

# THE EFFECTS OF WINDOW DISPLAY CONSTRUAL ON INTERNAL REACTIONS AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of the study presented in this paper is to examine the effects of window-display construal on cognitive and affective responses as well as on behavioral intentions. A high-construal vs. low-construal design was carried out in a laboratory experiment over the period of one month. The findings suggest positive effects of construal level on behavioral intentions and negative mediation effects of cognition on subsequent responses.

**Keywords:** Construal level theory, window displays, cognition, affect, attention

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Window displays are an atmospheric variable that have received little attention in the retailing literature (Lecointre-Erickson, Daucé, & Legohérel, in press; Oh & Petrie, 2012). Furthermore, no experiment has examined this variable specifically in the tourism literature. Although the extant literature examines the effects of creative and non creative displays (Lange, Rosengren, & Blom, 2016) and of specific display props and products (Sen, Block, & Chandran, 2002), it has not examined an overarching theoretical framework explaining how to design effective displays and how they effect consumer reactions. In order to respond to these gaps, this paper examines how window-display construal influences internal responses and behavioral intentions. Construal Level Theory (Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007) and an S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) were used to test the relationships between the chosen variables. A PLS-SEM model was chosen for the analysis. The results indicate a positive effect of construal level on behavioral intentions. However, negative and null effects were reported for cognitive and affective responses.

## 2.METHODOLOGY

Although the concept of construal has been examined in tourism advertising messages (Kim, Kim, Kim, & Magnini, 2014), the topic of construal at point-of-sale exteriors remains scarce. Thus, this study responds to the following research question: How does window-display construal influence attention, cognitive reactions, affective reactions and behavioral intentions? One hundred and forty-four francophone individuals were intercepted to be part of a convenience sample. A between-subjects experimental design was carried out during one month in order to test the effects of the stimuli. The theoretical framework for the model was founded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Manipulation of tourist-bureau window-display images was founded in Construal Level Theory (Liberman et al., 2007). The scales for measuring the constructs in the model were chosen in accordance with the literature (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Behe, Bae, Huddleston, & Sage, 2015; Bonnin & Goudey, 2012; Bradley & Lang, 1994). A manipulation check for construal level and a pre-test of the scales were conducted prior to the experiment.

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Objective physiological data as well as self-report data were collected from the sample. A Partial-Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was chosen in response to sample size and data distribution to analyze the model (Reinartz, Haenlein, & Henseler, 2009; Wong, 2013). A bootstrapping approach was used to test for mediation effects (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016).

### 3.FINDINGS

The findings from this study suggest a significant positive effect of window display construal on behavioral intentions. Furthermore, findings show null effects on visual attention to the display and significant negative effects of construal on cognitive, and subsequently on affective reactions and behavioral responses. The direct and positive effect of low-level construal is consistent with the extant window display literature (Oh & Petrie, 2012).

### CONCLUSIONS

The contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, this study is the first to examine the influence of window-display construal level in a tourist bureau setting. Secondly, it contributes to the retailing literature by examining physiological evidence of visual attention to window displays. From a managerial standpoint, the findings from this study suggest that low-level construal should be preferred in window-display merchandising. The generalization of the findings is limited by the experimental context (*i.e.*, the tourism sector) and by the size and characteristics of the sample. Thus, future research should be conducted on a larger sample in sectors other than tourism.

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