



The Effect of Visual Merchandising and Design Appeal on Customer Interaction and Shopping in Fashion Retailing on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to establish how visual merchandising and design appeal affect consumer interest and intention to buy online in the fashion retail industry in Pakistan. The interpretations were based on the stimulus organism response paradigm and the Technology Acceptance Model. The data were gathered through the use of a structured questionnaire that was given to 320 online fashion consumers. The information was analysed with the help of partial least squares structural equation modelling. It was found that the quality of visual design, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived enjoyment have a significant positive impact on consumer attitude, which, in its turn, has a powerful effect on online purchase intention. The results of the analysis provided practical tips that online fashion retailers can implement to complement their online visual merchandising and increase customer interaction. The results can give practical ideas to online fashion retailers to build customer engagement based on effective visual merchandising and design strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Online fashion retail competitive environment has increased the demand of online sites with visual and interactive online platforms. Historically viewed as a physical outlet, visual merchandising is now present online whereby the aesthetics of design and interactivity influence consumers. In the context of a Pakistan-based economy, where online fashion retail is growing at a fast rate, the role of visual merchandising in consumer interaction can hardly be overemphasized. The paper aims at identifying the correlation between the components of online visual merchandising and consumer engagement, as

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well as explaining how consumer engagement can be transformed into purchase behaviour. The rise of e-commerce has transformed the entire retail landscape of the world making it one of the ubiquitous aspects of consumer behaviour in the international consumer scene. The growth of online platforms has increased the intensity of competition among online retailers and the brands tend to focus on determinants that can influence consumer perceptions and buying behaviour (Colombi et al., 2018).

One of the factors that dictate the digital context is that of visual merchandising and design appeal, which represents the deliberate use of visuals such as layout, visual images, presentation of products and aesthetics to appeal to and capture customers (Ha et al., 2007). Visual merchandising does not just apply to physical spaces but is now being instrumental in the online world where consumers rely on visual information to evaluate what they cannot physically examine (Jongmans et al., 2022). The empirical studies show that consumer attention, satisfaction, and interaction depend on the quality of the product imagery and the design of digital interfaces significantly and, thus, determine the attitude toward online shopping experiences (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012).

Furthermore, online fashion retail can be viewed as an example of how the visual appeal can be leveraged to increase consumer interest and improve perceived value with technological opportunities, including virtual try-on tools and interactive displays (Samy et al., 2025). Theoretical principles of consumer behaviour in the online setting are often based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Stimulus- Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, which argue that the outside stimuli (e.g., the quality of design and usability) influence the internal consumer conditions (e.g., attitude, perception) and, consequently, the intentions of the behaviour (Cheng et al., 2024). The empirical studies conducted in online fashion and clothing segments prove that the visual characteristics are related to the purchase intention through the mediation of the attitudes towards using an online platform (Lin et al., 2025). The findings reflect the importance of aesthetic and functional design features in strengthening consumer trust and enjoyment and final purchase behaviour.

However, extensive literature has been conducted in the event of visual cues and consumer reaction in retail, there is an increasing literature that aims to pursue the development of visual merchandising and design attraction originating the online consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in the fashion industry, particular in the emerging markets like Pakistan. The objective of this research study is to examine the influence of visual merchandising and design appeal on customer interaction and online shopping behaviour using a structured consumer behaviour framework.

Research Objectives

- To test the impact of visual merchandising on customer interaction.
- To determine how design appeal influences online buying behaviour.
- To explore the association between purchase intention and customer interaction.
- To determine the synergistic effect of visual merchandising and design appeal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The appeal to visual merchandising and design is a significantly studied factor of consumer interaction in the case of ecommerce. Visual elements, such as the site design, product images, colour effects, and interactive functions in online retailing, directly influence consumer attitudes and behaviour, particularly in the fashion sector where it is impossible to test the product directly (Marmat, 2023). The empirical evidence shows that aesthetically pleasing interfaces not only attract users but also increase the perceived quality of the site and trust of users, which induce a positive cognitive and affective response (Sulikowski et al., 2022). In this regard, visual appeal is not the aesthetic property but a strategic stimulus, which can control the background psychological processes that rule out the purchasing decisions (Begum et al., 2023).

