

**THE DIGITAL DRESSING ROOM:
MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS PERCEPTION OF MOBILE RETAILING**

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores consumer's shopping experience using an innovative technology of a digital dressing room. In a focus group, consumers were exposed to and shared their opinions about the new shopping app called VIZL, which was evaluated based on the dimensions of visual information, social interaction, and customization. Analyses of the focus group data suggest that mobile shopping using VIZL is vastly different from the tangible or online shopping experience. Specifically, the level of customization with the app is better in comparison with in-store shopping. The quality of social interaction was superior when compared with online. Lastly, the visual information the app portrays is weak in contrast with online shopping.

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I. Introduction

The retail shopping experience is being revolutionized. While a decade ago e-commerce was taking hold, now consumers are demanding more convenience through mobile shopping (m-commerce). Mobile shopping is when a consumer uses an internet-enabled mobile device (smartphone, tablet, etc.) to experience and shop a store or brand. This transformation is expected to have significant effect in consumer behavior and create a new battleground for retailers to compete.

Mobile shopping has become a critical component in determining consumer shopping behavior, since almost half of mobile research is conducted in stores. Of the consumers who utilize mobile research, 90% of buying behavior is affected by smartphone shopping (McKinsey & Company). Additionally, given that 66% of Americans ages 24-35 own a smartphone. A majority of consumers have the ability to use their phone to shop (Walsh). A consumer's personal relationship to their mobile device is an additional challenge that requires retailers to create a fundamentally distinctive strategy to serve this type of shopper.

It is lucrative for retailers to engage in the mobile shopping trend and generate a mobile retail experience that will capture consumers or they will be at risk of losing them to a more technologically savvy company. Currently, the mobile commerce industry stands at about \$6 billion in revenue. Mobile sales are expected to grow 40 percent each year over the next five years, reaching \$31 billion by 2016 (Greene). Customers are beginning to interact on multiple dimensions with retailing companies that demand a strong technological existence in both online and mobile formats.

One revolutionary mobile shopping experience that has the potential to drastically affect consumer shopping behavior is VIZL, a digital dressing room app created for the iPhone. Using this mobile app, consumers are able to "try-on" clothing without physically entering a dressing

room. As a smartphone app, VIZL gives customers the opportunity to either be in-store, on-the-go, or at home and visualize the fit of an outfit without the uncomfortable, discouraging experience of a dressing room. VIZL has not tested how it is received by customers and has not received the necessary feedback to improve its consumer perception.

II. Literature Review

The consumer's shopping experience has drastically altered since the turn of the century. Since this experience has changed, its definition also must be amended. The revised shopping experience is the customer's perception (both conscious and subconscious) of his/her interaction with an organization. This perception is shaped by is the totality of the organization's service, entertainment, and enjoyment of a store, whether virtual or in physical stores. Many studies have been conducted that explore the shopping experience.

After reviewing numerous journal articles, certain aspects of consumer's interaction with various forms of digital retail appeared to be central in shopping decisions. These aspects were features of physical shopping experience that a consumer valued that they still expected in the technological format. The research that has been conducted on online shopping and customers' interaction with this retail format is extremely enlightening. Although this research may assist in understanding how consumers interact with a technological form of shopping, the research does not necessarily translate to the mobile shopping experience, since there are significant differences between the shopping formats and requires additional research.

