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Impact of Visual Merchandising on University of New Hampshire Students

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University of New Hampshire Students

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by

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Abstract

Visual merchandising is a marketing tool used by retail outlets in order to make their products attractive and engaging. It has the ability to sway consumers into buying a product, making visual merchandising a useful tool in today's competitive market. This study examines the impact visual merchandising has on the students of the University of New Hampshire (UNH). To determine this, we researched both the students and their local retailers. Retailers in Durham, New Hampshire were interviewed to determine how important visual merchandising is to their business. The consensus was that visual merchandising is an important segment of their business; it is one of the most effective ways to market to students. To gain an understanding of students' views, a survey was distributed to undergraduates to measure their shopping habits and perceptions of visual merchandising. It was found that students generally have a positive perception of visual merchandising. Overall, students find visual merchandising useful and valuable when shopping. Through the statements made by retailers and the data provided by students, it has been determined that students are largely impacted by visual merchandising at UNH.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Visual merchandising has been a focus of retailers since the 1800's. Retailers are constantly brainstorming how they can attract consumers to their stores, how they can facilitate purchases, and how they can provide the best experience possible for consumers. As consumer behavior habits have evolved, so have retailers' merchandising strategies. They are beginning to realize visual merchandising is essential to the health and well being of their businesses. Even local retailers found on Main Street in Durham, New Hampshire have expressed this ongoing struggle. How do they communicate with students who are bombarded with advertising and have unlimited shopping resources? This study focuses on the effects of visual merchandising on UNH students. To investigate these questions, UNH students were surveyed to measure any gaps between the retailers' merchandising intentions and the actual response of students.

Literature Review

Merchandising includes "sales promotion as a comprehensive function including market research, development of new products, coordination of manufacture and marketing, and effective advertising and selling" (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Visual merchandising is a sub-category of merchandising and it is becoming increasingly more important to both consumers and retailers. Factors such as the economy and changing consumer behavior are altering the way consumers shop for products. An advertisement on television or in a magazine is no longer going to fully convince customers to purchase a particular brand. Consumers have an unlimited amount of information and buying opportunities at their fingertips on the internet. Because of this, it has become even more critical for retailers to be able to attract consumers to their products. Consumers are currently facing a growing number of brands in almost every product category,

and it is up to the visual merchandising team to draw consumers not only to certain brands and products, but to their retail outlets as well.

Visual merchandising is defined as "the display of products which makes them appealing, attractive, accessible, engaging, and enticing to shoppers in a retail store" (Farfan, n.d.). Visual merchandisers add value to a retail outlet by making shopping an experience rather than a chore. Effective visual merchandising will increase the amount of pleasure a consumer receives from their shopping experience. Ultimately, visual merchandising should act as a persuasive method and should convince the consumer to purchase that particular product or brand. The term "displays" in the definition is a broad category that encompasses almost every promotional item in a store. Floor layouts, internal displays, window displays, signs, banners, and even the interior and exterior designs of a retail outlet are all managed by a visual merchandiser (Waters, n.d.). Overall, visual merchandising should create a positive atmosphere for the consumer (Bastow-Shoop, Zetocha, & Passewitz, 1991). This should help with not only sales, but consumer satisfaction. If a consumer enjoys the atmosphere in Starbucks or Macy's, for example, they are more likely to spend a considerable amount of time browsing and purchasing products in that outlet. They are also more likely to visit the store again if their experience was a pleasant one.

The Need for Visual Merchandising

The changing economic and consumer environment is making visual merchandising more of a priority for many retail outlets. Despite the increase in the amount of retail space available to consumers, they are spending less money on products per square foot (Bronson, n.d.). This means consumers are more selective than ever when purchasing products, especially during tough economic times. The recent recession has changed the way consumers manage their

money because they are heavily and directly impacted by a poor economy. When economic times are bad, consumer attitudes towards spending also tend to be bad, and vice versa when times are good (Babej & Pollok, 2008). Consumers have cut back on many of their lavish purchases and have developed the desire and necessity to live within their means during the recession (*The great reshuffle*, 2009). Further, fifty-five percent of consumers have experienced some form of economic hardship, and wealth in the average American household has decreased twenty percent (Zogby, 2010).

Overall, this results in more cautious American consumers when it comes to purchasing products and services. The concept of value is more prevalent to consumers because they're on a limited or tightened budget; they want and need the most utility for their money. For example, consumers are switching to generic brands from name brands and foregoing luxury items more frequently. Clothing, cars, entertainment, and household goods, such as furnishings, are seen as secondary wants, and not necessarily needs anymore (Beutler, 2011). Consumers need to be reminded of products through advertising, and most importantly, drawn to goods in the retail outlet through visual merchandising in order to simply be placed into a consideration set.

