

decisions, consumers essentially assess their options based on two motivational dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic (Ahn, 2016). Utilitarian motivations are problem-solving oriented and driven by the desire to complete a given task (Babin, 1994 as cited in Kesari & Atulkar, 2016) Hedonic motivations drive the consumer's desire for an enjoyable experience (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). According to Babin and Darden (1995), consumer motivation is not mutually exclusive, meaning a consumer shopping trip can encompass both hedonic and utilitarian motives. Babin and Darden (1995) also found that shopping experiences are subjective, implying that fulfillment of consumer motivations may differ for each shopping experience. Therefore, retailers' awareness of their target consumers specific motivation can help strategically craft the brick and mortar environment in a way that provides shopping value to the given consumer.

The traditional retail environment has changed vastly in the past decade as retailers try to market to today's attractive consumer: millennials. Millennials have a purchasing power exceeding $150 billion and represent the "Next generation of Spenders" (Aquino, 2012). This economically robust cohort spends $200 billion annually (Bilgihan, 2016). Millennials are the largest consumer group since baby boomers, totaling roughly 72.5 million (Smith, 2011; Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). Given the size and strength of the Millennial cohort, Millennials preferences and motives are necessary to know and understand, by the furniture and home furnishing industry (Vouchilas & Ulasewic, 2014). According to The Consumer Buying Trends Survey conducted by Furniture Today, millennial buyers represented 37 percent, or $27 billion, of all households purchasing furniture and bedding market in 2014, a sharp increase from 14 percent, or $11 billion, in 2012 (Weinswig, 2016). The primary cause of this rise is the continuous increase of the United States homeowner rate as millennials enter the housing market, as major life stages often prompts the purchase of new furniture or home décor (Kusisto, 2018;

Ponder, 2013). As a result, Millennials have become increasingly valuable consumers to furniture and home furnishing retailers.

Research has found that each generation is unique in their expectations, consumption patterns and shopping behaviors when compared to other generations (Chong, 2018). Millennials specifically are the outcome of world events, and social and economic changes, including heavy technological integration into their everyday life (Moreno, Lafuente, Avila & Moreno, 2017). Consequently, they respond differently in the marketplace than other generations (Bilgihan, 2016). As a result, retail multichannel operations have emerged as retailers adapt their efforts towards a more technology-enhanced experience in efforts to meet the demands of these tech-savvy consumers (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). However, recent research has found that millennials prefer to visit stores over shopping online (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013). While they may rely on online mediums to seek additional information and reviews, millennials prefer to visit the brick and mortar store for the "in-store experience" (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013; Howland 2018).

Millennials, as a group, are driven by gratifying experiences. According to previous consumer studies, this group prefers to spend money on experiences rather than materialistic items (Bilgihan, 2016). As a result, they put a heavy emphasis on the user experience while shopping (Bilgihan, 2016). Millennials desire brands that know and understand their consumer demands and respond to their unique needs. They value personalized customer-centric shopping experiences that make them feel appreciated by the company they are buying from (Bilgihan, 2016). When provided with a positive or negative experience, millennials often publicly advertise their opinions to other consumers online through electronic word of mouth (Moreno, Lafunte, Avilia & Moreno, 2017). Therefore, millennials should feel satisfied with their experiences, since it may result in a positive public review store and, consequently, additional

possible purchases (Moreno, Lafunte, Avilia & Moreno, 2017). Given this, millennial preferences are critical for retailers to understand in seeking success with this target group (Vouchilas & Ulasewicz, 2014). Therefore, this study attempts to contribute to the academic literature in visual merchandising by exploring the interaction between millennial motivation to shop in the brick and mortar store, despite the presence of online mediums, and brick and mortar store design in efforts to determine how to provide value to millennials.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify which visual merchandising factors in the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores are important to millennials.

Significance of Study

This study will contribute to the overall understanding of how to design furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores for millennials. In the rapidly evolving retail environment, multichannel operations are becoming increasingly significant as new online mediums emerge and provide millennials with multiple ways to shop. As millennials implement these mediums into their shopping behaviors, the traditional motivations for shopping in brick and mortar stores are changing. As a result, consumer perceived values are changing as well. According to Dewey's Theory of Valuation (1939), value is subjective to the individual and particular experience, as values naturally change throughout an individual's lifespan. Value is dependent upon both how well the specific experiences fulfill the motivations of the consumer to enter the marketplace, and the benefits the store provides to consumers that leads to the fulfillment of motivations (Davis & Dyer, 2012). Thus, to reflect the specific consumers, millennials, and their evolving shopping behaviors and patterns, furniture and home furnishing retailers should re-evaluate their brick and mortar visual merchandising efforts to reflect

millennial's preferences and new motives to shop there. This re-evaluation will not only assist in designing a built environment that provides the highest possible shopping value to millennials, but also help retailers remain competitive in an industry that being challenged by constantly evolving technologies and consumer values and habits.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify the utilitarian motivations of millennials to visit furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online

2. Identify the hedonic motivations of millennials to visit furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online

3. Explore the visual merchandising elements that millennials value in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this thesis is as followed:

In today's digital world, how can visual merchandising be used to produce shopping value for millennials in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores?

The overarching research question was broken down into the follow researching questions:

RQ1: Which visual merchandising elements contribute to providing a valuable shopping experience to millennials in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores?

RQ2: What motivates millennials to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online retailing?

Definitions

Consumer: "someone who buys goods or services for personal use" ("Consumer,"n.d.)

Brick and Mortar: "relating to or being a traditional business serving customers in a building as contrasted to an online business" ("Brick and Mortar," n.d.)

Furniture: new household furniture items, such as dressers, mattresses, outdoor furniture or couches. (United States Census Bureau, 2012)

Furniture and Home furnishings stores: Stores that specialize in the sale of new furniture or home furnishings (United States Census Bureau, 2012)

Hedonic Motivation: "shopping for pleasure and amusement... the happiness, enjoyment and pleasure derived from the shopping experience are at least as important as acquiring the products" (Jain et. al. , 2014)

Home Furnishing: new items used to decorate the home, such as home décor, drapery and pillows (United States Census Bureau, 2012)

Millennials: "Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 22 to 37 in 2018) will be considered a Millennial… the first generation to come of age in the new millennium" (Dimock, 2018).

Shopping: "to examine the stock or offerings of (a store);to examine goods or services with intent to buy" ("Shop," n.d.)

Shopping value: "both an event's (shopping experience) usefulness and an appreciation for the activities comprising it" (Davis & Hodges, 2012).

Utilitarian Motivation: "desire to get more value for their purchase... starts with a mission or task, and the perceived benefit depends on whether the mission is completed efficiently during the process or not" (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016).

Visual merchandising: "Visual merchandising refers to the development of effective displays – i.e. displays that attract, engage and motivate consumers by means of selection and organization of products" (Jain, Takayanagi & Malthouse, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 contains the following sections: a) Visual Merchandising and Interior

Environments, b) Furniture and Home Furnishings Retail Stores, c) Theoretical Framework and,

f) Research Gap.

Visual Merchandising and Interior Environments

The overall purpose of Visual Merchandising is to sell merchandise, but also to

physically embody the values and aspirations of the target consumer and the company

(Feigenbaum, 2016). Visual merchandising involves the manipulation of atmospheric elements

to alter, moreover, enhance the physical store environment. Visual merchandising alone has the

ability to affect consumer spending by influencing the consumers to desire to stay in the store

(Wakefield & Baker, 1998) Initially, visual merchandising involved displaying the product in a

way that heightened the appeal of the merchandise, attracted the customer and encouraged

purchases. The idea of visual merchandising as the "silent salesperson" emerged, as its primary

purpose was to promote the self-selection of products (Bubonia, 2013). However, as the retail

environment became increasingly competitive, companies were continuously seeking any, and

all, ways to differentiate themselves from competitors. Visual merchandising began to be used to

create a competitive advantage by infusing target customer interests and lifestyle elements into

the store environment (Bubonia, 2013). Today, visual merchandising is used to reflect and

reinforce a clear brand image that connects with the consumers in a way that is relevant and

distinguished (Bubonia, 2013). The consumer experience is also strongly emphasized in current

visual merchandising efforts. Visual merchandising is often used to create a visually gratifying

experience through the store environment that stimulates emotion, encourages purchases, and leaves a lasting impression in the consumer's mind that causes them to return (Law, Wong & Yip, 2009; Kotler, 1974).

Visual Merchandising Elements

Visual merchandising is composed of multiple controllable elements that are used to manipulate the total design of brick and mortar stores. These elements of design, also called atmospherics, allow for the entirety of the store to be selected and designed in a way that creates specific effects in consumers and improves their overall in-store experience. Although a significant amount of previous research has categorized and identified the atmospheric elements differently, results all indicate the overall end goal is to enhance the total design of the store environment (Kotler, 1974). Kotler (1974) further describes the complete design as the idea of crafting a cohesive tone and décor throughout interior and exterior of the building or store.

Previous research categorized visual merchandising elements into exterior, interior, layout and design, interior display (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Zhu, 2009; Mehta & Chugan, 2013). Exterior visual merchandising refers to the elements on the outside of the store that encourage the consumer to enter the store, such as window display (Turley and Milliman, 2000). A window display involves the presentation of store merchandise to consumers through store windows in efforts to create an impression, encourage entry and, ultimately, sell the merchandise (Zhu, 2009; Pegler, 2011; Taskiran, 2012). A window display is especially important in a store's overall visual merchandising, as it is the first point of contact between the consumer and the store (Taskiran, 2012).

Interior visual merchandising refers to the elements that are inside the store and influence the consumer's experience and encourage purchases (Turley and Milliman, 2000). These

elements include scent, music, color, lighting, and cleanliness (Zhu, 2009; Taskiran, 2012; Mehta, 2013). Scent and music are sensory elements used to attract consumers attention and influence their perception of the store. Through proper selection and use, they can be used to entice consumers to enter the store and enhance their overall experience (Nell, 2013). The use of color is an important aspect of visual merchandising. Color, alone, has the ability to create consumer's mood. However, researchers have found that public taste in color changes dramatically overtime and there are oftentimes cultural differences (Pegler, 2011). The Pantone Color Institute, a recognized color consulting service of Pantone, is known for its selection of the "Pantone Color of the Year" (Pantone, 2019a). According to Pantone, the color landscape is constantly evolving based on various psychological influences in all aspects of society including art, fashion and entertainment (Pantone, 2019b; Pantone, 2019c). Lighting is the selection and utilization of light in the store atmosphere. Lighting is an integral component of visual merchandising, as it influences how consumers perceive the store. The proper application of light can attract consumer's attention and create an ambience or mood for the merchandise (Nell, 2013). Cleanliness refers to the store's overall hygiene and tidiness. Previous research has found this to be the largest factor in attracting customers and enforcing a positive store image (Somaro, Kaimkhani, and Iqbal, 2017).

Layout and design refer to the different methods used to arrange and organize the floor plan and merchandise. It includes the overall allocation and design of floor space, and placement and grouping of merchandise (Turley and Milliman, 2000). A proper constructed store layout both communicates the product offerings and helps initiate consumer's positive purchasing decision (Taskiran, 2012)

Interior display includes product displays, signage and decoration (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Product display refer to the display of merchandise to attract consumers. A good display will help consumers select and accessorize product offerings. Product display techniques include portraying a specific scene or concept through the merchandise display, such as a realistic depiction of a bedroom or dining room (Pegler, 2011). Signage is defined as printed words or graphics displayed throughout the store (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Signage can either function as directive, to help consumers locate items or informative, to communicate product information and sales (Nell, 2013). Signage helps create awareness of product offerings and influence purchasing decisions (Taskiran, 2012) Interior decoration describes the use of décor items, such as props, planters or flowers, in a display that adds a store's overall ambiance (Zhu, 2009). Interior decorations enrich the design of the store environment by creating an attractive environment and enhancing the presentation of merchandise (Taskiran, 2012).

