WINDOW DISPLAYS: THEIR EFFECT ON CONSUMERS' INFORMATION

SEARCH WHEN MAKING PURCHASE DECISIONS

by

MEREDITH LEN PARSONS

(Under the Direction of Jan Hathcote)

ABSTRACT

It is necessary to understand the importance of visual merchandising within the retail environment and how it captures the attention of customers. Included in visual merchandising is window display which serves many functions for retailers, but ultimately serves a purpose to sell merchandise and is an important marketing tool. Window displays have been researched very little within the retail industry. The purpose of this study is to determine how window displays are significant when consumers are trying to make a purchase decision. This study examines three types of window display: store image, theatrical, and promotional; to determine which one is most effective for a specific target market. Results from this research show that there is a significant relationship between window displays and consumer purchase decisions. The display consumers chose as the one most likely to make a purchase from was the promotional window display.

INDEX WORDS: Visual Merchandising, Window Displays, Apparel Retail Store, and Consumer Purchase Decisions

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents, my sister, and Chris. I appreciate all of the love and support you have shown me throughout the past two years while completing my graduate degree at my dream school. I have never been happier and truly appreciate all the advice I have received throughout this process. To Mom and Dad: Without you, I would have never been able to accomplish everything I have at this stage in my life. I want to thank you for being loving parents who showed me with hard work, determination, and family support, it is possible to accomplish lifelong goals. I know it is hard to believe I am finished with graduate school, but these past two years have been amazing. My experience at the University of Georgia was just what I expected and more. To Courtney: I am so lucky to have a supportive sister who I consider my best friend. I appreciate you being there for me the past two years and showing me the way here at the University of Georgia. I feel very privileged to have shared the past two years with you in Athens, and I have learned a lot from you. You are an inspiration in my life, and I am so happy to share this graduation celebration with you. You have impressed me with your accomplishments and in a way, pushed me harder and further when it comes to my personal goals. I want to thank you for being so supportive and loving. To Chris: I appreciate your support the past year while completing my Master's degree. You have always believed in me and have always been there for me. I love you and want you to know how thankful I am to have someone so special in my life. Thank you for everything you have helped me accomplish. I have learned a great deal about life from you the past year and look forward to our future.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Visual merchandising today has become more complicated as competition between retailers continues. Creativity plays a major role, and consumer purchase decisions are influenced by retailers' marketing strategies. Visual merchandising, defined according to *Retail Product Management* by Rosemary Varley, is a common term for how retailers' present their products or merchandise to the best of their ability and the merchandise is displayed "to its best advantage" (Varley, 2001, p.182). Visual merchandising also "allow[s] retailers to make the marketplace innovative, exciting and stimulating by creating product-led stories supported by merchandising solutions" (Varley, 2001, p.183). Varley describes details about areas that are included in visual merchandising and the duties performed by visual merchandisers. These tasks include "choice of fixtures and fittings to be used, method of product presentation, construction of 'off-shelf' displays, choice of store layout, use of point of sale material to encourage impulse purchases, and construction of window displays" (Varley, 2001, p. 183). As a visual merchandiser or designer, it is crucial to have knowledge about the retail industry, some business sense, understanding of the fashion industry, and creative ideas. It is also necessary to understand the importance of visual merchandising within the retail environment and capture the attention of customers. One of the many elements included in visual merchandising is window displays. Window displays serve many functions for retailers including displaying the merchandise while creating and maintaining a store image. In addition, window displays exhibit a specific

theme or are used to entertain customers, but ultimately serve a purpose to sell the merchandise. A final function that window displays serve includes their promotional ability for events within the store. Martin Pegler (1998) states "the primary purposes of displays are to present and to promote" (p. 44). According to Varley (2001), window displays make a vast contribution to the external design of stores and have traditionally been an important function of visual merchandising. These two authors of retail and visual merchandising books are consistent with this study and the importance of window displays for retailers.

According to Davis (2002), "the American "department store" was birthed between 1860 and 1910" (para. 1). The art of visual merchandising has been around for many years, but the "the art of the store window was not part of the American psyche until the department stores existed" (Davis, 2002, para.2). The huge store fronts that we know today came into existence after the invention of plate glass, allowing window displays to become useful for retail stores (Who created the first mannequin, 1999). Store window displays and early mannequins first began at the turn of the twentieth century, and were initially displayed in retail store windows during this time. Words used to describe window displays include window trimming, display, and visual merchandising (Davis, 2002). According to the article *Early Store Retail Windows*, 1920s window design was called "display," and people in this time period called the designers "Display Man" (Davis, 2002), due to the fact that the weight of the mannequins permitted only men to move them.

Window designers or window dressers, as they are sometimes called, are influential with their designs and display the merchandise in retail stores in creative ways based on their experience to encourage multiple sales of apparel and accessories. Some of the most famous window dressers or designers include artist and designer Andy Warhol, Gene Moore from

Tiffany's, and Simon Doonan from Barneys New York. Past and present window dressers show merchandise in a variety of ways, but the primary forms include windows for theatrical and creative purposes, promotional windows, and store image windows. Simon Doonan, previous window dresser for Barneys New York and one of the most influential and modern window dressers, is known for his creative and extreme displays in New York. He says that "window dressers specifically deal with the creation of the desire to shop" (Doonan, 1998, p. 8). Doonan (1998) also states that store windows are the advertising venue with the closest proximity to "the point of sale," and windows are retail's oldest form of advertising (p. 8). Thus, it is important that window dressers maintain the overall store or brand image. According to Doonan (1998), there are short term and long term goals for window designers. "The short term goal of window dressing is a quick sale," selling the clothing or accessories on the mannequin in a specific window, and "the long term goal is the creation of a store image" (Doonan, 1998, p. 8). Some retailers allow their designers freedom to use their creativity within their designs due to the designer's reputation, or if the store is looking for a new image, they may think the designer will help the retailer create this image. Today, visual merchandisers are learning to accept budget cuts in order to continue showing their creative window displays. Display, according to Pegler, is changing and not dying, but display persons must continue to work hard to bring entertainment into the retail store through displays (Pegler, 1998). Most people in developed areas in the world understand the importance of the mannequin within window displays and therefore understand the importance of window designers' jobs within retail stores even though display is changing.

Justification.

Due to the lack of research on visual merchandising, and more specifically window displays, this research will help retailers with one of the most essential marketing tools designed to support their sales. Due to the difficulty in collecting and analyzing data for the creativity elements, there is little research and lack of literature in this area.

Purpose.

The purpose of this study is to determine window display influence on customers making purchase decisions, while also assisting smaller, downtown retailers with their sales potential through window display. The framework for the study will focus on the consumer decision process model, also known as the purchase decision model, to determine if the target market is making purchase decisions based on these displays. It is important to identify which type of window display will influence consumers when making purchases and verify the retailers' target market to ensure they are reaching this market.

Objectives.

The main objectives of the study include: 1) provide empirical data to small retailers for stand-alone stores, similar to boutiques, in a downtown college town, 2) make a contribution to retailing research by investigating the impact of visual merchandising, and 3) look at the impact of window display on consumer purchase decisions.

Research Questions.

Q1: Do window displays positively influence customers' purchase decisions?

Q2: Are consumers' purchase decisions influenced by store image, theatrical, and promotional window displays?

Q3: Does a specific type of window (store image, theatrical, or promotional) influence consumer purchase decisions?

Q4: Is there a significant difference between the younger age group (18-21 year olds) and older age group (22-25 year olds) when utilizing window displays to make purchase decisions?

Conceptual Definitions.

1. Creative (Creativity)- "marked by the ability or power to create; having the quality of something created rather than imitated: imaginative" (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/creative).