A major consumer trend is the shift to convenience shopping (Bronson, n.d.). Convenience goods are bought with minimum effort, which means consumers are seeking the easiest shopping experience possible. They are also looking for speed of purchase and convenience of location for both the retail outlet and the product itself. Perceived and actual time spent considering competing brands is a major constraint when shopping based on convenience (Yale & Venkatesh, 1986). In a survey, consumers spend very little time when shopping for convenience goods. Compared to other products, where consumers felt they spent a lot of time shopping, this is very low (Heckler, Childers, & Arunachalam, 1989). In general, consumers do

not have the desire to be shopping around for an extended period of time. This can be a possible explanation of why internet shopping has grown to be so popular. Information is accessed faster than in a retail outlet. Consumers can compare brands in a matter of seconds with minimal effort compared to traditional modes of shopping. Reviews and opinions about products are published frequently. This is information that is not readily available in a retail outlet without the consumer putting forward a decent effort. It is up to promotional materials to persuade consumers into, first, placing the product into their consideration set, and second, choosing the product.

Further, visual merchandising is extremely important for simply catching consumers' attention. Eighty-three percent of information gathered by a human comes from sight. This is interesting because it could easily be assumed that touch would have a major impact on consumer impressions, especially when buying a tangible product. In reality, touch only accounts for 1.5% of information gathered (Quidores, 2012). In result, attractive displays, visuals, and promotional items have the greatest potential impact on consumer behavior. Window displays can grab a consumer's attention before they have even entered a store. A proper display on a sales floor has the ability to increase sales for that product by 540% (Quidores, 2012). This is extremely important for retailers. If they choose not to take advantage of visual merchandising, they are potentially missing out on a large amount of sales. And in current times, with the economy and changing consumer behaviors, it is essential for retailers to take advantage of profit-making opportunities.

The Perceptual Process

The perceptual process begins with a sensory exposure. In visual merchandising, the sensory exposure is most likely sight since it has such a high importance to consumers. This

exposure leads to attention and then comprehension. Sensory exposure, such as a sign in a mall, needs to be at or above the absolute threshold. The absolute threshold is the minimum level of stimuli a consumer needs to experience a sensation. If the sign is not at the absolute threshold, it will more than likely go unnoticed by the consumer. While the level of stimuli is subjective for each consumer, it is important to consider when planning and developing different elements of visual merchandising.

Arousal is the state of physical wakefulness or alertness experienced by a consumer. Arousal is low when sleeping and high during exciting events. Arousal is an important consideration when evaluating the level of stimulation a display possesses. With too little stimulation, arousal remains low and consumers retain little information. But if stimulation is very high, consumers become over-stimulated and essentially shut down. Their arousal also becomes too high, resulting in little retained information. This goes against assumptions that an overly-stimulating display is memorable. In fact, consumers remember the most about a display when their arousal is moderate.

Visual merchandisers need to decide whether they are going to choose a display with salient stimuli or vivid stimuli. Salient stimuli draw consumers' attention involuntarily, but are context dependent. For example, an elaborate display in a small, local grocery store may seem more interesting than the same display in a large, chain grocery store where these kinds of displays are common. Salient stimuli depend on their novelty, intensity, and complexity to attract consumers' attention and to be memorable. Vivid stimuli are also involuntary, but vivid stimuli are emotionally interesting, concrete, imagery provoking, and rely on proximity to the consumer. Salient and vivid stimuli do not capture the attention of consumers one-hundred percent of the

time, but it is the hope of the marketer that they will help make promotions or displays more appealing to consumers (Kardes, Cronley, & Kline, 2011).

 Out of Store Influences

Visual merchandising is a powerful tool for promoting products and brands to consumers. Visual merchandising has the ability to increase sales and profits, but any kind of advertising or promotion is not one hundred percent effective. Consumer choice is not as easy as a fancy window display. There are a lot of different factors that affect the choices consumers make.

Involvement is the personal relevance and importance of an issue or situation. Enduring involvement is constant interest in a topic or issue. If a consumer really enjoys fashion, a fashion forward window display would be most appealing to them. If they have hobbies that fall under fishing, they might be more likely to browse a display of the newest fishing rods. Because these consumers have interests that are enduring they will always be attracted to the appropriate displays. This is where retailers can use target markets to their advantage. On the other hand, situational involvement is based on special circumstances or specific conditions. Involvement is high in situational involvement, which means there will be a lot of thought put forth by the consumer. This is where visual merchandising might be slightly less effective because impulse buys are less likely. A display may attract their attention, but if a consumer has a list of requirements that do not match the product, the display ultimately will not matter to them when making a choice.

