

# FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION OF SHOW WINDOW USING COMMUNICATION ITEMS REFLECTING DESIGNERS' INTENTION OF PRODUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

Window displays make the first impression of stores, representing the corporate images, latest fashion trend, and also influence shoppers' motivations. The usual method to evaluate successful window displays was outlined from the aspect of the contribution to the store sales or shoppers' responses. In prior research, window displays refer to store atmospherics, shoppers' behaviours, and visual merchandising were reviewed and verified as effective marketing approaches, but no systematic research has been done focusing on window displays as communication tools from a creative perspective. In this paper, we outlined the evaluation items for window displays such as design elements, visual harmony with surroundings, and seasonality through interviews with display creators, which sufficiently clarifies the stores' creative intention and what they put emphasis on. Outlining these items also give a chance to measure if the communication works effectively via window displays. The framework of evaluation structured by these items could be used as a scale to clarify the perception gap.

**Keywords:** Window displays, Designers' aspect, Communication item.

## 1. Introduction

Berman & Evans (1995) mentioned that the window display has two functions [1]. The first one is to show what kind of products the store sells. The second one is to encourage customers to enter into the store. Therefore, the contents of the window design depends on the creation purpose. Only one item centred with spot light represent the brand concept while the poster

printed with large "SALE" characters attracts consumers seeking affordable products. It is said that attractive VMD contributes to sales by disseminating brand messages and attracting consumers into stores as well. However, with the EC business boom stems in recent years, more companies have started laying emphasis on online market which leads the production budget of show window compressed in department store and fashion buildings, and even the necessity has begun to be questioned that was clarified through the interview with designers in the previous research.

As can be readily seen from examples of recent show windows that show windows tend to be "a place to provide performances and entertainment" not just "a place to display items". In the show window of "FENDI" in Tokyo Ginza Matsuya, a long established department, a unique fashion show was staged with models wearing the latest fashion, taking a pose like a real mannequin which attracted passers-by (see Fig.1.) On the same Ginza Central Street, another department store Ginza WAKO tried a special show window on the subject of white polar bears' family on Christmas season. There was a bottom set with a note written "Do not disturb!" on the window. If you press the bottom, a bell rings and the polar bear will wake up, shake his head and twinkle behaved like a real one. In another time, he sleeps and snores, and breath which makes his body move up and down that made passers-by inadvertently stopped in front of the show window and started to take a picture (see Fig. 2).



Fig.1. FENDI in Ginza Matsuya



Fig.2. Main show window of Ginza WAKO

In this way, more entertainment and performance elements have been added which makes show window plentiful and undergo a big transformation, though it is said that no systematic evaluation survey has been done to reflect consumers' view through the research interview. Consumer's evaluation of show window not only influence the store impression and the whole brand image, but also works as a key factor to be considered in terms of store management and marketing strategies. However, it is hard to determine whether it is appropriate to evaluate a show window display from unilateral consumer side without consideration of the displays' creative aims and functions. Since the show window is a media which transmit store and brand messages to consumers. In other words, the consumer's evaluation can be seen as an indicator to measure whether the intention of the production side has been understood or not. Therefore, firstly what

the production side want to express and disperse should be organized and listed up to manage as a consumer's evaluation indicator.

## **2. Theoretical Background and Research Framework**

### **2.1 Prior Research**

Many studies on show windows remain at practical level, and few academic prior re-search could be found. Kotler (1973) first focused on the store environment that have a greater influence on consumer purchasing behaviour than the items itself from a marketing aspect, who also established the concept of "store atmosphere"[2]. Based on Kotler's practical theory, Berman & Evans (1995), categorized the 4 physical factors that form the atmosphere of the store with "store exterior", "store interior", "layout and design", "POP(point of purchase) and decoration"[1]. Show window is stated as one of the external factor of store which includes the signboard, entrance of the store, the parking lots and so on. Then, the 5th factor, "human variables", was advocated for the store atmosphere by Turley & Milliman (2000) who pointed out that customers' behaviours are also influenced by the services experienced in the store [3]. They reviewed the prior search and found that there were only four literatures mentioned to the store exterior factor and only one study related to show windows by Edwards & Shackley (1992) which discussed the effect of the show window as an exterior factors [4]. From 2000 onwards, research on show windows began to gradually increase. From the view-point of marketing, Kim (2003) clarified that the purchasing decisions in the store are influenced by the promotion campaign and window display through the research of observing the purchasing behaviour of college students in clothing store [5]. Oh & Petrie (2012) also revealed that the window display is a key point for shoppers' decision to visit a store [6]. In addition, Somoon & Sahachaisaeree (2010; 2012), disclosed the window display as a part of the sales strategy and clarified several favourable factors like warm-coloured lights, spotlights, human-like mannequins, and graphics with letters are preferred by customers through a research of students in a clothing store[7][8].