2. Merchandising- "promoting the sale of certain commodities" (Bell & Ternus, 2002, p. 18)

3. Off shelf displays- "displays designed to have additional impact by showing the product as it might be used…alongside other products to suggest complementary purchases. This type of display can also be considered to be a visual feature that creates interest or excitement within the retail outlet. Many off-shelf displays are not used in the routine selling process and therefore can be constructed to make a significant visual impact" (Varley, 2001, p. 191)

4. Point of Sale (Also known as Point of Purchase)- A type of display usually "synonymous with impulse shopping," but can be displays, fixtures, or items provided by vendors or manufacturers used to sell their products. These displays help "a) attract attention to the product, b) promote or reinforce brand name recognition, c) show and explain the product to educate the consumer,

d) answer relevant questions: price, size, applications, e) hold stock or arrange stock for shopper convenience, f) increase sales by coordinating items- or by "impulse sales" (Pegler, 1998, p. 294-295)

5. Promotional windows- "feature products that are part of an advertising strategy promoting an entire line of goods, a single item, or a special storewide event" (Bell & Ternus, 2002).

6. Store Image windows- "the way a store is positioned in a consumer's mind, including the reinforcement of a retail brand and what it stands for" (Varley, 2001, p. 173).

7. Theatrical windows- once limited to Christmas displays, now boost retail sales along with five other items which include: "1) make your store stand out from the rest, 2) appeal to the customer's "inner child", 3) create a romance that surrounds your products and enhances their desirability, 4) make a joyous shopping experience, and 5) create a buzz" (Davis, 2009).

8. Visual- "relates to images that are taken into the brain by way of the eye" (Bell & Ternus, 2002, p. 18)

9. Visual Merchandising- "the process of promoting the sale of products by producing mental images that urge potential customers to make purchases" (Bell & Ternus, 2002, p. 18)

10. Window displays- "have an important role to play in communicating to the potential customer what the retailer stands for, and make customers aware of the type of merchandise being sold, and hopefully will attract the interest of target customers." Window displays can be open, backed, or partial boarding depending on the retailer's preference (Varley, 2001, p. 196)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Visual merchandising, according to Bell and Ternus (2002), can be defined as "the process of promoting the sale of products by producing mental images that urge potential customers to make purchases," (p. 18) but merchandising is also a retailer's creative way of displaying its merchandise to build a store image and attract its target market. Bell & Ternus (2002) also stated that "effective visual merchandising techniques establish and maintain the store's physical and mental image in the customer's mind, providing support for the rest of the store's selling effort" (p. 18). Effective merchandising is no longer about making the merchandise look presentable in a store or window display, but more about the "actual selling of merchandise through a visual medium" (Pegler, 1998). Set up of displays within the window and within the store is important, along with the set up of mannequins, furniture, racks, merchandise, and signage. These are all areas of visual merchandising and should flow together to impact consumers' purchase decisions. Window display is the main focus for this research, but other areas of interest for this study include consumer reaction toward different types of window displays and the effectiveness of these displays to benefit smaller retailer stores. The elements chosen to measure effectiveness for retailers include types of window display: windows with the purpose of portraying the store image, theatrical windows, and promotional windows. It is necessary to examine the target market and determine the effect of each type of window on it, if at all. It is also necessary to verify these retailers' target market and assist with effectively reaching these markets.

Window Display.

Window display is one of the most important aspects of retailer store image, brand awareness, advertising, as well as a key communication variable to show consumers who the retailers are targeting. Display is a form of advertising for the retail store whether it is during normal store hours or after dark with bright lights illuminating the window for people passing to gaze in. Window displays are "not only an integral element of both its ambient and design environment, but are also typically encountered before most, if not all, other elements of the retail environment (Klokis, 1986, p. 108-109). According to the Visual Standard 1 from Club Monaco, the top ten visual basics list windows as number one. This includes window cleanliness, steaming of the merchandise, mannequin placement, styling of mannequin's clothing and merchandise for the store, along with the lighting within the window, and window background. The background in this study describes the color choice painted as the backdrop, whether a blown up photograph is used as the backdrop for the window, or merely having aesthetically pleasing props hanging in the background. The other nine items ranked from Visual Standard 1 for retail environments are as follows in order: interior mannequins and display, merchandising, fixture placement, lighting, store atmosphere, staff, fitting rooms, cash desk, and stockroom (Club Monaco Visual Standard 1, n.d.). Window displays are also "likely to provide consumers with important cues about a store's overall image" (Sen, Block, & Chandran, 2002). Store image will be discussed later as an important element of an effective window display type. The researcher has found through interviews that customers respond more positively to display with mannequins than to other visual displays without a mannequin. Findings within a previous study titled Visual Merchandising and the Creation of Discernible Retail Brands the focus is on the

importance of visual merchandising and the lack of research in this area (Kerfoot, Davies, & Ward, 2003). Within Kerfoot, Davies, & Ward's (2003) study, "mannequins generated a positive response" and "respondents expressed approval at being able to see designs, entire outfits, and see what the clothes will look like on" (p. 149). It has also been found that when it comes to window displays and consumer shopping decisions, consumers are more likely to purchase from a display if they can imagine what the clothing will look like on them personally (Sen et al., 2002). Within this previous study, consumers participated in surveys and answered questions about items associated with window displays to determine their effectiveness, but one of the important factors within this study was the "FIT" factor, a four item measure that "assesses the extent to which consumers look at window displays to better visualize how the displayed clothes would look on them and infer the degree of product fit" (Sen et al., 2002). The four item measure includes questions asked in the survey and are listed as follows:

a) Looking at window displays makes it easier for me to decide whether I would look good or not in the styles displayed.

b) I find window displays useful for visualizing how the clothes would look on me.

c) I usually look at window displays to imagine what the clothes would look like on me.

d) I find it easier to visualize how clothes will look on me by looking at window displays. (Sen et al., 2002, p. 288).

Findings from Sen et al. (2002), determined that the FIT variable had the highest significance for consumers to enter a store based on its window display, and also FIT was one of the top three most significant variables for consumers to purchase from a display (Sen et al., 2002).

Mannequins in a window or free standing are valuable tools to help customers visualize how clothing will look on them, and previous research by Kerfoot, Davies, and Ward (2003), describes consumers' responses towards mannequins. The study stated that respondents liked being able to "see designs, see the entire outfits, and see what the clothes will look like on" (Kerfoot et al., 2003, p. 149). Respondents also noticed when mannequins were not used within displays and reacted negatively towards these displays. Consumer's reaction toward other display forms has been tested, whether the reaction was positive or negative, but not expanded upon to see why consumers prefer mannequins over the other forms (Kerfoot et al, 2003).

Within this study, three types of window displays will be researched to determine the effectiveness of each type in influencing consumer's in making a purchase. This study will examine three types: store image, theatrical, and promotional window displays. An example of each type is shown in the following pages with a short description and a photograph from Fairchild Publishers will further explain its classification.

Store Image Window Display.

Figure 21.3 You have to know your customer! This sort of risqué, humorous approach for the display of bed linens is right on target for this store's smart and sophisticated shoppers. The cartoon drawings work effectively in creating the "room" and also add to the light-hearted appeal. For some stores and their clients this could be considered "X-rated"! *Bloomingdale's, Lexington Avenue, New York.*

Figure 2.1: Store Image Window Display Example
Based on the caption under the photograph, it is explained that "you must know your customer" and the luxury factor in this display is said to be "right on target for this store's smart and sophisticated shoppers" (Pegler, 2006). This statement illustrates this window is meant to show a specific image which people that shop at Bloomingdale's have or the image they are thought by the designers to have. This photograph was used with the permission of Fairchild Publishers Inc.

