

Research Article 07

Impact of Visual Merchandizing on Consumer's Willingness to Purchase with the Moderating Role of Generations in Sri Lankan Fashion Retailers

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Abstract

The process of deliberately positioning objects in a retail setting in order to draw customers, produce an engaging shopping experience, and eventually increase sales is known as visual merchandizing. In the retail sector, visual merchandising has a significant impact on consumers' propensity to buy. However, the intended research findings are insufficient to determine how visual merchandising influences customers' propensity to buy, particularly in the setting of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Sri Lanka's heterogeneous age makeup adds complexity to this relationship. Therefore, the goal of this study is to determine how visual merchandising components affect consumers' propensity to buy while taking into account the moderating influence of generations. Primary data were collected from 200 respondents living in Western Province in Sri Lanka based on the convenience sampling method. Results indicated that color and lighting have a substantial beneficial impact on consumer purchase intention, with product display having the highest impact. Furthermore, these associations were found to be significantly moderated by generation, with various generations responding differently to consumer's willingness to purchase. In addition to strongly moderating the relationship between color and lighting on consumers' willingness to purchase, generations also significantly moderate the relationship between store layout and consumer willingness to purchase. These findings have significant practical ramifications for retailers and marketers involved in the Sri Lankan retail industry. Retailers can better serve the preferences of various demographic segments by customizing their marketing campaigns and optimizing their store surroundings by knowing the elements that influence willingness to purchase and how Generations moderate these interactions.

Keywords: Colour & lighting, cleanliness, generations, product display, store layout, willingness to purchase

Introduction

In-store presentation in terms of visual merchandising is one of the strongest strategies that may be employed to compete and set the company out from one another (Mondol et al., 2021; Mehta & Chugan, 2014). Fundamental to this concept is the idea of visual merchandising, a sophisticated approach that encompasses product display, store layout, color and lighting, and cleanliness (Gajanayake & Surangi, 2011; Rathnayake & Fernando, 2017; Wanniachchi & Kumara, 2016; Bhatti & Latif, 2014). In the retail environment, Visual merchandising plays a critical role in shaping consumers' perceptions, emotions, and purchase decisions (Mondol et al., 2021; Wakefield & Baker, 1998).

The fashion retail business is known for its fast-paced and fiercely competitive environment, which calls for a deep comprehension of customer behaviour and successful marketing techniques. The notion of visual merchandising, a complex strategy that includes product display, store layout, colour and lighting, and cleanliness, is fundamental to this idea (Mondol et al., 2021; Bhatti & Latif, 2014). Today, consumers are more different than previous ones and change their behaviour from time to time, and they are more meticulous and selective before making a purchase. Although the importance of visual merchandising in fashion retail has been well established worldwide, research on its implications in particular regional contexts, like Sri Lanka, is still lacking (Prasadika & Nishadi, 2024; Madushanka & Nishadi, 2024; Perera & Nishadi, 2024; Mondol et al., 2021). Due to fluctuating consumer preferences, moving disposable income, and changing lifestyles, Sri Lanka's fashion retail sector has seen substantial transformation in recent years (Gonda et al. 2020; Yang et al. 2017).

Additionally, there are many different age cohorts in Sri Lanka's consumer market, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. These groups can be identified by their shopping preferences, values, and behaviors (Perera & Nishadi, 2024; Dimock, 2019). This generational variability further complicates the relationship between visual merchandising and consumer behavior since it may lead to age-based variances in the effectiveness of visual signals and strategies. Since much of the research on the topic concentrates on Western markets (Mondol et al., 2021; Park et al., 2015; Hussain & Ali, 2015), it is imperative to look into the consequences of visual merchandising in Sri Lanka, a rising market with unique cultural and socioeconomic factors. This study attempts to close this gap by investigating the specific impact of visual merchandising elements on customers' propensity to purchase within the framework of Sri Lankan fashion retail establishments and generational influences. With the use of generational influences, this study aims to determine how visual merchandising affects consumers' propensity to buy from Sri Lankan fashion retail stores.

Research Questions

Aligning with the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated within this study as follows.

1. Does visual merchandising influence customers' willingness to buy from Sri Lankan fashion retailers?
2. Which component of visual merchandising has the biggest influence on customers' willingness to buy from Sri Lankan fashion retailers?
3. Is the relationship between visual merchandising aspects and willingness to buy moderated by consumer generation?