In Japan, only few research papers could be found about show windows. Takayanagi (2002) discussed the five physical factors that form the atmosphere of the store in the show window research [9]. She also organized the historical development of show windows in Japan, back to the Edo period, a Danren which is the predecessor of show window functioned as a signboard was described [10]. In addition, a comparative re-search about the media function and customer experiences between US and Japan of the show window by Takayanagi (2006) made it clear that the purchasing judgment influenced by the selling method [11]. Regarding the design factors of the window display about fashion products, Ikeda (2010) conducted a comparative survey and described the difference among four types of brands in three different cities [12].

### **2.2 Research Methodology**

There are three subjects that should be discussed from the prior search. First, in the prior research, a research sample composed with students only could be seen. The important role of the

show window is to disseminate information to consumers who may be a potential consumer. Therefore, it could be said that survey targeting with appropriate attributes should be selected corresponding to the purpose and store targeting.

The second issue is that in prior research paper, store locations and environmental factors were not mentioned. Most studies focused on the window itself such as layout method, graphics design, and lighting. However, show window is not necessarily a single unit, which is one part of exterior of the shops and the landscape of the town as well. Thus, the relationship with the environmental surroundings should also be taken into consideration in the research.

The third subject is that an objective criterion has not yet been established for evaluating show windows. Though in the prior research, favourable mannequins, lighting, and layouts are partly clarified, it is still limited in the contents level. Since the consumers' evaluation is an important criterion to measure what attracts consumers based on the store management and marketing strategy, there needs an evaluation criteria to clarify if the communication disseminated appropriately through the show window. In this research paper, we focused on structuring the evaluation framework of the show window with the view of production sides.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1. Research Framework

The show window is a place where a brand conveys their corporate messages. A relation map could be used to describe the relationship between consumers and company side which quote from the model Nagumo (2004) described in Fig.3 [13]. Companies provide media, products, and messages to users aimed for sales, customer satisfaction and customer relationship management. In this cycle, show window creators works as an information transfer who connect consumers and stores through show window display composed with layout, materials, characters, graphics elements and so on which definitely and directly influence consumers' evaluation and satisfaction.

In this research, we focused on department stores and fashion buildings in Japan to find out what kind of communication messages are designed by show window creators. The purpose of this study is to outline the communication items designers' appeal by a survey to structure a framework for evaluation of show window displays. Thus, the research field of this paper is the information contents designers apply to the show windows, but not the impression the consumers got (see Fig.4).

#### 3.2. Research Method

In this research, we applied for interviews with 10 department stores and fashion buildings handling show windows in Tokyo and successfully interviewed three companies in advance which were all located in the central shopping areas and long-established with all ranges of targeting. A questionnaire survey online was designed with the attributes, working experiences, and job titles following the question describing the messages with keywords about what the respondents put emphasis on the window creation.

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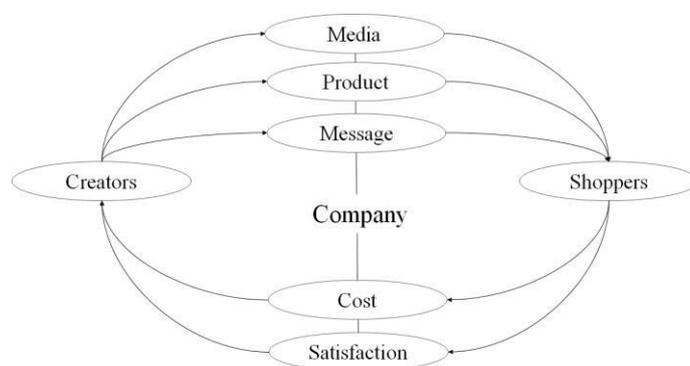


Fig.3 The relation between creators and shoppers (base on Nagumo (2014))

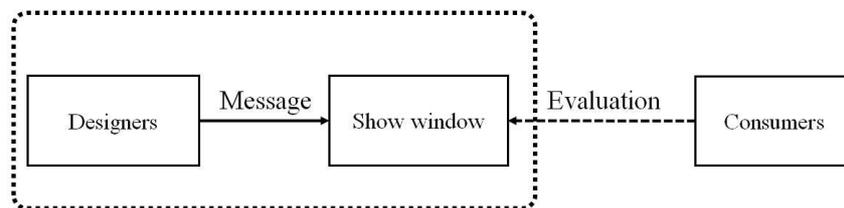


Fig. 4 Research filed

#### 4. Research Result

As a result of the questionnaire survey, the answer of total seven designers with 5 to 40 years of work experience was collected and 10 keywords were extracted with "Seasonality", "Fashionable trend", "Visual impact", "Originality", "Brand identity", "Symbolization", "Harmony with surrounding", "Photogenicity (topicality)", "Message", and "Display quality"(see Fig.5).

