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THE FEMALE INNOVATION-GENERATION CONSUMER'S EVALUATION OF TRADITIONAL AND VIRTUAL DISPLAYS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CLOTHING RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

OPSOMMING

Om bemarking strategieë te gebruik wat tegnologie soos virtuele visuele voorstellings van kleding produkte ten toon stel, kan moontlik vir die Suid-Afrikaanse kleding kleinhandelaar 'n mededingende voordeel bied in 'n kompiterende kleding industrie. Baie kleding kleinhandelaars belê deesdae in Omni-kanaal kleinhandel wat die virtuele en fisiese perseel insluit sodat 'n ervaring in beide wêrelde kan plaasvind. Verbruikers van die soogenaamde innovasie-generasie, wat een van die wêreld se invloedrykste verbruikers markte is, toon 'n toenemende belangstelling in elektroniese media en mag moontlik belangstel om kleding produkte elektronies te evalueer sodat hul bepaalde produkte kan oorweeg en opweeg teen ander produkte. Wat presies die voorkeure van hierdie verbruikersmark is ten opsigte van die elektroniese visuele voorstelle en statiese tradisionele visuele tentoostellings is steeds onbekend.

Hierdie studie stel dus ondersoek in oor die elektroniese visuele media wat gebruik kan word deur Suid-Afrikaanse kleding kleinhandelaars met spesifieke verwysing na die Suid Afrikaanse vroulike verbruiker van die innovasie-generasie. Die steekproef van hierdie studie sluit 653 dames van die innovasie-generasie in wat studente was tydens die tweede helfte van 2014 in Johannesburg. Twee visuele stumuli is saamgestel wat die respondente beoordeel het. Een van die stimuli was 'n statiese tradisionele visuele voorstelling wat op half skaal saamgestel is en die ander visuele stimulus was 'n elektroniese weergawe van die tradisionele visuele voorstelling. Respondente is gevra om beide stimuli te evalueer aan die hand van die emosies wat dit ontlok, sowel as die simboliese waarde wat dit vir hulle dra sodat die totale ervaring van beide opsies geevalueer kon word. Die evaluasie het plaasgevind op universiteit kampusse in Johannesburg en respondente het vraelyste voltooi wat deur veldwerkers terug geneem is nadat die respondente die evaluasie van beide stimuli gedoen het.

Die bevindings van die studie dui daarop dat die respondente steeds die statiese tradisionele visuele stimuli verkies bo die elektroniese tentoonstelling wat beweging en musiek ingesluit het. Desnieteenstaande is daar nie ‘n beduidende verskil tussen die emosies wat die tradisionale visuele stimulus en die elektroniese tentoonstelling ontlok het nie, maar die respondente se voorkeure vir die dimensies van die emosie wat ontlok word deur beide stimuli stem ooreen. Dieselfde is gevind ten opsigte van die simboliese betekenisse wat beide van die visuele stumuli in die repondente se opinie dra.

‘n Liniêre regressie analise wat gedoen is om vas te stel of die emosionele en simboliese aspekte van die stimuli die uiteindelike voorkeur van die respondente beïnvloed, dui daarop dat die ontlokte emosie en simboliek van beide die tradisionele en elektroniese visuele stimuli wel bydrae tot die respondent se voorkeure.

Een van die gevolgtrekings is dus dat dit die kleding kleinhandelaar baat om moeite te doen en strategiese visuele voorstelle saam te stel op ‘n tradisionele en elektroniese manier. Implikasies vir Suid Afrikaanse kleding kleinhandelaars is dat elektroniese visuele tentoonstellings nie net aanlyn kan gebruik word om die fisiese winkel te ondersteun nie, maar dat dit ook benut kan word op die fisiese persele van winkels deur byvoorbeeld elektroniese skerms in die winkel te gebruik om verbruikers met ‘n positiewe ingesteldheid tot die elektroniese wêreld, te vermaak.