Another key construct that is regularly explored in the digital retail research is consumer attitude toward online shopping. The perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived enjoyment under the concept of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and its recent developments play a powerful role in terms of the overall attitude of consumers toward online platforms (Cho & Son, 2019). Empirically perceived enjoyment, or the intensity of fun or enjoyment obtained through interaction with the site,

has been shown to have a direct, positive impact on positive attitudes and increases purchase intentions especially in hedonic situations such as fashion retailing (Moorhouse et al., 2017). Research in the developing markets shows that, despite the fact that functional features such as ease of navigation still play a role, hedonic factors involving visual design have a significant impact on consumer interaction and positive perceptions (Kusumawardani et al., 2023).

Recent empirical studies in various fashion online stores have also substantively supported the relationship between consumer attitude and online purchase intention. It has been found by several studies that, as soon as consumers have a favourable attitude toward an online platform, which is formed in utilitarian and hedonic determinants, they will develop a significantly greater tendency to have strong purchase intentions (Lee, et al., 2022). As an example, Park et al. (2015) have shown that appealing visual merchandising not only increases dwell time on a Web site but also the purchase intention because of increased consumer confidence and reduced perceived risk. In addition, the cross-cultural studies suggest that the visual attractiveness and usability become a more significant predictor of online shopping behaviour in developing economies with increased rates of digital literacy and smartphone adoption (Madan & Yadav, 2018). All these findings suggest the need to develop integrated models that include the visual design, consumer attitudes and purchase intentions to explain the success of online fashion retail holistically.

Online fashion retail has the potential to design marketing that is effective. Design marketing refers to the aspect of marketing that incorporates design concepts in marketing to reinforce brand communication, enhance customer experience, and create value. Design marketing is also central in online fashion retailing since consumers largely use visual details to rate products and brands. Aesthetics, chromatic harmony, typographic selection and imagery of websites all determine the perceptions of the consumers with regard to professionalism, credibility and trustworthiness (Cyr, 2008). It is empirically proven that attractive online settings positively influence the emotions and attitudes of consumers, thus causing an increase in the engagement and intention to make a purchase (Manganari et al., 2009). Design marketing, in the context of fashion, does not only help in conveying the product characteristics but also conveys other symbolic meanings related to lifestyle, identity, and social status (Joo et al., 2006). Therefore, online fashion retailers that hope to distinguish themselves in the competitive online market need effective design marketing strategies that would enable them to share a common market base with other online fashion retailers.

Visual Merchandising in the Online World

Traditionally focusing on the use of products in a tangible retail environment to ensure a consumer is drawn toward purchase, and product positioning can instigate the purchase behaviour, visual merchandising has been modified to a digital interface where layout, positioning of the product, quality of images, and navigational interface can define the shopping experience (Catherine Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). The online visual merchandising is aimed at recreating and improving the sensory shopping experience of the brick-and-mortar stores with the help of the rich visual data and user-friendly navigation. According to the prior research, the product images of high quality, multi-view, and zoom features reduce the perceived risk and enhance the purchase confidence of online fashion customers (Park & Stoel, 2005). In addition, the regularity of visual presentation and structure design make information processing and cognitive load less, which improves consumer satisfaction and buying intention (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

Technological Acceptance Model

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) is used to explain the acceptance of technology among users in terms of two fundamental beliefs namely, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The perceived usefulness is the level of how people feel that using a system will improve their performance, the perceived ease of use is the level of how people consider the system to be easy to use. TAM has proved to be extensively used in research about e-commerce to forecast attitudes and intentions towards online shopping. Although TAM can be considered as a sound framework of having functional elements of technology adoption, researchers state that hedonic and experiential variables should be added to it to help explain online consumer behaviour, especially in the context of fashion retail (Childers et al., 2001). The inclusion of design-related constructs in TAM becomes an effective way to address a more holistic picture of the very online environments shape consumer decision-making.