The first type of window display significant to this study is store image display which includes how the retailer wants to be perceived by customers. Atmosphere has to do with how

people react within retail environments, meaning if the atmosphere is enjoyable consumers will shop longer and this is important for store image as well. According to Kotler's article *Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool,* the "quality of the surroundings" known as the store atmosphere has been studied and proved important in many settings, but most importantly in a business sale setting where "buyers respond to a total product" (Kotler, 1973, 1974, p. 48). The total product can be tangible, or an intangible example, like a service. Kotler (1973,1974) describes in detail the different dimensions associated with surroundings, but the only one of interest to this study is visual dimensions within an atmosphere. The visual dimensions include "color, brightness, size, and shapes," which are all important elements of a window display (Kotler, 1973,1974, p. 51). The other three areas of dimensions are for the retail store environment or store atmosphere and as mentioned do not pertain to this research on visual merchandising. However, store atmosphere along with store image or how the store is perceived by consumers are both important. It is stated in previous research that "consumers are likely to recall various aspects of the image rather than the environmental cues that give rise to these aspects" (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986, p.146). This statement means that consumers are likely to pay attention to images rather than things going on around them at the time. The environmental cues mentioned here may be described as things going on around consumers when trying to make a purchase decision or while visiting a retail environment. This statement reaffirms the importance of image when it comes to using it in the context of window displays. It explains how important it is to carefully select merchandise for a display to portray the image retailers want for their store, and the merchandise they sell. If appeal to high-end customers is desired, they need to focus on offering window displays with high-end merchandise.

Theatrical Window Display.

Figure 15.11 This is the dinner party to end all dinner parties! However, it does get to show off some smart and sophisticated going-to-party outfits on some really spirited, realistic mannequins. Note how the spindly ballroom chairs have been cut down, as have the table legs, so that the tabletop with its display of fine china, crystal, and linens is at a convenient height for the viewer on the street to see all the beautiful "stuff"—up close. *Bergdorf Goodman, Fifth Avenue, New York.*

Figure 2.2: Theatrical Window Display Example
This photograph is an example of a theatrical window based on the elements that there are many props used within this display, the mannequins are not in a normal upright position, and the lighting is a spotlight not an overhead light or window light. This window shows a dramatic scene. This specific window display is not just trying to show clothing displayed, it is clearly trying to capture the consumer's attention and entertain (Pegler, 2006). This photograph was used with the permission of Fairchild Publishers Inc.

Theatrical windows, the second type of window display chosen for this study, are most beneficial for retailers to entertain and lure their target market to enter their store. Imagination plays a large role when it comes to retailer's creating entertaining windows and "creativity is a very important component of advertising" according to an article by Till and Baack (2005), so this is helpful when observing originality within window display. As we know, window displays are a form of advertising for the retailer, and it is thought that theatrical windows are effective ways to advertise based on their creativity.

Theatrical window displays share elements from theater production such as elaborate set designs, lighting effects, props other than mannequins, and even sound effects and multimedia (J. Blanco, personal communication, January 20, 2010). Within theatrical windows, components that may have an influence on whether people make purchase decisions from these windows may include backdrops, lighting, use of props more than mannequins, and set up of the display. The merchandise must also be displayed in a unique way to be considered creative or entertaining.

According to a recent article in Display and Design Ideas Magazine, there are five reasons theatricality will boost retail sales. Davis (2009) states that "the marriage of retail and fantasy is not new," (p. 17) but it usually surrounds holiday windows in New York. Davis tries to encourage retailers to use these types of windows and displays to "differentiate themselves from other retailers while also appealing to the customer, creating romance to surround products, make an enjoyable shopping experience, and create a must-see store" (p. 17). Another suggestion from the article is to make well displayed merchandise appear to make a specific customer feel a certain way. The creativity behind the displayed merchandise encourages sales and even encourages customers to spread information about the retail store to other consumers.

Theatrical window display is not an area that has been researched, and therefore very little literature is available. The few articles on this topic are featured in design retail industry magazines. It is evident that more research is needed for retail journals and the retail industry. This is a difficult type of window display to research based on the creativity aspect of these windows. It is hard to determine if consumers are looking at the colors, merchandise, or window as a whole.

Promotional Window Display.

Sale Ideas   227

Figure 19.9 Bendels waves its signature colors proudly—the brown and the white—to herald their sale. The dress forms are lined up across the front window and each is monogrammed with a single letter that when read together explains where all the merchandise has gone. *H-Bendel, Fifth Avenue, New York.*

Figure 2.3: Promotional Window Display Example
This photograph is a great example of a promotional window display because it is promoting a sale going on for the fourth of July based on the colors chosen and flag background. The mannequins are simple with their sale lettering, but this window display is a great example of a promotional window. This display is serving its promotional function (Pegler, 2006). This photograph was used with permission from Fairchild Publishers Inc.

Promotions are a crucial part of marketing for retailers to inform customers about events within the retail store such as a sale event, brand recognition, and any type of philanthropic association effort of the retailer. According to research by Mela, Gupta, and Lehmann (1997) the long term impact of promotion and advertising, "consumers in the nonloyal segment are more price and promotion sensitive than are consumers in the loyal segment" (Mela, Gupta, &

Lehmann, 1997). This study had the purpose of testing if "advertising and promotion affect consumers' price and promotion sensitivities over the long run" by using a household nonfood item and found that consumers were more price sensitive in the long run after experiencing price promotions (Mela, Gupta, & Lehmann, 1997, p. 256). Nonloyal customers also are more aware of price promotions and were taught to subconsciously look for them when shopping. This could benefit retailers when having promotional window displays lure their "nonloyal" customers or customers who have never shopped with them before.

The next study helpful with explaining the importance of promotions within a retail environment is The Role of Retail Promotion in Determining Future Brand Loyalty: Its Effect on Purchase Event Feedback by Gedenk and Neslin (1999). This research emphasizes the effectiveness of promotional activities on brand or store loyalty. The goal of all retailers, regardless of what they are selling, is to have brand or store recognition in a consumer's mind and promotions help increase this brand awareness. Gedenk and Neslin (1999) investigate purchase feedback and provide support through promotion purchases. This particular study was beneficial, based on its location in the retail environment and determining brand loyalty based on retail price promotions. The authors found that "in-store price promotions are associated with negative purchase event feedback compared to nonpromotion purchases," where nonprice promotions include sampling of products and these have no effect and are associated with "positive purchase event feedback" (Gedenk, Neslin, 1999, p. 433). The findings within this study are helpful because whether consumers purchase feedback is positive or negative it affects whether consumers make future brand purchases based on their current experience. If promotions cause consumers to associate promotions with negative responses, then retailers may want to look at other ways to get customers into their store. This study shows the importance of

future brand loyalty to keep current customers happy and making future purchases which may include customers using window displays to help them make future purchases.

Target Markets.

Retailers must know their target market and know this market well. Another significant area of window display research involves measuring the response of its target market, positive or negative. It is imperative to see what they react to or turn away from. It is important to know if window displays are truly influencing the retailer's proper target market. Each generation is a specific target market based on their different needs as a consumer. Previous research in marketing shows how important it is to define a target market and do everything as a retailer to cater to this market to increase profits and create an unforgettable image in the minds of these consumers. Also the "effectiveness of the communication potential of the in-store environment visual elements" (p.145) has been studied within Kerfoot, Davies, and Ward's 2003 research on retail brands. "Goals of retailers' ability to communicate effectively with their target audience" are found to be important within this study and it is stated that "retailers need a detailed understanding of their audience" (Kerfoot, Davies, & Ward, 2003, p. 152). So again, this emphasizes the importance of retailers knowing its target market. Through the understanding of their target market, retailers can focus their visual merchandising efforts to satisfy these customers.

