RESEARCH STATEMENT
As a consumer behavior researcher, my interests are inspired by and grounded in my experiences with consumers as a retail manager. Specifically, my research examines the impact of retail environment sensory stimuli on consumer affect and behaviors. With regards to methodology, I conduct laboratory and online experiments to test my hypotheses. Through a long-term coauthor partnership developed at a conference, I am able to examine these findings in practice by conducting in-store field studies with multinational retailers. Most of my current research focuses on the interaction between haptic and visual sensory stimuli while other research also examines auditory sensory stimuli.

My two-essay dissertation examines the impact of visual evidence of shoppers and store employees touching multicolor product displays—an in-store display in which a single product is available in an assortment of colors—across ten studies. While extant research focuses mostly on grocery store displays, this research concentrates on apparel displays as the women’s, men’s and children’s apparel merchandise categories are a significant proportion of annual retail sales in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau 2015). Further, apparel displays are utilized in a variety of stores (e.g. specialty, discount, and department stores). As apparel and other fabric products can be folded and are fabricated from materials not rigid enough to hold shapes, the product’s physical and visual condition is easily disturbed by daily shopping activities. Moreover, apparel products are those for which haptic communication from touching the composition material is important (Peck and Shu 2006). I propose that an in-store display condition continuum—from neatly organized to disarrayed—exists as a function of consumers touching product displays in stores and store employees straightening the impacted displays. It is at both extremes of the display condition continuum that consumer-shopping behavior can be negatively impacted. Each essay examines the negative impact at one of the display condition continuum extremes.

Essay 1 examines the negative impact of display disarray from prior shoppers touching the displayed products and the moderating role of product brightness, the black-to-white or dark-to-light dimension of color (Valdez and Mehrabian 1994). Several experiments and a field study in a major retailer demonstrate that product brightness choice shifts away from the darker products and daily sales decline significantly when the darker (but not brighter) products appear in disarray from prior shoppers examining and discarding the products back to the display. The conceptual model that builds on the attention and color literatures proposes that display disarray matters for darker—but not lighter—products as visual attention is drawn to (repelled by) larger visual cues that are more (less) bright. The brightness of the products in disarray are shown to impact visual attention to the display at both the pre-attentive and serial attention processes. This paper has been submitted to *Journal of Marketing Research*. A separate paper, which examines the individual difference variable of disgust sensitivity, will shortly be sent out for review as well.
Essay 2 examines the impact at the high store employee touch-low consumer touch end of the display condition continuum. It proposes that some consumers, those who fear being negatively evaluated by others, experience anxiety and fear at the prospect of touching neatly organized product displays, while simultaneously desiring to touch such displays. Four competing theoretical drivers of this perplexing consumer phenomenon are developed from the sociology (social identity, social phobia, social norm), haptic sensory, environmental criminology, and perceived ownership literatures. Data collection is expected to be completed for this essay in Fall 2015, and the manuscript will be in preparation for submission to the Journal of Marketing.

Beyond my dissertation research, my in-progress research projects are at various stages of completion. My research with Virginie Maille and Maureen Morrin proposes that a conceptually unrelated object within an ad or retail product display can act as a motor fluency cue which impacts consumer evaluations of the target product. This research is in preparation for second review at Journal of Consumer Research. Related research examines perspective taking as a function of handedness. Other in-progress research examines the impact of auditory feedback on consumer satisfaction with in-store, mobile, and online shopping experiences.

REFERENCES