ABSTRACT

Using virtual displays in South African clothing retail outlets could be a marketing communication strategy that attracted consumers to products or the actual stores. This marketing communication influences consumers' purchase decisions and consequently enhances the competitiveness of the clothing retailer in a dynamic fashion industry. Thus the use of virtual displays is increasing. Implementing digital and virtual display screens in the visual displays of South African physical retail outlets could appeal to particular consumer segments. The innovation-generation consumer segment is the largest and foremost global consumer segment to date, with massive buying power, and this group's affiliation for the virtual world should not be ignored, as it may prove to be useful when applying omni-channel retailing that stimulates a certain consumer experience. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to report on the evaluation of the female innovation-generation consumer with regard to a static traditional visual display or a virtual representation of the display. Two stimuli (displays) were presented to 653 female respondents from the innovation-generation consumer in Johannesburg (Gauteng). One stimulus was a static traditional visual display and the other a virtual representation thereof which included movement and music. The findings in this paper indicate that although the respondents understood the message of the virtual display and could identify with the symbolic meaning thereof, there is also evidence that the respondents' emotions were evoked by both the stimuli. Nevertheless, it seems that the traditional visual display still seemed to be preferred with regard to the emotions that it evoked, especially regarding pleasure. The paper concludes with recommendations on the use of virtual displays to support South African clothing retailers.

Keywords: Innovation-generation, competitiveness, omni-channel retailing, consumer preferences, purchase intention, consumer experience, traditional clothing display, virtual clothing displays

INTRODUCTION

The South African retail clothing industry is highly competitive, faced with several challenges to remain successful in a dynamic clothing fashion market (Nattrass & Seekings, 2012). In order to stay competitive, marketing communication strategies can be usedthat enable local retailers to apply different retail channels (e.g. the physical store space as well as virtual spaces) in order to enhance a positive consumer experience (Koontz & Gibson, 2002:381–395). Positive consumers' experiences are yielded through engaging the consumers' senses (Desmet & Hekkert, 2007), which in turn influence the consumers' purchase intention (Burkhart, 2012; Kim, 2003:20). A purchase intention implies that a consumer has the desire to purchase a product from the particular retailer (Park et al, 2015:100; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010:553). Visual stimuli in particular have been identified as powerful sources of stimulating consumers' purchase intention in traditional displays as well as in virtual channels (Verhoef et al, 2015). An argument is therefore made that retail stores can consider applying virtual channels that support the physical spaces to stimulate consumers' purchase intentions as a response to what they see in the retail stores..

One of the largest consumer market segments to date is the millennial consumer segment (Ruane & Wallace, 2013; Leen et al, 2012). Millennial generation consumers are also referred to as the innovation-generation consumers (Eastman et al, 2014; Pérez-Luño et al, 2011), due to their love of technology and the virtual world. Consumers of the innovation-generation were born between 1980 and 2000 and currently fall in the age bracket between 16 and 36 years (Faruk et al, 2013:657; Williams & Page, 2011). According to Ruane and Wallace (2013), these consumers have an affinity for online browsing. Consumers of the innovation-generation are not only known for their massive buying power and preference for convenience, but also for their habit of online browsing when they buy fashion merchandise (Ruane & Wallace, 2013:317). Although the innovation-generation consumers' appreciation for the convenience of virtual shopping is well documented, research indicates that they use virtual shopping for only 15% of their purchases (Leen et al, 2012:111). Moreover, it is the female consumers of

the innovation-generation that seem to purchase more clothing than the males of this consumer group (Ruane & Wallace, 2013:316). The larger number of females purchasing clothing, implies that the females of this group probably use virtual channels for information gathering or forming opinions that they then apply to purchase decisions in physical clothing stores. A starting point would be to understand their preferences of the visual stimuli as it is important for retailers to understand in order to create integrated marketing strategies that align with these consumers' preferences.

This authors therefore focus on the female innovation-generation's evaluation of visual displays in a retail environment communicated through two mediums (a static traditional display and a virtual display) in order to determine their preferences towards the different channels used to communicate a visual display. Two objectives are addressed in this paper: 1) to explore the emotions that are evoked when the respondents evaluate a traditional and virtual visual display of a clothing retailer, 2) to explore the symbolic meaning that the respondents derive when evaluating a traditional and virtual display of a clothing retailer. Both these objectives are explored in order to determine the preferences that the respondents have for different media channels (static traditional and virtual).

