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An Investigation Of Mannequins' Effect On Consumer Attitude And Intention

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AN INVESTIGATION OF MANNEQUINS' EFFECT ON CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND
INTENTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of mannequin type on consumers' purchase decisions. Data was collected from a convenience sample of 165 respondents through an online survey to measure the variables of envisioning, consumer attitude toward the display, and purchase intention in their relationship to mannequin type. Hypothesis 1, 2, and 3 were confirmed, confirming the conceptual model and the overall investigation into whether mannequin type effects consumer purchase decisions. Mannequin type was found to have a significant effect on envisioning, and the relationships between envisioning and consumer attitude toward the display and between attitude and purchase intention were found to positively correlate. Although hypothesis 4 was not supported, and self-image congruence was found not to have a moderating effect on the relationship between mannequin type and envisioning, it did have a main effect on envisioning. Overall, the study provides insight into the previously unstudied factor of mannequin type in consumer purchase decisions and provides a platform for further research and investigation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 JUSTIFICATION	3
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
2.1 VISUAL MERCHANDISING.....	4
2.2 MANNEQUINS	5
2.3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	7
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES.....	12
3.1 MANNEQUIN TYPE AND ENVISIONING	12
3.2 ENVISIONING AND CONSUMER ATTITUDE.....	13
3.3 CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION	14
3.4 SELF IMAGE CONGRUENCE AS A MODERATOR	15
CHAPTER 4 METHOD.....	18
4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	18
4.2 SURVEY DESIGN	18
4.3 EXPLANATION OF MEASURES.....	21
CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	23
5.1 ANALYSIS.....	23

5.2 HYPOTHESIS TEST RESULTS	25
CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION.....	28
6.1 MANNEQUIN TYPE AND ENVISIONING	28
6.2 ENVISIONING AND CONSUMER ATTITUDE.....	30
6.3 CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION	30
6.4 SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE AS A MODERATOR.....	31
CHAPTER 7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	33
7.1 LIMITATIONS	33
7.2 FURTHER RESEARCH	33
7.3 CONCLUSION	36
REFERENCES	37
APPENDIX A – SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	39
APPENDIX B – EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS.....	42
APPENDIX C – IRB APPROVAL	45

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Definition of Mannequin Type	7
Table 4.1 Measurements	22
Table 5.1 Respondents' Gender and Age	24
Table 5.2 Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses	17
Figure 4.1 Three Mannequin Types.....	20
Figure 5.1 Self-image Congruence as a Moderator	26

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every time a customer shops, he or she is exposed to various sensory stimuli in the store environment that may subconsciously affect the way he or she makes purchase decisions. A significant amount of research has been done to understand this relationship by identifying the stimuli that affect customer purchase decisions in-store (Sen, Block, & Chandran, 2002). Thus, many companies have begun learning how to tailor these stimuli in their stores to create a brand-appropriate store image and attract their customers to both enter the store and make a purchase. Previous research findings suggest that visual merchandising stimuli such as lighting, music, and smell affect consumers' store choice behavior and their buying behavior (Park, Jeon, & Sullivan, 2015). However, one of these important stimuli, mannequins, have been overlooked in most studies despite their ability to affect customer purchase behavior.

Visual merchandising involves visual stimuli such as window display, mannequins, color presentation, signage, and lighting that can have a significant impact on customers (Lanjewar, 2014; Law, Wong, & Yip, 2012). Mannequins specifically have an ability to influence customers in a more direct way than the other stimuli by directly showing consumers how clothing looks on a human body and allowing them to envision themselves in the mannequin's place. A consumer may be drawn to the clothing on the mannequin, the way the clothing looks on the mannequin, or the mannequin itself

(Schneider, 1997). Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of mannequins on consumer purchase behavior and have found that consumers often look to mannequins first for style inspiration for how they should dress (Hefer & Cant 2013; Jain, Sharma, & Narwal, 2012). In these studies, participants in focus groups stated that mannequins influence their decisions to purchase specific outfits by giving them ideas for putting together outfits, allowing them to picture the outfit on, and providing fit information (Hefer & Cant 2013; Jain et al., 2012). Mannequins have become an important visual merchandising element in retail stores due to their ability to catch the eye of potential shoppers and visually provide fit and style information. Particularly in window displays, mannequins play a critical role in establishing a store's brand identity in the mind of the consumer and triggering their interest in the store or a product, which may lead to a purchase (Park et al., 2015). However, there has been almost no research done on the different types of mannequins and their comparative effectiveness on consumer purchase decisions. One of the leading textbooks on visual merchandising, Pegler (2006), breaks mannequins into categories by differing levels of realism. Based on Pegler (2006), this study examines the effects of three different types of mannequins- realistic, semi-realistic, and abstract- on apparel shoppers' response. Realistic mannequins are the most traditional form and the most detailed, including full facial features and minute details such as natural skin and hair colors. A semi-realistic mannequin is still humanistic but more exaggerated and decorative, for example, having an unrealistic hair color or body color, while abstract mannequins are the least detailed and most artistic in form (Pegler, 2006).

1.1 JUSTIFICATION

Understanding the various types and styles of mannequins available in today's retail environments and their potential influences on consumers' shopping experience is critical. Despite the importance and ubiquitous usage of mannequins in the fashion industry, there has been a lack of empirical research done on the different types of mannequins and their comparative effectiveness. The purpose of this study is to understand different types of mannequins' effect on customers' purchase decisions. These findings will help the researcher discover whether one type of mannequin is more influential on these consumers' purchase decisions than others. Through this study, retailers can gain insight to their customer's perspective and develop visual merchandising strategies that enhance their customer's loyalty and purchases.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Visual merchandising refers to the presentation of a store and its merchandise through the use of mannequins, layout, signage, and lighting (Lanjewar, 2014; Law et al., 2012). Consumers perceive these sensory stimuli in retail settings and respond based on their personal preferences. Visual merchandising places the merchandise in an aesthetically pleasing context and presents it in a way aimed at converting spectators into prospective shoppers and ultimate buyers of the product (Park et al., 2015). Visual merchandising displays are often referred to as a “silent sales person” because they provide consumers with information through visual mediums. A great deal of communication takes place between the retailer and the consumer through the use of visual merchandising in terms of the store’s interior design, layout, atmospherics, merchandising, etc. (Hefer & Cant, 2013) The purpose of visual merchandising goes beyond simply décor- it seeks to increase sales by drawing shoppers into the store with an enticing window display, then encourage them to remain in the store and purchase by creating a positive experience with the interior layout and displays (Jain et al., 2012). A study by Law et al. (2012) illustrates the ability of visual merchandising to induce the desired affective response of consumers and enhance purchase probability. According to

their research, an effective visual design should consist of an appropriate degree of new and surprising elements in order to induce affective pleasure.