Theoretical Framework.
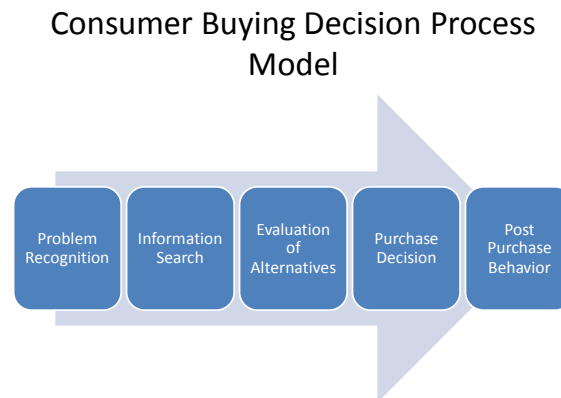
Consumer Buying Decision Process
Model

Figure 2.4: The Consumer Buying Decision Process Model: The Five Stage Model
(Source: Adapted from Kotler and Keller,2006, p.191)

The Consumer Purchase Decision Process, a reliable model that has been used in previous research, will be used as the theoretical framework for this study and seems to be one of the most popular marketing models still used today when evaluating how consumers make purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

The five stages of the consumer decision process model, as shown above, include: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and postpurchase decision (Kotler & Keller, 2006). According to *Marketing Management* by Kotler and Keller (2006), "the buying process starts when the buyer recognizes a problem or need" and it is important for marketers to identify and trigger a need by gathering information about certain consumers of their product (p. 191). After consumers recognize a need, they will try and search for more information about the product. Following this stage, the Information Search stage starts and consumers move into a mild search state called "heightened attention," which may be followed by an "active information search" (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 191-192). Retailers need to make sure they are positioned in their consumer's minds when the consumer starts their

information search. Evaluation of Alternatives, step three, involves consumers assessing their needs and determining which product "delivers the benefits sought to satisfy this need" (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 193). The Purchase Decision completes the purchase with the consumer basing their final decision on "purchase intention, attitudes of others, and unanticipated situational factors" (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 197). Postpurchase behavior is the last stage in this model and is where the marketer's job does not end with the purchase. The marketer must "monitor postpurchase satisfaction, postpurchase actions, and postpurchase uses" (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 198). If a customer is not satisfied after their purchase they will not make repeat purchases with the company or brand. This model is important to retailers when selling products and ensuring that consumers make the right purchase decisions for their needs. Visual merchandising, more specifically window displays, helps customers see merchandise when they are going through the information search and evaluation of alternatives steps of the consumer purchase decision model. A short description of each stage in the Consumer Buying Decision Process Model is described below with a more detailed description of the two stages important to this research.

Problem Recognition.

This is the first stage in the purchase decision model. Research in this area needs to include how consumers decided they need an item to fill a want or need. This is where the consumer decision process model starts and problem recognition occurs. There is very little research on this specific stage of the consumer decision process model. Marketers target their customers by creating a need or want for products and it is up to the consumers to respond by recognizing they have a need or a problem. After a consumer realizes they have a need,

"consumers engage in an ongoing search in order to build a useful bank of product information," and this leads into the next stage of the consumer purchase decision process where window display is a useful way to perform an information search (Bloch, Sherrell, & Ridgway, 1986, p. 123).

Information Search.

The second stage in the purchase decision process is the information search. When making a decision to shop in a store, the information search stage is a major factor. When customers look at window displays they may be in the process of going through the information search or the evaluation of alternatives for a specific product. Previous research that closely relates to the information search when using window displays to make purchase decisions is Hoyer's 1984 grocery store study on common repeat purchases. Clothing purchased at a retail store can be thought of as a repeat purchase item, especially if it involves a repeat customer. Clothing or accessories purchased at a retail store are usually low involvement purchases.

The results of this study show that when "decision making occurs, a large portion of the process may occur outside the immediate in-store decision" and the decision process did happen in this study for laundry detergent (Hoyer, 1984, p. 828). The amount of time taken to make a laundry detergent choice was very small, reemphasizing the decision making must have occurred before entering the store. Most consumers selected only one package to make a decision in the store when purchasing laundry detergent. This does not mean that clothing retailers would have the same results when consumers use window display to make purchase decisions. While Hoyer's study did not involve apparel retailing, it supports the search for low involvement

purchases like when consumers are making clothing purchase decisions. Another study that focused on information search was a study on high involvement purchases of expensive items which included a refrigerator, freezer, washer, and dryer. Not knowing which product the customer wanted to choose and having very little knowledge going into the store had a strong positive relationship in this study. Urbany, Dickson, & Wilkie show from the results of their study that people can be "high in knowledge uncertainty yet low in choice uncertainty" and vice versa because consumers may not be able to decide between several alternatives (Urbany, Dickson, & Wilkie, 1989, p. 213). "Prepurchase uncertainty" leads to more research about a product and a longer information search process for a buyer (Urbany, Dickson, & Wilkie, 1989). This is helpful for retailers to make sure their merchandise is well known through other means of advertising and reinforced through window display.

Evaluation of Alternatives.

After the consumer searches information, he/she takes time to evaluate alternatives. Few previous studies in this area have been located. Consumers do not know how to determine how their purchase decision was made other than to say that they prefer a particular brand, quality, price, etc. It is difficult to record, research, and analyze alternatives when making purchase decisions. Therefore, previous studies were not helpful for this research on window displays within the retail environment.

Purchase Decision.

A clothing retailer's main goal is to increase profits for the company. A recent study by Zhang and Zhang (2007) was done on consumer purchase decision-making and consumers'

interactions to help marketers learn more about understanding their market. It was found that when consumers face multiple purchase choices, they will "calculate all purchase motivations, compare them, and choose the one that brings the most advantage, and this paper introduced an algorithm derived from the decision-making model to control a person's buying behavior" (Zhang & Zhang, 2007, p. 913). This study also discussed the traditional theoretical framework for the consumer purchase decision, described their modification of this model, and also stated that "most of the purchase decisions are reasoned actions. Therefore, intention in the purchase decision-making process refers to "conscious intention" and motivation can be considered the "direct determinant of the purchase decision" (Zhang & Zhang, 2007, p. 914). The researchers stated that the key stimuli that help customers make purchase decisions are "prices, quality, brands of products, advertisements, friends'/families' recommendations and disqualifications and consumers' previous purchase experiences" (Zhang & Zhang, 2007, p. 914). All of these elements must work together for a person to make a purchase from a specific retailer. Window displays are examples of the advertisements section of this whole stimuli group. Also the previous stages in the consumer process decision model are important to examine because these lead to consumers ultimately making the purchase decision.

Postpurchase Decision.

Many studies have focused on consumer behavior, however, very little research on window displays with regard to consumer purchase decisions made within retail environments has been conducted, especially in clothing retail stores. It is important to look at how window displays affect consumer purchase decisions and whether customers actually purchase from specific merchandise displayed in windows. Although there has not been research on the

consumer decision model in relation to window displays, and if customers are more likely to make a purchase based on a window display, it is important for retailers to know how effective their windows are to customers when making purchase decisions. Most of the recent research on retail focuses on purchase decisions in grocery stores and how promotions affect purchase decisions. According to Gedenk and Neslin (1999), retail promotion's role in determining future brand loyalty is significant. As retailers know, brand loyalty is important and loyalty leads to future purchases, therefore higher profits for the business in the long run.

In conclusion, visual merchandising starts with the window display to attract consumers into the store and leads into the store design. This research of window displays focuses on stand-alone stores. This research will identify three types of window displays and elements of these windows that consumers like or dislike. Significant for this study is to determine how specific target markets are influenced by these types of window displays and if they are influenced enough to make a purchase decision. In this study, it is critical to determine whether customers use window displays to make purchase decisions.

Research Questions.

Q1: Do window displays positively influence customers' purchase decisions?

Q2: Are consumers' purchase decisions influenced by store image, theatrical, and promotional window displays?

Q3: Does a specific type of window (store image, theatrical, or promotional) influence consumer purchase decisions?

Q4: Is there a significant difference between the younger age group (18-21 year olds) and older age group (22-25 year olds) when utilizing window displays to make purchase decisions?