One dimension that was investigated in studies was perceived trust when a consumer shops online. One study, "Antecedents and Consequences of Trust in Online Product Recommendations: An Empirical Study in Social Shopping" by Hsiao, Kuo-Lun tested if a consumer's intention to purchase online is affected by peer interaction, which is created through social websites. The results portrayed that trust in product recommendations from others can

have a significant affect on purchase decisions. Using this concept, a shopping network should strengthen its trust between it and its customers. Another study, "Deriving Value from Social Commerce Networks" by Andrew Stephen also explored shopping decisions through interaction on social networks. This research showed that an increased level of accessibility creates a consumer driven online marketplace, which is connected a vast network. After analyzing the economic value created by allowing vendors to network with each other and customers, the study portrayed that a value of a shop is determined by how accessible it is. It showed that a good network positioning can significantly improve economic status and popularity of a shop. When consumers were questioned why they use social media, one study, "Survey Finds Consumers Using Pinterest to Engage With Retailers More Than Facebook, Twitter" by Kathy Grannis, found the most common responses was because a consumer was looking for product information, researching current trends, and finding styling ideas or expert opinions. This research shows that consumers base many shopping decisions on their perceptions of trust, which can be derived from a company's popularity and opinion of other customers. This is an important insight to test when utilizing an app, since there is also a social component that would translate into a consumer's perceived level of trust. Additionally, making financial transactions through mobile commerce is a point of further exploration, since this could also involve a level of consumer's perceived trust.

Customization through e-commerce was another aspect of shopping that studies investigated. One specific study's purpose was to investigate how customization in online shopping website features would effect consumer's attitudes about internet apparel shopping. These customization properties that were tested were interactivity with shopping representatives, customized additional information availability, and virtual models to portray the fit of merchandise. These appeared to be central in a customer's decision about product purchase.

Another study, "The Effect of Dynamic Retail Experiences on Experiential Perceptions of Value: An Internet and Catalog Comparison" by Charla Mathwick, also analyzed a customer's interaction with customization stated a more individualized shopping experience will cause a customer to have a more positive evaluation of the company if it is successful in satisfying their expectations. With the use of an app that functions as a visual dressing room, customization would also be an important dimension to further investigate, since customers will expect clothing to appear to fit them.

Multiple studies investigated a consumer's relationship to visual information and perception through online retailing. One study, "The Effects of Visual and Verbal Information on Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in Internet Shopping" by Minjeong Kim, found that the inability to physically scrutinize merchandise is a major deterrent in buying, since it is difficult to comprehend the tangible qualities of merchandise through a computer. After testing this hypothesis, the results revealed that detailed product descriptions are important, but that it is also vital that it is supported by visuals of the object. Another study, "Virtual Product Experience: Effects of Visual and Functional Control of Products on Perceived Diagnosticity and Flow in Electronic Shopping." By Jiang Zhienhui, revealed that visual control increased overall diagnosticity and flow, which means that when a consumer is able to experience a product through different angles and distance, he/she will believe that the shopping experience is effective in evaluating products. These studies proved that visual accuracy is vital component when consumers shop using technology. This factor needs to be further analyzed when applied to the app. It is important

Other advances in retailing were also analyzed in studies and can be used as a background for further exploration of a customer's perception of VIZL. Digital dressing room technology was investigated in multiple studies. This technology does not exist in a mobile

device form and is only able to be used from a computer, which limits the convenience and value of the system. When investigated, this technology was still in its infancy and is lacking in real time rendering or realism. From the study “A Body and Garment Creation Method for an Internet Based Virtual Fitting Room” by Dimitris Protopsaltou, consumers revealed an emphasis on realism in both a model’s physical appearance and material’s appearance. The program created, Vitruval Try-On accommodated these by utilizing virtual bodies that corresponded to real body shapes of various sizes and also calculated fabric parameters of elasticity, viscosity, and density, which aided the realism of the cloth. These are important factors to ensure are up to par in the mobile app, so that consumers are motivated actually use it. Without portraying realistic images, the app is useless, since consumers would not be able to get an accurate view of the fit of the clothing on their personal physique.