Established beliefs and attitudes sway consumer consideration and choice. Beliefs are non-evaluative judgments that describe a consumer's ratings on product attributes and benefits. Attitudes usually follow beliefs, and are evaluative judgments. A coat on a mannequin at a JC

Penny's in New Hampshire provides a lot of information to consumers. When they first look at it, they may believe the coat looks warm because it is puffy. When they actually try it on, though, they may find the coat is deceiving not very thick, so they put it back on the rack. The attitude they develop may be that particular coat will perform poorly in the cold New England weather. This attitude has the two components evaluative attitudes need: direction and extremity. The direction is negative, while the extremity is strong since the consumer decides immediately not to purchase the coat. In this case, the display does not have any effect on the consumer's final decision on whether to purchase the coat or not, even though it may have convinced them to examine the coat more closely (Kardes, Cronley, & Kline, 2011).

<div align="center">**Individual Difference Measures**</div>

Self-Monitoring Scale

The self-monitoring scale was developed by Mark Snyder in 1974. This scale is used to measure "the extent to which people regulate their self-presentation by tailoring their actions in accordance with immediate situational cues" (Lennox & Wolfe, 1982, p. 1349). A high self-monitor adapts their actions based on the situation they are in. They have the ability to distinguish what actions are appropriate based on external cues from others. The public self and the private self are in two different states. High self-monitors are sensitive to others' behavior and adapt accordingly. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, are oblivious to situational cues. These people have trouble hiding their true feelings in any given situation and, therefore, have trouble adjusting their external behavior. In this situation, the public and private self are essentially the same.

The self-monitoring scale has been used in this study because visual merchandising is a situational cue. If a display indicates a certain product is positive, a high self-monitor may be more likely to adjust their behavior to match that cue. A low self-monitor may be more likely to ignore the situational cue because external behavior does not affect them in the same way. A potential correlation between visual merchandising and self-monitoring could indicate who is more likely to welcome the message visual merchandising attempts to send.

A revised self-monitoring scale was used in this study. Lennox et al. (1982) revised Snyder's original 25 question scale to a 13 question scale. This 13 question scale measures "sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others and the ability to modify self-presentation" (p. 1349). Each of these categories represents seven and six questions in the scale, respectively. According to Lennox et al. (1982), the shortened scale is more appropriate because it has more of a focus on what it means to be a high or low self-monitor. They believe Snyder's use of questions involving theatricality do not give an accurate reading of the subject's true self-monitoring score. Thus, through repeated testing, Lennox et al. (1982) were able to reduce Snyder's original scale by 12 questions.

Need for Cognitive Closure Scale

Need for cognitive closure (NFCC) (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996) is defined as the "desire for a firm answer to a question and an aversion towards ambiguity" (Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, Bullington, 2007, p. 378). A person with a high need for cognitive closure has an aversion to ambiguity. They have a desire for an answer to end any further reasoning on a subject. Once the desired amount of information has been presented to the subject, they stop seeking more information and are able to make a decision with a level of confidence. These

individuals make their judgments based on early information as opposed to later information. They are quick to disregard information that appears to be ambiguous or hard to understand and fall back on their initial perceptions. Kardes et al. (2007) used a six question need for cognitive closure scale that was derived from the original 42 question scale for greater reliability. The six item scale was used in this study.

It was expected that people who are higher in NFCC may prefer visual merchandising more than people with low scores. Visual merchandising aides understanding of products and their benefits and it is likely that people who are higher in NFCC may find it more useful in forming quick judgments than those who are low in NFCC.

Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. First, retailers in the college town Durham, New Hampshire were interviewed about how they use visual merchandising in their stores. The two stores chosen for the interviews have some of the most prominent attempts at visual merchandising in town, including window displays, street displays, and informational signs. Interviews were conducted in order to determine if the uses of visual merchandising by retailers matched the preferences and actions of students at UNH. Two interviews were conducted and one observation was conducted.

Second, a survey was developed and distributed to students. The survey consisted of 40 questions. The first section of the survey focused on shopping habits. Students were asked seven questions about what products they shop for the most and why they shop. The second section asked questions about students' perceptions of visual merchandising. These sections were

followed by the Self-Monitoring Scale and the Need for Cognitive Closure scale. The final short

section of the survey asked a series of demographic questions.

