

## **Store Front Window Displays over Time and their Teachings**

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# Store Front Window Displays over Time and their Teachings

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to uncover and reflect upon the key theoretical underpinnings of grocery window display and provide managerial implications for current independent grocers.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** - In this article we have explored *The Grocer* periodical from 1890 – WWII to uncover theoretical underpinnings for window display for boutique and independent retailers today. A thematic analysis was used to uncover theoretical bases to expert's advice (Braun and Clarke, 2008) and an inductive approach taken at the semantic level of analysis using description through to interpretation based on the literature (Patton, 1990).

**Research limitations/implications** - We have found that advertising theory can help us to understand the expert views of the periodical. Lastly we have provided specific guidelines for modern day retailers regarding the organisation of their display, its content, persuasive techniques and execution, as well as some general warnings.

**Keywords** – Shop windows, store fronts, historical marketing, retail.

**Paper Type** – Research paper

## Introduction



**Traditional Store Front – 1862**

Storefront window displays have been identified in the literature as both sales promotions and advertising (Sen, Block and Chandran, 2002; Edwards and Shackley, 1992). They are seen to attract consumers' attention, gather their interest, increase store entry and sales (Edwards and Shackley, 1992; Sen et al, 2002; Cornelious, Natter and Faure, 2010; Oh and Petrie, 2012). However, even with all of these positive outcomes being known, there is little in the literature that explains why these outcomes occur.

Among the sparse amount of literature that exists, much of the focus has been on fashion retailers or general retailers (Sen et al, 2002; Oh and Petrie, 2012; Edwards and Shackley, 1992). However, shopping for groceries is different from these purchases. Groceries are essential items and one trip may incur multiple buying goals, compared with fashion shopping. On top of this, there is greater complexity of choice and stimuli, and the shopping trip is repeated at least weekly for most (Park, Iyer and Smith, 1989). Grocery buying is unique in that decisions are directly affected by display (Harris, 1958; McClure and West, 1969), with 50% of purchases being unplanned, and up to a third made because of triggers at the store (Kollat and Willett, 1967; Park et al, 1989).

This being said, there is only one article which looks specifically at grocery window displays, that by Kinney and Lyon (2013). Their article is an historical description of the demise of grocers' window displays in the UK. They do not provide links to theory, nor managerial implications. With independent and boutique grocers facing ever increasing competition (Cain, 2014), and the potential for window displays to increase sales and create a point of differentiation, we feel that a re-visiting of the topic is imperative.

In order to do this we delve into writings during the 'golden age' of shop windows circa 1890 – WWII to analyse the practical guidance given to grocers, for their theoretical underpinnings. This time period has been chosen as it is the time from which large plate glass windows and lighting allowed for display to flourish, up until when both rationing and blackout coverings all but killed competition and the need for such things (Curtis, 1939; Adburgham, 1989). On top of this, the growth in number of multiple chain stores with their standardised displays created increased need for innovation in the area by independent grocers (Davis, 1970).

The research objective for this article is to uncover and reflect upon the key theoretical underpinnings of grocery window display and provide managerial implications for current independent grocers. This is undertaken through a thematic analysis of *The Grocer* issues from 1862-1935. The source for this article is a weekly periodical called *The Grocer* which has been published weekly since 1862 until 1945. This is a British publication that was essential to all independent grocers of the period in question and was used to gain new knowledge and expert advice on current practises. 93 pages of articles and pictures were collected from 4316 issues. Any article or picture regarding storefront windows was included. Adverts for window fittings and lighting were also collected but do not feature in this article. A thematic analysis was used to uncover theoretical bases to expert's advice (Braun and Clarke, 2008) and an inductive approach taken at the semantic level of analysis using description through to interpretation based on the literature (Patton, 1990). Thus, each article was thematically analysed using an iterative approach going from the literature to the theme and back again to provide insights. By exploring the practical expert guidance provided to independent grocers at the time, we are able to retrospectively understand such advice by reflecting on its theoretical underpinnings. It is deemed necessary as a first step before further empirical work can be undertaken.

A quick note however that articles about shop windows were not present until 1909, though all issues from their first issue were consulted. What follows is first a review of the literature on shop windows, before the thematic analysis and reflection on window display articles from *The Grocer*. Managerial implications conclude the article.