Studies also investigated mobile commerce and how customers related to retail through their cellular device. Although this appears to investigate a similar topic, these studies did not explore the use of apps with shopping, since they did not exist yet. One study, "Factors Affecting Purchase Intention on Mobile Shopping Web Sites" by Hsi-Peng Lu, analyzed a consumer’s interaction with online shopping using a mobile device. The weaknesses that this study revealed were weak bandwidth of mobile internet, which created disconnections and obstacle to a customer completing his/her purchase. Consumers were also discouraged to mobile shop due to the limited displays, smaller screens, and lack of memory compared to computers. Other important results from this study were that enjoyment strongly effects engagement in mobile shopping. In comparison, the outcome also revealed that anxiety or technophobia is harmful to a consumer’s internship to mobile shop

The literature that exists on technological shopping has not explored shopping using an app. Since shopping with an app is drastically different than using a mobile device to simply online shop, it would be beneficial to further investigate this topic.

III. The Shopping App: VIZL

VIZL is an app that allows consumers to try-on clothing without any effort through its virtual dressing room. VIZL has partnered with multiple companies including Branding Brand, the largest m-commerce provider to the Internet. Under Branding Brand are 150 leading retailers, including Anthropologie, Kate Spade, and American Eagle Outfitters. The app allows customers to create outfits, complete with accessories, with just the swipe of a finger.

Figure 1 portrays the VIZL interface and how consumers interact with the app. These screen shots show the different steps a consumer take when utilizing the features of the app. The process starts by creating a profile with the brand. From there, the consumer takes a picture that allows for their figure to be visible. She also enters in her measurements. After that, the customer can “shop” on VIZL, utilize the virtual dressing room, and dress her image in the clothing she picks. From there, she has the opportunity to share the outfit she created through text, email, or Facebook.

IV. Research Questions

In this study, I will investigate if the current digital shopping tools of VIZL are equivalent to the physical and online shopping experience. I will investigate which components of the app differ from a tangible shopping experience and what qualities that the app provides additionally.

Research Question:

- I. How do consumers evaluate the VIZL mobile tool and how does it compare to their shopping experience in store and/or online?

Specifically, I will explore the how consumers interact with tangible and online shopping in comparison with the app through three dimensions. These are visual information, customization, and social interaction.

When analyzing the dimension of visual information, I will be focusing on the how the imagery throughout the app is conveyed to consumers. These visual graphics should be highly communicative and be able to provide a consumer with an accurate idea of the merchandise as well as features of the app. This can be analyzed in terms of size of graphics, detail in pictures, quality of the images, and any other visual details.

The component of customization will be analyzed by how a consumer is able to individually interact with the program and how she responds to the higher amount of personalization. Instead of a website, which only shows how an outfit fits on a model, the opportunity for a consumer to personalize an outfit to their body offers a higher level of customization. Additionally, the suggestions of the personal shopper are another customized feature, which will be investigated for the consumers' opinion.

The measurement of social interaction, in the study, is defined by how likely a consumer is to use the app to communicate. Although VIZL is an individual experience, its output of dressing room images and outfits are intended to be shared through multiple platforms. These platforms include text, email, Facebook, and Twitter. Through analyzing this dimension, consumers will be asked if they are likely to use social outlets to share information.

V. METHODOLOGY

OVERALL METHOD:

In order to gain insights on digital shopping, I conducted a focus group that educated the participants about the VIZL app. I chose to utilize a focus group because it provides more in-depth data, generates more participant thought, and allows for additional probing versus a

survey. A survey usually requires minimal participant thought and cannot be explored further. By exposing consumers to this app through the form of a tutorial video, consumer will be able to comprehend the uses and benefits of the innovative app, as well as give critiques.

SAMPLE:

The target market of VIZL is millennial consumers. This age group ranges from 16 to 34 years old. This generation grew up with technology embedded in every part of life and media is highly integrated into their lifestyle. The universal use of mobile phones in this age group is evident and furthermore, consumers are highly involved with their smart phones, which function as these consumers source of social interaction, information, and entertainment.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS:

A focus group consisting of millennial customers was created in order to evaluate the research questions. A short recruitment questionnaire was sent out prior to the actual study in order to generate some general information about the consumer and her preferences. This recruitment questionnaire delivered 17 responses total. Of the total responses, nine (41.7 percent) were eligible to participate at the specific time and location of the focus group. When the actual focus group took place, the group consisted of four participants who were all University of Arizona students. Additionally, the focus group was limited to ninety minutes.