Next, a literature review is provided that discusses omni-channel retailing with specific reference to visual displays and their role in the connection a consumer can make to the retailer in response to the visual stimuli on an emotional and cognitive level. The research methodology is provided, followed by the findings. Finally, conclusions and recommendations to fashion clothing retailers are provided on how to leverage both these channels to support the preferences of consumers of the innovation-generation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The constantly changing media habits of consumers challenge retailers to rethink and incorporate other ways of informing consumers (i.e. electronic channels, to

support traditional forms of advertising and retailing (Faruk et al, 2013). This could be especially true for the consumers from the innovation-generation, as their expectations of the virtual world and what it can offer are extremely demanding (Leen et al, 2012). Due to the innovation-generation's ability to form opinions of retailers through their experiences of retail stores yielded through different channels or media (Faruk et al, 2013:658), a retail strategy that accommodates traditional and virtual marketing is often required to accommodate these consumers' habits and preferences. An integrated marketing strategy that incorporates a traditional store channel as well as a virtual channel is referred to as omni-channel retailing (Parker & Hand, 2009).

Omni-channel retailing

Multi–channel retailing is concerned with offering merchandise online in addition to the physical stores, and omni-retailing emerged from this phenomenon (Ortis & Casoli, 2009). Rigby (2011:4) defines omni-channel retailing as "an integrated sales experience that melds the advantages of physical stores with the information-rich experience of online shopping". Levy et al (2013:67) highlight that omni-channel retailing is often used to coordinate multi-channel offerings that provide a "seamless experience when using all of the retailers' channels". Retail stores often have online channels that are available to consumers during and after retail hours (Brynjolfsson et al, 2013). However, the use of virtual representations of the image and items in the physical store during retail hours is also increasing (Ortega-S, 2011; Leen et al, 2012). Such virtual representations have the potential to inform and/or inspire the consumer during their shopping experience (Magrath & McCormick, 2013). In this regard, implementing virtual displays to support the displays in the store can be an effective marketing communication medium for visual displays of clothing products, and establishing omni-channel retailing could be suitable for the technologically shrewd consumers from the innovation-generation.

One way to market clothing merchandise to consumers is to provide sensory information such as visual displays, through electronic media as well as in physical outlets (Verhoef et al, 2015; Koontz & Gibson, 2002).

Visual displays A visual display is often used in stores to create a focal point in the store via static displays (e.g. a window display that is already visible outside the store) (Mehta & Chugan, 2013).Visual displays are also used in electronic media to display merchandise (Magrath & McCormick, 2013). The main purpose of visual displays or electronic media is to provide information or inspiration to consumers to facilitate their decision-making (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014). However, the virtual world and the wide variety of stores and marketing material that is available to all consumers on a constant basis can lead to information overload (Dalby, 2012; Riell, 2011). Visual displays should therefore also communicate the retailer's image, which is a combination of the message that the retailer wants to portray and the emotional response the retailers intends to evoke in the consumer (van der Vyver, 2008). Rose (2010:26) points out that any visual imagery is always strategically constructed through practices, technologies and knowledge, which can include the design of visual stimuli.

Designing visual stimuli can be viewed from multiple perspectives. One is from an arts and design perspective where the term visual culture is used to describe the use of visual material to express an idea or emotion to a viewer (Helmers, 2006:1). The design of visual stimuli can also be viewed from a consumer science perspective which includes visual merchandising strategies where displays are designed specifically to stimulate specific consumer groups (Pinzaru et al, 2013). This notwithstanding, Desmet and Hekkert (2007) offer a perspective on visual stimuli that incorporates a design perspective as well as a consumer perspective, thus offering valuable insights into the experience that a consumer might have when a visual stimulus is evaluated. In line with the work of Fiore and Kimle (1997), Desmet and Hekkert (2007) uphold that consumers analyse visual stimuli and consequently experience these stimuli on multiple levels, namely sensory, emotional and symbolic ones. Helmers (2006:22) asserts that this analysis relates to how the viewers read the visual objects/material and this pertains to their visual

literacy levels. In terms of visual displays of clothing stores, these perspectives offer insight into the importance of understanding how a particular group is “reading” visual stimuli in order to “design” an experience for the consumer. The emotions that are evoked are usually the first response a viewer (e.g.a consumer from the innovation-generation) has when experiencing a visual display (Helmers, 2006:9).

Emotions evoked by visual displays Consumers may evaluate visuals on an emotional level if the design elements and principles used in the visuals are strategically planned to be aesthetic and stimulate such evaluations (Park et al, 2015; Clarke et al, 2012; Fiore & Kimle, 1997:48). Distinctive visual imagery can aid consumers in creating emotional connections between the stimuli and the consumer (Clarke et al, 2012).