## Literature Review

While there are many articles that look at store environment (See Turley and Milliman, 2000 for a review), which includes the exterior of the store, store windows are not often studied. Instead, aspects of the external retail environment such as the shopping area (Grossbart, Mittelstaedt, Curtis and Rogers, 1975), similarity to exterior of nearby stores (Ward, Bitner and Barnes, 1992) and parking (Pinto and Leonidas, 1994) have been looked at. Cornelious et al (2010) look at moveable displays that are not a part of the window, such as flags and boards and the impact on store image evaluations. Much of this store environment literature uses the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm to explain behaviour whereby a stimulus evokes an evaluation which leads to approach or avoidance of the stimulus (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Such approach or avoidance behaviours due to store windows is an important area in need of further research (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

There are only three key articles on window display which provide an understanding of why window display might work (Edwards and Shackley, 1992; Sen, et al, 2002; Oh and Petrie, 2012). Edwards and Shackley (1992) undertake a survey on “Boots Chemists” English store windows and is the seminal work in the field. From their survey of those who had seen the Boots store windows they found that people were more interested in the content and design of windows than the promotions, and they liked windows to have a coherent theme linking the featured products. Participants liked good contrasting colours and designs and unexpected products were of most interest to them. They suggest (based on consumer behaviour theory) that windows should be in line with consumer needs and interests, as well as their aspirations in order to draw their attention. For them, window displays are seen as a marketing communication and thus a central or peripheral route to persuasion could be sought. The central route to persuasion would include a store window filled with information and interesting content. A peripheral route would need a window that focused on presentation instead of content as such, trying to evoke surprise, humour, or novelty from objects which create positive emotions such as animals.

Sen et al (2002) also undertake a survey relating to fashion retail store windows. They state that consumers use windows to gather information and at the same time may derive pleasure from such browsing for fun. The information sought is both about the store and the product category and this assumption is based on cue utilization theory (Richardson, Dick and Jain, 1994). The information can be directly observed or inferred from the window display. Store-related information that can be observed include range, variety, prices and quality, as well as special promotions. These can infer store image. Product-category related information that can be observed are product features and new trends which infer product fit and allow for pre-purchase, imagined trial. The amount of category knowledge that people have will moderate their use of the window for such information (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). They found that those who gained inferred information had a higher rate of store entry than those that acquired observed information, while those that gained product-category information had higher rates of purchasing than those that acquired store-related information. They also found that the window display was used to gain information mostly by those with moderate levels of category knowledge rather than high or low levels.

Oh and Petrie (2012) identify two types of window display – merchandise focused and artistic. Based on the S-O-R paradigm, merchandise displays try to increase traffic and purchase of the shown items, while artistic displays have an implicit message which increases attention, curiosity and exploration. The effect of displays is moderated by information processing capacity they find. While merchandise focused display facilitates understanding,

and artistic display increases exploration, those with high cognitive load are less likely to enter a store with an artistic display that they need to interpret. However cognitive load had no effect on store entry when a merchandise focused display was present. At low cognitive load, an artistic display increased entry.

In summary of this previous literature, we are presented with many types of information that consumers gather from window displays, along with only a couple of points as to why windows work. The main explanations are the S-O-R paradigm of approach and avoidance due to positive/negative evaluations; Diagnostic information gathered to inform evaluations; and central versus peripheral routes to persuasion. Our aim now is to explore these and other theoretical underpinnings of advice from shop window experts in *The Grocer* to give specific managerial direction for independent grocers' window displays.

## Findings

Prior to around 1880, shop windows were not really a feature of British retail, with the focus on what went on within the store, and signage outside the store informing the customer of the nature of the retail operation. Following this period, through to around the 1910s, the physical layout of store entrances in the high street went through structural changes that incorporated windows into the store frontage:

*“During the past few months there has been a welcome revival of interest amongst shopkeepers in windows and window-dressing. The continual replacement of old shop fronts by others of new design, which readily lend themselves to effective window displays has to a large extent been responsible for this renewed interest...”* (January 15<sup>th</sup> 1910, p79).

Large plate glass windows and lighting became commonplace in the 1910s (Curtis, 1939). These changes meant fittings became much more able to lend themselves to window dressing, and it was during this period the emergence of planned, intricate window displays took place.



## Example of Larger Window Formats – 1912

At first the emphasis was on the use of merchandise to attract the customer whilst still maintaining the practicality of the display:



*“Much has been said and much written on the art of window dressing, and since the day when it became recognised that an attractive window display meant “half a sale,” a good deal of advice...has been offered as to the manner in which windows should be dressed. But to many grocers the difficulty has been to arrange a good display at the minimum cost – that is, to employ as little stock as possible...When dressing the window always arrange the goods so that there can be no difficulty in taking any article out if required for a customer” (January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1909, p20)*

This suggests that ‘attractive windows are half the sale’ but also notes the importance of ‘not using too much stock that would have been sold’ and ensuring the displayed merchandise is set in a manner that the retailer is able to quickly gain entry:

*“When a customer asks for an article in the window, he or she should not be kept waiting whilst half the window is taken out in order to obtain the goods.” (January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1909, p20)*

