

# THE IMPACT OF DISPLAY INCOMPLETENESS ON CUSTOMERS' CHOICE

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**Keywords:** Display incompleteness, Display completeness, Mechanism model.

**Abstract:** In marketing practice, display completeness is overemphasized. In what condition won't display completeness take positive effect? Based on reviewing the literature related to display completeness/incompleteness, the paper has analyzed the possible factors that may affect the effectiveness of display incompleteness, and formulated a mechanism model of display incompleteness and has verified it through experimentation tentatively.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

When company displays his merchandise on shelf, they always want to stack the shelf he can get completely. They think it can leave the customer an impress of strong brand, abundance in products, so it can increase the possibility of purchase. But this practice may contradict the theory of Cialdini's principle of Social Proof which hold that individuals determine what is correct by finding out what other people think. According Cialdini's theory, shoppers would choose the products partially stacked because it suggest that someone else has chose it. According experience, when there is moderate vacancy in the shelf, we may think someone else have chose the product and it may be good. We define the display incompleteness as the way of merchandise which can suggest the product's scales through its outline and indicate the fact that the product has been bought by someone through the vacancy of the display: display completeness and display incompleteness illustrate as the sketch map (to take canned food as an example).

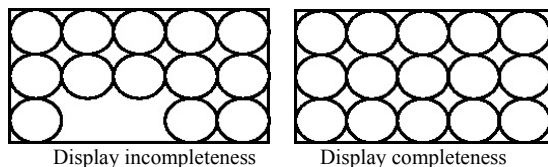


Figure 1: The sketch map of display completeness and display incompleteness.

How can we explain the contradiction between

the retailers' practice and the instinct experience? We think that the display completeness in practice may have some effect when customers are familiar with the products while the display incompleteness may have effect when the products is new or unfamous products. Then we put forward a further guess: which one is more effective between display completeness and display incompleteness depend on the quantity of product information, involvement of purchase, and the personality of the shopper.

The objective of this study is to determine the impact of shop environment, product information, involvement of purchase, and personality of the shopper on the effectiveness of display incompleteness. Then we can put forward useful theory to guide the retailer design effective display basined on different products and different target customers. And we want to change the trend of display completeness that is prevail but is not effective.

## 2 LITERATURES REVIEW

The literatures related to merchandise display all emphasized the importance of display completeness (Wang Wanzhen2005, Liu Dong & Song Xiang). Only Nabil Y. Kazouk, Victoria Seiz, Vijay Kumar (2002) hold different point about it. they think display incompleteness can increase the possibility of purchase compared with display completeness, and they have gotten supporting date through experiment. Their main conclusions are stated as

follows: (1) display incompleteness can promote customers to purchase compared with display completeness if other factors are same; (2) The difference in products character have obvious influence on effectiveness of display incompleteness and display completeness. When the difference between products is little, the effectiveness of display incompleteness is better than that of display completeness; (3) the effect of display modality (shelf, island, end-cap) is not significant; (4) have explained the reason why display incompleteness could take effect employing Cialdini's principle of Social Proof.

We think the conclusion of Nabil Y. Kazouk is believable, but there need to be some improvement in their study: (1) when they compare the effectiveness between display incompleteness and display completeness, they design groups based on the display modality (shelf, island, end-cap) and their conclusion is that the effect of display modality (shelf, island, end-cap) is not significant. It is not useful to explore the factors that affect the effectiveness of display incompleteness. (2) they can't explain well why the two brands products with obvious difference in character have different effectiveness (32.4% and 67.6%) when display completely and incompletely, if the two brand is comparable. They believe that the effectiveness of display incompleteness will fall when the actual difference and perceived difference are high. but even the display incompleteness could not take active effect, the number of pickings from both display should be equal. Why the number of pickings from display completeness is 2 times as that from display incompleteness. We think that when the customers are familiar with the brands and have enough products information, they will not rely on the marginal information such as that someone else have bought it. while the display completeness can leave the costumers an impress of verdure, abundance, and power, and can promote the purchase. (3) They wield the theory of Cialdini's principle of Social Proof to analyses the reason why display incompleteness could take effect. It is reasonable but not enough. Because the factors that influence the effectiveness of display incompleteness may include shop environment, product information, involvement of purchase, and personality of the shopper and so on. We could not give a reasonable explain or even may magnify the effect of display incompleteness if we neglect some of them.

Resource: Nabil Y. Razzouka, Victoria Seitza, Vijay Kumarb "The impact of perceived display

completeness/incompleteness on shoppers' in-store selection of merchandise: an empirical study". Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 9 (2002) 31-35.

Table 1: Distribution of items picked from incomplete and complete stacks by different forms of display.

Display modality	Incomplete stack		complete stack		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Shelf display	387	77.2	114	22.8	501	77.7
Island display	69	81.2	16	18.8	85	13.2
End - cap display	11	32.4	23	67.6	34	5.3
End - cap display	22	88.0	3	12.0	25	3.9
Total	489	75.8	156	24.2	642	100

### 3 THE ANALYSIS OF DISPLAY COMPLETENESS MECHANISM

Display incompleteness can take active effect in particular situations because of the conjoint effect of series rules of cognition, psychology, and society. These rules include perceptual selection, purchase involvement the path of information search, social obedience, and personality of the shopper. (1) perceptual selection. Since the stimulations information that exposed on people is superabundant, people can only notice the information that is novel or related to them. When all other products are stacked completely on shelf while this one is displayed incompletely, it can convey a sense of active and can arose the attention of shopper more easily. (2) the degree of purchase involvement. when the decision is not important, what does the decider pursue is not optimal result, but the least efforts such as time, energy and so on. (Einhorn and Hogarth, 1981); (Wayne D. Hoyer, 1984). (3) the path of information search. when the information is not enough, customer will make decision on the perceived relation between things that have no direct connection (Ford and Smith, 1987). They may deduce the quality of the product by these marginal information such as country-of - origin, price, and the history of the factory. So to say they go along the peripheral path when search for information. (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983). (4) social obedience. the theory of social obedience holds that people look others' behavior not only as an information reference, but as a value reference, and