Literature Review

Consumer's Willingness to Purchase

According to Wu et al. (2011), Consumer's Willingness to Purchase is the likelihood that a customer will be prepared to buy a product in the near future. It typically has something to do with the mindset, perception, and purchasing patterns of the customer (Prasadika & Nishadi, 2024; Mondol et al, 2021; Wanniarachchi & Kumara, 2016; Bhatti & Latif, 2014). It has been noted that consumers' willingness to purchase plays a critical role in their decision-making when it comes to selecting any given product (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). As per the findings of Musharraf & Ali (2013), there are three factors that impact consumer purchase intention. Those are extrinsic factors (store image, visual merchandising, in-store promotion), intrinsic factors (perceived value), and consumer factors (attitude and trust). An increase in purchase intention suggests that there may be more purchases made. Customers are more likely to make actual purchases when they are committed to a brand and have positive purchase intentions (Madushanka & Nishadi, 2024; Madavi & Leelavati, 2013; Law et al. 2012).

Visual Merchandising Effect on Consumer's Willingness to Purchase

According to the existing literature, Visual merchandising is the strategic presentation of products to draw customers and encourage purchases through the use of innovative techniques that make shopping effortless, make a good first impression, and reduce shopping time for both the salesperson and the customer (Perera & Nishadi, 2024; Diamond & Diamond, 2007; Hefer & Cant, 2013). Customer satisfaction is positively correlated with a pleasant store atmosphere (Ryu et al, 2012; Spies et al., 1997). Consumer participation in a store is increased when atmospheric cues meet their actual and emotional needs, which encourages favorable purchase habits (Tiu Wright et al., 2006).

There are two major areas covered in visual merchandising, such as exterior and interior, and many different elements go into creating a favorable atmosphere for customers to shop in. According to (Babin et al., 2003), the way that colors and lighting are combined has a big impact on customers' purchase intentions and in-store traffic. Appropriate music can influence consumers' cognitive function, and additionally, positive imagery strengthens consumers' desire to make purchases by fostering a better cognitive experience between them and the products (Chebat et al., 2001; MacInnis & Price, 1987). Findings of Madhavi & Leelavati (2013) discovered that visual merchandising techniques do affect consumers' purchasing decisions and encourage impulsive purchases, presentation style, merchandise colour, path finding, and lighting were the themes that linked most strongly to purchase intention.

Store Layout on Willingness to Purchase

The layout of a store has a significant impact on customer behaviour and is a key element in establishing the retail brand (Atulkar & Kesari, 2018). According to Van Rompay et al. (2012), a store designed with more consideration for space can make customers happier, and there can be an opposite effect if the store is filled with clutter (Muratore, 2016). Task-oriented customers find that a simple, well-spaced layout works best in stores because it makes it easy for them to find the items, they need without any extra clutter or obstacles in the way and these factors encourage customers to spend more money by keeping them in the store longer (Lin et al., 2023; Muratore, 2016). Further, Lin et al. (2023) found that the Store layout can improve merchandising strategies to increase sales, improve appearance, and make customers' shopping experiences more pleasurable. Moreover, if the store is well organized, customers will be drawn to its architecture, and if customers can easily choose the products they require, then customers prefer to shop at that store (Lin et al., 2023; Atulkar & Kesari, 2018).

H1- Store Layout has a significant impact on Consumers' willingness to purchase

Product Display on Willingness to Purchase

According to Mehta & Chugan (2013), Customers' willingness to purchase behavior is influenced by display strategies like promotional signage, merchandise display, and store windows. When people see an eye-catching and impressive product display, they are more likely to make a purchase (Siddhibhongsra & Kim, 2016). Further, Weimar et al., (2020) found that products put on special display close to the checkout area, customers' intention to buy is higher and it boosts the sales of the product. According to Inman et al. (2009) Unplanned purchases are increased by 40% by special product displays. It has become a standard promotional practice for retailers to arrange certain items near checkout points in efforts to entice consumers into impulse purchases (Burton et al., 2019). The product display was identified as a "boost shop," a kind of advertising meant to encourage purchases (Husnain et al., 2019). Displays are said to accelerate random purchases in dealer shops since customers are typically focused and observed at eye level (Hussain & Ali, 2015). Additionally, displays are one of the most persuasive factors when shopping impulsively (Li et al., 2015; Yim et al., 2014).

H2- Product Display has a significant impact on Consumers' willingness to purchase

Colour & Lighting on Willingness to Purchase

When it comes to the ambiance in retail, colour is one of the most crucial factors. (Yang et al., 2023; Atulkar & Kesari, 2018). Colour has perceptual qualities that influence how customers perceive a store and its products, and colour can physically draw customers to a retail display (Lin et al., 2023). A retail store with attractive colours would draw customers in and improve their impression of the products (Chang et al., 2015). Further, prior colour research has shown that red is perceived as negative and tense as well as physically arousing. Blue, on the other hand, has been identified as calm, cool, and positive (Lin et al., 2023). Certain colours that are thought to be very arousing may tempt buyers to make impulsive purchases (Lucas, 2003). Orange, red, and yellow are warm colours, such colours excite customers while simultaneously causing anxiety and drawing away their attention (Yang et al., 2023). These vibrant colours may be more appealing to thrill-seeking recreational shoppers (Van Rompay et al., 2012). According to Atulkar & Kesari (2018), in the retail environment, the blue colour generates more purchase intention than the red colour. In the blue retail environment, customers tend to be more stimulated to purchase, have lower purchase postponement, and have a greater tendency to shop (Chang et al., 2015).