Perceived Enjoyment

The concept of perceived enjoyment is the degree to which it is felt that a shopping platform online is enjoyable and entertaining regardless of the result of a performance (Davis et al., 1992). The pleasure in online fashion retailing is a crucial factor that defines the positive attitudes since fashion shopping is often hedonic in terms of pleasure and self-expression. There is empirical evidence that pleasant online experiences enhance browsing duration, interest and intention to purchase (Childers et al., 2001). Both visual attractiveness, interactive capabilities and captivating information play significant roles in the perceived enjoyment when shopping in online fashion shops.

Customer Attitude and Internet Buy Intention

Consumer attitude denotes the personal judgement of online shopping and indicates either positive or negative attitudes towards buying the products via digital media (Ajzen, 1991). The cognition and affective evaluation relationship translates into behavioural intentions, which is mediated by attitude. Online purchase intention refers to a possibility that a customer will purchase goods through an online medium. Regular studies prove that favourable online shopping attitudes are significant predictors of purchase intention (Pavlou, 2003). Attitude is subjective by the functionality and the experiences (visual appeal and enjoyment) in fashion retailing.

Research Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and theoretical bases, this research suggests a meaningful theoretical framework incorporating the elements of design marketing, visual merchandising, and TAM constructs to explain the online purchase intention.

- H₁: The quality of the visual design has a positive impact on the consumer attitude to online fashion shopping.
- H₂: Perceived usefulness has a significant impact on consumer attitude towards online fashion shopping.
- H₃: The perceived ease of use has a significant effect on consumer attitude to online fashion shopping.
- H₄: Perceived enjoyment has a significant impact on consumer attitude towards online shopping of fashion items.
- H₅: The consumer attitude has a significant impact on online purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was selected in this research to test the hypotheses put forward empirically. The survey was a cross-sectional design that was used to gather the data of the online consumers of fashion in Pakistan. The sample population was made up of online fashion shoppers who had in the past half a year made a purchase of fashion products. Respondents living in large Pakistani cities such as Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Hyderabad were used to collect the data. A convenience sampling method was adopted that is not probability based given the consideration of constraints with respect to accessibility. The questionnaire was a structured one, which consisted of two parts to gather the data. The first section was used in the collection of demographic data, with the second section evaluating the constructs of the study on the basis of the scale that was already validated and modified to fit in the online fashion setting. Every item was assessed using five-point Likert scale and the response choices ranged between one (strongly disagree) and five (strongly agree).

Data Analysis Technique

The data was analysed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS. The sample size of 350 questionnaires was distributed to Pakistani online fashion consumers; 320 others were considered as valid after eliminating the cases of incomplete and inconsistent answers. The dataset was screened before the analysis went on the values missing, outliers and normality. The statistics of skew and kurtosis of all constructs were within the acceptable range of -2 and +2, which means good normality.

RESULTS & FINDING

Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1, the demographic profile of the respondents is presented, with some of the variables being age, gender, education level.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Constructs	Mean	SD
Visual Design Quality	3.87	0.71
Perceived Usefulness	3.74	0.68
Perceived Ease of Use	3.91	0.65
Perceived Enjoyment	3.96	0.73
Consumer Attitude	3.89	0.69
Online Purchase Intention	3.92	0.72

To generalise the respondents' perception towards the variables under examination, descriptive statistics were performed to summarize the data of the respondents. The construct means were all above 3.5 indicating rather positive attitudes towards online fashion shopping sites. The highest mean scores were found in perceived enjoyment (Mean = 3.96) and perceived ease of use (Mean = 3.91) and this has indicated the importance of hedonic experience and usability in online fashion retailing.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The outcome of the correlation analysis between the variables of the study is presented in table 2.

Table 2
Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Visual Design Quality	0.86	0.90
Perceived Usefulness	0.83	0.88
Perceived Ease of Use	0.85	0.89
Perceived Enjoyment	0.88	0.92
Consumer Attitude	0.87	0.91
Online Purchase Intention	0.89	0.93

Measurement model was evaluated in terms of reliability and validity. Internal reliability was analysed based on Cronbach alpha and composite reliability with all the indicators exceeding the recommended value of 0.70 and this confirmed confidence in the reliability of the results. Validity convergent was defined through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) since all the constructs have a value that went above the 0.50 threshold. The Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) supported the idea of discriminant validity, in which the square root of AVE of each construct was greater than the inter-construct correlations.

Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing

The table 3 shows the regression analysis employed in testing the proposed hypotheses.

Table 3
Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Structural Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H ₁	Visual Design Quality → Consumer Attitude	0.29	4.87	0.001	Supported
H ₂	Perceived Usefulness → Consumer Attitude	0.18	3.12	0.002	Supported
H ₃	Perceived Ease of Use → Consumer Attitude	0.21	3.95	0.001	Supported
H ₄	Perceived Enjoyment → Consumer Attitude	0.34	5.62	0.001	Supported
H ₅	Consumer Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.61	12.84	0.001	Supported

The structural model was tested using a bootstrap approach with 5,000 resamples to test the hypotheses that were put forward. Results showed that the quality of visual design ($b = 0.29, p < 0.001$), perceived usefulness ($b = 0.18, p = 0.002$), perceived easy to use ($b = 0.21, p = 0.001$) and perceived enjoyment ($b = 0.34, p = 0.001$) had statistically significant positive effects on consumer attitude. Moreover, consumer attitude proved to have a significant impact on online purchase intention ($b = 0.61, p < 0.001$). This in turn supported all hypotheses.

Model Explanatory Power

The basic statistics (coefficient of determination (R^2)) indicates a moderate to strong explanatory power since it indicates that the model can explain 58 percent variance in consumer attitude and 37 percent variance in online purchase intention. The effect size analysis also indicated that there were medium to large effects indicated by perceived enjoyment and consumer attitude, which therefore highlight the critical role they play in explaining online consumer behaviour.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that the positive influence of visual merchandising on customer contact is important in online fashion retailing, supported by the reviewed literature (Park et al., 2015; Begum et al., 2023). This implies that effective visual contents are important in capturing and involving the consumers in the online spaces. This finding is in line with the findings of past researches, which stress on the fact that visually appealing layouts increase user attention and interaction. This could be through the fact that appealing visual displays make online shopping more involving and interesting. This is why online retailers need to invest in good imagery and attractive web designs in order to enhance the attractiveness of the customers. On the same note, the findings suggest that design attractiveness plays an important role in online shopping. This observation is consistent with the body of literature, which emphasizes the significance of aesthetic design in influencing the consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. One of the reasons could be that a pleasing design makes the design look more coming thereby making the customers move on to make purchases. Therefore, retailers ought to target on enhancing the aesthetics and usability of websites to impact positively through consumer behaviour.

In addition, the customer communication was observed to have a strong influence in online shopping. This is congruent with the existing literature, which indicates that greater sales intentions are created by the level of interaction. This could be explained by the fact that the interactive features add the level of engagement and satisfaction to the user and ultimately buy decision. The findings are supported by the reviewed literature (Samy et al., 2025). Online retailers are therefore advised to integrate in terms of interactive features like product zoom, reviews as well as customized recommendations to improve user experience. In general, the results indicate the mutual significance of the visual merchandising and design appeal in creating customer engagement and online shopping. Such findings confirm why fashion retailers should be strategic when it comes to designing websites and visual display in order to keep up in the online market.

CONCLUSION

The current research examined how design marketing and visual merchandising affects the purchase intention online in the Pakistani fashion market. The research offers a holistic framework in the understanding of consumer behaviour in online fashion by combining TAM with design and hedonic variables. The results provide useful information to scholars and practitioners who strive to perfect digital retail tactics.

Practical Implications

The emphasis must be made on the high quality of visual presentation, content and user-friendly interfaces to create positive consumer behaviour and purchase intentions through fashion retailers. Professional on-site design and interactive functions might be highly effective in enhancing online shopping experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has limitations associated with the sampling technique, as well as, the cross-sectional design. Longitudinal studies and probability sampling techniques should be considered in future studies in order to increase the generalizability. In addition, other variables like trust and social influence can be added to the model to make it even richer.

Competing Interests

The authors declared no competing interests.

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