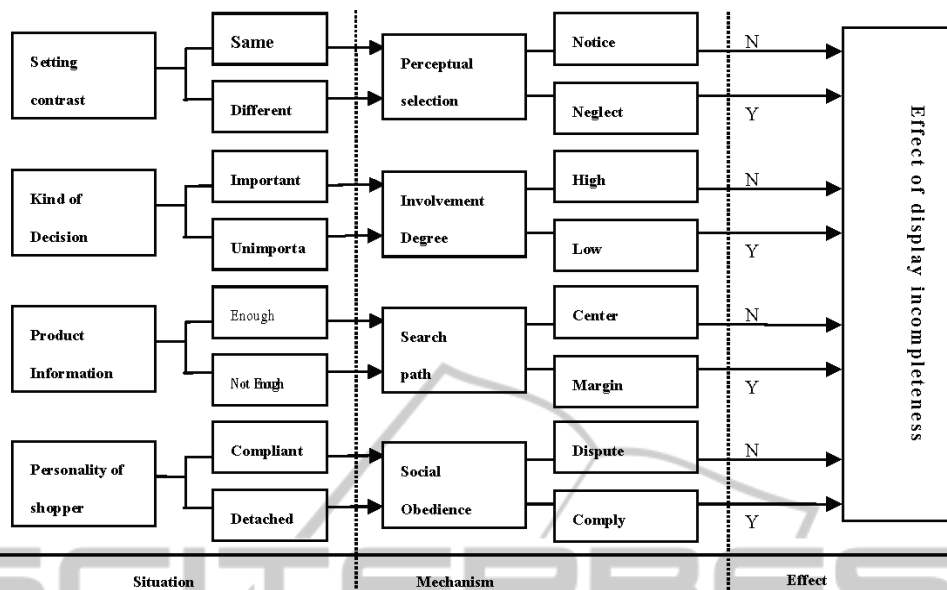


Figure 2: Mechanism Model of Display Incompleteness.

try to keep unanimous with others. There are many other theories such as Social Proof, Social Learning, Modeling hold the same standpoint. (5) personality of shopper. Psychoanalysis expert Karen Horney divides people into three categories: the compliant, the detached, the aggressive. the compliant is more likely to be affected by the cue figured by display incompleteness than the detached.

#### 4 HYPOTHESIS AND MODEL

Based on the above analyses, we guess that: whether display incompleteness can take active effect depends on many factors such as shop environment, product information, involvement of purchase, and personality of the shopper. We suppose that: (1) Only when the products all around are displayed completely can display incompleteness take active effect; (2) When decision information is not enough, the cue figured by display incompleteness have obvious effect. When customers are familiar with the products, display incompleteness cannot take active effect, and may have negative effect. (3) When the degree of purchase involvement is low, the effectiveness of display incompleteness is better; (4) When the personality of shopper is compliant, the effectiveness of display incompleteness is better; while when the personality of shopper is more independent, the effectiveness of display incompleteness is not obvious. We unify the above factors into a Mechanism Model of Display Incom-

pleteness (MMDI), the model illustrates as Figure 2.

#### 5 METHOD AND PROCEDURES

In order to test the model, we transfer the above hypothesis into those that can be proved in experiment to test the effect of environment contrast, product information, involvement degree, and personality on the effectiveness of display incompleteness.

- (1) The effect of display incompleteness is better when there is only one product is displayed incompletely than when many products are displayed incompletely at the same time;
- (2) The effect of display incompleteness of new products or unfamous products is better than that of famous ones;
- (3) The effect of display incompleteness of products with low price is better than that of high price products;
- (4) The effect of display incompleteness is better in low school degree than in high college degree.

We test these hypotheses through the follows experiment designs.

- (1) select two shelf that are far away in a shop, then display one product incompletely on one shelf and display three products incompletely on the other shelf, then observe the numbers of pickings;
- (2) select a unfamous product and a famous product to display incompletely two weeks, and then display them completely two weeks, observe and record the

Table 2: The results of different groups.

Factors	Group	Display Completeness	Display Incompleteness	Change
Setting kontras	One product	32	44	+37.5%
	Three product	90	72	-20%
Involvement degree	Low price	51	69	+35.3%
	High price	22	32	+45.5%
Product Information	Famous	52	40	-23.1%
	Unfamous	13	21	+61.5%
Personality	College city	28	35	+25%
	Old industry areas	22	26	+18.2%

number of pickings.

(3) select a high price product and a low price product to display incompletely two weeks, observe and record the number of pickings.

(4) select a product with obvious effect of display incompleteness from the previous experiments to display incompletely in two supermarkets near college and near old industry area separately for two weeks, and then display completely for two weeks. Observe and record the number of pickings.

## 6 RESULTS

The results of these experiments are illustrated in Table 2.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND THE FUTURE RESEARCH

This research confirmed the positive effect of incomplete display of merchandise. And found that marketplace environment, the product information owned by customer has influence on the effect of display incompleteness. The limitation of this study exists in (1) the time of experiment is short, the amount of sample is not enough, this may limit reliability of conclusion; (2) some experiment design needs to improve, for example, it may not be safe to suppose the personality based on the occupation of the main crowd who live near the supermarket. And the manipulation variable of involvement also needs to be improved.

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