Emotions can be evoked by visual and atmospheric stimuli and are divided into three categories, which were derived and refined from the work of Hollbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984).These are: pleasure (a positive feeling towards something or feeling that something has beauty), dominance (a feeling of being in control and power) and arousal (a feeling of excitement or awakening) (Park et al, 2015; Clarke et al, 2012:493; Fiore & Kimle, 1997:48; Floyd, 1997). Correspondingly, Hekkert (2006:160) refers to emotional experience when sensory/aesthetic aspects of objects are evaluated. Desmet and Hekkert (2007) explain that pleasant emotions attract people to products that promise to be beneficial, whereas unpleasant emotions will push them away from those that seem to be detrimental for their well-being (state of pleasure or happiness). The notion of attracting consumers towards a product or a store by stimulating their emotions is important for retailers as they may apply this powerful phenomenon to evoke an intended emotion in the target consumer with a visual display.

The consumer’s emotional evaluation of a visual stimulus could influence purchase intention (Kim & Lennon, 2013). By incorporating digital aspects into traditional retail spaces as omni-channel retailing applications, innovation-generation consumers may respond to the visual displays in a more positive and

excited manner (Pinzaru et al, 2013). Moreover, in order to have an experience as a result of the visual stimuli, it is not only the emotions of the consumer that should be influenced, but also the consumer's ability to understand the symbolic meaning of the stimuli (visual display) so that a meaning is connected to the displayed product or even the overall store image (Mover et al, 2012; Ortega-S, 2011:11).

Symbolic meanings of visual displays Law et al (2012:112) suggest that visual components do not only affect consumer behaviour by adding value to displayed merchandise, but may impact consumers from a symbolic and cultural point of view.. The symbolic ideas that may be portrayed through visual displays should include and enhance the customization, character, interactivity and community aspects of the retailer (Leen et al*,* 2012), speaking to the preferences of the consumer target market. Atmospheric stimuli can carry meanings and they may articulate to consumers' symbolic preferences (Desmet & Hekkert; 2007).Symbolic meaning of objects as derived from the work of Hollbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984)include: reality (what is), fantasy (what can be) or entertainment (symbolising amusement). In line with this, Desmet and Hekkert (2007) point out that emotion and symbolic meanings which are derived when a product or object is evaluated are inseparable. These authors explain that a level of meaning is connected to an object or product when the symbolic significance is assigned as a result of the expressive characteristics of products. Similarly, this phenomenon can be applied to the evaluation of visual stimuli such as a static display or a virtual display. In this regard, the symbolic meaning of a display could probably be connected to an image of the store or product.. It is therefore important that retailers use supplementary visuals to reinforce the retailer image and ideologies that align with the preferences of the consumer (Park et al 2015:100; Mover et al, 2012; Ortega-S, 2011:12).

The above discussions on emotions and symbolic meaning imply that if a retailer can measure the success of a r visual display effort against the how a target consumer will experience it. The visual display (sensory stimuli) is supposed to evoke an intended emotion in the target consumer and the target consumer must be able to identify with the virtual display (in other words understand the display)

as the retailer intended him/her to do so. Whether a clothing retailer applies a traditional display or an electronic visual stimuli should ultimately be considered against the evaluation of the target consumer so that the consumer's preferences can be acknowledged and catered to.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research phase 1

It is important to note that this paper reports only on a second phase of a larger two phased study. The first phase of the study involved the design of the two displays (static traditional display and a virtual representation thereof). The design of the two displays involved a process that was applied to ensure that the responses measured in the second phase were valid in terms of the respondents' preferences and experience. A short description of the first phase is provided merely to illustrate validity of the designed stimuli that the second phase on which this paper reports.

Research phase one involved nine experts and the Delphi method that is a survey technique used to capture the opinions of expert panels on a particular subject (Yousuf, 2007). As with most survey research designs, structured questionnaires are often used to collect data when employing the Delphi method (Somerville, 2007:2). The Delphi method involves experts who provide input into a specific aspect of a study. Nine experts were included: three academic experts who specialized in consumer science, interior design and marketing research, as well as six industry experts who specialized in merchandise selection, merchandising strategies, visual design, sound and digital animation aimed specifically at the consumer segment in question.