Furniture and Home Furnishings Retail Stores

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) classifies furniture stores and home furnishings stores distinctively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The North American Industry Classification System defines furniture stores as establishments that sell primarily new furniture. Conversely, home furnishing stores are establishments that sell new home furnishings other than furniture such as linens, chinaware and décor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). However, according to Lee and Seock (2009), there is some overlap between these two boundaries. For example, stores such as Pottery Barn, Crate and Barrel and West Elm classified as home furnishing stores and therefore carry furniture as well. For the context of this paper, furniture and home furnishing retail stores refer to stores that sell furniture or furniture and home furnishings.

The combined sales of furniture and home furnishing stores have grown exponentially throughout the years. The annual sales of U.S. furniture and home furnishings sales equaled $87,586 billion in 2011. In 2016, the total annual sales of U.S. furniture and home furnishings stores increased to over 106 billion (U.S. Census Bureau). According to Lee and Seock (2009), this continuous increase is the result of the increasing amount of importance consumers place on the home. Consumers today view their home as a shared environment to live and relax with friends and family (Perry, 2017; Lee & Seock, 2009). In this regard, the furniture consumers choose for their home facilitates sharing and a sense of togetherness (Ponder, 2013). Consumers want their home to be an extension of themselves and desire items in their home to reflect their personality, beliefs, and values. Therefore, the selection of items for the home in the retail store is very important (Ponder, 2013).

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Theoretical Framework

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Consumer Motivation

According to Cant, Van Heerden, and Ngambi (2010), when a company is aware of a consumer's motivation to purchase a specific product, it is easier to both market and sell that product to that consumer. However, there are many reasons or needs that influence why a consumer decides to shop other than the simple acquisition of a product. These reasons or needs are called shopping motivations (Falode, Amubode, Adegunwa & Ogunduyile, 2016). Motivation, in general, refers to "the drive, urge, wish, or desire that leads to a goal-oriented behavior" (Mowen, 1995). In this regard, motivation is viewed as a derivative of wants or needs, as humans are motivated by unmet wants and needs. There are two dimensions that encompass motivation: utilitarian motivation and hedonic motivation (Babin et al., 1994). Shopping motivation is often complex and stems from multiple psychological needs (Davis and Hodges,

2012). In this regard, a consumer may be motivated to shop by both hedonic and utilitarian elements. However, one dimension is often is more prevalent than the other (Westbrook and Black, 1985).

Utilitarian motivation is described as the desire to satisfy utilitarian needs. Utilitarian motives are problem-solving oriented and driven by the desire to complete a given task (Babin et al., 1994). Whether the consumer completes the task or, goal determines the perceived benefit or value of the shopping trip. (Babin et al., 1994 as cited in To, Laio, and Lin, 2007). In shopping, utilitarian motives are often met when the selection of a product is completed efficiently and based on logical reasoning of available options (Andersson, Palmblad, Prevdan, 2012). Previous research has defined convenience, product selection, and the ability to touch and feel merchandise as common utilitarian motivators for shopping (Babin et. al., 1994; Chandon et. al., 2000; Davis, 2013; Kesari and Atulkar, 2016)

Hedonic motivation is described as the desire to satisfy hedonic needs and is driven by the need for an emotionally gratifying experience (Falode et. al., 2016). Hedonic motivation values shopping experiences for their fun, and aesthetic pleasure from multiple sensory elements; purchasing is not a required function (Andersson, Palmblad, Prevdan, 2012; Kesari and Atulkar, 2016). Previous research has defined enjoyment and discovering new trends and ideas as common hedonic motivators for shopping (Babin et.al., 1994; Davis, 2013; Kesari and Atulkar, 2016).

Consumer Shopping Value

Creating and delivering consumer value has become a condition that is necessary in competing in today's competitive marketplace (Rintamäki, Kanto, Kuusela, Spence, 2006). In its earlier meanings, consumer value was described as what consumers want and believe they will

receive from buying a product (Woodruff, 1997). However, consumer value is no longer exclusively received through satisfaction with a product. Current consumers perceive value from their interaction with both the products and store environment during a shopping experience (Diep & Sweeny, 2008; Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994). Shopping value derives from the shopping trip's worth or usefulness and an appreciation for the activities encompassing it (Davis & Hodges, 2012). Previous researchers described consumer shopping value as being comprised of how well the shopping trip fulfilled their motivations, and what the retail store provided leading to fulfilment of motivations. Thus, it is received through both fulfillment of motivations and gaining particular benefits that contribute toward the overall shopping experience. Today's retailers often provide shopping value to consumers through products and store design elements that consumers want, need and, ultimately, seek in their shopping experience (Davis and Hodges, 2012).   However, consumer shopping value is subjective and varies based on the consumer, store and particular experience (Babin et. al., 1994; Davis & Hodges, 2012). Thus, each consumer may receive value from different aspects of the store experience. Positive shopping value can result in purchase, re-patronage intensions, and a positive evaluation of the store (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002).

Theory of Valuation

 John Dewey's Theory of Valuation (1939) was used for the theoretical framework of this study to help explain why understanding motives is a critical component in providing consumer value. The Theory of Valuation is commonly used in social sciences to assess and interpret value. The term "valuation" denotes both valuing, or appreciating, and evaluating, or appraising (Anderson, 2018). According to Dewey (1939), "To value means primarily to prize, to esteem; but secondarily it means to apprize, to estimate. It means, that is, the act of cherishing something,

holding it dear, and also the act of passing judgment upon the nature and amount of its value as compared with something else." In this regard, value is both the result and the process of determining the worth of a specific object during a specific experience. This appraisal, or judgement of value, arises when an individual recognizes a need or problem and pursues a solution seeking experience (Anderson, 2018). If the experience provided the best possible solution in relation to alternatives and despite the consequences, value, or human perception of value, is formed as a result (Anderson, 2018). Consequently, the developed value of the object, as well as other positive or negative aspects of the experience, will act as expectations or desires guiding future value judgements. (Anderson, 2018). Dewey asserted that when individuals refer back to values, or things cherished or prized, they consider, not the objects themselves, but the conditions that inhibited them, the reasons for esteeming them and consequences (Mitchell, 1945). Given this, values fluctuate constantly within an individual's lifespan and is subjective to the context of the current situation or environment. For example, new value judgements arise if the previous solution, or value, provides unsatisfactory consequences or is not immediately available (Anderson, 2018).

Davis and Dyer (2012) dissected Dewey's theory and provided a model that offers a consumer application to The Theory of Valuation. Their interpretation focuses on the idea that value is the result of individual needs, wants and, thus, motivations. According to the model, consumer's individual needs/wants, as they actually are and how they are perceived, motivate them to enter the marketplace for shopping experiences. The consumer perceived value developed and is dependent on the fulfillment of the consumer motivation by the shopping experience. Given this, it denotes the perception of value as the met or unmet consumer

motivations. Consumers perceived value of the shopping trip influences the consumers future shopping trips. Figure 2.1 shows the model used by Davis and Dyer (2012).

Figure 2:1: Conceptual framework of Theory of Valuation from Davis and Dyer, 2012.

Through determination of consumer motivations, this study ultimately seeks to understand how to provide shopping value to consumers through visual merchandising choices. Theory of Valuation is appropriate for this study because it denotes a consumer's motivations as determinants of the value received during a particular experience. Therefore, knowledge of consumer's motives will assist in determining what is expected from millennials in pursuing a shopping experience in the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar store. Specifically, the Theory of Valuation will assist in understanding how to provide millennials with a valuable brick and mortar experience through fulfillment of their motivations and expectations using visual merchandising, despite the other available online retailing options.

Conceptual Model

For the purpose of this paper, Davis and Dyer's model (2012), shown in Figure 2.1, has been adapted. The new model, shown in Figure 2.2, implements the two dimensions of consumer motivation, hedonic motivation and utilitarian motivation, and perceived design. As indicated previously in this study, preceding research suggests that consumer motivation is complex and

stems from multiple psychological needs (Davis & Hodges, 2012). Thus, it is important that the

specifies of the consumer's motives are understood, as consumer's perception of the retail design

differs based on the motivation (Wakefield & Baker, 1998).
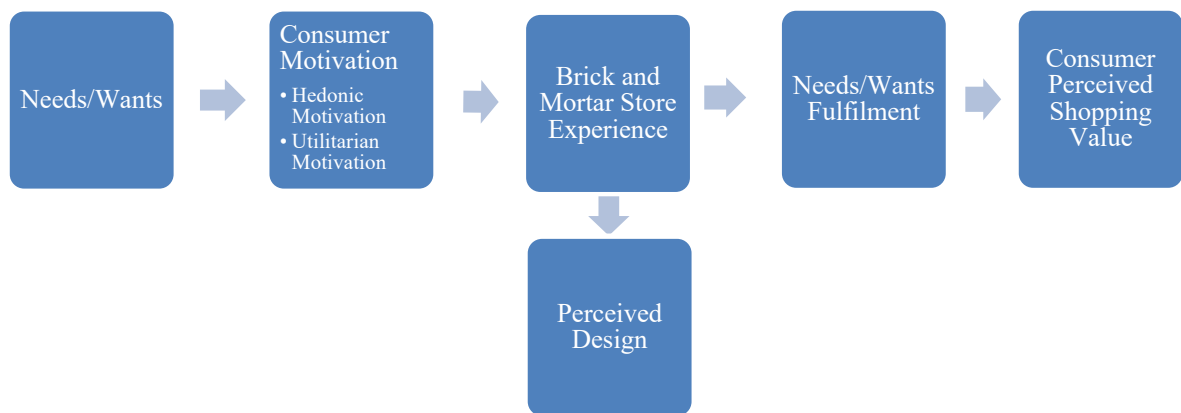
Figure 2:2: Thesis Conceptual Model (adapted from Davis and Dyer, 2012)

Using this model as a guide, this study seeks (1) to understand the motivations of

millennials to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to

online retailing and (2) to discover the visual merchandising elements that contributes to

providing a valuable shopping experience to millennials in furniture and home furnishings

products brick and mortar stores. According to the model, consumer shopping trips are driven by

individual needs and wants. The needs and wants of consumer, actual and perceived, ultimately

stimulate one of the two motivational dimensions: hedonic motivation or utilitarian motivation.

Consumers then pursue a shopping experience in the brick and mortar store and form a

perception of the overall design of the store environment based on their motivation. The

consumer's shopping value or perception of worth of their overall shopping experience, is

dependent on store's ability to fulfill, or solve, consumer needs and, ultimately, motivations through their experience with the environment in the brick and mortar store. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the millennial consumer's motivation will allow researchers to determine how to provide consumers value through the visual merchandising of the brick and mortar store.

Research Gap

Focusing on the relationship between consumer motivation and store design, several studies have explored the effects of store design on different consumer motivations. Van Rompay et. al. (2011) verified that the effects of store variables on consumer's behavior intensions and in-store experience are dependent on the consumer's goals in entering the retail environment. Anderson et. al (2012) characterized consumers as either predominately hedonic or utilitarian shoppers and discovered no difference in the atmospheric elements that produces a positive consumer experience in either consumer. Similarly, Babin and Darden's (1995) found that although shopping experiences are subjective in nature, these experiences have the ability to provide both hedonic and utilitarian benefits. In their later research, Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) furthered their implications by proposing that that atmospheric elements will not have the same effect on all consumers. This aligns with Law, Wong, and Yip's (2009) findings that suggest that consumer's evaluation of visual displays often encompasses both hedonic and utilitarian values or motives. Consequently, this suggests that the shopping environment should be crafted specifically for each store type and consumer in order to provide positive experiences.