Interviews

       The first retailer is fairly new to the Durham community and they sell clothing and

jewelry. This is the only retailer that sells fashionable clothing in town. The retailer expressed

not a lot of thought went into the displays. The only criteria they have are whether an item needs

a mannequin or not. This type of visual merchandising was helpful for items that need to be seen

on a form; the retailer said the items become more "convincing." They decided to recently

purchase more mannequins for their store to promote the items they are trying to sell. This

retailer has not seen a consistent pattern of increased sales using this method.

       Students and residents of Durham alike are unsure of the image the retailer is trying to

promote. Frustration was expressed by the owner because of the confusion customers often have

about the store. Because of this, people often come to browse but do not make purchases. On the

consumer end of this issue, the window and street displays are essential to promoting the

character of the business. The retailer agreed visual merchandising was important for the

business, but also realized they have yet to find a window display technique that works for them.

They mentioned their inconsistency with visual merchandising may play a part in the confusion

of customers. They are still creating a method that works for them.

       The second retailer sells various goods, many with the UNH logo printed on them. This

retailer has been in Durham for many years and has an established visual merchandising plan.

Products in their front window on Main Street are chosen based on the season. An example the

retailer used was UNH hockey and football sweatshirts in the fall and basketball sweatshirts in

the winter. During the holidays, many potential gifts are displayed in the window with festive

lights and decorations. This retailer takes full advantage of freshman orientation days by

displaying class year t-shirts in their window. Through experience, they have discovered what

students want to see displayed, but this does not mean all of the items displayed sell well. More

often than not, though, sales are good for these items.

The most interesting fact this retailer shared was that window displays were the most cost

effective and best way to reach students. Over the years, this store has done various promotions

but they never see the kind of return that window displays generate. The retailer mentioned that

students have many distractions on campus now and are ignoring traditional forms of

advertisement. The only way to promote their image is through window displays and signs on the

street. This is why they put a lot of effort into creating new displays frequently. A promotional

sign is always seen on the street. Clothing is always described as being "on sale," which is

particularly helpful for convincing students to visit their store. When students are looking to

purchase UNH related products, the word "sale" means a lot to them since these products tend to

be more expensive.

A third retailer was observed. This store is also new to Durham and claims to be a frozen

yogurt "lounge." This retailer was chosen because of the atmosphere they promote. They have an

abundance of seating, both indoors and out, and offers free WiFi to customers. The interior is

decorated in bright colors with the frozen yogurt and toppings on display for self-serve. They

want customers to spend time in their shop, even if their intentions are not solely to buy frozen

yogurt. Chances are high that patrons will give in to purchasing something. This idea is similar to

the concept used by Starbucks and comparable stores. By creating an atmosphere that appears to

be fun and inviting, consumers may be more enticed to visit. It is not uncommon to see students

with their laptops and books in the store, even though it is not a traditional place to study. Studying next to frozen yogurt is completely unexpected, but effective for the retailer. Essentially, this retailer has met the goals of visual merchandising: to create a positive atmosphere, to help recall a product, and to stimulate sales.

The main take away from the two interviews and one observation is how important visual merchandising is to students and retailers at UNH. Visual merchandising provides a glimpse of the retailer's message, and students find that extremely important when shopping in town. It is one of the few ways students can form an opinion about the stores. Failing to create a positive image, as seen with the first retailer, can affect the business negatively. Students were confused about the first retailer, but not the second or even the third. Also, as with any retail outlet, students are distracted. Visually appealing and interesting displays and signs make the difference in motivating them to shop. By triggering students' motivation, retail outlets can ensure a steady customer base.

Survey

A total of 67 students completed the survey in its entirety, with 66% of respondents being female and 34% being males. The Whittemore School of Business and Economics (WSBE) accounted for 84% of the responses. A majority of respondents were Seniors in WSBE. Only 21% of respondents were Juniors, Sophomores, or Freshmen. Eight percent of respondents represented the College of Health and Human Services. The College of Liberal Arts and the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture both accounted for three percent each, while the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences provided no responses.

The strong representation of seniors in WSBE suggests a possible bias when analyzing the data in this study. This limitation was not initially intended. Students of all schools and years were given the option of participating in the survey via Facebook. Due to lower than expected response, a convenience sample of WSBE students was used. An even distribution of all students attending UNH would have been desirable. Despite these limitations, it is believed that the responses collected will still be able to provide valuable insight about the impact of visual merchandising on UNH students.