Figure 2.5: Research Question Model
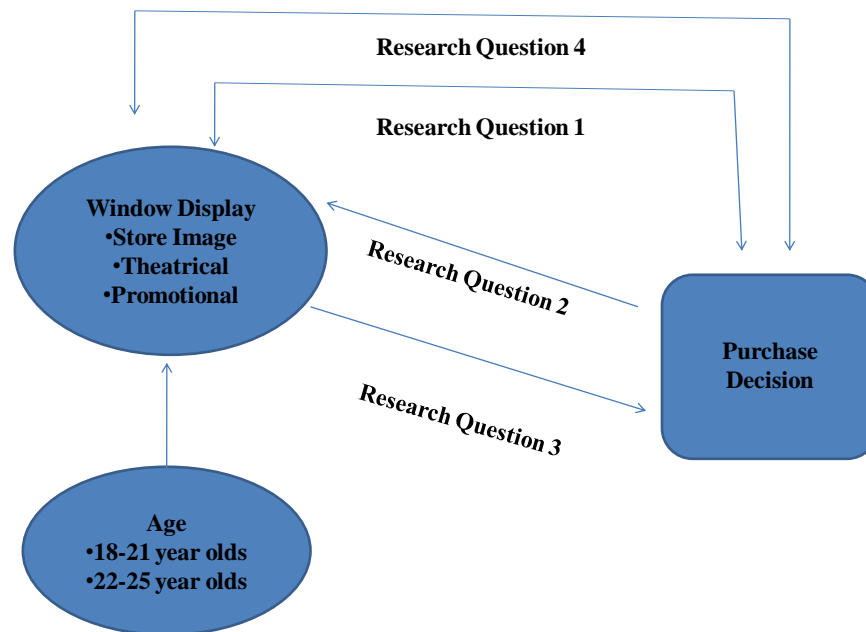This model is a visual to help better understand the four research questions observed for this study. It is shown that window displays influence purchase decisions and that the target market utilizes window displays when making purchase decisions. Through the data analysis process these questions are evaluated and within the results section of this study these questions will be answered.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The three types of window display researched were store image displays, theatrical displays, and promotional displays. It is postulated that window displays in general will influence the purchase decision, but also that each type of window display will influence the purchase decision in its own way. These three types were chosen because various visual merchandising text books identified them to be the main types utilized by retailers. As mentioned, there is little research on window displays and it is an area of visual merchandising that is neglected, but window displays are a very powerful resource for retailers to emphasize their store image to show how they want to be perceived or to demonstrate the type of customer that shops their store. Retailers can use window displays to entertain customers and help them come up with creative ways to wear their merchandise. In addition, retailers can use window displays when trying to attract customers or remind current customers about events and promotions in their store.

Operational Definitions.

Boutique- a women's apparel retail store in downtown southeast metropolitan location where window displays will be evaluated

Promotional window display- a type of window display that shows when a sale or events are happening within the retail store

Purchase Decision- to buy or not buy merchandise within a retail store

Store Image window display- a type of window display to show how the store is perceived by customers, but also may show the type of customer who shops at the retail store

Theatrical window display- a type of unique window display used by retailers which are used to entertain customers by way of creative use of props and usually very little merchandise is displayed, Elements from theater production such as set designs, lighting effects, sound effects, along with multimedia are used in these window displays

Window displays- windows in the front of retail stores showing merchandise trying to encourage sale of the merchandise shown or to show a promotional event is going on inside the store

Description of Sample.

The sample for this research targeted 18-25 year old women who attend a major university in the southeast who live in the metropolitan area and are aware of local boutiques in town. Boutique owners assume the target market for a downtown boutique in a college town includes the traditional college student between the ages of 18-25. A convenience sample was used to distribute surveys through the internet and through cooperating university professors who were willing to allow distribution of website information for the survey in their classrooms on a small business card. The business card had the survey title, website address, and contact information for further questions about the research. A copy of the business card that was distributed is included in the appendix of this paper (see Appendix A).

Description of Survey.

Data for the four research questions were collected through the online survey distributed mostly to college age females (See Appendices B and C). There were structured questions and photographs used within the survey. The photographs used were from downtown stand-alone

boutiques that were captured within a specific time frame, and photographs were taken after permission was granted by boutique owners or managers. A total of ten photographs (see Appendix D) were taken of downtown store windows, and from these ten only three were used within the survey. The three photographs used (see Appendix E) were determined by a focus group where they chose their top three photographs within each window type category (store image, theatrical, and promotional). The focus group consisted of ten students from various majors within a university located in the southeast who are all very involved students holding leadership positions within the university. When the focus group was conducted, the window displays were described in detail as a definition similar to the conceptual definitions within this research paper, along with elements of each window discussed. The operational definitions were included as well. The definitions were used to ensure each student participating had a clear understanding of the definition of each type of window. This helped the students properly chose the window they thought fit into each display type. The student's responses of their top three for each type were then tallied to obtain the final three photographs used for the survey.

Within this survey, a total of 14 scaled questions were asked where each question only had one answer. The design of this survey was as follows: a five point Likert scale was used to see if respondents strongly disagree, disagree, not available, agree, or strongly agree with the statements in each category. The category questions that used the five point Likert scale described previously were about window displays in general (seven questions), store image window displays (four questions), theatrical window displays (four questions), and promotional window displays (four questions). A five point Likert scale was used for a purchase decision

question where the response choices were: not at all, not likely, neutral, likely, or very likely when asked how much do window displays influence your purchase decisions at your favorite store. Three photographs of boutique windows were used for one question where the respondent was asked to select which window display photograph would most likely influence them to make a purchase. Demographic questions included age, gender, race, education level, current school status, household income range, and current employment status. These demographic questions were asked to verify the perceived target market for research question two. It was important to identify the correct target market to verify if the perceived target market was making the purchases. It was necessary to have evidence that the target market was captured and represented within the results of this study as well.

Data Collection.

This study surveyed a convenience sample targeting 18-25 year old females and identified which windows were the most influential to this target customer when making purchase decisions. The survey included questions about the three types of window displays with photographs of local boutique windows that illustrated store image, theatrical display, and promotional display to determine which window was the most influential, along with which window display customers would most likely make a purchase from. Local boutique owners described their target market as "traditional college aged students"; thus it was decided that consumers within this target market of 18-25 year old, college females would be the sample for this research (boutique owners, personal communication, January 2010).

After the focus group decided which photograph was going to represent each type of window display, the survey was redesigned online using a purchased subscription version of

Survey Monkey. A pretest of 20 females within the target age group (18-25 years old) was completed before the actual survey was posted online for data collection. The survey feedback from the pretest was positive, and very few changes were made. The changes that were made included color choice making it easier to read on a computer screen and slight changes to some of the questions' wording. The survey questions were adapted from a similar study by Sen, Block, and Chandran (2002) and are listed in Appendix F. The primary changes to the questions included targeting the different window display types: store image, theatrical, and promotional to fit this particular study. The number of questions was reduced to four for each type of window display. The previous study assessed whether the customer would make purchases from those displays as well. Sen, Block, and Chandran's (2002) study on window displays included some of their survey questions at the end of their study which were titled "promotion, image, and enter" in their study, but in this study modifications were made to the "enter" questions to create theatrical window display questions. The survey was marketed using business cards, containing the web address, within classrooms at a university in the southeast. Distribution of survey information was also posted on a social network site displaying the web link and an invitation to the participate in the survey, along with email distribution of the web address to college students, and through list serves of various organizations within a university located in the southeast.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

During the Spring Semester of 2010, responses were collected through an online survey using Survey Monkey, a data collection website. Out of the 200 completed surveys, only 159 were usable based on the sample description and target market determined for this study. All of the respondents that did not fall within the 18-25 year old female college student sample were removed from the data. A few of the demographic questions were skipped, but this is typical because some people do not believe that surveys are confidential.

Description of Respondents.

A summary of demographic information is shown in Table 4.1. The largest participant segment responses were white females in the age range between 18-21 and full time students with four year college degrees. The racial distribution was consistent with the racial distribution of the school's student profile. Table 4.1 shows the number of respondents in each category, along with the respondent percentage within each category and gives an idea of the types of individuals who participated in this study.