In a focus group study by Hefer and Cant (2013), participants agreed that their buying behavior is influenced on a subliminal level based on the quality of visual merchandising displays and their personal preferences. They stated that visual merchandising displays aid in the final stages of their decision-making regarding the purchasing of a specific product. In the end, the study found that when visual merchandising displays are well designed and logical, the participants tended to be attracted to the section of products that were emphasized in the display, but personal preferences such as color, textures, styles, sizes, budgetary constraints, etc. also have a great effect on the buying behavior of the consumers (Hefer & Cant, 2013). In one study exploring the impact of mannequins in visual merchandising, Jain et al. (2012) found that 42% of women chose which store to enter in a mall based on their window displays. This study concluded that women in particular give a lot of attention to what product is being displayed on mannequins and approximately 45% of the women surveyed said that they often get ideas of what clothing they would like to buy only after looking at the mannequin displays.

2.2 MANNEQUINS

Mannequins can be defined as “an assembled model of the human body used by retailers to demonstrate their products, especially to exhibit the draping of apparel” (Jain et al., 2012). The concept of mannequins is an ancient one, beginning with royalty using lifelike sculptures to display their clothing and the common European practice in the

1300's of dressing dolls in miniature copies of the newest fashions to distribute to shoppers overseas in America. The modern idea of using a full-bodied mannequin for retail displays began in France in 1870 in the midst of the Industrial Revolution as modern retailing practices began to develop. These first life-size mannequins were created to be a realistic interpretation of a human wearing the clothing and were made of wax with false teeth, glass eyes, and real hair. Immediately, mannequins demonstrated their ability to attract and influence shoppers. One historian stated, "Such was the allure of the then-wax figures that window shopping quickly became a form of entertainment; millions came to stare at a make-believe world frozen in place" (d'Aulaire & d'Aulaire, 1991). Over time, the use of the mannequin in retail displays spread all over the world, taking on many different styles and forms.

Realistic mannequins are the most traditional form and the most detailed. They have full facial features and are proportionally correct to resemble an average human, including even minute details such as natural skin and hair colors. A semi-realistic mannequin is typically proportioned and sculpted like a realistic mannequin but with details that are more exaggerated or decorative, for example, unrealistic hair color or an unnatural body color. Abstract mannequins are the most diverse category since they are meant to be a humanoid decorative piece rather than a literal interpretation of a body. They often do not have to be proportionally correct or have any realistic color or defined facial features (Pegler, 2006) (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1
Definition of Mannequin Type

<i>Mannequin Type</i>	<i>Facial Features</i>	<i>Body Color</i>	<i>Body Proportions</i>
Realistic	Defined facial features, eye color, hair color, and race	Natural skin color	Average human proportions
Semi-realistic	Vague features and no clear eye color, hair color, or race	Unnatural neutral color (e.g. white)	Average human proportions
Abstract	No facial features, eye color, hair color, or defined race	Decorative color (e.g. metallic)	Exaggerated height and length of appendages and/or slimmer than average waist

2.3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.3.1 Envisioning

“Envisioning” can be defined as consumers’ ability to imagine themselves in the clothing being displayed on a mannequin. Envisioning allows the customer to picture themselves in the clothing as they view it on a mannequin, such that they rely on the mannequin to visualize how the displayed clothes would look on their own body and infer a degree of product fit (Lindström et al., 2015). In application to a retail setting, envisioning would refer to the extent to which customers are able to visualize themselves wearing an outfit displayed on a mannequin and how the displayed clothes would look and fit on their own body. According to Anitha and Selvaraj (2010), mannequins provide shoppers with a visualization of whether the product is suitable for them. Lindström et al.

(2015) conducted a study on the presence of mannequin heads' influence on purchase decisions and demonstrated that envisioning influences shoppers' purchase intention. This study investigated one specific element of a mannequin, the presence or absence of its head, and the consequent effect on consumers through two different experiments- comparing the difference in purchase intentions when viewing a headless versus a headed mannequin in-store and online, as well as investigating the consumer's fashion knowledge as a moderating factor. The study found that the presence/absence of a mannequin's head directly influenced the consumers' ability to envision themselves wearing the clothing being displayed.

Studies like Lindström et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of envisioning in visual merchandising. Consider for a moment the presence of an abstract mannequin in a display. With its unrealistic proportions and color and lack of facial features, customers may have trouble envisioning themselves personally wearing the clothing being displayed when looking at such an abnormal body type. It is also possible, however, that the abstractness of the mannequin may allow the customers the ability to mentally substitute themselves in its place. Consider a different extreme- a realistic mannequin with correct body proportions, hair color, eye color, and an identifiable race. One customer with similar features to the mannequin may see that mannequin, immediately acknowledge that it resembles them and, as a result, can easily envision wearing the merchandise. However, a customer with a different hair color, race, etc. may see the same mannequin and immediately disqualify the product because they perceive it as "not for them". In situations such as these, the element of self-image comes into play. How a customer perceives oneself can immediately determine how they view a mannequin and their

consequential purchase behavior (Cohen, 2014). This study will seek to compare how the amount of envisioning possible differs depending on mannequin type and to examine this moderating effect of self-image.

2.3.2 Conceptual Fluency

Another relevant theory in the field of visual merchandising is conceptual fluency. Lee and Labroo (2004) define conceptual fluency as “the ease with which a person perceives and identifies the physical characteristics of a stimulus” and discuss its implication on retail branding. In other words, conceptual fluency asks whether a stimulus fits or seems to belong in a certain context or background. The authors demonstrate that when a target comes to mind more readily and becomes conceptually fluent, as when it is presented in a predictive context or when it is primed by a related construct, participants develop more favorable attitudes toward the target. Lee and Labroo’s (2004) research specifically investigated word order and image order in advertising messages and concluded that their participants’ attitudes toward a product were more favorable when the product had been made more accessible in their memory through a predictive context, regardless of potential moderators like prior knowledge. They concluded through their experiments that conceptual fluency leads to more favorable attitudes toward the product and may also lead to more favorable attitudes toward the brand itself, thus creating loyalty (Lee & Labroo, 2004).

In a retail setting, this theory implies that clothing items come to mind more readily and become conceptually fluent when the display matches the look of the mannequin to the store’s brand image, causing shoppers to develop more favorable attitudes toward the clothing on the mannequin. It has yet to be investigated whether one

kind of mannequin is more prone to produce conceptual fluency. Based on Lee and Labroo's (2004) research, it can be assumed that mannequins are most effective in influencing consumers' attitude when they fit with the consumers' perception of the brand. For example, due to their artistic nature, abstract mannequins are often associated with very high-fashion displays. It would feel very unnatural for consumers to observe a high-fashion abstract display in the window of a discount retailer because the display would not fit with the context of the consumers' perception of the brand. This situation would leave the shopper feeling uncomfortable and confused, not pleased and eager to shop the items featured in the display. Thus, considering the theory of conceptual fluency is critical when retailers choose the mannequin type they will use in their displays since it has such a strong influence on consumers' attitude.