The questionnaire provided statistics, which generally reflected the opinions of the participants of the focus group. The recruitment survey also revealed that 82.4 percent of consumers who responded owned a smart phone. Another dimension consumers portrayed was their preferred form of shopping. 88.2 percent of participants chose in-store as their preferred form. In contrast, 35.3 percent said they prefer to shop using the online format. Other specifics about the focus group characteristics are listed in figure 2 in the appendix.

PROTOCOL:

An ad was put out and asked for a response for those who are interested. In order to attract people to attend the focus groups, it was advertised that food would be provided. The ad was put out through the Retailing and Consumer Sciences Listserv, the Family Studies Listserv, and the TREND Fashion Club Listserv. Additionally, the focus group was promoted through announcements in specific classes. The recruitment questionnaire was attached to the listserv emails, which provided interested participants the opportunity to sign up for the study and articulate their personal shopping preferences (see figure 3). During the focus group, a recording would take place in order to later transcribe and interpret, which required consent from participants. This consent was obtained in the recruitment questionnaire that was answered prior to the focus group. If a participant did not agree to being filmed, they were contacted and told they would not be able to participate.

In the focus group, specific questions were generated that helped guide the conversation, but attempted to get subjects to express their true opinions and not lead them to a certain conclusion (see figure 4) . A conversation about shopping habits and values started the focus group. In order to get the participants to feel comfortable and to think on a deeper level, participants were instructed to look at the posters with two words listed, (1) shopping and (2) technology in retail. Post-it notes and a pen were provided for participants and they were instructed to write down three words that they associate with for each concept. After jotting these down, the conversation began and participants were asked what they wrote and delved further into their shopping experiences by conversing about why they wrote specific words. This icebreaker, fostered conversation through a different activity and also led participants to start thinking a different way about retailing. After getting an impression of the group's shopping

behavior in general, the conversation then turned to introducing the app. The app was first demonstrated through videos created by the founders of VIZL. The first video explained what the app was and the second video showed how the app would be used through a tutorial. This allowed consumers to learn about the app, which then set the stage to discuss their perceptions of the app. Participants then shared their opinions and had lively conversations about their critiques of the app.

link to video shown:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6_ePIRwZAA&feature=player_embedded

VI. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS:

From the focus group, valuable consumer insights were gathered about the millennial shopping habits. Although nine participants expressed interest, four participants came to the focus group. This was a smaller sample, but the size allowed for more conversation and gave every participant the opportunity to speak his or her mind on every topic.

The post-it note discussion portrayed that convenience is one of the most valuable parts of their shopping experience to the focus group participants. They felt that the in-store shopping experience was devalued by lines, returns, and clothing not fitting properly. The participants said they shop various formats for apparel, which included boutiques, department stores, or online. They largely agreed that shopping boutiques provided unique clothing and that they interacted with the sales associates. At department stores, although there is variety, the participants said they do not talk to the sales associate or ask for advice. When discussing the online format, the participants said that it was nice that usually the clothing was in-stock when it may not be in stores, but drawbacks were that the models on the popular online shopping websites did not represent a typical women's body shape, the websites showed the clothing in an unrealistic manner, and shipping time of waiting for merchandise.

When discussing technology in fashion, the participants thought of innovative fabrics and new shipping methods of quick delivery. When asked about shopping on their phones, the group agreed that they might look at an apparel website on their phone, but would not purchase from that format. Participant #4 stated, “I don’t really buy stuff on it [phone]. If there’s something that I really want, I’ll look at it on my phone, but I would go back and buy it on my computer. It’s not convenient [to buy on the phone]. I would rather do it on my computer because it takes so much longer on the phone to type in my information.” Other mobile phone shopping complaints were that the picture is not large enough to see detail and that shopping on phones sometimes doesn’t work well and often double charges a person. When discussing shopping apps, the participants said they largely use Starbucks and Amazon app. They all agreed that they used Pinterest to shop, since it had a variety of clothing and ideas all on one format, but that typically their shopping was not converted into a sale and instead was just to look at style concepts.