Even at this early stage in the development of store windows, however, proponents were already recognising the similarity of a window display to a print advertisement, for instance:

*“One rule for the window-dresser should be: Always mark each separate line or brand of goods with the price. This is a most important matter, because nowadays prospective purchasers rarely enter a shop to ask the price of unticketed goods. The tickets should not be unsightly, or the effect to some extent will be spoilt.” (January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1909, p20)*



**Effective Display with Clear Signage - 1929**

suggests that one should ‘mark the price because people will not enter to ask’, but not ugly or too large, taking into consideration the typeface in a similar way to print advertisements and the semantic cues they offer (e.g. Childers and Jass, 2002; Pieters and Wedel, 2004). In the same period:

*“If there is one criticism more than another which an acute observer would pass upon grocers’ windows to-day, it might be that the general effect was too heavy. The grocer, for lack of taste, tries to make up by an overpowering heaping together of many varieties of goods crowded together, so as to give the impression that there is*

*not room even to stand another pot of jam or another tin of sardines. The total effect may be summed up in a word – ‘stodginess.’” (May 15<sup>th</sup> 1909, p1)*

suggests that displays should not be too heavy as this may overwhelm the onlooker, while:

*“The old, haphazard way of ‘filling’ a window will not do for the grocer who is determined to fight his way to the top of the trade. He must show originality in design, and he must work with an eye to colour as well as to form.” (January 1<sup>st</sup> 1910, p181)*

point out that a window filled too much is the ‘stereotypical and unoriginal shop window’, recognising the same issue that the print advertisement has with the number of pictures in the advertisement (e.g. Chowdhury, Olsen, and Pracejus, 2011).

Nevertheless, the practicalities of window displays continues to be discussed for instance:

*“...the windows in the summer time are apt to be a very heated part of the premises. There are very few articles of the grocer’s stock which do not deteriorate rapidly if subjected to a high temperature, for at least the labels fade; and therefore fewer goods exposed to the heat of the windows the better.” (May 15<sup>th</sup> 1909, p1)*

noting that merchandise will get hot, so needs to be appropriate, and advocates the pyramid or tiered display for ease of access to required merchandise (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910, p1620).

*“Your course must be in accordance with the special requirements of the community which you do business... Window displays can be utilised as an introduction to the larger and more comprehensive displays inside. The window is the eye of the store, but unless the window is properly dressed there is little opportunity to attract possible customers... This introduction must in nowise misrepresent the stock inside... The buyer who finds that the goods in the store do not come up to the quality of the goods in the window will become suspicious, and will refuse to make a second a second visit.” (January 1<sup>st</sup> 1910, p63)*



**Pyramid Display – 1935**

cautions that the display must match the target market, be a true representation of what is in the store, and the window should be seen as an ‘eye into the store’, which has been an issue

with discussions of misleading or deceptive advertising as well (Olson and Dorer, 1978). Further while:

*“In designing your window display remember that attractiveness and novelty must not supersede utility, because your primary object is increased sales; therefore, endeavour to convert your window into a ‘silent salesman.’”* (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910, p1619)

invokes a rule mentioned by others that attractiveness and novelty are important, but the ultimate aim of the display is to increase sales. This has also been a contentious area in advertising where the effectiveness in regards to purchase intent of highly creative advertising has been questioned (Till and Baack, 2005).

As early as 1909 there was already the suggestion that the more artistic display would have greater appeal, with a call for the interactive imagery (Lutz and Lutz, 1977) and framing (Edell and Staelin, 1983) used in print advertisements to be utilised in window displays:

*“A very few articles, artistically disposed in a novel and striking way, may well be more effective in the direction desired...The central idea is meant to suggest the readiness of the proprietors to supply all sorts of appetising dainties, both in the way of food and drinks, at a season when the appetite is jaded and fickle and requires tempting with suitable delicacies. Accordingly a small table is introduced into the foreground of the window, which should be covered with a nice white tablecloth of handsome design. This should be laid ready for luncheon or dinner, with serviettes prettily folded, tumblers and wine-glasses, knives and forks, &c., and decorated with a couple of nice plants or ferns in art pots...a stout and fairly wide shelf should be firmly fixed, so that it will carry two, or even more, piles of bottles of lemon squash, lime-juice, cordial and lemon syrup.”* (May 15 1909, p1)



### Summer Display – 1932

Another article shows a picture of a tea window at Brady Webster's (see below picture) with a *“...table set out for afternoon tea for two people”* and the following signs reading:



*"It was a cup of good tea you had at Mrs Brown's the other day. Well, she always gets her tea from Brady Webster's. Treat your friends to a similar cup and retain friendship."*

*"During the reign of Charles I, only the ladies of the Court could afford to drink tea, and then only on Sundays. Today we can supply you with better tea than these ladies had at 2/s and 2/4 per pound."*

