
The Effect of Face-Front Book Display in a Public Library

Sarah P. Long

Much research has been conducted on the effects of different variables on the circulation of library books, especially that of displays. The research confirms that books displayed circulate significantly more than books not displayed. Studies conducted in the retail sales sector support this hypothesis and provide ideas for librarians and insight into consumer behavior.

Very little has been written, however, about the method of display. There have been studies of location, age, and size as well as behavioral studies on impulse buying and information processing. But the issue of displaying books face-front (with all or most of the book jacket showing), as opposed to displaying them spine-front, has not been studied. The hypothesis of this research project is that books displayed face-front will circulate more than those displayed spine-front.

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Libraries face a never ending struggle to justify themselves to funding and governing agencies. Circulation statistics are often used as justification and ways to increase the numbers are always welcome. This study, if the hypothesis is proven, should be relevant to all types of libraries when planning and implementing displays. It should support the theories of impulse buying and relate them to the world of libraries. Most importantly, it should give library administrators insight into their patrons, specifically that information consumers are subject to the same marketing techniques used on retail consumers.

A Review of the Literature

There are some basic concepts of consumer behavior that need to be reviewed and defined as a prelude to a review of the literature on library

displays. These concepts are the cornerstones of marketing strategy, since behavior analysis should be a means of better satisfying consumer needs (Robertson, Zielinski and Ward 1984). This section of the literature review will follow the purchase process from perception and information processing to the purchase itself, including impulse buying.

Perception and information processing are key points. Runyon (1977) defines perception as the process by which "we make sense of the world." We select from the many that are presented the stimuli which we will process. Perceptual categorization is the process through which we make all that stimuli manageable and organized by assigning perceptual classes to objects and events (Runyon). Marketing should surround products with aids to categorization—signs, tags, markings, displays, etc.

Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1986) described the stages that information passes through while being processed by the consumer. They are: exposure, attention, comprehension or perception, yielding or acceptance, and retrieval. Consumers cannot possibly process all the stimuli which are presented to the brain, and an understanding of what factors influence attention can be very useful. Stimuli that are related to a consumer's needs and are novel attract attention (Robertson, Zielinski, Ward 1984).

Runyon (1977) defined purchasing in terms of problem solving and borrows John Dewey's stages in his definition. They are: problem recognition, the search for a satisfactory solution, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase evaluation.

Impulse purchasing represents a special case in consumer problem solving in that such purchases are unplanned and involve no search activity. This behavior closely parallels browsing in a library, as we will see later. It is estimated that almost half of the buying decisions in supermarkets are impulse decisions and store managers are justified in spending a substantial part of their marketing budgets on planning store layouts, product locations, shelf positions, special

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displays, etc. to aid in guiding impulse buyers (Runyon 1977). For example, a study carried out in Super Value Stores over a period of twelve weeks indicated that an item given special display will increase in sales an average of 550%, chiefly because displays appeal to impulse buyers (Runyon).

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The most extensive and detailed study in the retail sector was done in eight Publix stores in central Florida. Merchandise scanners were installed in all eight stores in order to have an exact record of purchases. They studied the effects of newspaper ads, displays at the check-out counter or point-of-purchase displays, display location and display age on sales. They reported that point-of-purchase displays increased sales an average of 445%, that prime display locations increased sales by 363%, and that sales of displayed items decreases significantly after the first week (Dyer 1980).

Marketing News (1983) reported that sales of *Old Farmer's Almanac* increased in two thousand stores anywhere from 212% to 599%. Their displays were in prime locations, usually point of purchase; and the books were faced front (*Marketing News*, May 27, 1983).

The better we understand these basics of consumer research the better we can plan marketing for our libraries. Taylor and Johnson (1973) conducted an involved study of public library use in Great Britain in 1972. They found that two-thirds of library users were visiting the library for personal and recreational reasons and that they were looking for any novel of interest. This suggests that impulse behavior is at work in library patrons as well as grocery shoppers. They recommended that library managers observe book selling practices and provide more facilities for book displays and exhibits.