2.3.3 Source Similarity

Yet another theory important to consider in the effect of mannequin types on consumer response is that of source similarity. "Source", in this case, refers to a person who tries to convey some messages to persuade audience, most likely measured as "attitude" toward to message, while "proximity" (or similarity) of the source group refers to how close – physically, emotionally, psychologically, or otherwise – a participant feels to the source of information (Gopinath & Nyer, 2008). In one study, Gopinath and Nyer (2008) found that other members with close proximity to an individual have significant power to persuade that individual, while a study by Simon, Berkowitz, and Moyer (1970) concluded that communicators (i.e. store mannequins) who are perceived as similar to their audiences are more likely to affect persuasion and attitude change than those sources who are seen as dissimilar.

In visual merchandising, different types of mannequins could be considered different types of sources with differing similarity or proximity to the consumer. The previous studies on source similarity (Gopinath & Nyer, 2008; Simon et al., 1970) suggest that a mannequin which a consumer perceives as similar or in close proximity to himself would be more likely to persuade an individual and affect an attitude change toward the displayed clothing. Thus, research could examine how the mannequins' differences affect customers' responses (e.g., purchase intention etc.). Based on this theory, it could be assumed that realistic mannequins who appear similar to a consumer would be the most influential in affecting an attitude change. However, since all individual consumers look unique, it would be impossible for a retailer to use realistic mannequins that resemble all of their potential customers. The challenge for retailers lies in how to use the principles from this theory and find a mannequin that a wide group of customers could perceive as similar to themselves to best influence their purchase behavior. The theory of source similarity works together with the concepts of envisioning and conceptual fluency to support this paper's objective to investigate how the differing types of mannequins affect customer purchase decisions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

3.1 MANNEQUIN TYPE AND ENVISIONING

Any mannequin in a display will, to some degree, allow for envisioning. The previously mentioned research that has been conducted on the effectiveness of mannequins on envisioning seems to suggest that mannequins with more realistic features and proportions have the ability to positively affect consumer purchase decisions. (Anitha & Selvaraj, 2010; Cohen, 2014; Lindström et al., 2015). While clothing retailers usually use mannequins with idealized, rather than average, body-types and proportions, Sen et al., (2002) suggests that in order to communicate the true fit and look of the item to customer it would be better to use realistic mannequins that more closely reflect the dimensions and proportions of the store's major target market. Similarly, Anitha and Selvaraj (2010) conclude that people can envision themselves in outfits worn by mannequins only if they can relate to the mannequin, suggesting that semiabstract and abstract mannequins may not be as successful as a more realistic mannequin type in encouraging customer purchases. However, it could also be argued that a mannequin that is too realistic will inhibit a customer from envisioning because the mannequin's features are too different from the customer's own and the customer can no longer relate to the mannequin. Because of this, the moderating effect of self-image congruence must also be

considered when investigating the relationship between mannequin type and envisioning. Increasing a customer's ability to envision is critical for retailers since it is theorized that a stronger ability to envision wearing the merchandise will translate into greater purchase intentions for merchandise displayed (Sen et al., 2002). These previously mentioned studies suggest that a consumer's ability to envision is partially determined by the type of mannequin being used. This study seeks to understand whether different mannequin types will affect consumers' ability to envision.

H1- Different types of mannequins have different influences on envisioning.

3.2 ENVISIONING AND CONSUMER ATTITUDE

The next relationship that must be considered is the one between envisioning and consumers' attitude. Attitude in this case can be defined as the degree of affective response elicited by visual merchandising (Anitha & Selvaraj, 2010). The studies conducted by both Sen et al. (2002) and Anitha and Selvaraj (2010) discuss envisioning's ability to influence consumers' thoughts about the display and merchandise as well as their ultimate purchase decisions, so it is understood that envisioning would be capable of affecting consumers' attitudes. The previously mentioned theory of source similarity, the idea that communicators who are perceived as similar to their audiences are more likely to affect attitude change, supports this hypothesized relationship between envisioning and attitude (Gopinath & Nyer, 2008). Based on this theory, if a consumer can relate to a mannequin as similar to himself, he will not only be able to envision himself in the clothing but will also develop a positive attitude toward the clothing due to his perceived connection to the mannequin. Thus, consumers' self-image congruence and envisioning play a direct role in the consumers' attitude. Based on the previous research, it can be

seen that mannequins have the ability to influence consumers' thoughts about the display and merchandise as well as their ultimate purchase decisions (Anitha & Selvaraj, 2010; Sen et al., 2002). This study will seek to discover whether a consumer's attitude toward a display will be positively affected by their ability to envision.

H2- Envisioning is positively associated with consumer's attitude toward the display.

3.3 CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Finally, the customers' attitude toward the display can play an important role in purchase decisions. Attitude, the affective response elicited by visual merchandising, often influences behavior in the form of shopping style and purchase intention. Purchase intention can be defined as simply the willingness of a customer to buy a certain product. A study by Park et al. (2015) hypothesized that visual merchandising cognition effects brand salience and attitude toward visual merchandising, which in turn effects consumer attitude toward the display. This study concluded that environmental factors such as visual merchandising may impact consumers' internal responses, and subsequently those responses affect consumer behavior. Park et al. (2015) found that consumers are more likely to purchase if they have a favorable attitude toward the brand and claimed that a consumer's perception of a brand is key to the formation of their purchase intention. A study by Law et al. (2012) asserted that the degree of consumer response to stimuli is interactive and hypothesized that positive influences on consumer attitude toward the display can affect purchase behavior in terms of involvement, time spent in the store, etc. and can even encourage spending. This study seeks to understand whether positive consumer attitude toward the display can increase consumers' purchase intentions.

H3- Consumer's attitude toward the display will positively affect the purchase intention of the clothing/merchandise on display.

3.4 SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE AS A MODERATOR

The relationship between the mannequin type and envisioning is often moderated by the shopper's self-image. Self-image congruence refers to similarity of consumers' perceptions of themselves and the "personality" of a given product, brand, store, or in this case, mannequin (Kressmann et al., 2006). According to one study conducted by Jamal and Goode (2001), self-image congruence can facilitate positive behavior and attitudes toward products. Respondents in their study with higher levels of self-image congruity were found to be more likely to prefer a brand and enjoy higher levels of satisfaction compared to those with lower of self-image congruity, indicating that self-image congruity can be a predictor of consumers' attitude and satisfaction. In a similar study Kressmann et al. (2006) found self-image congruence to be a foundation for consumers to build a relationship with a brand that results in strong brand loyalty and increased purchase intentions.