Table 4.1

Demographic Information from Window Display Survey

For the following table the response count equals n on the following table. The following data which includes n and response percent information was obtained from the SPSS frequencies under the analyze function.

Demographic Title	Response	N	Response Percent
Age	18-21	105	66%
	22-25	54	34%
Gender	Female	159	100%
Race	Asian	4	2.5%
(reporting only represented	Black/African American	5	3.1%
race within results)	White	143	89.9%
	Hispanic/Latino	2	1.3%
	Multi-racial	5	3.1%
Level of Education	2 year Associate Degree	9	5.7%
	4 year College Degree	134	84.3%
	Some Graduate School	11	6.9%
	Graduate Degree	5	3.1%
Current School Status	Student	159	100%

Demographic Title	Response	N	Response Percent
Income Range	Below $15,000	49	30.8%
	$15,000- $34,999	16	10.1%
	$35,000- $49,999	3	1.9%
	$50,000- $74,999	8	5.0%
	$75,000- $99,999	19	11.9%
	$100,000 and above	64	40.3%
Employment Status	Part Time	39	24.5%
	Full Time	3	1.9%
	Full Time Student	111	69.8%
	Unemployed	6	3.8%

Data Analysis.

For the four research questions, SPSS was used to run statistical tests. Each question is shown, and the procedure is described in detail with the exact SPSS procedure. The results for each research question and correlation tables from the SPSS output are shown as well. These tables show the p-values and r-values for each correlation, along with each variable run for the correlations. These output tables will exhibit the validity of each test run and the validity of these results. For this analysis, the original data was altered by removing all respondents that did not fit exactly into the target market. The target market was described as the sample so only 18-25 year old females, who are currently attending college were used in this analysis. The responses from these participants totaled 159 according to the SPSS data output.

Research Question 1: **Do window displays positively influence customers purchase decisions?** SPSS was used to run a summated correlation. The results of seven general questions related to window displays were added together to come up with a single window display

variable. A correlation was then run between the summed window display variable and the purchase decision variable. The purchase decision variable was derived from survey question number two about consumers making purchase decisions at their favorite store. This variable was used for the other research questions as well when correlations were run using the purchase decision variable.

Findings, based on r=.513 and p-value= .000, indicate that there is a positive relationship between window displays and purchase decisions based on the positive r-value and this correlation is shown to be significant. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level because the p-value is less than 0.01. Table 4.2 shows the SPSS data output.

Table 4.2

Correlation Between Window Displays and Purchase Decisions

Subscale	1	2
Respondents (n=159)		
1. Purchase Decision		.513
2. Window Display	.513	

Research Question 2: **Are consumers purchase decisions influenced by store image, theatrical, and promotional window displays?** For the second research question, individual summated correlations were run between each type of window and the purchase decision variable. Responses for each type of window display which included store image window displays, theatrical window displays, and promotional window displays were summed individually to create a single variable for each window type. These separate variables titled STORE IMAGE, THEATRICAL, and PROMOTIONAL were then correlated with the purchase

decision variable independently. The first correlation with this set was between the store image variable and the purchase decision variable. According to SPSS, r=.066 and the p-value was .410 which indicated there is no significance between these two variables based on the p-value. The next window type correlated was theatrical windows. The results of this summated correlation was r=.191 and p-value of .017 and this shows there is a positive relationship between these two variables. It is also stated on the SPSS output that this correlation is significant. The final summated correlation was between the promotional window variable and the purchase decision variable. The four promotional window questions were summated and then the total of the promotional window variable was correlated with the purchase decision variable. The promotional window display variable was correlated with the purchase decision variable and the results of this summated correlation show that r=.043 and the p-value shown was .589 therefore, showing no significance between the two variables based on the p-value. See Table 4.3 for SPSS output.

Table 4.3

Correlations Between Each Type of Window Display and Purchase Decisions

Variable 1	1	2	3	4
Respondents (n=159)				
1. Purchase Decision		.066	.191	.043
2. Store Image Window Display	.066			
3. Theatrical Window Display	.191			
4. Promotional Window Display	.043			

Research Question 3: **Does a specific type of window (store image, theatrical, or promotional) influence consumer purchase decisions?** Percentages from the window display photograph question were used to describe which window would most likely influence the

respondents to make a purchase. The promotional window was chosen as the type of window that most influences consumer purchase decisions compared to the other two types. The percentage, obtained from SPSS frequency data, of respondents that chose this window was 42.2%. Based on the frequency of each window display, the promotional window had the highest frequency based on the 159 responses.

Research Question 4: **Is there a significant difference between the younger age group (18- 21 year olds) and older age group (22-25 year olds) when utilizing window displays to make purchase decisions?** For this correlation, the data was altered to create one data set containing only 18-21 year old participant responses and the second data set contained only 22-25 year old participant responses. Correlations were run between the window display variable and the purchase decision variable for each data set. The results of this research question show that both age groups have significant correlations based on each individual r-value and p-value. For the 18-21 year olds, the r-value was .506 and the p-value was .000. This shows there is a positive relationship between window displays and purchase decisions. Also this correlation is shown to be significant based on the p-value. The results for the 22-25 year olds include r-value of .524 and p-value= .000. This relationship is also positive between window displays and purchase decisions and this correlation is significant as well. Looking at the r-values, the older age group shows that they utilize window displays when making purchase decisions a little more, but there is not a huge significant difference between the two age categories.

Table 4.4

Correlation Between Age Category 1 and Age Category 2 Purchase Decisions and Window Displays

Subscale	1	2	Age 1 (18-21 Year Olds)
Respondents (n=105)			
1. Purchase Decision		.506	
2. Window Display	.506		

Subscale	1	2	Age 2 (22-25 Year Olds)
Respondents (n=54)			
1. Purchase Decision		.524	
2. Window Display	.524		

Discussion.

Survey results indicate that retail window displays play a significant role in consumer purchase decisions. Window displays are helpful during the Information Search Stage of the consumer decision process. It was determined that the highest percentage of respondents "agree" that "window displays play an important part in clothing purchase decisions, window displays help them put an outfit together, and the set up of a window display helps them make purchase decisions (See Appendix C, Question 1)." The highest percentage of respondents also replied with it is "likely" that "window displays influence purchase decisions at the respondent's favorite store (See Appendix C, Question 2)." Data supports research question 1 and confirms that window displays do positively influence customer's purchase decisions. The survey questions used were an adaptation of questions previously tested by Sen, Block, and Chandran (2002), but their questions were testing a different aspect of window displays to make purchase

decisions (See Appendix D). Their main objective was to determine if consumers enter the store based on window displays and whether consumers use mannequins within a window display to see if the merchandise will fit their body type. These two studies are similar in the way they were conducted, but focused on different relationships between the customer and window displays.

The target market of 18-25 year old females who attend college were well represented within this study. After eliminating anyone who participated in the study that did not fall within this target market as described, it was determined that this specific target market does use window displays to make purchase decisions. The results, after running the correlation between the target markets responses to the window display questions and the target markets response to the purchase decision question, show that there is a positive relationship between these two variables. It is interesting to report how influential promotional window displays can be with this target market and helpful for retailers who target this market segment. As previous literature on target markets have indicated, the findings of this research support the importance of retailers knowing their target markets and what impacts their purchasing decisions too. This includes the target market's likes and dislikes as well. The data supports and confirms that the target market of 18-25 year old female college students in this sample utilize window displays when making purchase decisions.

The results of the research question "Are consumer purchase decisions influenced by store image, theatrical, and promotional window displays?" are illustrated in Table 4.3. There is no significance between store image window display and purchase decision variables. This means that there is no relationship between retailers using store image through their window display and respondents making purchase decisions because of these windows. The respondents did, however, strongly agree with the following questions asked within this particular type of

window display: "I use window displays to get a general impression of the store, I usually look at window displays to get an idea of the type of perception the store wants to show (upscale or discount), and I use window displays to figure out the store's overall image (See Appendix C, Question 5)."