There have been several studies on the effectiveness of displays in libraries. Goldhor (1972, 1981) tested the hypothesis in three public libraries that books displayed in a prime location will circulate more, and found a significant increase in the circulation of books in prime location displays. Baker (1985) attempted to determine why displayed books circulate more and found that the circulation of books in prime displays increased 405% to 590% in one library and

708% to 784% in another. However, circulation of books in non-prime displays remained the same. This implies that the positioning of the display is a vital factor influencing use.

Baker (1986) identified three characteristics of library browsers. First, they do not attempt to identify a specific title by using the card catalog or some other tool, but instead go straight to the shelves to look for a book. Second, as Taylor and Johnson noted (1972), they are looking for any book that will meet their needs. Third, since they do not have a specific title in mind, they are susceptible to influence in their decision making. Baker pointed out that browsers are subject to user frustration when a collection becomes too large to scan easily. She suggested that librarians should help browsers "narrow their selection by developing strategies to focus patron attention on a smaller number of titles." Book lists and book displays are simple and effective strategies which can accomplish this when properly designed. They tend to work because "they place little or no burden of effort on the potential user and because they require little time to use" (Baker 1986).

Green (1981) wrote an excellent article on techniques libraries can use in merchandising. Her findings supported the theories of book displays and agreed with the recommendation of Taylor and Johnson that libraries adopt the book-selling techniques used in the retail sector. She mentioned the use of face-front display on the top and bottom shelves and on the shelf ends to give "movement and interest to what before was only a row of spines" (Green, p. 38). She cited the merchandising program at the Dallas Public Library where she is director of selection and acquisitions as an example. In the few months following the implementation of a merchandising program, circulation increased by ten percent.

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In summary then, it seems that libraries can benefit from the techniques used in retail marketing to boost the circulation of all types of books, perhaps in all types of libraries. Grocery shoppers, bookstore browsers, and library browsers appear to be displaying the same consumer behaviors and are equally susceptible to attention-getting devices such as displays of the varying types mentioned above.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to look at one method of book display, that is face-front, and test the hypothesis that books consistently displayed in this method circulate significantly more than those books displayed spine-front by narrowing browsers' choices, thus decreasing user frustration. However, in order to statistically test the data in a valid manner, a null hypothesis must be used. Therefore, the formal hypothesis of this study is that books displayed face-front will not circulate significantly more than those books displayed spine-front.

The experimental design used for this study was the four-cell pretest-posttest pattern. (Fig. 1). In this type of controlled experiment, two like groups are identified and an experimental variable is assigned to one of those groups, in this case group Y2. The groups are measured before and after the test. Y1 should not differ significantly from X1 and X2. If Y2 varies from the other groups by more than just chance, then it could be thought that the experimental variable led to or caused the difference.

Fig 1. The Four-Cell Pattern of Controlled Experiment

Before	After	
X1	Y1	Control Group
X2	Y2	Experimental Group

The Four-Cell Pattern of Controlled Experiment

The research was conducted at the Parkwood Branch of the Durham County Public Library in North Carolina. Books at least four months old from the Adult Current Fiction, which is housed at the front of the library with books customarily shelved both face-front and spine-front, were chosen for the study group. This section was chosen in order to eliminate two problems—bias on the part of the patron toward very new books and bias toward an entirely new display method. In addition, the seven-day circulation of this section would allow for more circulations and a shorter test period.

Two random samples of fifty books each were pulled from the approximately three hundred in this section to be the control and experimental groups.

Following the four-cell pattern, the control group was displayed spine out only (Y1) during

the test period. The experimental group was displayed face-front only during the test period (Y2). Both groups were randomly and haphazardly displayed face-front during the pre-test period (X1 and X2) according to usual library practice. The pre-test circulation figures (X1 and X2) were taken from the two months preceding the test period (Y1 and Y2). The test period was then run for two months.

At the end of the test period, all the books and book cards were pulled from the shelves and the circulation files for tabulation. The due dates that fell within the pre-test and test periods were entered into the record for each book in a database created with PC-File. The data was then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences-X.