This study hypothesizes that the relationship between the three different types of mannequins and the envisioning of the merchandise on display maybe strengthened or weakened depending on the self-image of the shopper and the resulting self-image congruence. In many cases, the envisioning process will come to a stand-still when a shopper cannot relate to a mannequin because it does not look like them, making it difficult to imagine themselves in the outfit on display. This issue most often occurs with realistic mannequins who have a distinct eye color, hair color, or skin color or when they

suggest a certain race. It is easy to understand that a petite Asian woman would not be able to envision herself wearing an outfit that she sees displayed on a plus-size Caucasian mannequin. This same problem can also occur with some shoppers viewing very abstract displays. The mannequin only looks vaguely human without detailed features and often with unrealistic proportions, so the shopper has trouble associating the artistically displayed product with the practical fit of her body. In both scenarios, because the mannequin does not “look like” the shopper, she feels that the product is not for her. Thus, shoppers’ perceptions of themselves and its consistency with their perception of a brand play a critical role in moderating envisioning.

H4- Self-image congruence will moderate the relationship between the mannequin type and envisioning.

Figure 3.1 depicts the model for this conceptual framework

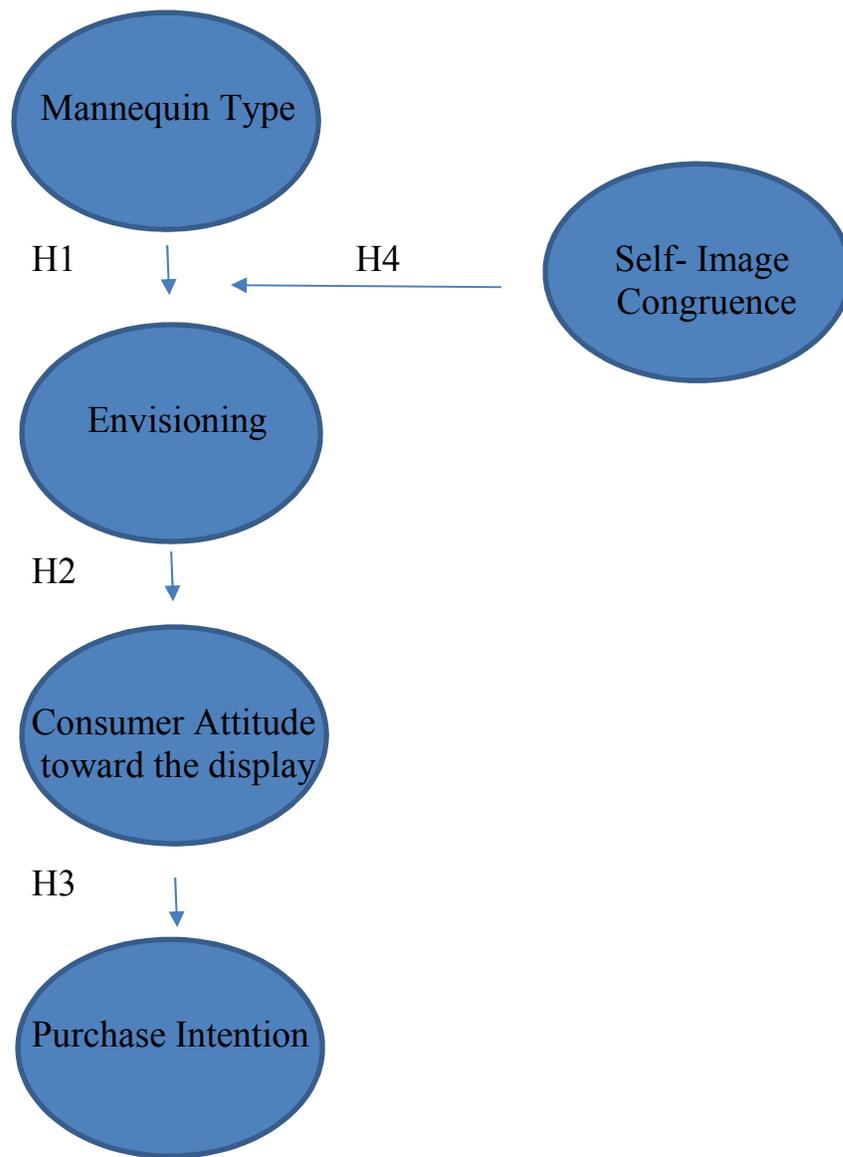


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study examines the effects of the different types of mannequins on consumer purchase behavior. An online survey with different conditions (displays using different types of mannequins) was administered to a convenience sample of shoppers of varying demographics to investigate their preferences. The participants of this survey were recruited from undergraduate college classes in the University of South Carolina's Retailing department. The researcher prepared a solicitation email with a link to the online survey and sent it to several professors who offered their students extra credit if they completed the survey. This study was submitted and approved by the University of South Carolina Human Subject Review Committee before the data collection (Appendix C).

4.2 SURVEY DESIGN

This study conducted an experiment where a window display was identical across conditions, with the exception of the mannequin type being used. Three separate conditions were created, each featuring a different mannequin type wearing identical clothing items in the display, with the survey respondents automatically randomly assigned to one of the three conditions when they clicked on the survey link. At the

beginning of the survey, participants were asked to “imagine that you have decided to visit your local shopping mall. You want to buy a new outfit for yourself, but it is not a pressing need. As you walk through the mall, you notice a window display in which a mannequin showcases an outfit.” A picture of the window display featuring one of the three mannequin types appears next- one male and one female mannequin. The female mannequins are pictured wearing a basic black dress, while the male mannequins are pictured wearing a traditional black suit. These outfits were chosen because they are not limited to one certain price range or brand image to avoid bias. After viewing the mannequins in the display, participants were asked to complete a brief survey.

4.2.1 Experimental Conditions – Three Mannequin Types

For the purpose of this study, the broad concept of mannequin type can be broken into three main categories: realistic, semi-realistic, and abstract. The filters used to divide the mannequins into these categories are the detail of the mannequin’s facial features, the color of the mannequin’s body, and the mannequin’s body proportions. Realistic mannequins will have full defined facial features, a natural flesh-toned color, and an average proportioned body size. A semi-realistic mannequin will have more vague facial features with no details like eye color, a neutral body color, and an average proportioned body size. Last, an abstract mannequin will have no facial features, a non-human body color, and exaggerated body proportions. By breaking the mannequins into three defined categories, this study was able to compare consumers’ differing reactions to each type of mannequin. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three mannequin conditions and asked to indicate their perceptions and purchase intentions in

addition to basic demographic information. Figure 4.1 Illustrates the three different mannequin types.