*"When you buy our tea you get the pick of the world's best tea plantations. We blend it to suit the water of the town, and for Quality and Cheapness we are unapproachable"*

*"In making Tea remember not to over boil the water."* (December 31<sup>st</sup> 1910, p1761)



**Tea Window Display - 1910**

By doing this the window dresser was in effect creating nascent experiential or lifestyle imagery leading to scenarios with 'context', sometimes referred to this as a scheme, where the window 'talks to the customer':

*"...whereby the window may be made to 'talk'. The art of window-dressing is enhanced by a 'scheme'...Therefore a few hints as to 'scheming' a window may be acceptable. Take the breakfast table as an instance. The first suggestion is as to coffee. Get a small table- a bamboo one will suit- and place upon it a white cloth and a vase of flowers, with some dainty cups and saucers and a coffee pot, as shown in the first drawing. On the location of the stalboard and in the centre of the window place a bowl of freshly roasted coffee, 'the leading line,' say at 1s. 8d. and at each side place a smaller bowl containing coffee at 1s. 6d. and 1s. 4d. Next put tickets stating that the coffee will be greatly appreciated...Dainties suitable for the morning meal may also be included in the display."* (April 30<sup>th</sup> 1910, p4)

In addition to these scenes advice was given on signage:

*"The day is gone when mere pricing of foods or saying 'Jone's tea is the best' is all sufficient for successful window dressing...ticketed with selling tickets - tickets that*

*will take the place of a neat and efficient salesman saying just the right thing and the right amount of that thing to convince the passer-by that the goods shown are goods for him...Make your tickets informative, but concise, your intimate knowledge of the origin and treatment of the goods shown should here serve you well and will give your goods and windows distinction...I firmly believe in the value of a striking headline, followed by not more than half-a-dozen lines of description or praise of the goods, then the price” (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910, p1622-1623)*



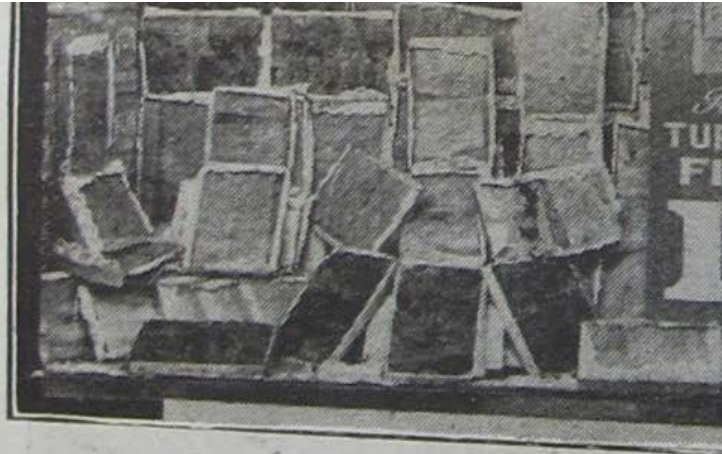
### **Themed window – 1931**

Of note in this suggestion is the encouragement to include text as part of the window, particularly as it incorporates the same instructional component commonly used in print advertising (e.g. Babin and Burns, 1997). There was still a lot of debate over what worked best though, with one article contradicting previous articles, and suggesting one should fill the window to brimming (and even giving instructions to the window dresser on then how to get out of the filled window in the picture below).

*“This is what may be termed a ‘combination window,’ as it embraces novelty and attractiveness combined with utility and massiveness...I will give you in this article, as far as the scope of the practical grocer’s vocabulary allows and space permits, the best method of erecting and dressing the window display under review, at the same time assuring you that I always ‘practise what I preach.’” (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910, p1619)*

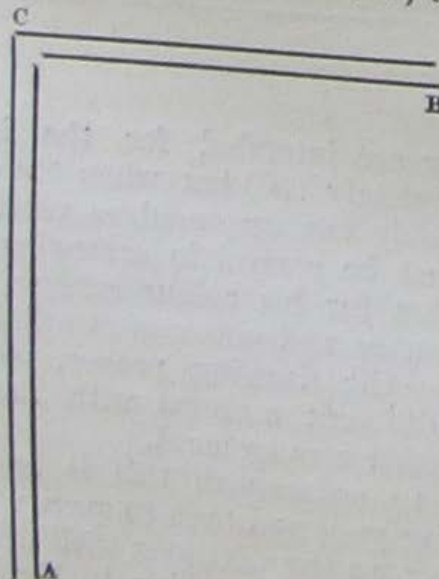
The system I adopt to get out of a window of this kind, if not original, is at least unique.

I finished dressing the central design of this window standing in the space occupied with "Pecan Nuts."