When participants were asked about using their phones during shopping, they said they really only use them in dressing room to send a picture of an outfit to friend. They considered shopping a social activity and typically need approval of friends to purchase clothing.

Overall, the app was well received by the focus group participants. After seeing the video and tutorial about VIZL, the participants agreed that they would use the app, but out of boredom. When discussing the app, participant one said, “I would use it when I’m bored in class... If I had nothing else at the moment or if I was in the store I would use it.” All participants agreed that it would not completely take the place of shopping in a real store and they would still maintain their usual shopping activities. In evaluation of the app, the participants thought that the in-store tangible experience still created unmatched experience. They thought for the app to be equal to the online sector, it needed to not just have the same capabilities, but excel at creating a digital dressing room.

The component of the social interaction that allowed VIZL users to send their ideas and pictures to friends over a variety of methods was well received. The participants agreed they would send pictures and ideas, since it would be similar to the idea of Pinterest. Participant #2 suggested, “the app should have folders like Pinterest has. If I could save my outfits by different categories, that would be cool.” The ability to share in multiple ways creates an enhanced social interaction, that portrays that in terms of social media, VIZL is unmatched by online shopping, since a consumer cannot able to share an image of herself in the clothing.

The visual information component was deficient, since VIZL users were unable to view enough detail about the merchandise. The smartphone’s minute screen only provides a small glimpse into what merchandise looks like. When a consumer is online shopping, she is typically able to get a highly detailed view of the clothing that allows her to fully comprehend the look of the merchandise. Additionally, the participants’ critiques were that the clothing was not realistic and just looked pasted on during the tutorial of the app. Participant #3 suggested, “You know JC Penney is redoing everything. They’re redoing the Levi department for men. They’re doing this tablet thing and they show every jean and show a 360 degree view each jean. You can see each angle of a person.” She felt that the app only showed the front and back, so it lacked the multiplicity of view necessary to fully comprehend the fit of the merchandise and suggested to incorporate that capability into the app for a better experience with the visuals of the dressing room.

The customization abilities were a positive to the participants, since they emulated the online and store experience that allows a customer to feel personally catered to. The personal shopper concept was well received by the group who believed that the suggestions on online websites are generally helpful, so that feature would also be a positive. They said that if they were provided choices that were in a particular price range, that it would be valuable. The ability

to see the clothing on oneself instead of online model was viewed as a positive by the focus group, since the models were considered unrealistic for every type of body. Unfortunately, the level of accuracy of the app was not reliable. Participant two criticized, “[i]f you have a different body type, watching it put the dress on the girl, it was like it was like a paste on top and move the arms down... On a person, you would see more this lump here or this body shape here, so I don’t know how it would exactly look, but I would mess around with it. ”

VIZL also appeared deficient in comparison with the online format, which gives details about merchandise that includes measurements, materials, care instructions, and reviews.

VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Shopping through apps has started to gain traction and become popular among millennial consumers. Although these women are shopping, the focus group revealed that they are not usually buying with their smart phone. The challenge for any strictly mobile shopping app is that consumers still turn to bricks and mortar or online shopping when making the purchase. Additionally, consumers did not perceive VIZL as a revolutionary shopping concept that would replace the existing formats and that it was more supplementary and for entertainment.

The level of convenience and personalization was a selling point to the participants who agreed that they would use the app when they were bored and had nothing to do, but all decided that the app needed some significant improvements to be taken more seriously. The critiques of the app included more realistic images that would better emulate a tangible dressing room, which would provide an improved visual information component. Another suggestion was more organization within the app that mirrors the features of Pinterest, which would advance the social interaction characteristic. Lastly, the participants requested better options in merchandise within the app, which could relate to customization and having merchandise that is relevant to customers.