The experts were asked to provide their input into the theme that will suit the target market (South African females from the innovation-generation), the props such as the mannequins and decorations, lighting, colour, texture, line, shape and form, as well as signage and the backdrop in the static display. Inputs were

considered and implemented until consensus was reached between all the experts on the suitability of the final traditional display for the innovation-generation female consumer.

The static traditional display was firstly assembled on half scale with all the experts' inputs. The virtual representation of the static display was designed with the input of industry experts specifically involved with digitalisation and they also assisted with the selection of suitable music for the target market as well as providing input into how a digital representation of the static display would typically be depicted in the virtual world. The same props, theme, clothing and mannequins were thus used for both displays.

Research phase 2

The second part of the study followed a survey research design where the respondents were asked to view both the displays and respond to the stimuli in a closed - ended questionnaire. The respondents' evaluation related to the overall preference of the traditional or virtual displays in terms of: 1) the emotion the visual displays evoked, 2) the symbolic meaning the visual displays carried.

The sample The sample of 653 respondents was a convenience sample made up from female students on university campuses in Johannesburg. These university students were deemed suitable for the study as they are confronted with numerous retail offerings and because Johannesburg is the largest metropolis in South Africa. The younger females of the innovation-generation were included in this study as more than half of the South African population is younger than 24 years of age, making this specific student-based innovation-generation consumer segment extremely relevant in any applied marketing research efforts (Sonnenberg et al, 2014). The sample fell within the fastest-growing consumer segments, with a substantial amount of disposable income (Faruk et al, 2013; Ruane & Wallace, 2013:316; Leen et al, 2012:111). In addition, the younger females of the innovation-generation (between 18 and 24 years of age) are known to spend a lot of their time, effort and money on purchasing clothing (Ruane &

Wallace, 2013:317) and hence females were included in this sample. The sample was considered suitable because students from this generation have technology shrewdness as they are used to applying handheld devices in their classes. Only female respondents who were willing to participate in this study were included in it.

The data gathering process Ethical considerations that were important in this study include information that was provided on the purpose of the study, the credibility of the researcher and the implications of participant involvement. 46 fieldworkers were trained to be able to answer questions or explain uncertainties regarding information concerned with the study and their involvement in the study. Furthermore, fieldworkers were instructed to focus on female respondents who passed the data gathering points on the campuses and only gave a female respondent a questionnaire after she had been briefed on the purpose of the study and given an opportunity to ask questions and then indicated that she was willing to complete a consent form. The informed consent form was completed and placed in a container by trained fieldworkers. In addition, each questionnaire was assigned a numerical code that was used for data analysis and the interpretation process, making it impossible to link any information to any respondent's signature on the consent form.

Two stimuli (displays) were presented to female respondents from the innovation-generation consumers in Johannesburg (Gauteng) at specific data gathering points. One stimulus was a model of a half-scale static traditional visual display and the other an online virtual representation of the traditional display that included movement and music. Both stimuli were placed on central points on campuses and respondents could evaluate the traditional display as well as the virtual display that was available online via electronic hand-held devices. The merchandise in the displays was the same for both and was considered neutral (denim merchandise) so that respondents could focus on the mode of display rather than on the merchandise itself. All respondents were expected to evaluate both stimuli (displays). The stimuli also did not contain a retailer's name to ensure that respondents had no previous symbolic or emotional connection to a specific retail store.

The research method Respondents were asked to evaluate both stimuli with a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire contained closed - ended questions with Likert-type scales that measured the respondents' evaluations with regard to the static traditional and virtual display. Scale items were derived and adjusted form several sources, including the work of Hollbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984) and that of Fiore and Kimle (1997:48-50), to derive the three dimensions for emotions (pleasure, arousal and dominance) and three dimensions for cognitive/symbolic meaning (reality, fantasy and entertainment). Indicators for every dimension were also derived from the framework of Desmet and Hekkert (2007:58) so that two scale items per indicator were converted into a statement in the Likert scales that measured the preferences of the respondents. All statements (scale items) were positive and could be rated from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The respondents' evaluations were thus measured on two levels: 1) the emotion the stimuli evoked as set out in Table 2 and 2) symbolic meaning of the stimuli as set out in Table 4. Respondents were also asked to select their overall preference for the medium of display.