A FIG

To effect an exit, I had two stout boards—previously nailed together—passed into the window, as shown:—



A rested on the window bottom, B rested on the back of the window fixture, and was securely fastened with a couple

### Description for Escaping from the Window – 1910

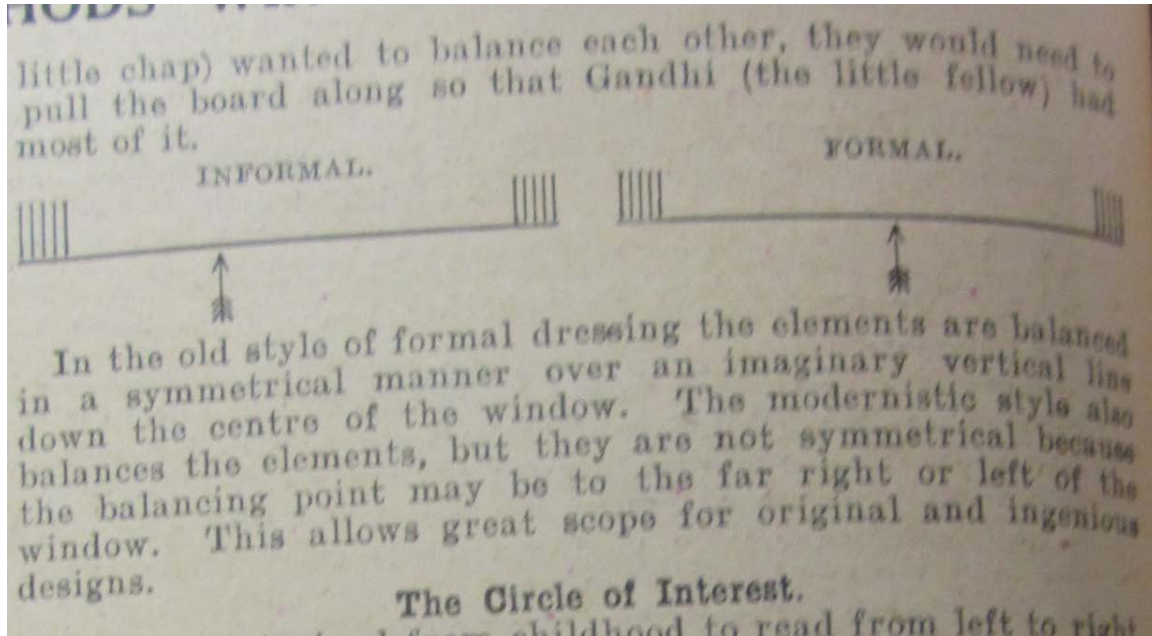
We also see an understanding of consumer's behaviour when purchasing groceries, with them seeing grocery shopping as more of a chore by an emphasis on easily understood and seen displays:

*"...you must put yourself in the place of the purchaser and study your window from their point of view, think out what would interest you if you were a buyer and then put the goods in your window to catch the interest of the buyer and keep him interested up to the buying point...for you must not expect people to bend their backs and crane their necks to find your points of interest: but if you give them the important goods right in the line of sight and interest them sufficiently to stop and look, your filling up*



*part of the window will catch them before interest has died out.*" (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910, p1621-1622)

This view is also seen in print advertising theory, which shows and explains text and picture placement (see picture below) to match consumer's natural train of vision (Lohse, 1997).



### Placement suggestions – 1921

Overall the early emphasis for a store window display was on simply displaying the merchandise in as practical a way as possible, while recognising the need to make the display attractive. The only goal was to increase sales, so like simple advertisements that inform the reader of a product's attributes, the window informed the prospective customer of what was available in the store. However in the lead up to the First World War (during which shop windows temporarily returned to an era of austerity or one of patriotism) window dressers were experimenting with some of the more innovative merchandising techniques of the time, such as incorporating seasonality and mixing products up to show combinations, suggesting positioning of products for usage and problem solving (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis, 1986):

*"Our first window is devoted to the showing of dried fruits, and will be very suitable for the present time. It will be remembered that fresh fruits are just now scarce, and that the housewife is looking for material for her sweets course and desserts...Besides, in combination they make a most delicious 'fruit salad.' The grocer can mix this for himself and can include all the above-named varieties, and then give his 'fruit salad' a prominent place in the window."* (May 11<sup>th</sup> 1912, p7)



### Fruit Salad Suggestion – 1912

An emphasis on creating ‘striking’ displays was stated in a speech by Councillor Hunter Saltcoats which was published and stated that *“there are few women...who can look at a well-got-up window with there being something in it which we ought to appeal to them.”* And that:

*“The shopkeeper who appeals to 1000 people is more likely to make money than if he appealed to 100. He can only appeal successfully to 1000 if he studies the wants of the great masses of the populace”* (June 1<sup>st</sup> 1912, p1579).