For the correlation between the theatrical window display variable and the purchase decision variable, there is a significant relationship between these two variables. This is an interesting finding because when participants were asked directly to choose which window display photograph they would most likely make a purchase from, theatrical ranked last. There is also a positive relationship between the theatrical window display variable and making a purchase decision based on these indirect questions. The questions from the survey that respondents "agree" include "I use window displays to get my attention based on the window's uniqueness, I will enter a store that I never intended to enter just because it has an innovative window display, and often, I find myself entering a store because of its creative window display (See Appendix C, Question 6)." This data supports and confirms that for research question two consumer's purchase decisions were influenced by theatrical window displays when asked indirectly about their preferences. There was no previous literature or studies to compare to the results of this research question.

The relationship between the promotional window display variable and purchase decision variable show that there is no significance between these two variables as well. This is interesting because when respondents were asked directly to choose which window display they would make a purchase, the participants chose the promotional window display. When respondents were asked indirectly through the four questions relating to promotional window displays, the results indicated that there is no relationship between consumers using promotional

windows to make purchase decisions. The results of this correlation are similar to the store image and purchase decision relationship because the highest percentage of respondents "strongly agree" that they use window displays to figure out whether the store is having a sale and the highest percentage of respondents "agree" with the following questions: "I usually look at window displays to see if the store is running any special promotions, generally, I look at window displays to see if the store is offering any special deals, and in general, I look at window displays to see if any of the displayed items are on sale (See Appendix C, Question 4)."

The result of research question three, "Does a specific type of window (store image, theatrical, or promotional) influence consumer purchase decisions?" was that promotional window displays are the most influential window display. This result is based on the survey question directly asking the participant to choose the window display photograph that they would most likely make a purchase from. This is an interesting finding to compare with research question two's results. Because there was not previous literature written on window display types, there is nothing to compare these results to. The research question asked is confirmed by saying there is a specific type of window that influences consumer purchase decisions and this type is promotional window display. This question is confirmed by the results when participants were asked directly. This makes an interesting analysis between research questions two and three because the theatrical window display was chosen as the influential display for consumers when asked indirectly, whereas, the promotional window display was chosen as the influential display for consumers when asked directly.

The result of research question four shows that both age groups within the target market (18-25) year olds have a positive relationship between window displays and purchase decisions. There is also a significant relationship between both age groups and whether they make purchase

decisions based on window displays, but Age Category 2 (22-25 year olds) is slightly more significant and possibly more influenced by window displays when making purchase decisions. This was determined by a slightly higher r-value when the correlations were run. This is an interesting finding and will help retailers with their future displays if this is their store's target market.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the importance of window displays has been presented and the importance of capturing the attention of target markets was expressed. Retailers are aware of the marketing potential that window displays serve, but it is expected that this potential is more apparent after the results of this study, especially for boutique owners in college towns. The purpose of this study was to focus on the consumer decision process model to see if consumers were making purchase decisions based on window displays. It was determined that consumers do use window displays to help them make purchase decisions, which indirectly verifies that window displays also help with the information search within the consumer decision process based on the results of this study. The three types of window display chosen to research received interesting results with the respondents answering differently depending on if they were asked directly or indirectly.

There are a couple of different explanations for these findings. Respondents were influenced by stimuli, which were the photographs used within the survey, when asked directly about the different window types. When respondents were asked indirectly about the different types of window display, the respondents had to think about their likes and dislikes for each type, along with whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. It is thought that when elements of theatrical window displays are described, these are appealing elements to respondents within the target market. The timing of this study shows the reality of what participants were attracted to. With the current economic downturn, promotional windows are

extremely appealing and seem to be the most influential because of the timing. The difference between the two research questions and the results presented show that respondents like the thought of theatrical window displays, but actually think about making purchases based on promotional window displays. This shows the difference between consumers attraction towards appealing displays versus the reality of the display consumers would most likely make a purchase from.

The following limitations are described in detail, along with corresponding studies that can be executed in the future. It would be interesting to see other studies similar to this one, carried out in other areas of the United States or even other areas of the world, and to see if those studies have similar results. Every city, state, country, and continent varies in likes and dislikes based on their culture, location (urban, suburban, rural), income and climate so it would be a challenge to get results globally, but interesting to have findings based on the consumer's location.

This study contributes a great deal to retailing research, but more specifically to visual merchandising research. This study also determined window displays influence on consumers making purchase decisions. The consumer decision process model was used throughout this study as the theoretical framework and the objectives of this study were achieved. As stated previously, the objectives were to provide empirical data to smaller retailers, make a contribution to visual merchandising retail research, and to explore the impact of window displays on purchase decisions.

Limitations.

There are limitations to every research study and within this study there are a few which include the sample was limited to college-age women in an area where the population is approximately 115,000 as recorded in 2008 (Georgia Statistics, 2010). The location is a limitation because the study was conducted in the southeastern part of the United States near a major metropolitan city meaning this study was a local study and not a global study. Within this study, only one aspect of window displays were examined which was the window type (store image, theatrical, and promotional). Other aspects of the window displays were not observed. Aspects that could be observed are colors used within the display, the merchandise within the display, props influence within displays or display techniques. Examining the effects of colors used within displays is important, but not within this study. It is difficult to describe how individuals are seeing the same details within displays, therefore, if researching specific aspects mentioned studies need to be done individually. The only window displays researched were local boutique windows within the survey; photographs of chain retailer's window displays were not used. This study was limited by the windows that were available at the time of the survey, the willingness of boutique owners or managers to participate in the study, and the owners allowing photography of these windows to use within my focus group and within my survey. Another limitation included the respondents recognizing and identifying boutique windows used within the survey. This can cause some bias toward specific stores and when choosing the display they would most likely make a purchase from. These respondents may have additional information on these displays or stores. The final limitation for this study was the instrument used to obtain results. The survey asked participants to respond to questions based on their favorite store or

based on the photographs shown. We cannot prove that these respondents would actually make purchase decisions or purchase the merchandise from a window display unless someone working at a store recorded the number of people purchasing items that were displayed within their store windows. It would be difficult to capture every purchase if the store is busy and accurate results would be challenging to obtain. Based on the limitations described, more research needs to be conducted within this area of retail. Research in this area is very sparse and the retail industry would benefit from these findings. The boutique owners will receive a summary of the findings and anticipate incorporating them into their future window displays.

Future Research.

Future studies should be conducted to explore some of the areas mentioned in the limitations. Such as: researching a different sample (age, non-student, male), a different type of retail store's window (chain department stores instead of local boutiques), changing store locations (malls instead of stand-alone stores), as well as the location within the United States. This study would be interesting to see on a global level as well if the survey could be conducted in other countries to compare the differences in consumers when examining window displays and see if the windows influence their purchase decisions. Other aspects of the window display could be researched to see how color choice and merchandise within the window influences purchase decisions or to determine if these two variables help with the consumer's information search while deciding what to purchase. Because a limitation was mentioned about the type of windows that were available at the time of the survey, future research could include a longer time frame of capturing windows offering a series of window displays to choose from, along

with the addition of department store or chain retailer's window displays photographed. The research suggestion would be rather difficult to capture results, but after the type of retailer (department store, boutique etc.) is determined someone working at the retail store could record purchases made based on their current window display. This would have to be a very systematic study where all of the stores involved in the study kept count all day every day for an extended period of time. A content analysis could also be done with a description of each window display and the merchandise in each window display. This study would also be very time consuming. Overall, these future studies are fairly straightforward and would benefit the retail industry.

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Photographs used within survey cited as follows:

      Store Name. Type of Window Display. Date Taken

Fetish. Promotional Window Display. Photograph taken January 15, 2010

Flirt. Theatrical Window Display. Photograph taken January 15, 2010

Pitaya. Store Image Window Display. Photograph taken January 15, 2010

APPENDIX A: COPY OF BUSINESS CARD
This card was used for the promotion of the survey.