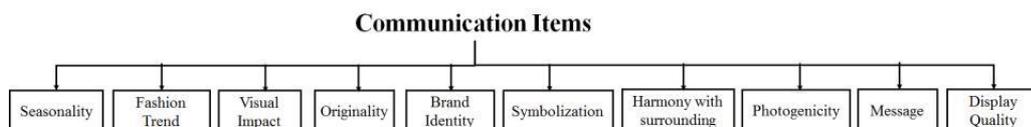


Fig. 5 Communication Items Abstract

##### Seasonality

One of the important roles of the show window is to catch the eye of passers-by and raise commodity demand. Especially, by displaying the latest seasonal products can encourage purchasing promotion through the materials, colour, and the motive of the decoration used for the display to emphasise on the season coming and demands of new products. Thus, how to design the window with seasonal elements is what designers focus on.

##### Fashion Trend

How quickly the store delivers the latest fashion information to consumers is a big criterion to measure the attractiveness of the store. If the products exhibited on the display are of low popularity, which will decrease the visit rate as well as the popularity of the store. For that reason, design work are mainly focused on the trend elements and designers work hard to collect fashionable items to display.

##### Visual Impact

The visual impact has been mentioned for a long time. Unlike other media, few people would watch the show window display with purpose. Therefore, how to attract passers-by depends on the designers' work. Although different role of the production such as decorators, graphic designers, and lighting staff in the whole work who attempts to try to maximize their work quality,

but on a general consumer side, it is more important that the overall visual factors such as usage of colour and materials without professional views.

### **Originality**

It's getting hard for stores to replace whole decoration items every season. Thus, the reusing or remaking of items could be seen. Through the annual sales promotion calendar, nearly topics could be seen and lack of novelty would make the store lose their identity and originality. To cover these issues and make it engaged in production budget, designers try hard to create something new through remaking the items used before which could be recoloured or reshaped, but still keep the uniqueness of the whole display image with creative effort behind.

### **Brand Identity**

It could be said that show window is a reflection of the brand concept. Especially, the shopping mall or fashion building in Japan, which is composed of several fashion brand with their private brand items. In this case, two patterns of display could be seen that the display by mall focus on the sale or event information, and the tenant shop focus on how to distinguish their brand concept and attract consumers to come in on the other hand. Thus, how to express the brand identity through the show window is much more important. What designers try hard is to express is the unique brand concept and try differentiation and comparison to competitors through displays instead of putting a clear logo or brand name on it.

### **Symbolization**

The show window is seen as the face of stores. Therefore, it is occasionally used as a place for people to meet up if the store is well located with high visibility in Japan. Characteristic show windows are easy to describe and easily recognized which promote more people gathering in front of the store and increase touch-points with the items displayed through the window. Thus, waiting time is an effective advertising time which is one part of marketing strategy to stimulate peoples' purchase intention. For instance, WAKO, a department store located in the central of Ginza in Japan with historical exterior, is regarded as a symbol of Ginza. It is famous for its unique and artistic show windows organized with four parts of windows. Thus, how to make the show window as a symbol that representing the store as well as the town is one of the challenges faced by creators.

### **Harmony with surroundings**

Since a good window display is evaluated not only by the window itself but also how successful it combines with the building, the peripheral facilities, and surrounding environment. Thus, the external appearance of a building composed of show windows, entrance, and parking areas totally affect the first impression of consumers to enter. In a store in Harajuku, a town crowded with young people and famous for pop culture in Japan, vivid colours and mode style are much more preferred that harmonises with the people in the town. On the country, usage of high quality materials in quiet colours and classical mannequin display are highly preferred among the people in pursuit for a high quality commodity. For creators, when planning the show window,

visitor attributes, and environmental influence are concerned as part of store management strategy as well.