Speaking to the concepts behind the use of mass media advertisements due to exposure (Tellis, 1988). Excitement over appealing and striking display was also created not only through the window dressing competition at the Grocery, Provision, Oil and Italian Warehouse and Allied Trades’ 20<sup>th</sup> Annual International Exhibition and Market held on 21<sup>st</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> September 1912, but by winning and striking windows being printed in each issue such as the New Zealand cheese display (August 24<sup>th</sup> 1912, p480). Other articles described how striking displays could be made with single lines of product for instance with:

*“The accompanying illustration shows a ‘one line’ window...For the past eighteen months Mr. Norris has displayed but one article at a time in two of his windows, and he finds it pays much better than dressing the window in the old style.”* (October 11<sup>th</sup> 1913, p953)

*“I walked through the streets looking at the shops, and in the fruit window of Cooper & Co. I saw a shop of oranges – just oranges, and nothing else...I persuaded the firm to give me the three windows for booming oranges... We not only set ourselves right in the front of the green fruit trade, and kept the shop busy during an otherwise quiet time, but we had the satisfaction of seeing that most sincere form of flattery, imitation, spring up all round us...”* (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910, 1621)





**Single Line Display – 1932**

And one particular prize winning window that featured live piglets:

*“One of their windows contained a litter of pigs with the mother sow watching over them. In the side window there were rolls of bacon and ham, tastefully arranged...”*  
 (November 12<sup>th</sup> 1921, p86)



**Live Piglets in a Window Display – 1921**

After the First World War and the immediate aftermath, we see a change in the development of store windows. During the 1920s and into the early 1930s we can see a shift from the more prosaic merchandising for sales to a more subtle creation of context. Still using the techniques of print advertising, such as creating a narrative (e.g. Polvorat, Alden, and Kim, 2007), shop windows began incorporating tag lines for instance for products:

*“Salmon - Good for any meal-anywhere; Salmon - A meal in a can!”* (May 21<sup>st</sup> 1921, p54)

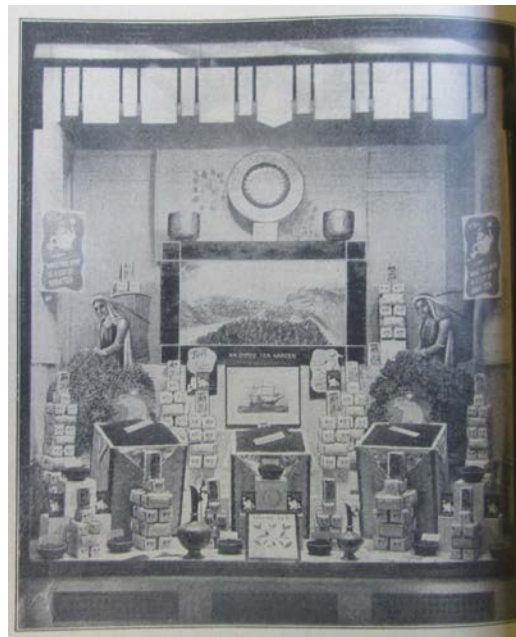
As well as the following list provided for retailers themselves:

*“Famous for food; The House of Quality, Courtesy and Service; The man who does not sell cheap goods but sells good goods cheap; Trade with us and bank the difference.”* (January 9<sup>th</sup> 1932, p76)

This, combined with the schemes of the previous decade, and the seasonality themes from the same, meant that through the 1920s window dressers were using more sophisticated techniques to differentiate their windows:

*“But one may say, ‘What about that arresting window that is going to collect the crowd and block the footpath?’ It is what can be done with old grocers’ boxes, a saw, nails and a few drawing pins. Beautiful pedestals could be made at the cost of a few pence, and covered with fancy coloured paper and cut out stencils of many designs.”* (June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1929, p126)

This commonality of competing store displays occurred with articles breaking down current grocers’ window display schemes and their technical aspects so others could use their ideas such as the ‘Afternoon tea window’ and ‘A geographical display’ window for selling tea (June 25<sup>th</sup> 1921, p49).