Assuring the quality of the data The quality of the data was assured with strategiesrecommended by Mouton (2006:109-111). Theoretical validity was acquired by doing thorough literature reviews so that clear and logical concepts related to the study were explored. Measurement validity was acquired through the development of a questionnaire with valid scales. In this regard the Cronbach's Alpha values for the symbolic items as well as the emotional items for the scale measuring emotions of traditional display was 0.99; the value for the scale items measuring emotions of the visual display was 0.98. These values indicate a high internal consistency.

The high internal consistency in a pre-test of 30 respondents also indicated that the questionnaire was reliable as the alpha was higher than 0.7 (usually considered as acceptable reliability). In addition reliability was acquired by training fieldworkers on the purpose and context of the study, facilitating questionnaire completion and limiting respondent technical error.

The representativeness of the sample was compromised as a non-probability sample was used. Nevertheless, the respondent in the sample all belonged to the innovation generation, all respondents were female and all respondents were full time students. The lack of representativeness of the study is a limitation and therefore no generalisations is made.

To achieve inferential validity, statistical computerised programmes (SPSS 2013) were employed to analyse the data and a statistician was consulted to observe and provide guidance on the final interpretation of findings. Descriptive statistics provided some insight into the number of respondents who selected and ascribed higher scores to the two statements for each indicator that measured one dimension of emotional or symbolic levels of the larger construct: evaluation or experience. Inferential statistics were also performed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the descriptive statistics. Simple linear regression methods were used to demonstrate the relationship of each dimension towards the overall preference of stimuli. The independent dimensions (variables) in the dataset (emotional, symbolic) and their impact on dependent variables (preference) were measured. Single linear regression was conducted to determine the relationship of the dependent variables to the independent variables. In other words, the emotional, symbolic responses' impact and their contribution towards overall preferences was determined.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents' overall preference for traditional or virtual display

Respondents were asked to indicate which display they prefer (overall) after evaluating each display on the Likert scales.

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS' OVERALL PREFERENCE OF DISPLAY

Insert Table 1 here

From Table 1 it is evident that almost double the respondents preferred the traditional static visual display above the virtual display (that included movement and music). 66.5% of respondents indicated their overall preference was the static traditional display. 33.5% of respondents indicated their overall preference was the virtual display with the moving screens showing detail at different times and then zooming out while music was playing

Evaluations on specific aspects of the displays follow. For the purposes of this paper, discussions will report on the positive and negative responses of the respondents, which implies that the following tables were reduced to three-point Likert scales.

The respondents' evaluation of the emotions that the traditional and virtual displays evoke

TABLE 2: RESPONDENTS' EVALUATION OF EMOTION THE DISPLAYS EVOKE

Insert Table 2 here

78.6% of respondents felt that the traditional display was indeed aesthetically pleasing as they felt that the "display is beautiful". This higher positive rating corresponds with the other indicator that measured pleasure: "I like this display" which 73.1% of respondents selected. In this regard, the virtual display also evoked pleasure with 62.9% of respondents agreeing that they felt the display was beautiful. The second highest evaluation with regard to the virtual display was again an indicator for pleasure: 59.1%. In line with the evaluation of the traditional display, a positive evaluation of the display's ability to evoke a feeling of dominance (V6 and V26- "the display makes a statement") has the second highest

positive scores. It can therefore be deducted that although respondents showed a slight preference for the traditional display with regard to the emotions it evokes (particularly pleasure and dominance), the virtual display was at least in line with this with regard to the dimension of emotions that were evoked. Another important aspect to note is that the traditional display seemed to excite the respondents more than the virtual display, but that the virtual display seemed to energise the respondents more (since there is movement in the virtual display, this finding is expected).

The respondents' evaluations of emotion evoked and how it contributes to preference (dependent variable) in traditional and virtual displays were tested with simple linear regression. Table 3 represents the descriptive statistics concerned with this section after the Likert scale was converted to a three-point scale to get a better grouping and combine "agree" and "totally agree" as well as "disagree and totally disagree".

TABLE 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL EVALUATION AND PREFERENCE

Insert Table 3 here

When converted to a three-point Likert scale, it is evident that some of the components on the scale resulted in more positive evaluation than others, such as V1. This item specifically encapsulates the questionnaire question "I feel this display is beautiful", aiding the assumption that the traditional display was aesthetically pleasing to respondents. Moreover, it is evident from Table 3 that significant relationships exist between the two tested variables (preference as independent variable and emotion as dependant variable), which confirms that emotion evoked by the static traditional display significantly contributes to the preference of the respondents.