Results

Shopping Habits

The most popular product category students shopped for is food, with 43% of respondents shopping for this category five or more times a month. Another 45% of respondents shopped for food three to four times a month. This is interesting because in an open-response question, 15 out of 38 respondents said food or food products would be a product that would benefit from visual merchandising. There is a lot of competition on grocery store shelves and among restaurants. In order to distinguish choices, consumers need assistance. At the rate students are shopping for food, they are being exposed to visual merchandising in this category very often.

Clothes and health and beauty products had similar shopping frequencies among students, as seen in Figures 1 and 2. Of the respondents, 60% shopped for clothes one to two times a month. Only nine percent shopped for clothes five or more times a month. Health and beauty products were shopped for one to two times a month by 58% of respondents. This category includes cosmetics, supplements, vitamins, and fitness products. These products are not shopped

for very often, with only eight percent reporting they shop five or more times a month for this
category.

Figure 1: Clothes Frequency

In any given month, how many times do you shop for clothes?

Figure 2: Health and Beauty Frequency

In any given month, how many times do you shop for health and beauty
products (including cosmetics,...
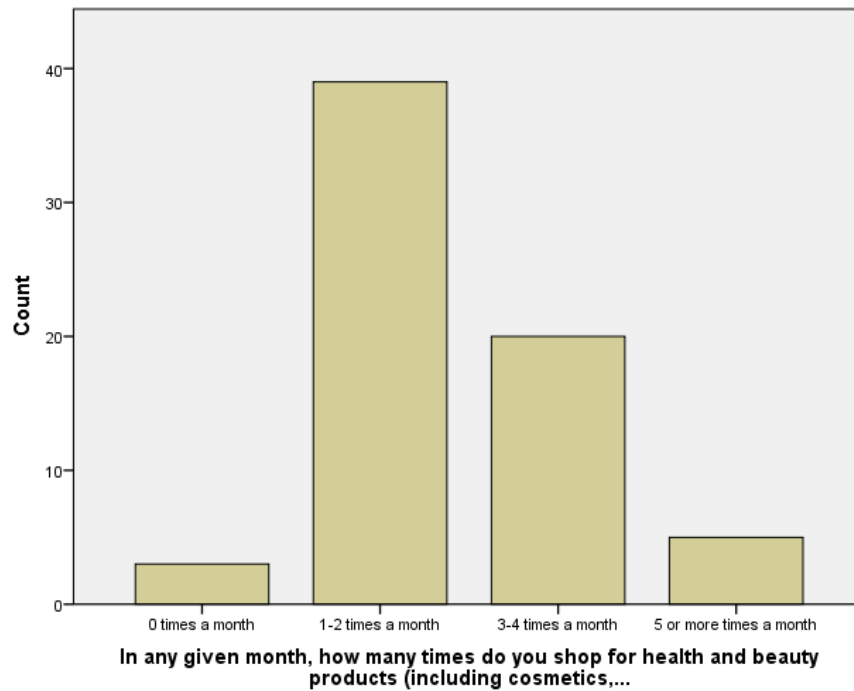
In the open response question, students expressed that these categories would benefit from visual merchandising as well. There were 27 responses for clothing and 15 for health and beauty products. Clothing is a popular form of visual merchandising because of the use of mannequins, as seen in the interviews conducted with Durham retailers. Consumers are instantly exposed to information about a clothing product when it is displayed on a mannequin. Information is also important for health and beauty products in order to differentiate between choices.

Technology is shopped for the least among students at UNH. A majority of respondents report either shopping for technology zero times a month (44%) or one to two times a month (44%). This is very infrequent, but technology is a durable good. Durable goods are not consumed within one use and have an extended product life. Despite the infrequency of this category, students still believed technology could benefit from visual merchandising. Technology was a popular choice for the open-response question on the survey, with 16 out of 38 responses.

Not only were students asked what products they shop for, but they were also asked why they shop. Students are likely to shop for fun, with 73% of respondents saying this activity was likely during any given month. Shopping for fun includes shopping for entertainment or to socialize. When shopping for fun, students' attention may not be completely focused on their surroundings. Visual merchandising has the potential to attract the consumer to a product they otherwise would not have noticed. It is not as easy to convince these shoppers to buy, but since their attention is so scattered, visual merchandising may become an effective tool to convince them to make a purchase.

Most students (43%) answered "Very Likely" to shopping for a specific need or want in any given month. Another 52% responded that they were either "Likely" or "Somewhat Likely." Overall, a majority of students feel as though they set out with some sort of idea in their mind of what they are looking for when they shop. To support this statement, four percent of students said they were unlikely to participate in this kind of shopping behavior.