### Origin of Tea Window Display – 1935

However, by the early 1930s the science of window displays was starting to make room for the art of window dressing. Like the visual rhetoric (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999) or linguistic cues (Percy, 1988) in print advertising, window dressers were seeing the value in humorous settings, the use of posters, and the inclusion of art as described in an article titled ‘Modernistic Methods to Win Sales’:

*“Posters added to the riot of attention catching, with colours that hurt one another to the point of positive cruelty, and the motto of the business man became punch, zip and zest...”* (January 9<sup>th</sup> 1932, p76)

But as the public became sick of this:

*“...art can demonstrate the attractiveness and utility of any article by eliminating all that is ugly and grotesque and showing that even the most prosaic article can be*

*beautiful. And beauty has a definite sales value. There are few people so busy that they will not make time to stop and admire a pretty design.”* (January 9<sup>th</sup> 1932, p76)

So still grocers retained the bottom line of keeping window displays attractive so as to entice the customer in for the sale. But, while the value of context, such as through seasonality (May 21<sup>st</sup> 1932, p76) was still seen, by 1935 the window was viewed as a genuine advertisement.

Advertising was defined in one article as:

*“Any means or method, other than oral, by which the consumers of merchandise, utilities, or services, can be informed or reminded of them and induced to buy them”* (March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1935, p45)

which included windows, but not simply of merchandise and/or context, but of the ‘character, ability, and artistry of the grocer’ (April 27<sup>th</sup> 1935, p86). Thus in the matter of a couple of decades, and only 50 years after the introduction of the shop window in a form recognisable today, we moved from a merchandising emphasis, to a contextualisation of the merchandise, to using the window to create and reflect, through imagery, the reputation of the retailer. At the same time, proponents were also recognising the value in the window to provide distraction and novelty for the task-driven shopper, creating a sense of pleasure and hedonic value for an otherwise mundane shopping trip with:

*“...the wise grocer will do his utmost to transform necessity to pleasure... Women are always attracted by novelty...so it will pay the grocer to introduce novelty, or, in other words, unique features, that have a definite sales appeal.”* (May 11<sup>th</sup> 1935, p66)



**Artistic Display of Towels – 1910**

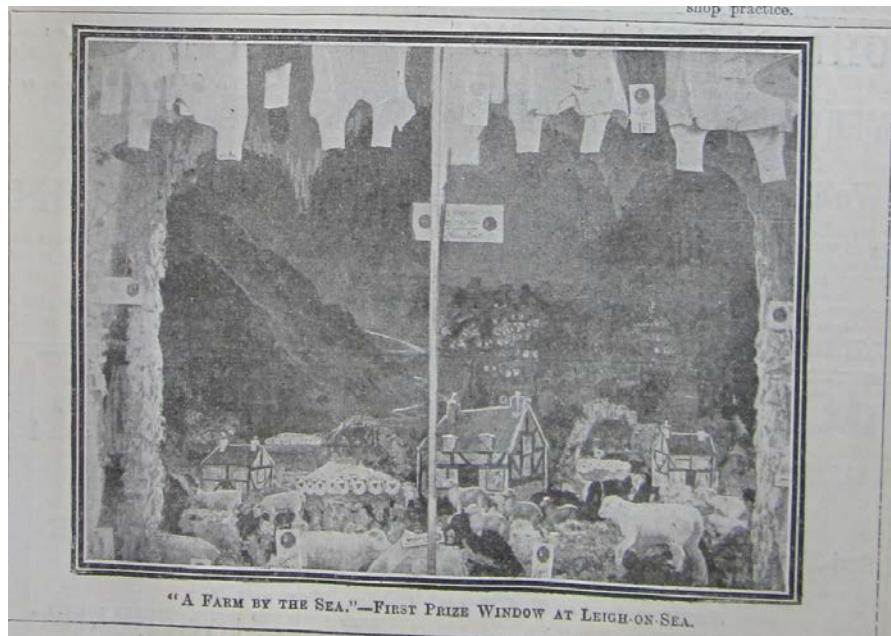
The benefits of such hedonic themes in advertising is also supported (Moore and Lee, 2012). Across all that time, however, the overriding principle remained the same – that of increasing sales – but by 1935 it was recognised that shop windows were truly important because the ‘value of windows could be measured by trade falling when they failed to be attractive’:

*“Trade soon begins to fall away from monotonous, untidy windows that pay no rent, and soon the shop is unable to do so either...It has been said that there are two classes of shop windows – those that attract and interest the passers-by for a moment, and those that compel him to step in...[but] it is safe to say that for every person who*



*enters the shop as the result of an impulse generated by a certain display, five more will come in from the interest evoked by continual efforts made in the windows to arouse their attention and respect.” (May 11<sup>th</sup> 1935, p73)*

And so we see not only an acknowledgement that windows need to be considered and planned, but that they need to be changed often and kept fresh, echoing advertisements understanding of consumer wear out and the need for continual change (Blair, 1987).



### **Novel Window - 1910**

In summary, we have found that window display advice from experts in *The Grocer* can be understood through reflection on advertising theory. Theory regarding print advertising presentation and placement of text and images; Persuasive tactics such as informing, educating and entertaining; and base concepts such as target markets, exposure and the fundamental objective of effectively creating sales. We now move onto a discussion and reflection on how our findings add to the body of literature on window displays, how we have met our objectives, and how we might use these findings to provide managerial implications for boutique and independent grocers.