VIII. LIMITATIONS

Limitations to this study were that there was a small focus group that was representative of a larger population of millennials. The sample was drawn from a homogenous group of college students who all live in the same environment and attend the same university. Therefore, the lack of diversity may change the results of how the app was received by customers in the general public.

Additionally, the study chose to focus on the overall shopping experience, which was defined in specific terms. Shopping experience can be perceived in multiple ways, so this different view of shopping, could potentially skew the results. Future research on this app and other shopping apps on smart phones require further research to make any substantial conclusions about consumer interaction and perception.

IX. PERSONAL STATEMENT

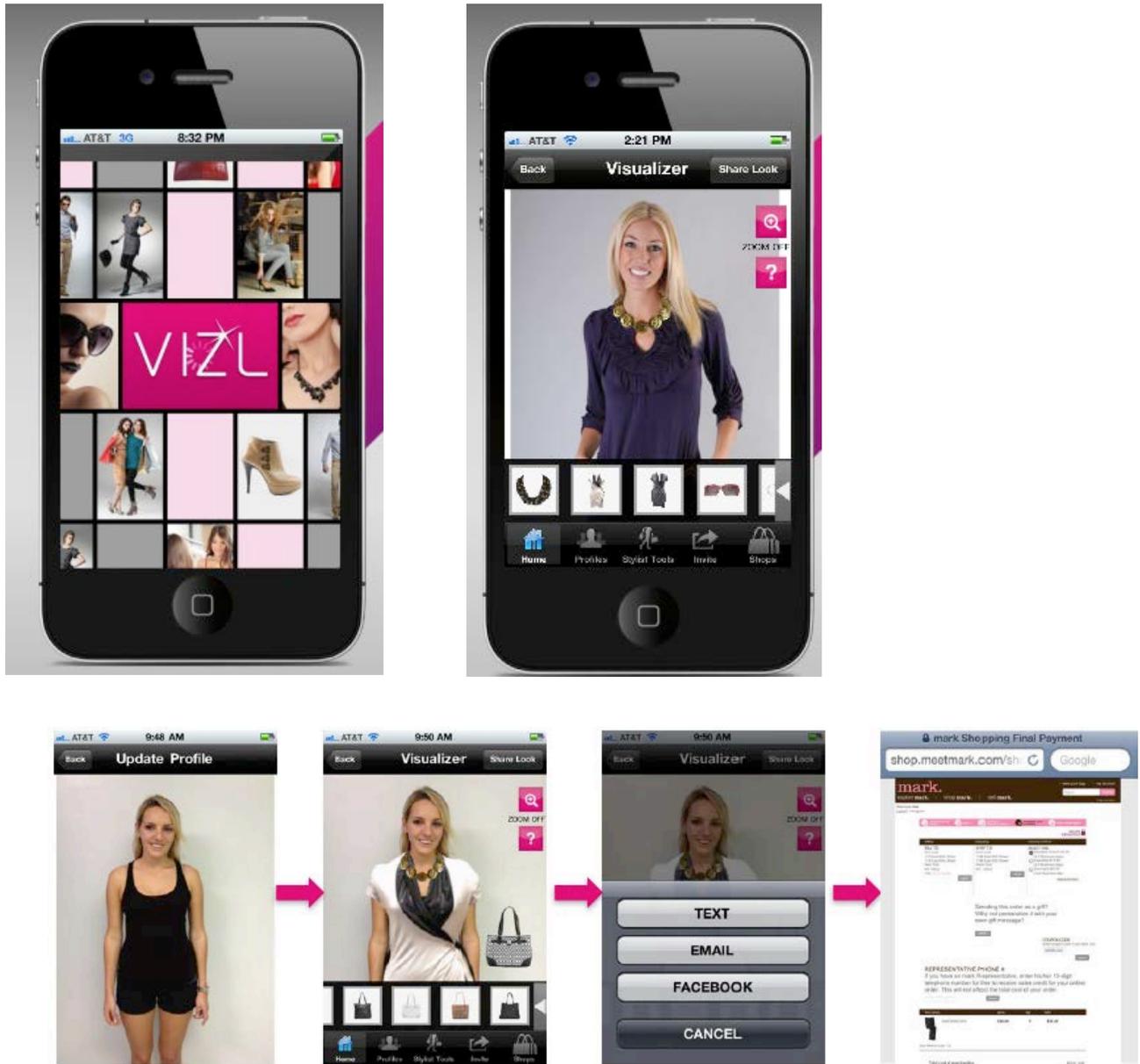
Through conducting research and developing this thesis, I became aware of the difficulties that a researcher faces. Initially, I was under the impression that the research would occur initially, but what I discovered was that a significant amount of background work must be performed before carrying out research. I discovered that the process and answer is not as clear cut and simplified as I would have like it to be. Lastly, I realized the difficulty in getting participants in research. Although I reached out in multiple ways and had incentives of lunch and extra credit, it was still challenging to achieve a high number of participants in the focus group.