Figure 3: Need and Want Frequency

In any given month, how likely are you to shop for a specific need or want?
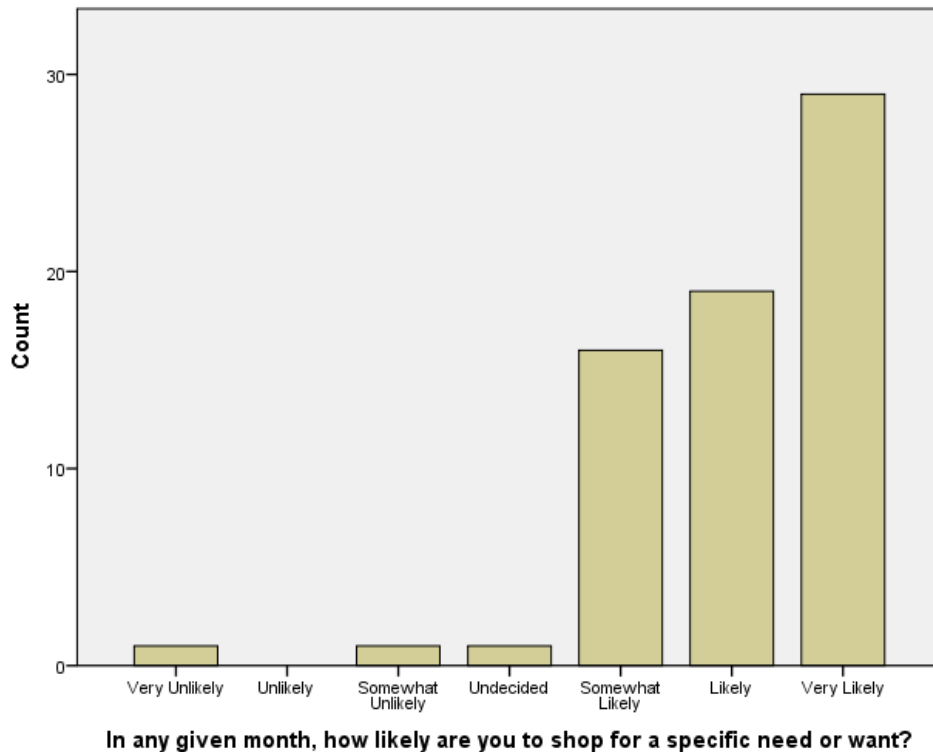
When asked how likely they were to shop to browse, 65% of students answered that they were likely. On the other hand, 31% of students answered that they were unlikely. The key to this set of students is whether they can be swayed to transition from simply browsing to actually purchasing a product. Since these shoppers are paying attention to their surroundings, visual merchandising essentially becomes a critical tool in capturing attention and sales.

Perceptions of Visual Merchandising

The next topic UNH students were surveyed on is their perceptions of visual merchandising. Students were asked to read the following statement and answer a set of nine related questions:

"Visual merchandising is defined as "the display of products which makes them appealing, attractive, accessible, engaging, and enticing to shoppers in a retail store." The term "displays" includes almost every promotional item found in a retail store, such as window and floor displays featuring a particular brand/product (example: mannequins in a clothing store), informational signs (example: "50% Off Nike products!"), and banners. When taking this survey, think of tangible products that you would purchase in a store, as opposed to online."

When asked if students felt as though visual merchandising helped them make every day purchase decisions, 85% said they agreed. Further, when asked if the information visual merchandising provided was valuable, 77% of students agreed. Less than six percent of students disagreed with both of the questions. The overall consensus seems to be UNH students find visual merchandising as something that makes shopping easier for them. Not only is visual merchandising helpful, but it is valuable and its assistance is worth something to UNH students.

It was found that 81% of students agreed visual merchandising attracts them to a brand or product they had not previously considered buying. They also agreed (71%) that visual merchandising distinguishes a brand or product in a positive way. Students have indicated that visual merchandising is a helpful tool to have when shopping. The information provided by visual merchandising also helps 85% of students decide between products or brands. Students reported their future purchase decisions may not be influenced by past visual merchandising.

42% of students agreed they would continue to buy the product in the future, while 57% were either undecided or disagreed.

Despite the help and value visual merchandising has, it does not protect students from buyers' remorse. When asked if visual merchandising helps make educated purchase decisions, 41% disagreed. The attractive displays and enticing visuals do not necessarily mean the consumer has purchased the best product the market has to offer. So while students appear to be grateful for visual merchandising, they also appear to be leery as well.