### Photogenicity

It has been preferred to record a beautiful show window display into the photo from before. Especially, in recent years, the increase of windows incorporating motions and sounds make it much easier to approach a wide range of targets. The number of posts with “#show window” in the Instagram has reached 12,703 (on September 30, 2017) that the colourful show window display worldwide could be found. Sharing the daily life scene or recording beautiful items through the social networking service have been a trend for people, which constitute a communication platform and sharing a latest information through photos and short movies. Thus, how to take an eye-catching and memorable photo, called photogenic, has been a boom among the youth generation in Japan. For the creators, the SNS media is also a good platform to deliver their art work as well. A unique window display could attract more records, topics, and media exposure that means it could attract people’s attention by providing constant topics. Therefore, it was clarified that how to make a photogenic display is also what creators keep in mind recently.

### Message

The theme in the show window planning differs significantly depending on corporate strategy. Through the window display, what message the store delivers is mainly shown in the items displayed and how it’s displayed. The message could be related to sales, hottest items, and even fuse with social events sometimes. An example of a window display in the theme of Tokyo Marathon 2017 in Ginza WAKO could be mentioned that as a member of Seiko group, Ginza WAKO is famous for its watch brand (Fig.6).



Fig.6 Ginza WAKO

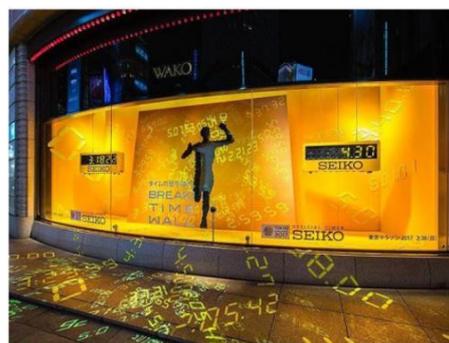


Fig.7. The display in Tokyo Marathon

As the timer used in the Tokyo Marathon is made by Seiko and the store faced to the running course as well, the main window display was decorated in yellow with two big timer and a catchphrase “Break your time!” behind the cut-off shaped of running (Fig.7).On the racing day, the timer works officially, when the runners reaches the corner of Ginza 4-chome that is in marathon course, time records could be checked. After the marathon, plenty of runners’ photos with smiles

taken in the goal was added into the window which made a beautiful timeline story through the show window. As a show window like this, it works not only as a simple display but also become a strong platform to deliver strong social message through tying up with events and contribution to the local community.

### **Display Quality**

The window is an indefinite production that after a certain period of display period, the campus must be back to white and next theme would be engaged in. Every year, even a same annual theme like Christmas, changes are gradually being made year by year to avoid similar visual performance and aesthetic fatigue. However, due to the emphasis on EC business in recent years, lots of companies tend to reduce the production budgets on show windows. Alternating materials with inexpensive paper and plastic and remaking materials used before would be a good cost reduction. On the other hand, it is also risky that a cheap material usage could make the display seedy-looking which hardly reflects the good quality of items displayed and even damage the brand image. For these reasons, how to guarantee a high quality within a limited budget is what creators engage in daily.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this research, we focused on constructing a framework to evaluate show windows from a creative aspect which was not mentioned in the previous research. An approach from a creative aspect could be applied to clarify if the current consumer research is reasonable. As a result of investigating, what kind of message that creators keep in mind in the production process, 10 items with "Seasonality", "Fashion trend", "Visual impact", "Originality", "Brand image", "Symbolism", "Photogenicity", "Harmony with surroundings", "Message" and "Quality" are clarified. Among these items, items like "Seasonality" and "Visual impact" have been subjected as an evaluation item from both creative side and consumer side from before which strictly affects the window display itself. Besides, items newly appearing along with social trends such as "Photogenicity" and "Harmony with surroundings" are found through the research.

What window display convey remains no more than the realization of sales promotion, but it gets derived into much wide ranged media to connect the store or even the town with people around the world. Through the research, what the creative side put emphasis on has been outlined which helps more designers to understand the show window designing work. Another successful point to approach from the creative side is that it helps people to understand the communication gap between creative side and consumer side. Based on the extracted 10 items, constructing a show window evaluation framework makes it possible to investigate the difference in message transmission with the media of window display instead of one-sided perspective of consumers' evaluations until now. By clarifying the communication gap through show window, it helps to clarify what elements of the window is evaluated, and which part is unfavourable for consumers that can be utilized as a reference during store planning and budget decisions.

Research with this framework to conduct consumer surveys at concrete stores is planned to clarify the differences between store strategies and consumer ratings.

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