Multiple studies focus on evaluating consumer behavior in furniture and home furnishings settings. Lee and Seock (2009) identified visual merchandising factors that positively related to store image and shopping behaviors in the brick and mortar setting. Burnstead (2009)

investigated the motivations of product choice in purchasing home furnishings from brick and mortar stores and made recommendations towards how to provide value to multiple demographics including age, race, and gender. However, the literature neglects to acknowledge the presence of other mediums for purchasing furniture or home furnishings, which is a characteristic shopping pattern of millennials. This presents an opportunity to research the motivations of millennials to shop in the brick and mortar environment for furniture and home furnishings, despite the presence of online mediums. Thus, it is important to determine the visual merchandising elements that are valued by millennials, as they are a powerhouse in today's economy.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 contains the following sections: (a) Research Method, (b) Participants, (c) Data

Collection (d) Survey Design, and (e) Data Analysis.

Research Method

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the motivations of millennials to

shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores, which assisted in identifying the

visual merchandising elements that provide a value shopping experience or shopping value to

millennials. To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative exploratory approach was deemed

most appropriate as it seeks to understand individual interpretation and explanation of why

events occur, and what those events mean to the individuals studied. Generally, qualitative

research aims to understand people holistically by engaging with their emotional and intuitive

knowledge (Keegan, 2009).

An open-ended survey, made up of 17 open-ended questions, was the chosen instrument

for this study. Surveys, in general, provide participants with confidentiality and they are typically

more willing to share information. It is also less time consuming for the participants to complete.

Open-ended surveys remove the bias associated with surveys, as participants are less likely to

provide socially desirable answers to the researcher (Safdar, Abbo, Knobloch, & Seo, 2016;

Popping, 2015). Thus, open-ended surveys were appropriate for the exploratory nature of this

study, as it encourages participants to demonstrate knowledge through presenting an explanation

or motivation based on attitudes or evaluations (Popping, 2015).

Participants

Although each generational cohort is distinct in their values and morals from those of other generations, the millennial generation represents a very broad portion of people in different stages of life and of many different ages. For the context of this research, men and women born between the years of 1989 and 1994 within the boundaries of the United States, a subgroup of millennials, was studied.

In addition, the participants in this study represent current furniture and home furnishing buyers. As previously mentioned, the purchase of a first home is a major life stage that often precipitates the need for new furniture or home furnishings (Evans, 2008; Ponder, 2013). According to previous consumer studies, consumers' prime home-buying years begin at the age of twenty-five and peaks at age thirty (Hackel & Shan, 2014; Yale, 2018). Households with a bachelor's degree or greater, or earning relatively higher wages, are the most likely to buy a house and when compared to those who don't meet either of these characteristics (Cilluffo, Geiger, & Fry, 2017). Research suggests that the average earnings of college graduates range from $35,000 to $62,000 depending on degree (Strauss, 2017). Thus, millennial consumers born between the years 1989 and 1994, ranging from ages twenty-five to thirty, with either or both a college degree and a full-time job (earning greater than $35,000) are most more likely to purchase furniture.

Data Collection

The open-ended survey was conducted using Qualtrics, an online data collecting company. A total of 150 surveys were distributed using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing marketplace service. Through MTurk, researchers are able to distribute the survey and provide monetary compensation to workers (participants) upon necessary completion.

Although, researchers using MTurk website provides monetary compensations to participants, the website also provides researchers with the ability to a large number of individuals. By doing so researchers are able to have a more robust data collection pool to analyze. In addition, MTurk ensures that both the workers (participants) and requesters (researchers) are kept anonymous in the selection process (Paolassi, Chander, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

The survey was published as a Human Intelligence Task (HIT), or a single self-contained task completed for a reward. Participants that met the specified qualification criteria had the option to accept the task or complete the survey upon reading the provided brief description. The specific participant criteria were disclosed to the workers in the task description (See Appendix C). By selecting the HIT or survey task, participants followed a link that lead to the Qualtrics survey. Once the task was completed, the participants received a unique identification number that they were directed to copy and paste into MTurk. This code allowed the researcher to link the Mturk accounts and survey submissions to determine compensation.

The base compensation for participants was $0.20 for participation in the screening questions prior to the survey. Participants who passed the screening questions had the ability to receive an additional $3.25 upon necessary completion, through the bonus feature on MTurk. Bonus compensation was determined by what was completed and at the researchers' discretion. In order to receive full bonus compensation, participants passed the screening questions and thoroughly completed the survey to their best abilities. In this case, compensation was determined by researchers based on completion of the survey.

Survey Design

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, the survey was distributed to 150 participants. Before beginning the survey (See Appendix A), consumers were provided with

a letter of consent (See Appendix B), which included the study's purpose, the participant's role in the study, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and the researchers contact information. Prior to continuing, the participants were required to select a) I agree to participate in this study or b) I do not agree to participate in this study. If participants agreed, they were directed to the first section of the survey. If participants did not agree, they were directed to the end of the survey.

The questions, shown in Table 3.1, were organized into three sections. Section one consisted of a series of eight screening questions that determined whether the participant was within the parameters of the study. The information collected during section one included gender, age, job status, yearly salary, and highest level of education. In addition, participants were also required to have made a furniture or home furnishings purchase in a furniture or home furnishings brick and mortar store in the past six months. Participants that met the requirements were asked to name up the store, or stores, they purchased an item from.

Section two, which consists of questions 9 through 17, pertains to research question one. Research question one was focused to determine the visual merchandising elements that contributed to providing millennials with a valuable shopping experience in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. Participants were asked to identify their favorite store; of the stores they purchased an item from in the past six months. Each question was directed towards the identifying consumers perception of the store environment during their experience. Participants were also asked to identify any additional aspects of the store environment that they liked or disliked as well as suggested improvements, if they believed their needs were need, and if they were satisfied with their experience. The questions assisted in determining the visual merchandising elements that consumers identify as important in their perception of shopping experience value.

Section three, which consists of questions 18 through 23, pertains to research question two. Research question two was focused on determining the motivations of millennials to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online. Each of the following survey questions for sections two developed and formed around a previously identified general category. While these categories were derived from prior studies, the researcher provided options for participants to suggest additional categories. Participants were asked why they chose to shop in the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar store rather than online. Each question was directed towards the following specific hedonic or utilitarian motives, or store attributes: selection, convenience, the ability to touch and feel merchandise, enjoyment, and trends and ideas. Participants were directed to either respond "No", if they were not motivated by the specific factor, or yes with an explanation as to why. The participants were also given the opportunity to provide additional motivations, or reasons.

Table 3.1: Survey Questions

Survey Question Number	Survey Question	Question Type
Section 1: Screening Questions		
Q1	How old are you?	Multiple Choice: Less than 25 /25 /26 /27 /28 /29 /30 /Older than 30
Q2	What is your gender?	Multiple Choice: Male / Female / Prefer not to say
Q3	What is your highest level of education?	Multiple Choice: Less than high school diploma / High school degree or equivalent / Bachelor's Degree/ Greater than bachelor's degree

Q4	What is your current employment status?	Multiple Choice: Unemployed / Employed Part-time / Employed full-time
Q5	What is your current personal income before taxes?	Multiple Choice: Less than $35,000 /$35,000 to $49,999 / $50,000 to $74,999 / $75,000 to $99,999 / $100,000 or more
Q6	Have you purchased furniture or home furnishings in a furniture or home furnishings brick and mortar store in the past six months? (Pottery Barn, West Elm, Crate and Barrel etc.)	Multiple Choice: Yes / No
Q7	What is the name of the stores? Please name up to three stores.	Open-Ended
Q8	Do you have a favorite store of the stores mentioned above? Please name the store.	Open-Ended

Section 2: RQ1: Which visual merchandising elements contributes to providing a valuable shopping experience to millennials in furniture and home furnishings products brick and mortar stores?			
Survey Question Number	Category/Central Concept	Survey Question	Question Type
Q9	Perceived Design	Was the store easy to navigate? (signage, floorplan etc.) Please share your experience about the ease of navigation aspect of the store in 1000 characters or less.	Open-Ended
Q10	Perceived Design	How did the store appeal to your five senses? (Scent, music, etc.) Please share your	Open-Ended

		experience about these aspects in 1000 characters or less.	
Q11	Perceived Design	What was your opinion of the lighting, color and overall ambiance of the store? Please share your experience about these aspects in 1000 characters or less.	Open-Ended
Q12	Perceived Design	Were the store displays attractive to you? Please share your experience about the store displays in 1000 characters or less.	Open-Ended
Q13	Perceived Design	What was your impression of the store's cleanliness? Please share your experience in the store Explain. (1000 characters or less).	Open-Ended
Q14	Perceived Design	Describe any additional aspects of the store environment that liked or disliked (1000 characters or less)	Open-Ended
Q15	Needs/Wants Fulfilment	Do you believe your needs were met through the store environment? Please share your experience in the store (1000 characters or less).	Open-Ended
Q16	Consumer Perceived shopping value	Overall, were you pleased with you experience? Please share your experience in the store (1000 characters or less).	Open-Ended

Q17	N/A	Are there any improvements you would make to the store environment? Please provide your suggestions for the store (1000 characters or less).	Open-Ended
Section 3: RQ2: What motivates millennials to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online retailing?			
Survey Question Number	Category/Central Concept	Survey Question	Question Type
Q18	Utilitarian Motivation: Selection	Do you believe the brick and mortar stores provided you with a large variety of products as compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)	Open-Ended
Q19	Utilitarian Motivation: Convenience	Do you believe the brick and mortar store offered you convenience as compared to online stores? (1000 characters or less)	Open-Ended
Q20	Utilitarian Motivation: Ability to touch and feel Merchandise	Does the brick and mortar store(s) provide you with the ability to touch and feel products before purchasing as compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)	Open-Ended
Q21	Hedonic Motivation: Enjoyment	Does shopping in the brick and mortar store environment provide you with enjoyment and fun as compared to online stores?	Open-Ended

		Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)	
Q22	Hedonic Motivation: Trends and ideas	Do you believe the brick and mortar store provides you with ideas and the latest trends Does shopping in the brick and mortar store environment provide you with enjoyment and fun as compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it.	Open-Ended
Q23	N/A	Do you have any other reasons why you chose to shop in the brick and mortar store as opposed to online? Please tell us more about it. (1000 characters or less)	Open-Ended

Data Analysis

The data gathered was analyzed by means of Carson's (2001) coding technique. According to Carson (2001), the data analysis typically takes place in two separate phases. The first phase, or the axial coding phase, assigns previously identified code to words or segments of words within the responses. The second phase, or the selective coding phase, compares and contrasts the coded data to identify themes (Carson, 2001, p.83). The data for both research question one and two were each analyzed and coded in the two phases. The initial codes, or general categories, were previously determined in the literature review section. Thus, the first phase was axial coding. During this phase, the researcher assigned segments of words within the participant's answers to one of the previously identified codes or categories. This was completed both manually and using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to triangulate the data and

ensure the researcher identified all possible codes. During the manual coding, the researcher read each responses line by line locating the codes within the data. All significant answers within each question were organized into its corresponding code. New emerging codes, or categories, were also identified during this process. The researcher then repeated this using NVivo. This software searched for each code within the data and identified specific phrases that include them. The software also counted the number of participants that referenced the specific code as well as the number of times it appeared in the data as a whole. In the case that a participant referred to a code more than once in their responses, they were considered as one, single response.

The next phase was selective coding. The data were compared and contrasted, themes were identified, and conclusions were drawn. In addition, the researcher searched for specific responses and statements that illustrate identified themes and differences. Final findings were published using charts and figures to validate the conclusions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter contains the following sections: 1) Age and Gender Profile of Participants, 2)

Research Question One findings and 3) Research Question Two Findings 4) Additional Findings

Introduction

The finding of the study was used to understand how visual merchandising can be used to

provide shopping value to millennials. The results of the study discuss prevalent categories and

well as emerging themes.