Relationships Between Variables

Regressions were run to investigate the relationships between responses and the two individual difference measures. No relationship was found for Self-Monitoring or Need for Cognitive Closure. It was also found that students answered inconsistently on the Self-Monitoring questions. As a result, the reliability of the measure was very low ($\alpha = .46$). The Need for Cognitive Closure was answered consistently and had good reliability ($\alpha = .72$), but there was no relationship found between this scale and any other variables.

A series of regressions were run to investigate the relationships between specific areas of interest. Students shopping habits were compared against their perceptions of visual merchandising. The following relationships were found.

- Students who shopped for clothes frequently in any give month are more likely to agree that visual merchandising provides them with valuable information for making purchase decisions. This is a significant relationship; ($F(1, 64) = 4.91$, $P < .05$).

- Students who shopped for technology more frequently are more likely to disagree that visual merchandising attracts them to a brand or product they had not previously considered purchasing. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 64) = 5.53, P < .05)$.

- Students who shopped for technology more frequently are more likely to agree that visual merchandising influences their decisions in the long term. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 62) = 4.60, P < .05)$.

- Students who shopped for technology more frequently are more likely to agree that visual merchandising helps them make educated purchase decisions. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 64) = 6.31, P < .05)$.

- Students who shopped for fun more frequently are more likely to agree that visual merchandising is a useful way to display information about a product or brand. This is a marginally significant relationship; $(F(1, 65) = 2.68, P = .11)$.

- Students who shopped for a specific need or want more frequently are more likely to agree that visual merchandising attracts them to a brand or product they had not previously considered purchasing. This is a marginally significant relationship; $(F(1, 65) = 3.05, P = .09)$.

- Students who shopped for a specific need or want more frequently are more likely to disagree that visual merchandising influences their purchase decisions in the long term. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 63) = 8.15, P < .05)$.

- Students who shopped for a specific need or want more frequently are more likely to disagree that visual merchandising helps them make educated decisions. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 65) = 4.02, P < .05)$.

- Students who shopped to browse stores more frequently are more likely to agree that visual merchandising is a useful way to display information about a brand or product. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 65) = 6.08, P < .05)$.

- Students who shopped to browse stores more frequently are more likely to disagree that visual merchandising helps them make educated purchase decisions. This is a significant relationship; $(F(1, 65) = 5.03, P < .05)$.

It appears that students who shop for technology more frequently welcome the benefits of visual merchandising for items they are already considering purchasing. It does not have the same benefits for products they had not been considering. In this case, those who shopped for technology had positive feelings towards visual merchandising overall. Students who shop for specific needs or wants also appear to be as affected by visual merchandising. For this group of students, visual merchandising attracts them to products they had not been considering, but does not influence their long term purchases. They also believe that visual merchandising does not help them make educated purchase decisions. Similarly, students who browse more frequently do not feel as though visual merchandising helps them make educated decisions, but they do see the benefit in displaying the information visual merchandising provides.

Discussion

The survey results and the retailer interviews have provided us with important insight on students' consumer behavior at UNH. When looking at the students and the retailers, it becomes clear that they both have a want and need for visual merchandising. This helps establish the conclusion that visual merchandising has an important impact on all involved when shopping in Durham.

Overall, the perception students have of visual merchandising is positive. They view visual merchandising as helpful to their decision process, as discovered in the survey data. An important finding from students is that a majority (85%) thought visual merchandising helped them make every day purchase decisions. For the most part, students' perceptions of visual merchandising indicated they were in favor of it. Not only is visual merchandising helpful to them, but it is valuable and useful when shopping. They agreed it distinguished products in a positive way and assisted them in their decisions.

Initial hypotheses were proven wrong by the survey data provided by students. It was anticipated that individual difference scores would result in a significant impact on students' perceptions of visual merchandising. Neither self-monitoring nor need for cognitive closure showed any significance between variables when regressions were run. Instead, it was found that shopping habits influence students' perceptions of visual merchandising. In particular, students who shopped for technology more frequently and who shopped for a need or want more frequently both had strong opinions about how visual merchandising affects them.

Students' view of visual merchandising further impacts the local retailers in Durham, New Hampshire. As expressed by the shop owners in the interviews, visual merchandising is important to the well-being of their businesses. The second retailer interviewed had especially strong positive feelings towards visual merchandising, claiming it was one of the few ways to reach students on campus. From the way the retailer talked about the use of visual merchandising in his store, it became clear that he viewed it as a necessary marketing tool. Also, the observation of the frozen yogurt lounge shows how all different forms of visual merchandising are important by creating an enticing atmosphere for their patrons. These retailers are both successful in

providing students with a message about their store. In return, retailers hope the message is

persuasive enough to generate a sale, which is what visual merchandising is essentially all about.