### **Discussion**

In this article we have set out to uncover the theoretical underpinnings of expert advice to grocers regarding window displays from *The Grocer* periodical from 1890 – WWII. We have provided this in the findings section and can now reflect on these theories and apply them to the extant literature. Our main contribution is in extending the discussion on shop windows to include advertising theory. Previous literature has acknowledged that advertising theory such as the central and peripheral routes to persuasion (Edwards and Shackley, 1992) can apply to window display. That central routes using informative and interesting content are effective, as are peripheral routes using surprise, humour and novelty. We have found these recommendations also in our findings but have been provided with practical advice on how this can be achieved and clear indication of what a novel window is. For instance, central routes can be sought through the use of clear information and instruction regarding the product (Babin and Burns, 1997) as is the case with examples of how to make tea and maps of where the tea is sourced. Artistic windows can assist peripheral routes to persuasion by

using the art of rhetoric (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999), linguistic cues (Percy, 1988), and hedonic themes (Moore and Lee, 2012). This can be seen in the different scenes and additions to windows and especially in suggestions of including live animals.

Oh and Petrie (2012) have described merchandise based and artistic window displays. The use of both of these has been supported in our findings and can also be linked to central and peripheral routes to persuasion. For instance the merchandise based window provides central routes to persuasion, while the artistic, as stated above, peripheral. While Oh and Petrie (2012) found that artistic display is most effective when people have enough cognitive resources to interpret them, lessons we learn from our findings can add to this discussion. For instance, our findings show that experts knew that windows, even artistic ones, needed constant changing in order to avoid wear out (Blair, 1987) and that the use of an artistic display was not appropriate if it did not lead to increased sales. Examples of the incorporation of a product into an artistic display as with that of the oranges in one and the tea cups in another can show us how to combine both of the best aspects of merchandise and artistic display that was not discussed in Oh and Petrie (2012).

The findings of Sen et al (2002) that consumers collect information about the store and product category through the window are echoed in the writings of experts in *The Grocer*. Examples of discussions of the window being the ‘eye into the store’, and the ‘silent salesperson’, and also to the window being an accurate representation of the merchandise in the store suggest this. However we can add to their findings with some of the specifics of how to create grocery specific displays to help consumers with their information collecting instead of the fashion retailers that Sen et al (2002) surveyed. For instance showing scenes of usage situations such as with tea and coffee as well as signs suggesting problem identification and solutions (such as with keeping friends through purchasing the right type of tea) give us specifics for grocers. The reasons behind these found again in advertising theory on interactive imagery (Lutz and Lutz, 1977); framing (Edell and Staelin, 1983); narrative (Polyorat, Alsen and Kim, 2007); and positioning (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis, 1986).

Managerial implications from our findings surround organisation of objects and text in the window, persuasive techniques and their execution, and key lessons. First, grocers need to remember print advertising when creating their store window. For instance, the size and typeface of signage not only need to be readable, but add to the overall theme of the display (Pieters and Wedel, 2004). It needs to be placed to match the natural visual path of the consumer and not be overcrowded with objects (Chowdhury, Olsen and Pracejus, 2011).

Second, while the themes could be seen to be either artistic or merchandise focused, we suggest that actually, displays can be both artistic and merchandise focused. For instance, the use of scenes of usage situations, narratives, lifestyles, maps of origin, and single line artistic presentations allow for both: clear merchandise messages, in an artistic way. Such windows acknowledge the consumption experience, which includes play, aesthetic enjoyment, sensory pleasures and fun, and allows for consumer whimsy and daydream (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Interactive aspects of windows such as digital display that respond to movement may be a more humane version of the early use of live animals in the window.

Third, key lessons have been uncovered from the pioneering experts for grocery managers even today. For instance, when using artistic and novel displays, the warning against being too artistic and not creating sales is given (Till and Baack, 2005). Other problems with artistic displays and scenes could be the incorporation of products that are not sold in the store. Such



misrepresentation of the store's merchandise may frustrate consumers (Olsen and Dover, 1978). Further, the rate of wear out of a new window needs to be taken into account when its budget is set. Thus while an ever changing window is needed, its return on investment needs to be taken into consideration also.

The limitations of our research stem from its historical nature but also lead to the areas for future research. The historical sources used do not represent all thought around the world on shop windows and also cannot 'prove' the relation of the theories and constructs we have identified with sales, nor would we wish them to. We have sought to explore and uncover potential areas of insight. We now leave it up to future researchers to seek the experimental evidence for such correlations.

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