Similarly to the traditional static display, the evaluation of the emotion that the virtual static display evokes only slightly signifies a positive relationship, but once again all of the components, i.e. V21 to V26, indicate a favourable opinion rather than it being unfavourable. A significant relationship exists between the two tested variables (emotion and preference to virtual display) which confirms that emotion evoked by the virtual display significantly contributes to the preference of the respondents.

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The respondents' evaluation of the symbolic meaning that the traditional and virtual displays portray

TABLE 4: RESPONDENTS' EVALUATION OF SYMBOLIC MEANING THE DISPLAYS PORTRAY

Insert Table 4 here

From Table 4 it is apparent that respondents' evaluations of the symbolic meanings that the virtual displays carry are aligned in the sense that the evaluation of entertainment (V11) is the highest positive response with 68.1% of respondents in favour of for the traditional and 57.1% of respondents positive about the virtual display (V31). In this regard it would seem that respondents thought that both stimuli represented fun and that both stimuli seemed to be entertaining. It is also important to note that the virtual display was slightly favoured with regard to what the respondents expected (V27) as 46.4% of respondents indicated that the virtual display is "everything they expect". This finding confirms the respondents' affiliation and comfort with the virtual world (Leen et al, 2012). However, when respondents were asked which of the displays they can identify with (V10 and V30), they responded more positively towards the static traditional display. One can therefore derive that the virtual display seemed to support the traditional display and even though the preference to the traditional display still seemed to carry the most weight in most categories, the virtual display

did contest, especially with regard to what respondents expect, which pertains to the reality indicator of the symbolic dimension of their evaluation or experience.

The symbolic evaluation contributions to preference (dependent variable) in the traditional and virtual display were tested with simple linear regression. Table 5 represents the descriptive statistics concerned with these inferences after the Likert scale was converted to a three-point scale for a better grouping.

TABLE 5: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYMBOLIC EVALUATION AND PREFERENCE

Insert Table 5 here

From Table 5, variable V11, which refers to the questionnaire question “I think the display is fun”, yielded the highest positive evaluation rate on the traditional visual display. The respondent group’s need for entertainment factors relating to the symbolic evaluation is thus evident.

Table 5 also indicates a slight preference towards the virtual display from a symbolic perspective. The variables V28 and V31 both reflected the same positive evaluations. As with the traditional display, evaluation on a cognitive level emphasises the respondent group’s need for entertainment factors in relation to the symbolic evaluation. The variable V12, however, represents an almost neutral evaluation. This variable relates to the questionnaire statement “the display is almost unreal”, confirming the reviewed literature stating that the respondent group prefers real-life situations (Wu et al*,* 2015).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the respondents enjoyed both stimuli and at least confirm the innovation-generation consumer‘s fondness of the virtual world

as Leen et al (2012) indicate. Nevertheless, findings also indicate that although the respondents understood the message of the virtual display and could identify with the message portrayed, the traditional static display still seemed to be preferred with regards to the emotions that it evoked. This finding confirms the view of Pinzaru et al (2013) who are of the opinion that consumers from the innovation-generation may respond to the visual displays in a positive and excited manner. Nevertheless, the respondents of this study did not respond more positively on an emotional level to the virtual display, despite all the benefits the virtual display had to offer in terms of movement and sound. This implies that the virtual display did not replace the preferred experience that the static traditional display offered and that these two channels can be used to support each other. The authenticity of the traditional static display still seemed to evoke the most positive emotion. The advantages that the virtual display has with regard to symbolic meaning should, however, not be ignored if retailers want to leverage visual displays.

Recommendations for clothing retailers therefore relate to implementing omni-channel retailing principles, not only with regard to having an online platform that supports the physical store, but also to implement and introduce the e-world in the physical store space. This implies that retailers can add plasma screens or projections containing virtual displays in the traditional storefront window displays as props/backdrops. These backdrops could house movement that may connect to consumers' personal philosophy by depicting scenes of popular culture and real-life environments. Moreover, introducing hand-held devices and other smart devices at an accessible point in the traditional displays to supply additional information on new products/product lines, may be a way to facilitate the consumers' evaluation of clothing products.