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Appendix

Survey

Q1 In any given month, how many times do you shop for clothes?

❍ 1-2 times a month
❍ 3-4 times a month
❍ 5 or more times a month
❍ 0 times a month

Q2 In any given month, how many times do you shop for technology?

❍ 1-2 times a month
❍ 3-4 times a month
❍ 5 or more times a month
❍ 0 times a month

Q3 In any given month, how many times do you shop for food?

❍ 1-2 times a month
❍ 3-4 times a month
❍ 5 or more times a month
❍ 0 times a month

Q4 In any given month, how many times do you shop for health and beauty products (including cosmetics, supplements/vitamins, fitness products, and the like)?

❍ 1-2 times a month
❍ 3-4 times a month
❍ 5 or more times a month
❍ 0 times a month

Q5 In any given month, how likely are you to shop for fun?

❍ Very Unlikely
❍ Unlikely
❍ Somewhat Unlikely
❍ Undecided
❍ Somewhat Likely
❍ Likely
❍ Very Likely

Q6 In any given month, how likely are you to shop for a specific need or want?

❍ Very Unlikely
❍ Unlikely
❍ Somewhat Unlikely
❍ Undecided
❍ Somewhat Likely
❍ Likely
❍ Very Likely

Q7 In any given month, how likely are you to shop to browse and to see what products stores have to offer?

❍ Very Unlikely
❍ Unlikely
❍ Somewhat Unlikely
❍ Undecided
❍ Somewhat Likely
❍ Likely
❍ Very Likely

Q8 Please read the following passage and answer the following questions: Visual merchandising is defined as "the display of products which makes them appealing, attractive, accessible, engaging, and enticing to shoppers in a retail store." The term "displays" includes almost every promotional item found in a retail store, such as window and floor displays featuring a particular brand/product (example: mannequins in a clothing store), informational signs (example: "50% Off Nike products!"), and banners. When taking this survey, think of tangible products (or products that you can physically hold) that you would purchase in a store as opposed to online.

Q9 Visual merchandising helps me make every day purchasing decisions.

❍ Strongly Agree
❍ Agree
❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree
❍ Disagree
❍ Strongly Disagree

Q10 Visual merchandising provides me with information I find valuable for making every day purchase decisions.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q11 Visual merchandising helps me compare products I am considering buying.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q12 Visual merchandising attracts me to a brand or product I hadn't previously considered purchasing before entering a store.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q13 Visual merchandising distinguishes a brand or product from others in the store in a positive way.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q14 Visual merchandising helps me recall a particular brand or product at a later date.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q15 Visual merchandising influences my purchase decisions in the long term (you are more likely to purchase a particular brand or product repeatedly because of visual merchandising)

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q16 Visual merchandising is a useful way to display information about a brand or product.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q19 Visual merchandising helps me make educated purchase decisions.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q17 Please list three products you feel visual merchandising would be most effective for.

Self-Monitoring, Q18-Q31

Q18 In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for.

○ True
○ False

Q20 I am often able to read people's true emotions correctly through their eyes.

○ True
○ False

Q21 I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.

○ True
○ False

Q22 In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I'm conversing with.

○ True
○ False

Q23 My powers of intuition are quite good when it comes to understanding others' emotions and motives.

○ True
○ False

Q24 I can usually tell when others consider a joke to be in bad taste, even though they may laugh convincingly.

○ True
○ False

Q25 When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something else that does.

○ True
○ False

Q26 I can usually tell when I've said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes.

○ True
○ False

Q27 I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different things.

○ True
○ False

Q28 I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.

○ True
○ False

Q29 If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person's manner of expression.

○ True
○ False

Q30 Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front.

○ True
○ False

Q31 Once I know what a situation calls for, it's easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly.

○ True
○ False

Need for Cognitive Closure, Q32-Q37

Q32 I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q34 I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q33 I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q35 I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q36 I like to have a place for everything and everything in its place.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q37 I dislike unpredictable situations.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Q38 What is your gender?

○ Male
○ Female

Q42 Are you a UNH student?

○ Yes
○ No

Q39 What is your current class standing?

○ Freshman
○ Sophomore
○ Junior
○ Senior

Q43 What school are you in?

❍ COLA
❍ COLSA
❍ WSBE
❍ CEPS
❍ CHHS
❍ Thompson School

Q44 If taking this survey for a class, please list your name and class title.