WINDOW DISPLAY SURVEY
DATA COLLECTION

MEREDITH PARSONS
GRADUATE STUDENT
TEXTILES, MERCHANDISING,
AND INTERIORS

MLP2008@UGA.EDU

GO TO THE FOLLOWING WEBSITE:
WWW.SURVEYMONKEY.COM/S/
WINDOWDISPLAYTHESIS

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jan Hathcote in the Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled "Window Displays: Their Effect on Consumers' Information Search and Evaluation of Alternatives When Making Purchase Decisions" that is being conducted for my Master of Science Thesis. The purpose of this study is to help retailers with their sales potential through window display and to determine if the target market is making purchase decisions based on these displays.
Your participation will involve taking an online survey and should only take about five minutes. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please note that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once we receive the completed surveys, we will store them in a locked cabinet in my office and destroy any contact information that we have by March 30, 2010. If you are not comfortable with the level of confidentiality provided by the Internet, please feel free to print out a copy of the survey, fill it out by hand, and mail it to Jan Hathcote at 224 Dawson Hall Athens, GA 30602, with no return address on the envelope.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project may provide information on consumer purchase decisions when looking at window displays. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or Dr. Hathcote at (706) 542-xxxx or send an e-mail to mlp2008@uga.edu or jhathcote@fcs.uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing this questionnaire online, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.
Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.
Sincerely,
Meredith L. Parsons

APPENDIX C: COPY OF ONLINE SURVEY

1. Window Displays

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Window displays often play an important role in my clothing purchase decisions.					
I often base my clothing purchase decisions on what is displayed in the store windows.					
What I purchase from a store often depends on its window displays.					
What I see in the window displays often ends up being what I buy in the store.					
I purchase multiple items shown in a window display.					
Window displays help customers put an outfit together.					
The set up of a window display helps me make purchase decisions.					

2. Purchase

	Not At All	Not Likely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
How much do window displays influence your purchase decisions at your favorite store?					

Use these photographs for Question #3:

Promotional Window Store Image Window Theatrical Window

1) Fetish. Promotional Window Display. Photograph taken January 15, 2010
2) Pitaya. Store Image Window Display. Photograph taken January 15, 2010
3) Flirt. Theatrical Window Display. Photograph taken January 15, 2010

3. Which window would you likely make a purchase from the above photographs?

Promotional
Store Image
Theatrical

4. Promotion
The following questions are about your favorite store:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I use window displays to figure out whether the store is having a sale.					
I usually look at window displays to see if the store is running any special promotions.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Generally, I look at window displays to see if the store is offering any special deals.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
In general, I look at window displays to see	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

if any of the displayed
items are on sale.

5. Image
The following are about your favorite store:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A

I use window displays
to get a general
impression of the
store.

I usually look at   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A
window displays to get
a feel for who the
store's customer is.

I usually look at   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A
window displays to get
an idea of the type of
perception the store
wants to show(upscale
or discount).

I use window displays   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A
to figure out the
store's overall image.

6. Theatrical
The following are about your favorite store:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A

I use window displays
to get my attention
based on the window's
uniqueness.

I usually look for   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A
theatrical window
displays when walking
past stores.

I will enter a store that   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A
I never intended to
enter just because it
has an innovative

window display.

Often, I find myself entering a store because of its creative window display.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

*7. Gender

Female
Male

*8. Age

☐ ☐☐ 18-21
☐ ☐☐ 22-25
☐ ☐☐ 26-30
☐ ☐☐ 31-35
☐ ☐☐ 36-40
☐ ☐☐ 41-45
☐ ☐☐ 46-50
☐ ☐☐ 51 or older

9. Race

☐ ☐☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ ☐☐ Asian
☐ ☐☐ Black or African American
☐ ☐☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ ☐☐ White
☐ ☐☐ Hispanic or Latino
☐ ☐☐ Two or more races
Other (please specify)
(Race information from U.S. Census, 2000)

10. Highest Level of Education

☐ ☐☐ high school graduate
☐ ☐☐ 2 year associate degree
☐ ☐☐ 4 year college degree
☐ ☐☐ some graduate school
☐ ☐☐ Graduate degree

11. Current School Status

☐ ☐☐ student
☐ ☐☐ non-student

12. If you are a current student, which university or institution do you attend?

☐   ☐☐   University of Georgia
☐   ☐☐   Gainesville State College
Other (please specify University or Institution)

13. What is your household income range?

Below $15,000
$15,000-$34,999
$35,000-$49,999
$50,000-$74,999
$75,000-$99,999
$100,000 and above

14. Current Employment Status
Part Time
Full Time
Full Time Student
Unemployed

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this study!

APPENDIX D: PHOTOGRAPHS PRESENTED TO FOCUS GROUP

These photographs were presented to the focus group so that they could rank A-J as their top three

choices for each window type (Promotional, Theatrical, and Store Image). The top choice ranked by the

focus group for each type is shown in Appendix E as the photograph used within the survey.

Photo A

Photo B

Photo C

Photo D

Photo E

Photo F

Photo I

Photo J

APPENDIX E: THREE PHOTOGRAPHS SELECTED FOR SURVEY BY FOCUS GROUP

Promotional Window

Store Image Window

Theatrical Window

APPENDIX F: SURVEY QUESTIONS
A variation of the following questions were included in my survey from Sen, Block and Chandran's Study (Sen, et. al., 2002, p.287-289):

Promotion:
I use window displays to figure out whether the store is having a sale.
I usually look at window displays to see if the store is running any special promotions.
Generally, I look at window displays to see if the store is offering any special deals.
In general, I look at window displays to see if any of the displayed items are on sale.

Image:
I use window displays to get a general impression of the store.
I usually use window displays to get a feel for who the store's typical customer is.
I usually use window displays to figure out the store's overall image.

Enter:

For me, looking at window displays is an important part of the shopping experience.
If I am walking past clothing stores, I take every opportunity to look at their window displays.
I usually look for interesting window displays.
I usually stop and take time to check out window displays.
Before entering a store, I usually check out its window displays.
I will often enter a store solely because of its window display.
I will enter a store that I never intended to enter just because of what I saw in its window display.
Often, I find myself entering a store because of its window display.
My decision to enter a store often depends on its window displays.
Window displays are an important factor in my decision to enter a store.
I often enter a store because of what I see in its window displays.

Purchase:
Window displays often play an important role in my clothing purchase decisions.
I often base my clothing purchases on what is displayed in the store windows.
What I buy at a store often depend on its window displays.
What I see in the window displays often ends up being what I buy in the store.

AGE   Years

SEX   Male/Female

APPENDIX G: DOWNTOWN RETAIL OWNER/MANAGER LETTER

January 2010

Dear Downtown Retailer,

I am Meredith Parsons, a second year Graduate Student at UGA in the Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors program. I was writing you to let you know that I am finishing my thesis this semester on window displays and was hoping for some assistance with my data collection process within the next two months. I am currently doing my research on downtown Athens retailers window displays. I am looking for boutique owners who are willing to help me and I am willing to help you with your business and let you know my findings of what your target market (college females) look for in window displays, along with what your customers say about the displays.

I was wondering if I would be able to come by the store periodically when you change your window displays and take pictures for my survey. I am then going to use all the retailer's photographs that I am allowed to capture within my focus group. I will then see which final photographs will be used within my final survey, which will be distributed to mainly UGA students. My focus group and survey group will consist of all different majors of students to capture a true representation of the college population here in Athens to gather their likes/dislikes within the displays used. All data and final research submission materials will be available for you if I am given permission to take pictures of your window displays throughout January and February and if I actually use your window display photographs in my survey. I was also wondering how often the windows of your store change and if there is a specific day the displays are changed. Please contact me at my email address mlp2008@uga.edu, if you have further questions. I also would be happy to meet with you to discuss my thesis research further if you need me to. Thanks in advance for taking the time to consider me using photographs of your window displays. I hope to hear from you soon through email.

Sincerely,

Meredith Parsons