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Appendix

Figure 1



Source: <http://www.govizl.com/index.html>

Figure 2: Focus Group Specifics

Participant	Year in School	Area of Study
#1	Senior	Media Arts Major Communication Minor
#2	Freshman	Pre- Retailing and Consumer Sciences Major
#3	Junior	Pre- Pharmacy Major
#4	Junior	Family Studies Major

Figure 3: Qualification Survey

Focus Group Survey

1. What is your name & email address?

2. What is your year in school?

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

***3. What is your major?**

4. What is your preferred form of shopping?

In-store

Online

Mobile

5. Do you own a smartphone?

Yes

No

6. The focus group will be taped. Do you give your consent to be filmed?

Yes

No

7. Are you available on Friday, April 5th at 12:30pm?

Yes

No

Figure 4: Focus Group Questions

INTRODUCTION:

Hi! Welcome to the focus group. I'm Addi Steinberg and I will be conducting this group for my Honor's Thesis. A focus group is used to gather the general public's feedback and comments about a particular product or service

A. On your post-it notes write five words or phrases that come to mind when you see these words. Then put your post-its on the correlating poster. (Posters: Shopping, Technology in Retail)

B. Circle words. (On-line, In-store; Mobile, app) have discussion about the words

QUESTIONS:

1. General Shopping Habits Discussion

- What type of shopping do you participate in? Online, In-store, Mobile, etc?
 - Why do you choose this form?
- Why or why not do you use online shopping? What are the benefits and is there something that is lacking in that type of shopping?
- How important is technology to your shopping experience?
 - What forms of technology do you use? Phone, Tablet, Computer, etc.
- How do you like to shop? In a large group? With just one other person or alone? Why?
- Do you send pictures or merchandise to others? (Whether it's on or off of you)
- Do you like when a sales associate dotes on you or do you find that frustrating?
- What retail apps do you presently have on your smartphone? What companies' apps excel at aiding the shopping experience? Why?

2. Introduce the VIZL app through the youtube video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6_ePIRwZAA&feature=player_embedded

- **Would you use this app?** Tell me a bit more why you would or wouldn't
- **How would you improve this app? What would you change?**
- What components do you like best?
- What do you think of the feature of personal shopper?
 - How likely are you to use this feature?
- Would you feel comfortable buying merchandise through this app?
- Would you use the feature to share on outfit? Why or why not?
- What is VIZL missing that the online format has? What is it missing that the store format has?

CONCLUSION:

Thanks so much for taking the time out of your day to participate in this focus group. Is there anything else that you would like to share or discuss? I will be using your responses to analyze how consumers interact with this innovative form of shopping.

To hear the focus group:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A97KMRVDZk0>