Demographic Profile of Participants

As mentioned in chapter 3, the participants were recruited based on their inclusion to

specific criteria. After completing a screening questionnaire, participants had the option to
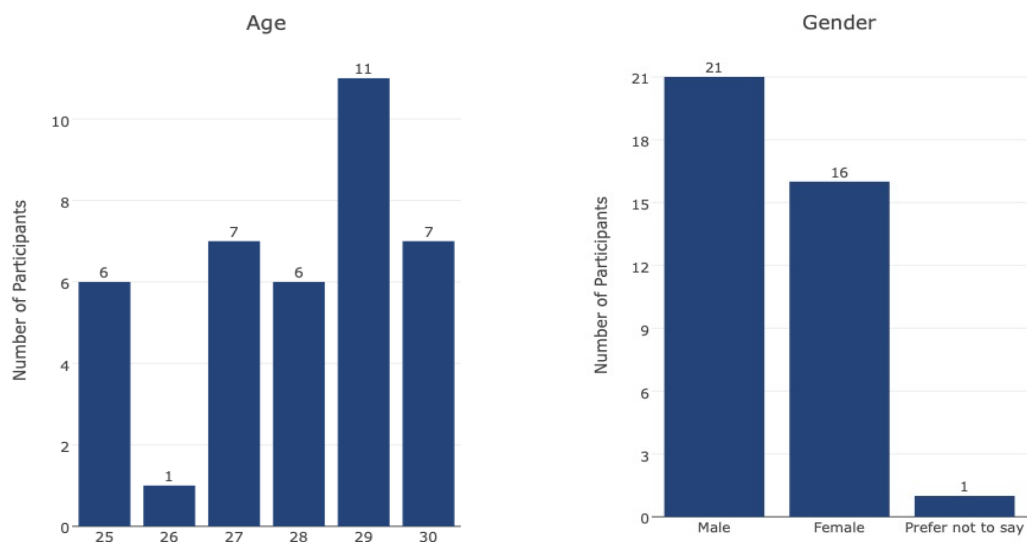
complete the stated survey.

Figure 4:1:Age and Gender Profile of Participants

The researcher distributed a total of 150 surveys to consumers registered with the MTurk software. Of the 150 surveys distributed, participants returned 38 surveys with the correct target criteria and useable responses. As shown in Figure 4.1, there was an approximately equal distribution of age and gender represented in the study.
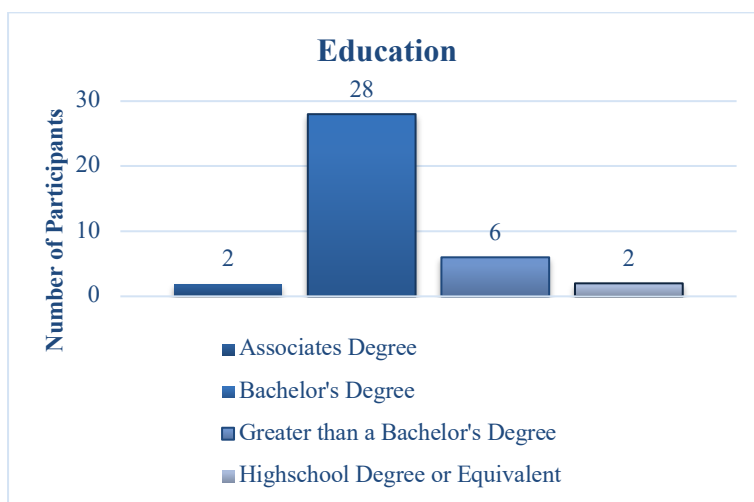
Figure 4:2 Education Profile of Participants

Figure 4.2 displays the highest level of education employed by participants. According to the data, a bachelor's degree is the level of education most occupied by participants, followed by greater than a bachelor's degree. The two levels of education least occupied by participants was associates degree and high school degree or equivalent. Figure 4.3 displays the yearly income of participants. Clearly, there is a wide distribution of income, however, the two most prevalent incomes are $35,000 to $49,999 followed by $50,000 to $74,999. In addition, among the favorite stores identified by participants, Ikea was the most frequently identified. A total of 8 participants revealed their favorite store that they purchased an item from in the past 6 months was Ikea. The second store most favored by participants was Pottery Barn. A total of 7 participants identified Pottery Barn as their favorite store.
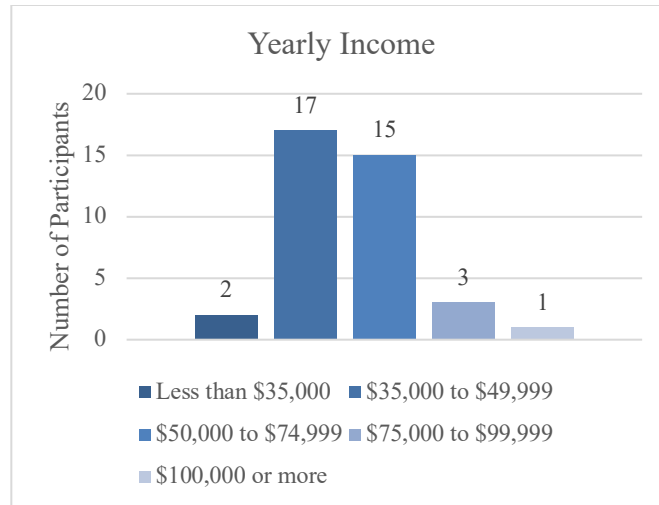
Figure 4:3 Income Profile of Participants

Research Question One Findings

Research question one asked, "Which visual merchandising elements contributes to providing a valuable shopping experience to millennials in furniture and home furnishings products brick and mortar stores?" The findings of research question one were initially organized into four general categories. The aforementioned categories included exterior, interior, store layout, and interior displays. One category, exterior, was removed after the data collection due to the lack of references from participants. Only one participant referenced the exterior during the open-ended survey. Thus, the data indicated that the exterior visual merchandising elements are minuscule to participants. Following the data collection, the primary categories were further categorized into reoccurring, and thus important, elements, as displayed by Figure 4.2.

Figure 4:4:Research Question One Findings: Visual Merchandising Categories and Elements

According to Zhu (2009), consumers are prone to filter information that is not relevant to their individual needs. Similarly, consumers only pay attention to certain design elements and factors in the brick and mortar environment that are relevant to them.

Table 4.1: Research Question One: Visual Merchandising Element References

Element	Percent of Participants
Cleanliness	35/38=92%
Lighting	29/38=76%
Product Display	28/38=73%
Floor Plan	25/38=65%
Product Grouping	18/38=47%
Scent	18/38=47%
Music	17/38=45%
Signage	14/38=37%
Color	10/38=26%

Through describing the store design during their experience in the open-ended survey, participants indicated the elements they perceived as relevant. Importance was determined by

the number of participants that referenced each element either positively or negatively. Figure 4.3, and Table 4.1 indicates the important visual merchandising elements as identified by participants.
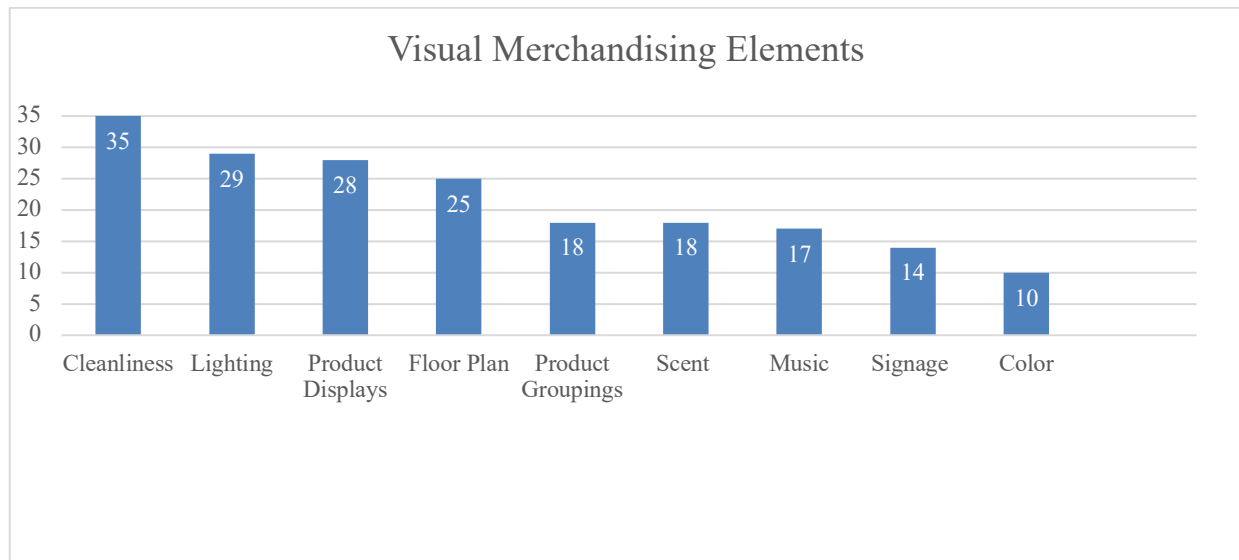
Figure 4:5:Research Question One Findings: Participant Perceived of Visual Merchandising Elements

Each of the elements identified will be discussed in order of importance. In addition, reoccurring significant themes were also identified, as displayed by Table 4.2. Significance of theme was determined by the number of participants that referenced each theme. Themes with three or more references were deemed as significant. Each category, subcategories, and corresponding themes will be addressed below.

Table 4.2:Research Question One Findings: Categories, Sub-Categories and Themes.

Category	Sub-category (Element)	Theme(s)
Interior	Scent	Wood/furniture Candle
	Music	Low Calming Genre
	Color	Neutral

	Lighting	Bright Primary Ambient Secondary
	Cleanliness	Dirt Clutter Trash
Store Layout	Floorplan	Open Accessible
	Product Groupings	Organized by End Use Organized by Coordination Easy to Understand
Interior Displays	Product Displays	Realistic Setting
	Signage	Directive Information

Cleanliness

Cleanliness was identified as the most important visual merchandising element. A total of 35 participants referenced the stores' cleanliness at least once during the open-ended survey. The data implied that stores overall hygiene is one of the first factors consumers consider when determining the value of their shopping trip. Participants indicated that they appreciate an environment that is regularly maintained. Participants further indicated that a poor evaluation of a stores cleanliness will result in a negative store image and the possibility of returning. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The store was incredibly clean and well-maintained."

- "The aisles are obviously regularly maintained so that inventory is easily accessed."

- "The store is always clean…the overall hygienic atmosphere of the store is well maintained."

- "…I don't go to stores that are dirty because that's a reflection of how the store cares about their customers."

When asked to describe the stores cleanliness, participants indicated through their responses their interpretation of the term. Participants identified three dimensions that incorporate a nonclean environment: Clutter, Dirt and Trash. The data indicated consumers regard all of these characteristics when evaluating a stores cleanliness.

Figure 4:6:Research Question One Themes: Cleanliness

Clutter refers to items that are out of place or unorganized. Participants referred to clutter in regard to cleanliness. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "…The aisles are free of clutter and you can get a good view of the surroundings."

- "[I] liked that it was organized and [didn't] appear cluttered"

- "The store was super clean. Everything was very neatly placed and well organized."

- "[The store is] so big without enough employees [to maintain items] that things were out of place everywhere…"

- "Everything seemed to be thrown everywhere"

- "…some items were out of place. It was easy to see where customers had picked up, then later discarded various items."

Dirt refers to the presence of dust or dirt on products, floors, walls or windows. Participants referred to dirt in regard to cleanliness. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 5.

- "The store is absolutely clean. The floor is sparking and the windows, you cannot find even a speck of dust."

- "There was a few specs of dirt here and there..."

Trash refers to trash or debris in aisles or resting on items. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 5.

- "It was a very clean store. The floors were free of debris and so clean they were shiny."

- "I didn't see trash around or stains on the furniture."