Other information, such as store policies and supplementary processes, can add value to the consumer's evaluation process. This can be done, for example, by adding barcoded information that may be extracted from a displayed item and uploaded to the mobile smart device of an individual consumer. Some mobile

applications available to South African consumers are available and just need to be implemented.

Finally, the authors of this paper acknowledges the limitations of this study, specifically regarding the convenience sample, hence a more representative sample is recommended for future studies. No generalisations can be made from this study. Considering the findings of this study, however, it does seem that e-retailing is not a viable replacement of physical clothing retail stores, even for South African consumers that seem to have a preference for technology in other areas of their lives. Nevertheless, the advantages of the e-world can be integrated into an omni-channel retailing space that could facilitate informed decisions of consumers and leverage the symbolic meaning that the physical store or displayed merchandise carries. The author of this paper therefore concludes with the following final thought: it is time to embrace the e-space!

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TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS' OVERALL PREFERENCE OF DISPLAY

Traditional display	Virtual display
	
66.5% of respondents indicated their overall preference was the traditional display	33.5% of respondents indicated their overall preference was the virtual display

TABLE 2: RESPONDENTS' EVALUATION OF EMOTION THE DISPLAYS EVOKE

		Traditional display					Virtual display				
			Negative		N	Positive		Negative		N	Positive
Dimension of emotion	**Statement in questionnaire**		**SD**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**		**SD**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**
Pleasure	I feel that the display is beautiful	V1	4.1		17.3	78.6		V21	7.6		29.5	62.9	
Arousal	The display excites me	V2	8.4		32	59.6		V22	12.7		31.3	55.8	
Dominance	This display is powerful	V3	8.7		34.9	57.3		V23	14.3		29.7	56	
Pleasure	I like this display	V4	6		20.9	73.1		V24	11.3		29.5	59.1	
Arousal	The display energises me	V5	12.7		40.2	47.1		V25	16.6.		34.2	49.2	
Dominance	The display makes a statement	V6	7.7		25.7	66.5		V26	11		29.5	59.6	

TABLE 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL EVALUATION AND PREFERENCE

Traditional display			**Virtual display**		
Preference	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**Preference**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**
	1.34	**.473**		**1.34**	**.473**
V1 Pleasure	2.70	.552	V21 Pleasure	2.53	.629
V2 Arousal	2.44	.663	V22 Arousal	2.38	.716
V3 Dominance	2.40	.664	V23 Dominance	2.36	.738
V4 Pleasure	2.63	.608	V24 Pleasure	2.43	.703
V5 Arousal	2.25	.692	V25 Arousal	2.26	.747
V6 Dominance	2.54	.649	V26 Dominance	2.44	.696

TABLE 4: RESPONDENTS' EVALUATION OF SYMBOLIC MEANING THE DISPLAYS PORTRAY

		Traditional display					Virtual display				
			Negative		N	Positive		Negative		N	Positive	
Dimension of symbolic meaning	**Statement in questionnaire**		**SD**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**		**SD**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**
Reality	The display is everything I expect	V7	14.7		40.2	45.1		V27	17.5		36.1	46.4	
Entertainment	I think the display is entertaining	V8	10.7		28.7	60.7		V28	14.1		29	57	
Fantasy	I think the display is out of this world	V9	19.1		36.3	44.6		V29	19.8		35.3	44.9	
Reality	The display is something I can identify with	V10	11.6		30.5	57.9		V30	17.6		32.9	49.4	
Entertainment	I think the display is fun	V11	9.6		22.3	68.1		V31	13.7		29.1	57.1	
Fantasy	The display is almost unreal	V12	28.5		35.1	36.4		V32	25.1		33.4	41.5	

TABLE 5: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYMBOLIC EVALUATION AND PREFERENCE

Traditional display			**Virtual display**		
Preference	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**Preference**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**
	1.34	**.473**		**1.34**	**.473**
V7 Reality	2.20	.707	V27 Reality	2.22	.446
V8 Entertainment	2.43	.698	V28 Entertainment	2.38	.737.
V9 Fantasy	2.15	.752	V29 Fantasy	2.17	.762
V10 Reality	2.39	.708	V30 Reality	2.25	.759
V11 Entertainment	2.53	.682	V31 Entertainment	2.38	.733
V12 Fantasy	1.96	.777	V32 Fantasy	2.09	.794