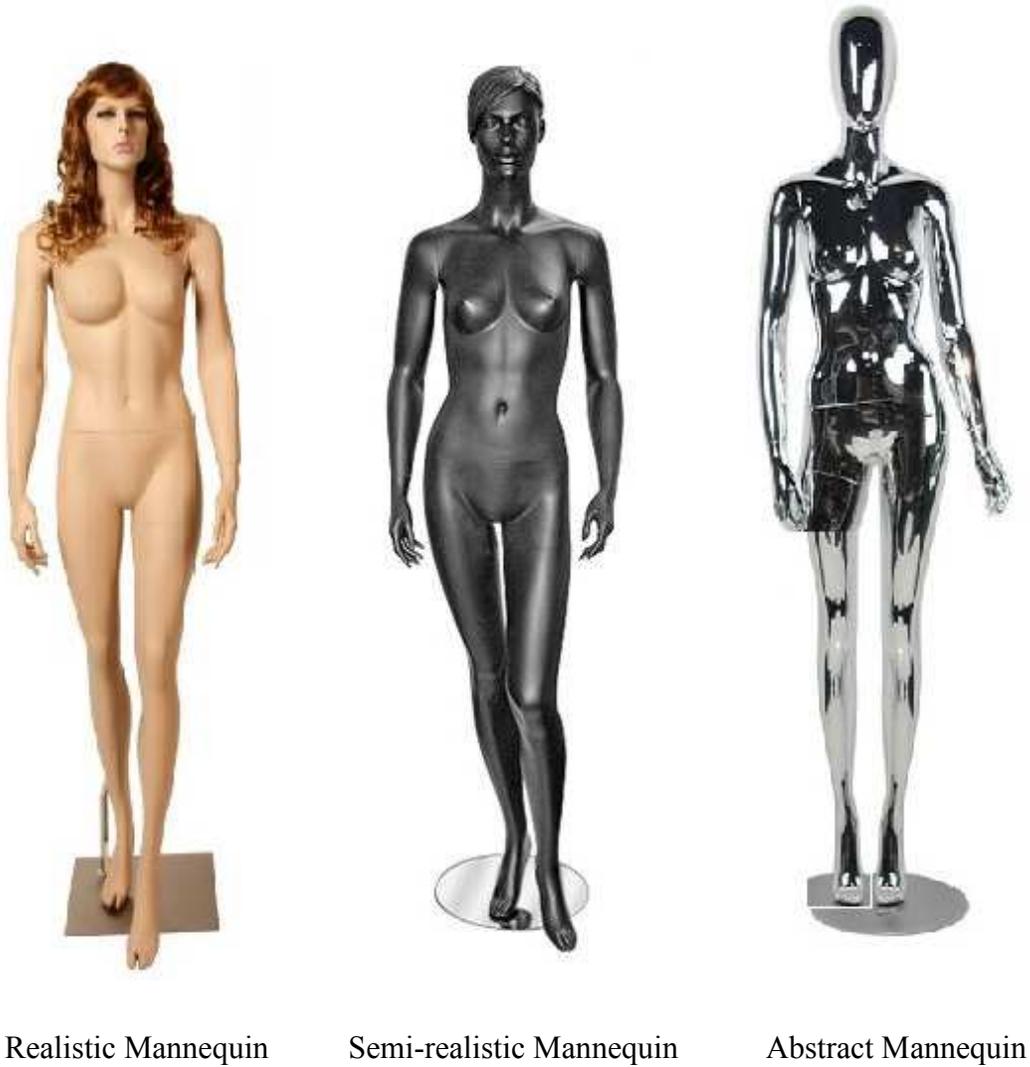


Figure 4.1 Three Mannequin Types

4.3 EXPLANATION OF MEASURES

After viewing the displays, the participants were asked to answer questions on a Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree) regarding the extent to which they agree/disagree with statements about their ability to envision, their attitudes toward the different mannequins, and their purchase intentions. These responses were statistically analyzed to discover if one type of mannequin could be proven more effective at influencing consumer purchase behavior.

Each of the questions included in the study were adapted from previously mentioned studies. The survey begins with questions measuring the participants' ability to envision (e.g. I can imagine how I would look in the outfit; I can envision myself in the outfit) from the study conducted by Sen et al. (2002) about window displays' effect on consumer shopping decisions. The measures for self-image congruence were adapted from Cohen (2014) and Law et al. (2012) on visual merchandising and consumers' affective responses (e.g. When buying clothes, I look at the mannequins to give me ideas about how I should dress; the mannequin looks similar to me) (Table 4.1).

Consumers' attitudes and purchase intention were assessed using items from Park et al. (2015) (e.g. The window display is appealing) and Lindström et al. (2015), respectively (Table 4.1). To gain insight into the respondents' shopping habits, the survey asked how often consumers look to mannequins for inspiration, what type of retailers they normally shop, and what type of retailer the respondent believed the window display they saw would belong in. An optional open-ended question asking participants to share their thoughts on the display was added to collect qualitative data and observe whether

any trends emerged. Finally, demographic information was collected, including the respondents' age, gender, ethnicity, and highest level of education completed.

Table 4.1
Measurements

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Source</i>
Envisioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can imagine how I would look in the outfit - I can envision myself wearing the outfit - The mannequin helps me picture what the outfit would look like on me 	- Sen et al. (2002)
Self-Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The mannequin looks similar to me - I can identify with the mannequin - I have a lot in common with the mannequin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cohen (2014) - Law et al. (2012)
Consumer Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The window display is pleasing - The window display is appealing - I like this window display 	- Park et al. (2015)
Purchase Intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I would like to buy the outfit on display - The display makes me want to buy the outfit - When I intend to make a purchase, the display helps my decision 	- Lindström et al. (2015)

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Because this study seeks to compare three independent groups, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether any significant differences in envisioning exists among the three experimental conditions (H1) and whether self-image congruence moderates the relationship between mannequin type and envisioning (H4). The relationship between envisioning and attitude (H2) and the link between attitude and purchase intention (H3) was tested by examining correlations.

5.1 ANALYSIS

5.1.1 Sample

165 completed surveys were collected from the convenience sample of undergraduate students from the University of South Carolina's Retailing department. The respondents were made up of 83% females (137 respondents) and 17% males (28 respondents). The majority of survey respondents were also self-labeled as non-Hispanic white (77%), followed by African American (12.7%) and Asian/ Asian American (4.8%). Because the sample was composed of students, the respondents ranged in age from 18-34 years old, and were primarily 21 (29%) or 20 (23%) years old. Table 5.1 summarizes the age and gender of the respondents.