- "Very clean, no trash"

Lighting

Lighting is the second significant element identified through the open-ended survey. A total of 29 participants referenced the use of lighting, executed either positively or negatively executed during their experience. Participants identified two dimensions of lighting: (bright) primary lighting and ambient lighting. Participants expressed that they appreciated stores that utilized bright primary lighting, as it allowed them to thoroughly examine merchandise. Participants believed that stores that were "well lit" provided them with clarity during their shopping experience.
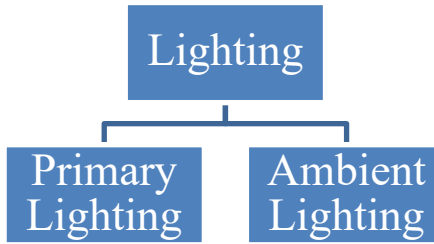
Figure 4:7: Research Question One Themes: Lighting

Participants also indicated that the bright lights portrayed a sense of cleanliness and reinforced the stores' overall hygiene. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The store was well-lit, making it easy to make out things."

- "It was very well lit and everything was clear."

- "It was clean and the lighting was good enough that you could browse and see what you wanted clearly."

- "The store was well-lit, making it easy to make out things."

- "very attractive clean and well lit"

- "It looked clean and was well-lit, making it easy to see everything."

However, the data also indicated that consumers dislike lighting that appears too bright. Many participants expressed their displeasure with the store environment if the primary lighting of the store was too vivid or intense. It was, thus, established that the participants desired primary lighting that provides sufficient clarity to view items and navigate comfortably. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The store was a little on the bright side. Everything else about it was fine"

- "Everything about my experience in the store was pleasant besides the lights being kinda bright."

- "[Ihe store should] Turn down the lights a bit."

- "The lighting is the perfect brightness. It makes it clear for me to see, but does not seem overly bright. The store feels open but not too big."

- "Seemed pleasant enough to not blind me or have me trip."

In regard to secondary lighting, multiple participants referenced the lighting in the store, either positively or negatively. The data indicated that consumers prefer the use of secondary lighting to create an ambiance in-store environment. Participants indicated in the open-ended survey that the use of secondary lighting during in the store made them feel welcome and provided them with a sense of comfort. The use of secondary lighting, in the form of lamps, also allowed participants to view visualize how the item would look in their home. The participants further indicated that the secondary lighting and overall ambiance of the store has a direct influence on their decision to return to the store. In addition, several negative comments regarding the lighting, in general, concerned the participants' disappointment with the absence or lack of secondary lighting. Many participants further suggested that the store utilize more. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- The lighting was perfect, it help visualize how the piece of furniture would look in our house. Ambiance was great and welcoming overall.

- "[the store should add] more ambiance while retaining the clear lighting would be nice

- "The lighting is just right and sets the mood of a calming state of relaxation."

- "the lighting was bright -- it did not create ambiance."

- "The store and the ambiance were explicit and surprisingly comfortable to the eyes. It felt like I am really at home. It was nice overall that's why I like coming back to their store when I want to purchase a piece of furniture."

- "[the store was] mostly lit by lamps or lighting which was also being sold."

From the above findings, it is clear that consumers prefer general lighting that is at a moderate brightness while employing secondary lighting through the use of lamps or fixtures.

Product Display

A total of 28 participants or 73% of participants, referenced the use of product displays during the open-ended survey. When asked about product display, participants were very particular about the aspects of the displays they liked and disliked.

Product
Display

Realistic
Display Setting
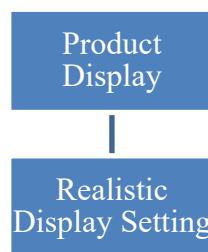
Figure 4:8: Research Question One Themes: Product Display

Specifically, the data indicated that consumers appreciate realistic display settings. Participants expressed their admiration with displays that resemble rooms in a house. Participants stated that viewing the displays from outside of the store, encouraged them to enter and browse. Participants indicated that the realistic display settings helped them to visualize what the furniture would look like in their home. They further indicated that this made the merchandise appear more attractive and added value to it. In addition, participants expressed that the realistic display settings oftentimes give them ideas and, as a result, they purchase the items displayed together on impulse. In other words, the more realistic displays of merchandise

promote impulse buying of more merchandise. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "Very attractive. I guess their job is to lay things out to make it easy for you to see yourself at home in the furniture, and they did an excellent job of it. I was able to see myself living within the furniture that appealed to me, and that heightened the attractiveness and its value to me."

- "… some of them were very attractive, it gave me ideas on how I should decorate the interiors of my home."

- "I like how certain things are staged so you can get a good idea of how they will look in your house."

- "The store displays that were attractive to me were the ones that look realistic. I liked the bedroom sets and could visualize how my room would look at home."

- "…the displays told a visual story that drew me in and made me want to browse and shop for longer."

- "I enjoyed the ambiance of having multiple living spaces set up throughout the store to see how all of the pieces worked together."

Floor Plan

A total of 25 participants or 65% of participants referenced the Floor Plan during the open-ended survey. Participants inferred two dimensions of the store floor plan through their responses: open and accessible.

```
Floor Plan
   ├── Open
   └── Accessible
```
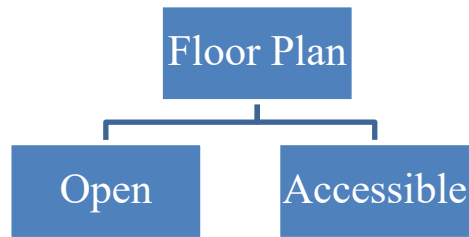
Figure 4:9: Research Question One Themes: Floor Plan

Participants indicated they were able to effortlessly navigate when the store floor plan was easy to understand. The data indicated that participants were pleased with the floor plan when they located the items or areas they were searching for with ease. Several participants further indicated that they liked the use of an open floor plan. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "I like the layout of the store because it is easy to zone in on what you are looking for."

- "The store was easy to navigate…The floorplan was [intuitive] and easy to use. It was an amazing experience overall because we got what we were looking for."

- "It was all organized and the floor plan was very [accessible] and [non-confusing]"

- "yes it was one large open floor that was easy to navigate"

- "the store was very open (you could basically see everything from the entrance), so it was easy to find everything."

- "In the center of the store was this large checkout area where all of the employees were stationed. I liked that since it was easy to find and I didn't have to wander around looking for it."

However, along with the positive responses, participants also perceived a negative element in regard to the floor plan, that is the lack of accessibility to all areas in the store. Participants indicated they desire the ability to access all merchandise from the front door of the

store. Some participants further suggested additional doors to solve this issue. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "Make it easier to navigate in the store to specific areas if customers are wanting very specific things without going through the entire large store."

- "…it was all in a straight line meaning there wasn't more than one direction to walk through…it took forever to get to the checkout. I was exhausted from all the walking by the time it was time to pay."

- "…the set up could be a little different. Like have more than one exit

Product Groupings

A total of 18 participants (18/38) referenced the product groupings or merchandise organization during the open-ended survey. Participants inferred two dimensions of product groupings through their responses: end use, and easy to understand.
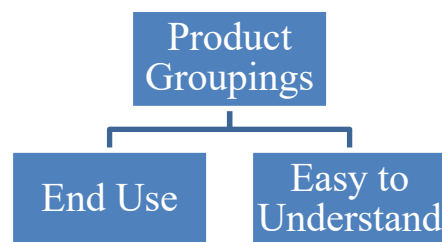
Figure 4:10: Research Question One Themes: Product Groupings

Participants expressed that they liked when the merchandise organization was simple and easy to understand. They further expressed that they want the ability to quickly find the areas of the products they are seeking. Several participants specifically indicated they liked the stores that were organized by end use, or room. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The store is quite large but familiar and easy as pie to navigate as everything is arranged in their own little sector and category of goods and services."

- "The store was easy to navigate everything was well organized… It was an amazing experience overall because we got what we were looking for. "

- "the store is extremely easy to navigate…. Wander a little, and boom! Furniture for the living room. Wander a little more, and boom! You're surrounded by bedroom stuff"

- "It was very easy to navigate as you could visually see which areas contained different furniture types."

- "I was able to go where I needed to. I knew that the store had specific areas which made it easy"

- "The departments are clearly laid out and it is easy to tell what types of items are in each section. The flow of the store makes sense and where you think things would be located is where they are. "

- "the place is arranged in such a way that types of furniture are arranged in sections. The bedroom's furniture is in their own area etc."

Scent

Participants were asked if they recalled a particular scent present in the environment during their experience. A total of 18 participants or 47% of participants referenced the scent at least once during the open-ended survey. There were multiple opinions regarding this aspect.
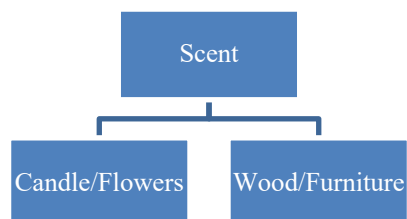
Figure 4:11: Research Question One Themes: Scent

Some participants indicated that there was a pleasant scent from the accessories such as either from a candle, flowers used in the displays. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The entire store also smelled amazing because of all the candles and flowers everywhere."

- "The scent of the store is very refreshing, very appealing."

- "It smelled good and I liked how it looked, it was very [cozy].

However, multiple participants also expressed that they enjoyed the wood scent that accompanies new furniture. Some of these participants further expressed that they enjoyed the mix of the wood and candle scent. The data indicates that consumers believe this scent appears refreshing or clean. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 2.

- "The smell is heavenly, a mix of wood scents and candles."

- "The smell is clean and refreshing and woody smell."

- "I liked the new furniture smell."

- "I can smell the wood and other materials that are [used] to make the [furniture]."

- "Loved the scent (wood/crafty smell)"

Music

A total of 17 participants or 45% of participants referenced the use of music during the open-ended survey. Participants recalled the music in the environment during their experience. Of these participants, the volume and type of music play a role in the experience in a brick and mortar furniture store.

```
            ┌──────────┐
            │  Music   │
            └────┬─────┘
         ┌───────┴────────┐
   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌──────┴──────┐
   │    Low    │   │   Calming   │
   │  Volume   │   │    Genre    │
   └───────────┘   └─────────────┘
```
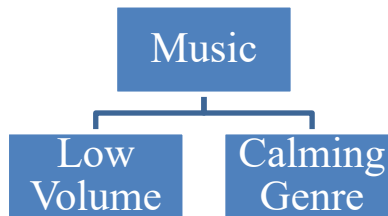
Figure 4:12: Research Question One Themes: Music

Participants expressed that they prefer music that is not very loud. They further specified that they desire the music be loud enough to hear but not loud enough the interrupt their thought process or distract from their experience. In addition, participants indicated that they prefer music that is of a calm or relaxing genre. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "music is playing but not too loudly throughout the entire store."

- The music was at a loud enough volume that I registered it, but it didn't interfere with my thinking while I shopped.

- "It was a beautiful store and they played calm, soothing, and quiet music."

- "The sound atmosphere is soft and relaxing without loud music."

- "There is a lot of products that are easy on the eyes and there is no loud noise at all."

- "The music made me feel relaxed like at home."

Participants suggested that the proper use and volume of music helped them think and focus on their decision process. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "...They also have very calm background music that plays all the time and it helps the customers to focus on what they are looking for and It honestly helps me find the right furniture that fits me and my crib."