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Results

In order to determine the effect of face front display on circulation, the control group and the experimental group were compared using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The average number of circulations per book was 3.30 for the control group and 3.28 for the experimental group during the pre-test period. This difference was not statistically significant. The average number of circulations during the post-test period was 2.58 for the control group and 4.70 for the experimental group. This difference was significant at the .000 level, implying the experimental variable of face-front display was associated with the circulation increase.

A review of the weekly circulation figures of both the experimental and control groups also suggests that face-front display was the causal factor of the circulation differences. The figures for both groups are very close during the first nine weeks of the study (the pre-test period), the greatest difference between them being only six circulations. From week ten (the first full week of the test period) to the end of the study, the divergence is quite large, ranging from eight to twenty-four more circulations per week for the group displayed face-front.

Therefore, the null hypothesis, that face-front display will not increase circulation, can be rejected. This method of display does have an effect on browsers by helping their brains wade through all the stimuli presented by gaining their attention, narrowing their choices, and causing them to select certain titles.

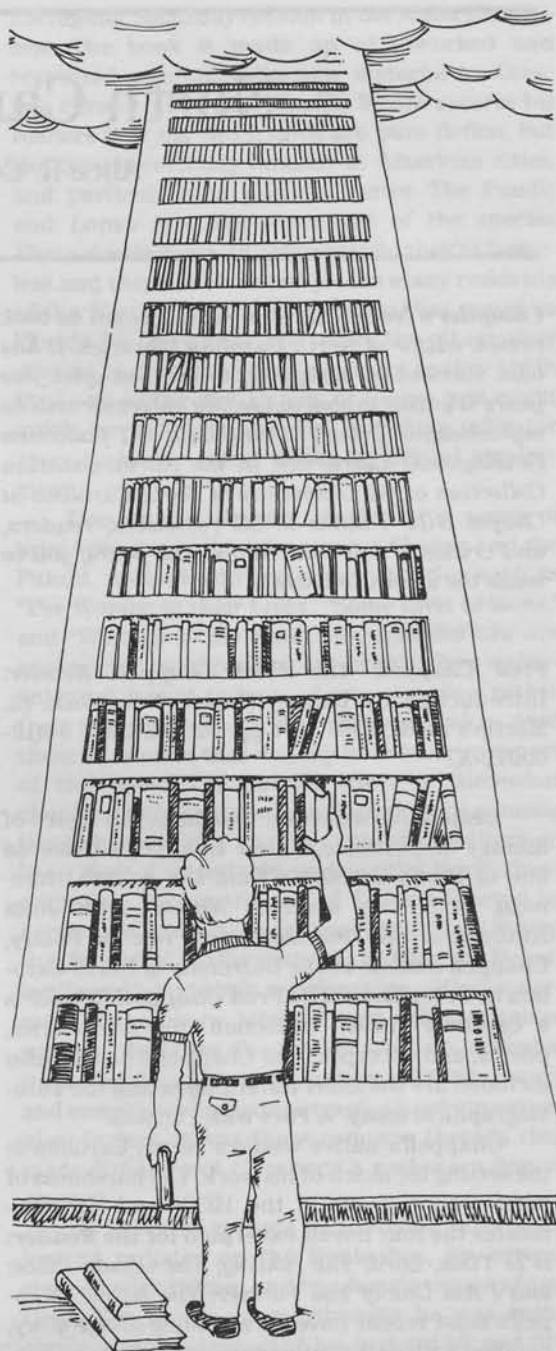
Implications for Further Research

Even though the scope of this study was limited, it shows that the method of display, not just the display itself, can significantly increase the circulation of books. Much has been written in marketing about what attracts a shopper's attention and these theories can be applied to library browsers with the same effect.

More research must be done however to substantiate the findings of this study. Studies in different types and sizes of libraries will need to be conducted. Research on bookjackets themselves should be done to study just what attracts the attention of the browser. Questionnaires could be used in conjunction with a controlled experiment to find out if patrons are aware of how they are choosing their reading materials. It would also be interesting to introduce such variables as height and location into a study of face-front display.

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