Table 5.1

Respondents' Gender and Age

Item	<i>n</i>	% of Sample
Gender:		
Male	28	17
Female	137	83
Age:		
18	12	7.3
19	26	15.8
20	38	23
21	48	29
22	26	15.8
23	8	4.8
>23	7	4.2

5.1.2 Manipulation Check

Before hypotheses were tested, a manipulation check was conducted to determine whether consumers' perceptions of the three mannequin types' varying levels of realism differed enough for the purposes of this study. The respondents were asked how realistic they felt that the mannequin they saw was in terms of detail (e.g. facial features, color, etc.). The three conditions were found to be significantly different by one-way ANOVA ($F(2,162) = 12.774, p < .001$). A post hoc test was conducted to discover how the three types varied and which of the three was perceived as the most realistic. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the mean score for realistic mannequins differed significantly from the semi-realistic mannequins ($p = .029$) and abstract mannequins ($p < .001$), and that the means of the semi-realistic mannequins and abstract mannequins

differed significantly ($p = .037$). This post hoc test revealed that realistic mannequins ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .96$) were perceived as the most realistic, followed by the semi-realistic mannequins ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.02$) and abstract mannequins ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.12$) as the least realistic.

5.2 HYPOTHESIS TEST RESULTS

5.2.1 Mannequin Type and Envisioning

To test hypotheses 1 and 4, a two-way ANOVA was conducted with the mannequin type and self-image congruence as the factors and envisioning as the dependent variable. The sample was divided into two groups: one with high self-image congruence ($M = 5.15$, $n = 83$) and the other with low self-image congruence ($M = 4.22$, $n = 82$) using a median split.

H1- Different types of mannequins have different influences on envisioning.

The level of envisioning with each of the three conditions ($n = 55$ for each group) were found to be significantly different ($F(1,159) = 3.79$, $p = .025$). Thus, H1 was supported. A post hoc test was then conducted to discover how the amount of envisioning varied between the three different conditions. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the mean score for the semi-realistic mannequins differed significantly from the abstract mannequins ($M_{\text{semi-realistic}} = 4.92$, $M_{\text{abstract}} = 4.36$, $p = .019$). The level of envisioning with realistic mannequins was not found to be significant when compared to semi-realistic mannequins ($M_{\text{realistic}} = 4.77$, $M_{\text{semi-realistic}} = 4.92$, $p = .751$) or abstract mannequins ($M_{\text{realistic}} = 4.77$, $M_{\text{abstract}} = 4.36$, $p = .111$).

H4- Self-image will moderate the relationship between the mannequin type and envisioning.

The moderating effect of self-image congruence on the relationship between mannequin type and envisioning was not significant ($F(2, 159) = 1.024, p = .362$). Thus, H4 was not supported (See Figure 5.1). Instead, although not hypothesized, self-image was found to have a main effect on envisioning instead of a moderating effect. The main effect of self-image congruence on envisioning was significant ($F(1, 159) = 29.321, p < .001$).

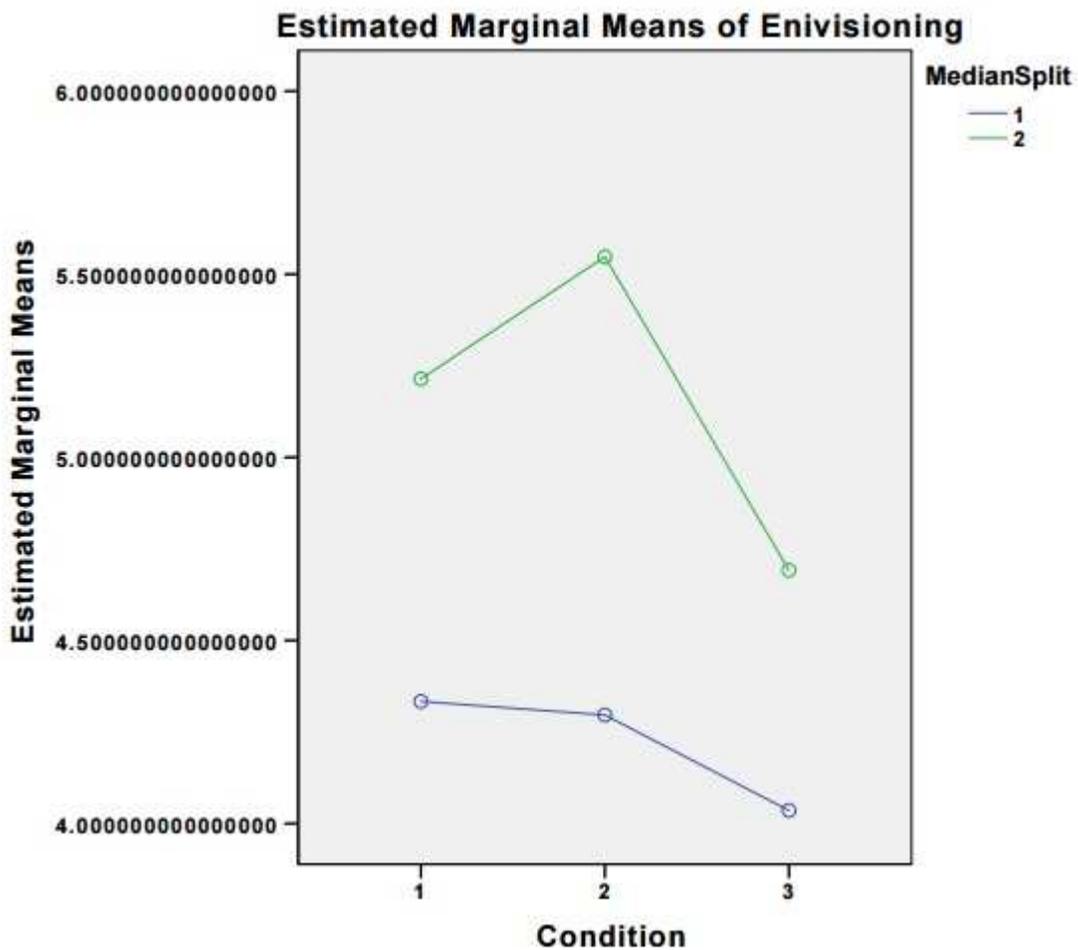


Figure 5.1 Self-Image Congruence as a Moderator

5.2.2 Envisioning, Consumer Attitude, and Purchase Intention

H2- Envisioning is positively associated with consumer's attitude.

Hypothesis 2 was testing using the mean responses to the survey questions regarding envisioning and consumer attitude toward the display through Pearson correlation (r) analysis. There was a moderately strong positive relationship between envisioning and consumer attitude toward the display ($r = .40, p = .005$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

H3- Consumer's attitude toward the display will positively affect the purchase intention of the clothing/merchandise on display.