Signage

A total of 14 participants or 38% of participants referenced the use of signage during their experience at least once during the open-ended survey. Participants identified two dimensions of signage: directive signage, and information signage.

```
        ┌──────────┐
        │ Signage  │
        └──────────┘
          │      │
   ┌───────────┐ ┌─────────────┐
   │ Directive │ │ Information │
   │  Signage  │ │   Signage   │
   └───────────┘ └─────────────┘
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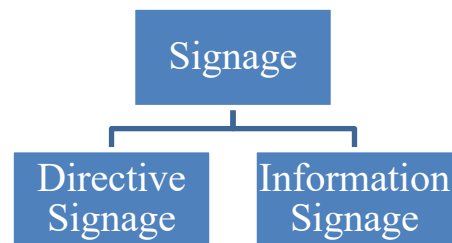
Figure 4:13: Research Question One Themes: Signage

Participants indicated their value of directive signage throughout the store to direct them to specific areas or products. They further indicated that proper use of signage allows them ease when browsing. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "everything is plain to see with signs and directions of the locations near the ceiling"

- "The store was easy to navigate. I was able to find everything I was looking for and the signage was easy to see."

- "… the store was very pleasant and it was easy to navigate provided it has all the signage you need when you are at the store."

- "Very easy to navigate, signs directing you to practically anything you are looking for"

The data indicated that consumers also desire information signage on displays. Participants stated that they want the ability to easily see specific product information and specifications upon viewing the display. However, participants also expressed their disappointment with displays that did not display this information, as they were required to go

ask an employee for information. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The store displays are large and distinctive to show off the features of the product. It is immediately apparent of the product's name, price, purpose and unique features of the item."

- "the only thing I don't like [about the displays] is that the prices aren't displayed well,

- "The store displays were nicely shown in big fonts and the ability to pull out items to hold on to. The displays contain all the information that is needed for the specific product and all the specifications for it."

- "All the prices were listed so you could compare things.

Color

Color was referenced by 10 participants during the open-ended survey. Participants suggested that they enjoy the use of neutral colors, such as white or brown used throughout the store.

Color
|
Neutral

Figure 4:14: Research Question One Themes: Color

The neutral colors were perceived to be not overwhelming to the senses and created a calming effect in participants. Participants also specified the colors used in stores were matching. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "It was white so [the store] wasnt an overwhelming of the senses"

- "The store has great ambiance. It's very bright, with lots of white coloring."

- "…the walls have different colors that are not overpowering."

- "The color scheme use in the displays were matching well..."

Additional Findings

Along with the previously stated findings, the data analysis revealed additional findings and information that were deemed as significant. Through answering other questions in the open-ended survey, participants revealed their corresponding reaction in response to store design and visual merchandising efforts. Participants indicated that the store design encouraged them to make additional unintended purchases. The data suggests that the correct mix of design elements causes consumers to make an impulse purchase. In addition, participants indicated they would recommend the store to other friends or family in need of furniture or home furnishings. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings.

- "The store for some reason inspires me to want to go out there and work hard to buy more products that I like."

- "[the store] makes it very hard to leave without buying anything."

- "[the store] may prompt me to buy additional things I wasn't [planning] on buying."

- "The store for some reason inspires me to want to go out there and work hard to buy more products that I like."

- "…the way they display the products makes you want to buy everything in the store"

- "Overall, I am very pleased with my experience. I would recommend the store to others and plan to go back again when I make my next furniture purchase."

- "It was nice overall that's why I like coming back to their store when I want to purchase a piece of furniture."

Research Question Two Findings

Research question two asked, "*What motivates millennials to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online retailing?"* As previously mentioned, hedonic motivation is driven by the need for an emotionally gratifying experience and utilitarian motivation is driven by the desire to complete a given task (Falode et. al., 2016; Babin et al., 1994). The findings of research question two can be organized into seven general categories or themes. The categories include the five initial categories that were derived from previous literature in the field before the data collection (Selection, Convenience, Ability to Touch and Teel Merchandise, Enjoyment and Trends and Ideas) as well as two categories that emerged following the data collection (Customer Service and Pricing/Sales).

Table 4.3: Research Question Two: Motivation References

Motivator	Percent of Participants
Ability to Touch, See, and Feel Merchandise (Utilitarian)	38/38= 100%
Enjoyment and Fun (Hedonic)	28/38=73%
Convenience (Utilitarian)	26/38=68%
Ideas and Trends (Hedonic)	23/38=33%
Selection (Utilitarian)	20/38=53%
Customer Service (Utilitarian)	20/38=53%
Pricing/Sales (Utilitarian)	4/38=10%

Importance or theme relevance was determined by the number of respondents that indicated they were motivated by one of the seven categories. As seen in Figure 4.13 and Table 4.3, The primary categories in order of importance included (1) Ability to Touch and Feel Merchandise, (2) Enjoyment and Fun, (3) Convenience (4) Ideas and Trends, (5) Selection, (6) Customer Service, and (7) Pricing/Sales. Each primary category will be discussed in importance.
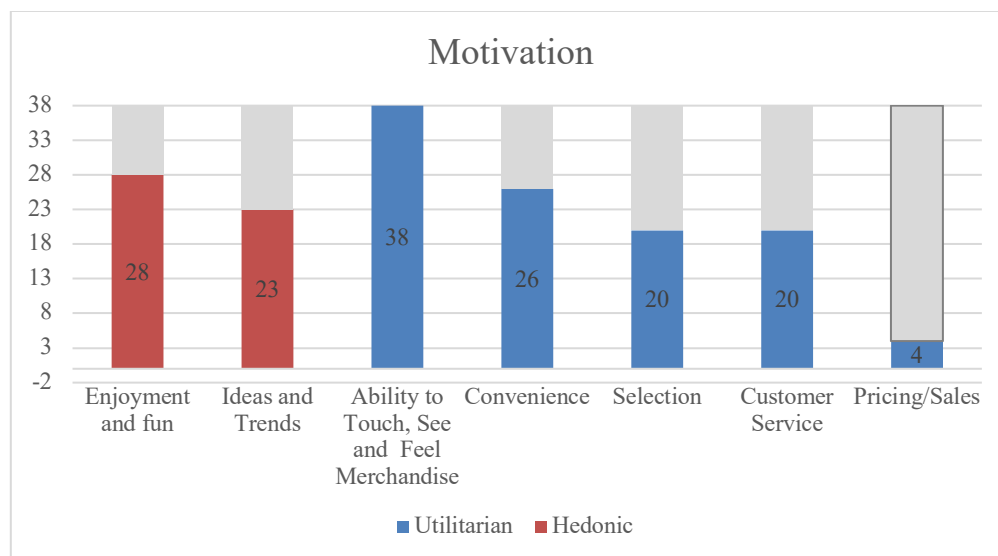
Figure 4:15:Research Question Two Findings: Millennial Motivation

Category 1: The Ability to Touch, See and Feel Merchandise (Utilitarian)

The largest, and most significant, motivator shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores was the ability to touch and feel the merchandise. Thus, the analysis indicates that in addition to touching and feeling the merchandise, the ability to see the item is an important catalyst for motivating people to go to brick and mortar stores. All 38 participants interviewed indicated that the ability to touch and feel merchandise motivated them to shop in brick and mortar stores as opposed to online. Participants indicated that they were attracted to both the tactile and visual nature of brick and mortar stores. Thus, following the data collection, the category was renamed from "The Ability to Touch and Feel Merchandise" to "The Ability to Touch, See and Feel Merchandise." Participants believe that brick and mortar stores allowed

them to physically evaluate products and product qualities, an attribute that is not available to them through online retailing channels. Participants further indicated they also wish to test the products out prior to purchasing them. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 1.

- "I like really being able to touch and feel items before I buy them just to make sure what I am getting is what I want. Things online are great but they don't always hold up to expectations."

- "While online stores have more items, the brick and mortar allow you to touch, see and interact with the items"

- "…often I need to feel or try out the piece before I am willing to buy it"

- "…everything for purchase is right on the floor and available for the customer to see and feel as much as they wish to examine the item."

- "I like really being able to touch and feel items before I buy them just to make sure what I am getting is what I want. Things online are great but they don't always hold up to expectations."

- "I have to touch and feel the material to know if I'll like it."

- "It is very difficult to find what I am looking for and like online for furniture and often I need to feel or try out the piece before I am willing to buy it."

Some participants indicated that they prize the ability to physically see the color of the merchandise in brick and mortar stores. They further indicated that pictures (online) do not always capture the exact color of the product, and it is generally challenging to match with current household items. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 1.

- "Sometimes color may not appear well on online stores because of camera lighting and there is a difference between the colors shown and bought."

- "Having items in front of you allows you to picture and understand textures, colors etc better. I think photos make this harder and [especially] with color..."

- "I am able to better see the colors and visuals in person and get a better sense of what it will actually look and feel like."

Participants pointed out in the survey that they desire to see and feel the quality of the merchandise prior to purchasing. Participants further indicated that this is oftentimes due to the high-priced nature of furniture and home furnishings products. Most of which have been previously disappointed with the quality of furniture and home furnishings items during prior online shopping experiences. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 1.

- "…being able to check out their quality is heads and tails beyond what online shopping doesn't offer."

- "I think anyone who has ordered something online has at one time or another been disappointed with the quality of the product received. If this was an expensive item it'd be a big loss for me."

- "Brick and mortar stores does have a benefit in which the customer can actually feel the texture and the quality of the furniture as oppose to an online [store]."

- "I can be aware of the quality and the material use to produce the product."

Some participants revealed that the physical nature of brick and mortar stores helped them to mentally visualize the products in their home. They implied that seeing the products in person allowed them to determine if the product coordinated with the other items in their home.

Participants further implied seeing the exact size of items to allow them to determine if they will fit in their homes. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 1.

- Mainly because of the ability for me to see the size of things in relation to others as I have a hard time picturing that in my mind, and in my space, without having a physical object.

- "It's always neat to go and sit and just check out all the products and visualize how you are going to set them up in your home."

- "It's fun seeing everything in front of me. It lets me visualize better."

Category 2: Enjoyment and Fun (Hedonic)

The second category, in significance, identified as a motivator in shopping in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores was Enjoyment and Fun. 73% (28/38) Participants indicated that they are motivated to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores because it provides them with an enjoyable experience. Participants implied they genuinely enjoy the shopping experiences in brick and mortar stores and believe they are fun. They further implied they would return to the brick and mortar stores to simply browse without a specified need or goal. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 2.

- "I wouldn't have nearly as much fun shopping online"

- "…there's something much more fun in going to a store rather than sitting on a computer."

- "…I believe shopping in the brick and mortar store environment provide you with enjoyment and fun as compared to online stores"

- "It is a fun event that we look forward to."

- "It is fun to walk around and see what is on sale, what is new or interesting, as the items change regularly and seasonally. I enjoy shopping at this store regularly for all my needs"

- "I have so much more fun shopping in the brick and mortar store because it is something we love to do for fun."

- "[It's] more fun seeing and feeling the stuff in person because it feels more personal"

- "Overall a great experience. I would go here just to look around even if I didn't need anything."

The data suggests that consumers consider the shopping experience as a comforting escape from everyday life. Participants indicated that shopping environment in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores provides them with a relaxing experience that relieves them of stress and anxiety. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 2.

- "I liked the store environment. It was a hot day and it was nice to be able to relax and shop with ease"

- "For some reason the atmosphere puts me in a good and relaxing mood."

- "The experience of shopping [in this environment] takes away my stress and anxiety of shopping."

- "…you can get out and shop and relax and enjoy yourself."

Following research on consumer motivation, shopping was regarded as an adventure to a different universe (Arnolds and Reynolds, 2003). Some participants expressed that shopping in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores provides them with a stimulating activity that allows them to leave their houses. Participants indicated shopping for furniture or home

furnishings an event that they look forward to since it is not typically done often. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 2.

- "It makes it a little like an adventure, and I guess it should be... I don't go furniture shopping every week!"

- "I would say "adventure" or "outing" as opposed to online stores."

- "I think the experience of actually going to the store and seeing the goods. It's not only functional, but it gives me something to do"

- "yes it is like an activity instead of just something on a screen at home"

- "I feel as though I'm in a completely different geographical place when I'm in the store."

Category 3: Convenience (Utilitarian)

The third significant category influencing consumers motivation to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores is convenience. A total of 26 participants expressed that convenience is an important factor in choosing to shop in brick and mortar stores as opposed to online retailing mediums. According to the data, the brick and mortar experience allowed participants ease, as they were able to take their items home the same day they were purchased. Participants also appreciated the absence of shipping costs when shopping in brick and mortar stores. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 3.

- "…the [shopping] experience is fun and it's nice to be able to take home what you bought that same day."

- "Brick and mortar store offered me more convenience as compared to an online store because I could see everything I wanted in person and was able to make my purchase and bring the furniture home right away."

- "they are definitely more [convenient] because you can see things in person and you dont have to wait for it to arrive at your home."

- "…since it is a brick and mortar store, the convenience lies in being able to purchase something immediately and being able to take it home and use it right then."

Category 4: Ideas and Trends (Hedonic)

The fourth category of consumer motivation to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores is ideas and trends. Over half of participants (23/38) indicated that they are motivated by the new products in the market place. Participants confirmed that they oftentimes will specifically shop in brick and mortar stores as opposed to online retailing to gain ideas and learn the latest trends from store product displays. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 4.

- "it is fun to walk around and see what is on sale, what is new or interesting, as the items change regularly and seasonally."

- "I believe this store does provide me with ideas and offers the latest trends. The items are always being switched out for new products, as they change with the holidays, seasons or popular events that are currently on going in society."