Hypothesis 3 was testing using the mean responses to the survey questions regarding consumer attitude toward the display and purchase intention through Pearson correlation (r) analysis. There was a strong positive relationship between consumer's attitude and their purchase intention ($r = .725, p = .005$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported. Table 5.2 illustrates the correlations between the variables.

Table 5.2
Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4
Envisioning (1)	4.69 (1.21)				
Attitude (2)	4.63 (1.53)	.401**			
Purchase Intention (3)	4.14 (1.27)	.493**	.725**		
Self-image Congruence (4)	3.08 (1.35)	.527**	.280**	.379**	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

6.1 MANNEQUIN TYPE AND ENVISIONING

Because Hypothesis 1 was supported, this study is able to demonstrate that mannequin type can affect envisioning. The data revealed that consumers had the highest levels of envisioning when viewing a semi-realistic mannequin compared to a realistic mannequin or abstract mannequin, and that there was no significant difference in envisioning between the realistic and abstract mannequins and between realistic and semi-realistic mannequins. Based on the literature review, this result confirms the researcher's main hypothesis. The variable of envisioning investigates the extent to which customers are able to visualize themselves wearing an outfit displayed on a mannequin and how the displayed clothes would look and fit on their own body. Although it was not found to be statistically significant, the mean for semi-realistic condition was the highest, indicating that it could be the most effective in influencing envisioning, possibly because of their realistic form and a lack of distinguishing detail that could introduce bias.

Semi-realistic mannequins provide consumers with a proportionate body size, a neutral body color, and the illusion of a face without specific facial details, allowing consumers to view a human form that could essentially be any human. Instead of viewing a distinct hair color, eye color, and race like with a realistic mannequin, semi-realistic mannequins serve as more of a blank canvas where consumers of virtually any genetic

makeup could envision themselves in the mannequin's place. This result also suggests that consumers may be deterred by defined facial features and body color or an unrealistic proportion and body color. It seems from the study that consumers who viewed the realistic mannequin may have had hindering in the envisioning process due to the bias of the mannequin's defined hair color, eye color, and race, while consumers who viewed the abstract mannequin had a hindrance in the envisioning process because of the mannequins more alien form and metallic body color. This type of information could potentially be valuable to retailers when choosing a mannequin type for their stores.

To further investigate consumers' perceptions of the different mannequin types, an open-ended question asking respondents to share their thoughts on the display was added to collect qualitative data. Many of the respondents chose to address their feelings toward a particular mannequin type in the open-ended time and provided feedback that supported this study's findings. Respondents who saw the abstract mannequins in the display stated that the store "seems to feature clothing specifically designed for special occasions/formal wear" and that "the metallic color makes it look a little flashier and fancier". Another said "it is bare and uninteresting. The (abstract) mannequins do not appear lifelike and there is nothing to draw my eye". Respondents who saw the realistic mannequins in the display stated that the "mannequins are outdated in my opinion" and "I would rather not have a realistic looking mannequin. I think it gives it a sort of unclean look when adding hair". One humorously added "the mannequins are scary!", while one provided the unpopular opinion to "make it as realistic as possible". The only respondent who provided feedback about the semi-realistic mannequin type said "I personally like when mannequins' don't have heads because it focuses more on the outfit than the overall

appearance of the mannequin. Sometimes people focus more on the features of the mannequin than the actual merchandise”.

6.2 ENVISIONING AND CONSUMER ATTITUDE

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed, demonstrating that higher levels of envisioning do lead to a more positive consumer attitude toward the display. Some of the theories previously mentioned in this study, such as source similarity, confirm this idea. Source similarity asserts that communicators (i.e. store mannequins) who are perceived as similar to their audiences are more likely to affect persuasion and attitude change than those sources who are seen as dissimilar. Thus, the mannequin that a consumer views as most similar to herself, and creating the greatest amount of envisioning, will have the greatest potential to affect her attitude. This positive relationship demonstrates the importance of envisioning in the greater field of visual merchandising and the business perspective of retailing. Companies want their consumers to have positive attitudes toward their product, store, and overall brand and will seek out actionable ways to make their consumers’ attitudes more positive. By demonstrating this correlation between envisioning and consumer attitude toward the display and the difference in envisioning based on mannequin type, this study provides retailers with practical ways to increase their consumers’ positive attitudes- it lies simply in their choice of mannequin.

6.3 CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Hypothesis 3 was confirmed as the data demonstrated a strong positive correlation between consumer attitude toward the display and purchase intention. This result confirmed the findings of several previously mentioned studies such as Park et al. (2015)

and Law et al. (2012) who found in their own research that their consumers were more likely to purchase if they had a favorable attitude toward the brand, claiming that a consumer's perception of a brand is primary element in the formation of their purchase intention. Thus, this study's conceptual model can be confirmed.

6.4 SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE AS A MODERATOR

This study hypothesized that the relationship between the three different types of mannequins and the envisioning of the merchandise on display maybe strengthened or weakened depending on the self-image of the shopper and the resulting self-image congruence. Self-image congruence refers to similarity of consumers' perceptions of themselves and the “personality” of a given product, brand, store, or in this case, mannequin (Kressmann et al., 2006). Although the moderation test failed, self-image congruence was found to have a main effect on the envisioning process, demonstrating that self-image does have an effect on envisioning.

Self-image congruence could have failed the moderation test for a variety of reasons. It is possible that the design of the method did not properly measure the variable of self-image congruence. The studies by Kressmann et al. (2006) and Jamal and Goode (2001) investigated self-image as a main effect and found that it significantly affected consumers' attitude toward the product, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention. The results of this study's correlation test confirmed the research of Kressmann et al. (2006) and Jamal and Goode (2001) to prove that self-image congruence can facilitate positive behavior and attitudes toward the display. Because self-image congruence was

found to have a main effect instead of a moderating effect, further research could be done to better investigate this variable and its effect on envisioning and mannequin type.

CHAPTER 7

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation to this study was the diversity of the sample. Because the respondents were recruited through a convenience sample of undergraduate students at the university, there was not a large variety in the ethnicity and age of the respondents. This lack of diversity could potentially leave portions of the population under-represented in the study. Future research could include a larger and more diverse population to further examination into how mannequin type affects consumers differently based on gender, race, or age.