- "The ability to see the products staged gives you ideas that you can apply to your own home."

- "They usually place the latest trend upfront and the trends that are out of style in the back of the store or on the sale section. So I do believe that they do provide me with ideas on it."

- "Seeing things physically does prompt me to come up with new ideas and perspectives."

Category 5: Selection (Utilitarian)

A total of 20 participants (20/38) regarded the selection during the open-ended survey. The fifth category of consumer motivation to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores is selection. Participants were careful to clarify what they regarded as selection. Participants expressed that they appreciated the wide variety of items for them to choose from in brick and mortar stores. While participants indicated they did not believe the brick and mortar store offered a vast amount of stock for each item as compared to online retailing, they did not believe their options were limited due to their choice to shop in the brick and mortar store. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 5.

- "…The items are varied as the store is very large and it has room for many products for sale throughout"

- "…they have a wide variety of [items] as well as displays"

- "of course online stores have more, but they do have a wide variety of items."

- "I think [brick and mortar stores] have tons of products, so I never felt as though my options were being limited due to my choice to shop in person."

- "I liked that they had a large selection to choose from. Just walking around and examining the setups could take you 30 minutes."

- "They didn't have as much in store but they still had more than plenty."

- "Their [physical]locations have a huge amount of inventory and I never feel like I don't have enough options."

Category 6: Customer Service (Utilitarian)

The data shows that the participants regarded customer service as a common motivator in their decision to shop in brick and mortar stores. Although customer service was not a category identified prior to the data collection, roughly half of the participants (20/38) specifically indicated that customer service was an important factor in their brick and mortar experience. Participants appreciated that the brick and mortar store sales associates were available if they required assistance or had any questions. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 6.

- "Store associates have always been super helpful…"

- "the people are really accommodating, that's a plus point for me."

- "there is plenty of staff if you're looking for something in particular."

- "I loved the customer services of the store. The attendants pay full attention to you and help you in the selection of the furniture."

Many participants further indicated that they respected that the sales people were not overbearing with their assistance. The data showed that consumers prefer to have space when browsing throughout the store and only desire sales assistance when they ask. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 6.

- "Employees did an excellent job of being available, but giving us plenty of room to browse and come to some decisions. That's becoming a lost art."

- "The staff and the managerial staff are very friendly and don't' seem pushy or weary of me."

- "Staff wasn't overbearing and that was nice."

- "Employees are there to help but not to like smother you with information if you aren't ready. They leave you alone and let you do your thing."

Category 7: Specials and Pricing (Utilitarian)

The seventh, and final, category recognized as a significant motivator to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores is specials and pricing. A total of 4 participants regarded specials and pricing during the open-ended survey. Participants implied that they are able to receive a cheaper price for items in brick and mortar stores than online. Participants expressed that they appreciate the subjectivity of pricing in some brick and mortar stores, as they are able to negotiate the price of items. The data also indicated that some stores offer promotions that are available exclusively through the brick and mortar store. The following quotes from participants were taken from the open-ended survey to confirm the findings regarding Category 7.

- "…specials/sales/promotions for that particular local store that cannot be redeemed online."

- "Sometimes in certain brick and mortar stores I am able to negotiate the price…"

- "…it is easy to bargain the price of the furniture."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contains the following section: 1) Summary of Findings 2) Discussion of Findings 3)Implications of this Study and 4) Limitations and Future Research.

Summary of Findings

The overall goal of this qualitative study was to determine visual merchandising be used to produce shopping value for millennials in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. From this overarching research question, two research questions were developed that explored how design elements impacted the motivations of millennials to shop in a brick and mortar store, specifically utilitarian and hedonic motivations. Research question one involved understanding the visual merchandising factors that contribute to providing a valuable shopping experience to millennials in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. Research question two was focused on seeking to understand the motivations of millennials to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as opposed to online retailing.

In regard to research question one, the open-ended survey revealed 9 general visual merchandising elements as significant (Table 5.1). Cleanliness was referenced by participants the most frequently followed by Lighting, Product Display, Floor Plan, Product Grouping, Scent, Music, Signage, and Color.

Cleanliness was revealed as the most significant visual merchandising element to millennials in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. Cleanliness is the overall hygiene in the store, free of dirt clutter and trash. The data indicated that participants desire brick and mortar stores that are overall, sanitary, neat and orderly.

In regard to lighting, the data indicated that consumers desire moderately bright primary lighting while retaining ambiance through secondary lighting to create a "homey feel". Product displays were regarded as the third significant visual merchandising element. Participants specified that they enjoyed the use of realistic settings in store displays, as they are able to visualize merchandise in their homes through displays. The floor plan was the fourth most referenced element. Participants indicated they desire a floor plan that allows all areas of the store to be easily accessible. Participants specified the use of open floor plans during their shopping experience. The fifth element in significance was product groupings. Participants expressed that they preferred merchandise to be organized in a way that was easy to understand. They further expressed that they liked when merchandise was organization by end use or coordination. The sixth element in significance was music. Participants enjoyed music that was of a low volume and a calming genre. Participants perceived effective use of music assists their shopping process. The seventh element was scent. Participant indicated that they enjoy the mix of wood scent from the furniture and a subtle scent of candles in the store. The eighth significant element was signage. The findings indicated that consumers regard and appreciate both directive signage and information signage. Participants expressed the use of both forms of signage allowed them ease when navigating throughout the store. The ninth and last element was color. Participants responses showed that they appreciate the use of neutral colors throughout the store, as they are not overwhelming and do not distract from merchandise

In regard to research question two, the findings revealed that consumer motivation to shop in furniture or home furnishings brick and mortar store encompasses both hedonic and utilitarian motives. The findings identified the top four motivators to be the ability to touch see

and feel merchandise, enjoyment and fun, convenience and trends and ideas. However, the overall overwhelming motive is the ability to touch, see, and feel merchandise.

The results of this study suggest that millennial's furniture and home furnishings shopping trips encompass both hedonic and utilitarian motivation. This aligns with previous findings, that suggest that shopping experiences are not mutually exclusive and have the ability to be motivated by both hedonic and utilitarian motivation (Law, Wong & Yip, 2012; Babin & Darden, 1994). The findings indicated that the two most common motivators are the ability to see, touch and feel merchandise, a utilitarian motivation, and enjoyment and fun, a hedonic motivation. This indicates that millennials view shopping in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as multi-purposeful. Although they pursue the shopping trip with the purpose of seeing the physical product to ensure characteristics such as quality and color prior to purchasing, they also deem the shopping experience as fun

The third largest motivator is convenience, a utilitarian motivation. Consumers believe the stores ability to take the item home the same day they purchase it allows for a much more convenient shopping process. The fourth largest motivator is to search for the newest design ideas the trends for the home, a hedonic motivation. Consumers believe that by walking through brick and mortar stores the store displays provide them with design ideas of how to decorate their home through product displays put together with the latest furniture and home furnishings items.

The least significant motivators to shop in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores were perceived to be selection, customer service, and specials and pricing. While they may be significant to some consumers, a majority of participants do not deem them as significant as compared to online retailing.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the data lead to the following findings. The findings revealed that millennials are most motivated by a utilitarian motivation, the ability to touch, see, and feel merchandise. However, a secondary motive encompassing millennial motivation is enjoyment and fun, a hedonic motivation. This indicates that while millennials primarily visit the brick and mortar stores for its functional abilities, they also genuinely enjoy the shopping process in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores as it provides them with the "in-store experience." Therefore, millennials are provided value though both the utilitarian and hedonic aspects and elements of the environment, as indicated through the significant elements.

The findings revealed that millennials are motivated by the ability to touch, see, and feel merchandise and to gain new ideas and trends. In regard to visual merchandising elements, the participants suggested their preference for a realistic setting of product displays, and product groupings by end use or room. The findings, thus, indicate that retailers should design the brick and mortar store to function similarly to a design showroom, with the items staged to resemble the rooms in a house. Consequently, retailers should focus on frequently updated product displays with new merchandise and encourage consumer interaction with displays.

Customer service was identified by participants as a factor that motivates them to shop in brick and mortar stores as opposed to online. However, through their responses, participants indicated that they are motivated by the un-overbearing nature of store associates. While some participants suggested that they shop in brick and mortar stores because sales associates provide personal assistance when needed, the findings suggest that millennials only want help if they cannot complete the activity on their own. In addition, participants expressed that they appreciated the visual merchandising elements that allowed them to self-direct themselves and

select products on their own. Participants suggested that they desired an easy to use and accessible floor plan, easy to understand product groupings, and directive and information signage. This indicates that millennials value the environment as a "Silent Sales Person", as an environment that promotes the self-selection of products (Bubonia, 2013). Retailers should focus on designing brick and mortar stores that are user friendly, and straight forward that allows millennials to easily find the items they are searching for without having to ask store associates for help.

While a significant motivator to shop in furniture and home furnishings stores was convenience, it is not provided by the environment. Consumers perceived convenience through the stores' lack of shipping costs and turnaround time. Participants valued the ability for the store to provide them with their product the same day it was purchased and without the high costs of shipping. However, the convenience suggested by the participants in the survey is provided by store's selection. The stores selection was deemed as a common motivator as well. While participants valued the brick and mortar store for its ability to provide them with a variety of products, they also believed there is a larger number of stocked items online. Thus, in order to provide millennials with the convenience they desire in brick and mortar stores, retailers should guarantee that stores are thoroughly stocked with an ample amount of a variety of merchandise. This will ensure that consumers are able to leave with selected items without the possibility of having to order them online.

The data indicated that millennials value design elements that are not overpowering. While participants indicated that they liked the use of elements such as scent, music, color, and lighting, they also did not want them to distract from their shopping process. Participants suggested that they desire a subtle scent, a low volume of music, neutral coloring, and lighting

that is not too bright. As a result, retailers should provide these elements with caution as to not overwhelm millennial shoppers.

Previous research findings suggested that the consumer's perception and effects of retail store design differ based on the consumer's motivation for entering the store (Wakefield & Baker, 1998; Van Rompay et. al., 2011). Thus, based on findings from this study, retailers should focus on designing compelling stores centered on the millennial motivations utilizing the suggested visual elements.

Implications of this Study

The role of the brick and mortar store design has become increasingly significant as online mediums grow in the global market place. Companies strive to deliver value through visual merchandising elements and factors. Recent studies show that consumers' perception of the brick and mortar store environment, or store design, is directly influenced by consumer motivation for entering the store (Wakefield & Baker, 1998).

This qualitative study discovered the motives and relevant visual merchandise elements of millennials in efforts to understand how visual merchandising can be used to create shopping value in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. The current study provides significant information on a sub-group of millennials who are at the age of prime home-buying year. It provides insight into why millennials visit the brick and mortar store to shop for furniture and home furnishings as opposed to online and which elements they deem as significant while shopping for furniture and home furnishings. The results of the study provide implication for visual merchandise designers, and managers in the industry.

The study provides implications for retail design and visual merchandising because this study's findings brings forth the design and consumer preferences of a subgroup of millennials, a

growing economic generational group. It is important to acknowledge the millennial consumer's motivation for shopping among all current conditions in designing a retail environment and experience that provides the highest value to these consumers, as their positive or negative reviews will most likely be expressed to other millennials through electronic word of mouth (Moreno, Lafuente, Avila & Moreno, 2017). This study provides implication for other researchers in the visual merchandising or retail design industry as well. Researchers are provided with further insight on how to design for millennials in the current marketplace conditions.

This study is important because there is little significant research on millennials and their perception of furniture and home furnishing stores. Therefore, it is useful to understand their preferences in designing retail space, as most retailers have limited monetary and human resources to utilize in the design of their space.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study was carefully designed and analyzed, it is important to be aware of the limitations present in the research process. First, this study focused on millennials because of their economic buying power. Further research could widen the parameters of consumers to receive broader results. Research could also determine the specific demographic makeup of the current millennial furniture and home furnishings buyer.

A limitation is the potential misinterpretation of data due to the use of open-ended survey research instrument. Therefore, future research could utilize either focus groups or individual interviews to help triangulate and clarify the questions and responses. Lastly, further research could gather additional knowledge of consumer shopping preferences by exploring other retail

and visual merchandise design issues beyond the furniture and home furnishings industry. Future research can perform similar studies in other retail industries, such as clothing.

Another limitation is the possible presence of multichannel mediums, or pre-purchase research in the consumers' shopping process. Specifically, the open-ended survey didn't ask a question to determine if the consumer researched the item in online retail channels prior to visiting the brick and mortar store. This could have affected the importance of visual merchandising elements that were regarded as insignificant, such as window display and other exterior elements, and pricing and specials. For example, the consumer might have visited a stores website prior to visiting the brick and mortar store to make their purchase. In this case, the window display would not have been a factor that encouraged the consumer to enter the store, as it is purposed with (Zhu, 2009; Pegler, 2011; Taskiran, 2012). In addition, if the consumer had a pre-conceived notion regarding the price of the merchandise from prior online research, pricing and specials might not have encouraged the consumer to enter the store as it would other people. Future research could determine if the significant visual merchandising elements differ based on the presence of pre-purchase research through other mediums in the consumers decision process.

While this research focused on the furniture and home furnishings industry specifically, previous research might provide implications that the findings of this study can be generalized in other industries. A previous study determining the selection of visual merchandising design elements in different types of fashion retailers found that the lighting was an element that was consistently favored by consumers (Saricam, Okur, Erdem, Akdag,& Kilikci, 2018). This study found lighting as the second significant element to millennials in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. While the findings of the study might align with other industries, future

research could perform a similar study to determine if the visual elements are consistent within other industries.

The number of participants is an additional limitation. The researcher distributed a total of 150 open-ended surveys and only received 38 responses back. The overall number of participants was lower than anticipated, as a large number of surveys were disposed during the data analysis because of incomplete responses. Participants were required to fully complete both sections of the survey in order for the results to be used in the analysis, as the researcher wanted the results to form a holistic opinion of the target market. According to previous studies, this is the most significant problem in conducting online open-ended surveys (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebac, & Vehovar, 2003). However, the 38 responses were deemed as acceptable for this study, as the data was consistent and repeated itself. The researcher was able to draw valid conclusions from the responses. Although the responses received contained very valuable and insightful information that allows researchers to make valid conclusions, future research would produce more robust data with at least 100 or more responses.

This research was performed on a subgroup of millennials born between the years of 1989 and 1994. Considering that Millennials are classified as consumers born between the years of 1981 and 1996, this study focuses on the millennials within the tail-end of this generational group. Future research should focus on the preferences of Generation Z, as they are the following generation to emerge in the marketplace.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 How old are you?

- Less than 25
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- Older than 30

Q2 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Q3 What is your highest level of education?

- Less than high school diploma
- High school degree or equivalent
- Bachelor's Degree
- Greater than bachelor's degree

Q4 What is your current employment status?

- Unemployed
- Employed Part-time
- Employed full-time

Q5 What is your current personal income before taxes?

- Less than $35,000
- $35,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 or more

Q6 Have you purchased furniture or home furnishings in a furniture or home furnishings brick

and mortar store in the past six months? (Pottery Barn, West Elm, Crate and Barrel etc.)

- Yes
- No

Q7 If you answered no, you will now be directed to an exit screen. Thank you for your time.

If you answered "yes", what is the name of the stores? Please name up to three stores.

Q8 Do you have a favorite store of the stores mentioned above? Please name the store.

Please continue to the survey keeping the store as mentioned above in mind when answering the following questions.

 Upon entering the store, what were your initial thoughts of the overall store environment?

Please provide a minimum of two sentences explaining each answer.

Q9 Was the store easy to navigate? (signage, floorplan etc.)

Please share your experience about the ease of navigation aspect of the store in 1000 characters or less.

Q10 How did the store appeal to your five senses? (Scent, music, etc.)

Please share your experience about these aspects in 1000 characters or less.

Q11 What was your opinion of the lighting, color and overall ambiance of the store?

Please share your experience about these aspects in 1000 characters or less.

Q12 Were the store displays attractive to you?

Please share your experience about the store displays in 1000 characters or less.

[blank response box]

Q13 What was your impression of the store's cleanliness?

Please share your experience in the store Explain. (1000 characters or less).

[blank response box]

Q14 Describe any additional aspects of the store environment that liked or disliked

(1000 characters or less)

[blank response box]

Q15 Do you believe your needs were met through the store environment?

Please share your experience in the store (1000 characters or less).

Q16 Overall, were you pleased with you experience?

Please share your experience in the store (1000 characters or less).

Q17 Are there any improvements you would make to the store environment?

Please provide your suggestions for the store (1000 characters or less).

Please continue to the survey keeping the store as mentioned above in mind when answering the following questions.

Why did you choose to shop in a brick-and-mortar store(s) as opposed to an online store(s)?

If you do not agree with the following statement(s), you may simply state "No". However, if you do agree, please provide a minimum of two sentences explaining each answer.

Q18 Do you believe the brick and mortar stores provided you with a large variety of products as compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)

Q19 Do you believe the brick and mortar store offered you convenience as compared to online stores? (1000 characters or less)

Q20 Does the brick and mortar store(s) provide you with the ability to touch and feel products before purchasing as compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)

Q21 Does shopping in the brick and mortar store environment provide you with enjoyment and fun as compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)

[ ]

Q22 Do you believe the brick and mortar store provides you with ideas and the latest trends

Does shopping in the brick and mortar store environment provide you with enjoyment and fun as

compared to online stores? Please tell us your opinion about it. (1000 characters or less)

[ ]

Q23 Do you have any other reasons why you chose to shop in the brick and mortar store as

opposed to online? Please tell us more about it. (1000 characters or less)

[ ]

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ELEMENTS IN FURNITURE AND

HOME FURNISHINGS RETAIL STORES

Researcher's Statement
We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent."

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of your study is to identify which visual merchandising factors in the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores are important to millennials. Through determination of millennials' motives in the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar environment, we will gain a greater understanding of how to design brick and mortar furniture and home furnishings stores for millennials. Your responses will help retailers improve the shopping experience as a whole.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, participation in this survey will take 20-30 minutes. Your answers will assist design a retail environment that is better suited to your needs. You will be asked to answer various questions regarding a recent shopping experience in a furniture or home furnishings brick and mortar store. You will be asked the following questions about your recent experience:

- Your motivation for shopping in a furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar store as opposed to shopping online
- Your opinion regarding the store interiors or store design of the furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar store
- Your overall satisfaction with your shopping experience

The following definitions may help you better understand this study:

- "Shopping" refers to browsing and buying merchandise
- "Home furnishings" refer to items used to decorate the home, other than furniture
- "Furniture and Home furnishings stores" refer to stores that sell new furniture or home furnishing items.
- "Brick and Mortar Stores" refer to a physical retail location you can shop at.

Compensation

Base compensation includes $0.20 for your participation in the screening questions prior to the survey. Workers who pass screening questions will have the ability to receive a bonus of up to $3.25 upon necessary completion. Bonus compensation will be determined by what was completed and at the researchers' discretion.

PLEASE NOTE: You must thoroughly complete the survey to receive the full bonus. As long as you read the instructions and complete the tasks you will receive the full compensation of $3.

Following completion, you will receive a unique identification code that you must copy and paste into MTurk. This will ensure confidentiality when linking your survey responses to your MTurk account and, ultimately, assist in providing you the necessary compensation.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Your personal contact information is in the protected database maintained by Amazon Mechanical Turk. Your Mechanical Turk Worker ID and the unique ID assigned to you in Qualtrics (the software we use to collect your survey answers) will be linked to your research data. Please be aware that any work performed on Amazon MTurk can potentially be linked to information about you on your Amazon public profile page, depending on the settings you have for your Amazon profile. We will not be accessing any personally identifying information about you that you may have put on your Amazon public profile page. Any reports and presentations about the findings from this study will not include your name or any other information that could identify you. Information will not be used or distributed for future research. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary. No risk is foreseen in this study, however, if you feel any discomfort, you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. You will still receive partial compensation.

If you have questions

The researchers conducting this study are Lilia Gomez-Lanier, a professor at the University of Georgia, and Carly Cerneka, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Lilia Gomez-Lanier at lglanier@uga.edu or Carly Cerneka at carly.cerneka@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Please read the following statements carefully:
- I am at least 18 years old.
- I have been informed as to the nature and the purpose of this study as described above.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any point during the study.
- I understand that I must pass screening questions to qualify for the bonus compensation.
- I understand that my bonus compensation will be prorated according to my participation.

- I understand that my information will be kept private and confidential using and that any identifying information will be removed from the final stored data.
- I agree to my data being used in the analysis of research collected for the purpose of this study.
- I have read and understood this consent form.

By clicking on the "I agree" link below, I confirm that I have read and understood the above information and that I freely give my informed consent to participate in this study.

- I agree
- I do not agree

APPENDIX C: MTURK HUMAN INTELLIGENCE TASK

Answer a survey about your shopping experiences in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores

Requester: UGA Graduate Researcher- TXMI   **Reward:** $0.20 per task   **Tasks available:** 0   **Duration:** 1 Hours

Qualifications Required: HIT Approval Rate (%) for all Requesters' HITs greater than 95 , Location is US

Survey Link Instructions (Click to expand)

We are conducting an <u>open-ended</u> academic survey on brick and mortar store design. Specifically, we are seeking to understand the opinions on store design when shopping in furniture and home furnishings brick and mortar stores. In addition, we are also exploring the motivations to shop for furniture and home furnishings in brick and mortars stores as opposed to online stores.
We are seeking opinions from consumers that meet the following criteria:

- born between the years 1989 and 1994 (Ages 25-30)
- with a Bachelors degree or greater OR a full-time job earning $35,000 or greater

The survey will include a variety of open-ended questions take up to 15 minutes.

The base reward includes $0.20 for your participation in the screening questions prior to the survey. Workers who pass screening questions will have the ability to receive a bonus of up to $3.25 upon necessary completion. Bonus compensation will be determined by what was completed and at the researchers' discretion. Bonus compensation will be determined as soon as possible following your submission.

Thank you for your interest in our study!

Make sure to leave this window open as you complete the survey. When you are finished, you will return to this page to paste the code into the box.

Survey | https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cYCRc7I5xBtlUOV