7.2 FURTHER RESEARCH

7.2.1 Brand Image

A factor that must be considered alongside envisioning is the company's brand image. Once the shopper has cleared the hurdle of self-image and can effectively envision herself in the clothing, the process can still be hindered by the moderating factor of brand image. Visual merchandising has the ability to both communicate information about the brand and differentiate its merchandise from competitors who sell comparable products, which can be an effective tool to for increasing purchase intentions (Park et al., 2015). Consumers have expectations about a brand based on their visual display and vice versa;

so, when displays do not meet their expectations of the brand, they must re-evaluate their assumptions. Due to the theory of conceptual fluency, it has been shown that mannequins are most effective in effecting purchase intention when they are primed by a related construct by matching the look of the mannequin to the store's brand image. If a mannequin appears to be out of place or inconsistent with the shopper's perception of the store's brand image, the display will affect the shopper's attitude negatively instead of creating the desired result of increasing purchase intention.

One can imagine how absurd a high-fashion display would look in the window of a discount retailer and vice-versa. Thus, when choosing a mannequin to use in their displays, a retailer must carefully consider the mannequin's fit with the store's other visual merchandising elements and with the brand identity. If a store desires an industrial feel, perhaps a metallic mannequin would keep the clothing in a related enough context to make the clothing displayed more conceptually fluent. In the same way, a retailer that primarily carries plus-size clothing might use a plus-size mannequin, as opposed to a size zero mannequin, to maintain consistency with the store's brand image. In every visual merchandising choice that a retailer makes, the concept of conceptual fluency should be considered to increase a consumer's attitudes toward the product and the brand itself. This theory of conceptual fluency goes hand-in-hand with the concept of envisioning. When a display uses a mannequin that is not conceptually fluent with the display it can serve as a hindrance to the envisioning process (Anitha and Selvaraj, 2010). Because of this potential result, brand image must also be considered a moderating factor in this process.

7.2.2 Racial Differences

One question raised during the conduction of this study was whether a consumer's race could influence their ability to envision. Since realistic mannequins have a defined race, it was hypothesized that if a shopper's race differed from the race of the mannequin the envisioning process could be hindered. During the survey's pre-test, a sample of consumers of non-Caucasian race were gathered to compare their levels of envisioning when viewing a Caucasian mannequin to those of Caucasian race viewing the same mannequin. Contrary to the hypothesis, the pre-test actually showed higher levels of envisioning in non-Caucasian consumers than in Caucasian consumers viewing a Caucasian mannequin. However, the sample size of the non-Caucasian consumers was extremely small, which could have introduced error to the test. In the future, this test could be conducted on a far larger scale to better investigate how race plays a role in the envisioning process.

7.2.3 Mannequins and Body Image

To further investigate consumers' perceptions of the different mannequin types, an open-ended question asking respondents to share their thoughts on the display was added to collect qualitative data. Nearly half of the respondents who chose to answer the open-ended question focused on the body proportions of the mannequins. Multiple respondents commented on the fact that window displays rarely feature a variety of body types. One respondent said "as a plus size female I often think mannequins are unrealistic and not relatable, I have to make my decision by trying on the clothes," while another said "the mannequin is not my height so the dress would be longer on me. This inhibits my ability to picture the outfit on me". This idea of body proportions effecting the perceived realism

of a mannequin is often debated in both the retailing industry and in the mass media. This idea could be a potential starting point for additional research in the areas of envisioning and consumer purchase decisions.

7.3 CONCLUSION

Overall, this study confirmed the researcher's hypotheses and conceptual model. The results of this study indicate that mannequin types can influence consumer purchase decisions. With this knowledge, retailers can better understand how their choice of mannequin affects their consumers and discover whether one type of mannequin is more influential on these consumers' purchase decisions than others. Through this study, retailers can gain insight to their customer's perspective and develop visual merchandising strategies that enhance their customer's loyalty and purchases.

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APPENDIX A – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Dear participant,

My name is Hannah Shealy, a graduate student in the Retail department at the University of South Carolina. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting a research study with a purpose of understanding how different mannequin types effect shoppers' purchase decisions. I would really appreciate if you could take a few minutes to complete the survey.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but no personally identifiable information of any respondents will be disclosed in any way. This survey should not take more than 15 minutes to complete. Your completion of this survey will serve as your agreement that you understand the purpose of this study as well as your consent to use your answers in aggregated form.

If you have study related questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at gaunch@email.sc.edu, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Jiyeon Kim at Jkim01@mailbox.sc.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

Thank you very much for your consideration to participate in the survey. I truly appreciate it.

CLICK the link below to take the survey:

SURVEY LINK HERE

With kind regards,

Hannah Shealy
Master's student
Department of Retailing
University of South Carolina, Columbia SC
Email: gaunch@email.sc.edu

Imagine that you have decided to visit your local shopping mall. You want to buy a new outfit, but it is not a pressing need. As you walk through the mall, you notice a window display in which a mannequin showcases an outfit.

(Window display appears next)

1. I can imagine how I would look in the outfit

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

2. I can envision myself wearing the outfit

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

3. When buying clothes, I look at the mannequins to give me ideas about how I should dress

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

4. The mannequin looks similar to me

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

5. I can identify with the mannequin

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

6. The mannequin helps me picture what the outfit would look like on me

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

7. I have a lot in common with the mannequin

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

8. The window display is pleasing

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

9. The window display is appealing

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

10. I like this window display

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

11. I would like to buy the outfit on display

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

12. The display makes me want to buy the outfit

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

13. When I intend to make a purchase, the display helps my decision

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

14. Please share any additional thoughts you have about the display

15. How realistic you do think the mannequin is?

Very Realistic 1 2 3 4 5 Very Abstract

16. Considering the type of the mannequin, this display would likely to belong in the window of what type of retail store (check all that apply): Designer boutique, high-end clothing store, moderate-priced clothing store, mid to low-priced clothing store, discount store

17. Where do you usually shop? (check all that apply): Designer boutique, high-end clothing store, moderate-priced clothing store, mid to low-priced clothing store, discount store

18. What is your age: Under 18, 18-25, 25-35, 35-45, 45-55, 55+

19. What is your gender: Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to answer

20. How do you describe yourself? (please check the one option that best describes you): American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Asian or Asian American, Middle Eastern, European, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Non-Hispanic White, Prefer not to answer

21. What is the highest year of school you completed: Some high school, High school graduate, Some college or technical school, College graduate, Graduate school

APPENDIX B – EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS



Realistic Mannequin Window Display



Semi-realistic Mannequin Window Display



Abstract Mannequin Window Display

APPENDIX C – IRB APPROVAL



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

This is to certify that the research proposal: **Pro00055834**

Title: *An Investigation of Mannequins' Effect of Consumer Purchase Behavior*

Submitted by:

Principal Investigator: Hannah Gaunch
Hospitality, Retail, & Sport Management
Retailing
701 Assembly St
Columbia, SC 29208

was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **6/23/2016**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Arlene McWhorter at arlenem@sc.edu or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa M. Johnson".

Lisa M. Johnson
IRB Manager