H3- Colour and Lighting have a significant impact on Consumers' willingness to purchase

Cleanliness on Willingness to Purchase

One of the most crucial elements of the visual store is cleanliness (Burton et al., 2019). An attractive retail chain store that enhances the environment and influences customers' perception of the outlet represents cleanliness (Hussain & Ali, 2015). Consumers' perceptions of retail chain stores are shaped by their observations of the cleanliness of the outlet, which can generate positive or negative word of mouth (Banat & Wandebori, 2012). According to Wanninayake and Randiwela (2007), customers are more likely to stay in a clean store longer and form positive opinions of it. When choosing an outlet, cleanliness and product presentation are crucial factors. According to Kim & He (2007), overall store cleanliness comprises of product placement on shelves, shelf cleanliness, and store cleanliness. The

degree of cleanliness will have an impact on customers' intentions to return (Li et al., 2015). The state of the physical environment and the level of employee grooming are the two factors that determine how clean a store is perceived to be (Li et al., 2015; Yim et al., 2014; Lucas, 2003).

H4- Cleanliness has a significant impact on Consumers' willingness to purchase

Moderating Role of Generation

According to Burton et al, 2019, the impact of retail store appearance can have an influence on consumers' willingness to purchase. While older consumers would value product quality and necessity over prices, younger consumers might be more attracted to sales and special offers (Burton et al., 2019; Banat, A., & Wandebori, 2012). Furthermore, older customers may choose a simpler and more recognizable store layout, whereas younger customers may be more influenced by trendy store designs and bright, dynamic lighting (Lin et al., 2023; Husnain et al., 2019; Li et al., 2015). Furthermore, elderly consumers may choose softer, more calming music, whereas younger consumers may be more impacted by fashionable or fast-paced music (Li et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013; Kalla & AroraView, 2010).

However, as explained by Mondol et al. (2021), there is a lack of studies in the current body of knowledge regarding the impact of the generation cohort on the relationship between visual merchandising and willingness to purchase. Furthermore, Mondol et al., (2021) emphasized that more research is required to examine how the generational cohort affects the connection between visual merchandising and willingness to buy in a different setting for fashion retail stores.

H5 – Generation significantly moderates the relationship between Visual Merchandizing and Willingness to purchase

Research Methodology

Research Approach

A positivistic approach has been used in the current study to examine the impact of Visual Merchandizing on Willingness to purchase with the moderating effect of generations. According to Hair et al. (2016), positivism is a philosophical perspective that stresses the use of scientific methods and empirical data in the study of social phenomena. In keeping with positivism, the researcher employed a quantitative method for data collection and analysis in this study. Therefore, the study's objectives were to use statistical analysis to evaluate hypotheses and determine causal links between variables.

Sampling Design and Data Collection

Based on a pre-determined structured questionnaire, data were collected from a sample of 200 respondents living in Western Province in Sri Lanka. Participants in the study's sampling frame are divided into three generational groups: Generation Z (12–29 years old), Generation Y (30–43 years old), and Generation X (44–58 years old). In addition, the following factors are included: age ranges from 18 to over 54; marital status (married or single); income brackets (50,000 and under, 50,000-75,000, 75,000-100,000, 100,000-125,000, and (5) above 125,000); career types (businessperson, employee, etc.); and educational levels (diploma, up to O/L, up to A/L, bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc.).

Sample Selection Technique

Because convenience sampling is convenient and readily available, it was used in this investigation. Participants are selected based on their convenience and willingness rather than at random. This approach was selected due to its ease of use, particularly in situations where time is of the essence or the target group is inaccessible. It has been discovered that this procedure establishes the study sample size of 200 participants.

Model Specification and Data Analysis

The current study used Smart PLS, a typical PLS-SEM program, to measure both reflective and formative components (Ringle et al., 2015; Sarstedt and Cheah, 2020). Partial Least Squares path modeling was chosen because it is frequently used as a composite-based estimator or to concurrently examine structural equation models with latent variables in business research (Sarstedt and Cheah, 2020).

Results and Interpretations

The current study's data analysis is divided into two sections as analysis of the measurement model and the structural model.

Analysis of the Measurement Model

The following statistics were found to be pertinent to factor loadings, validity, and reliability within the measurement model.

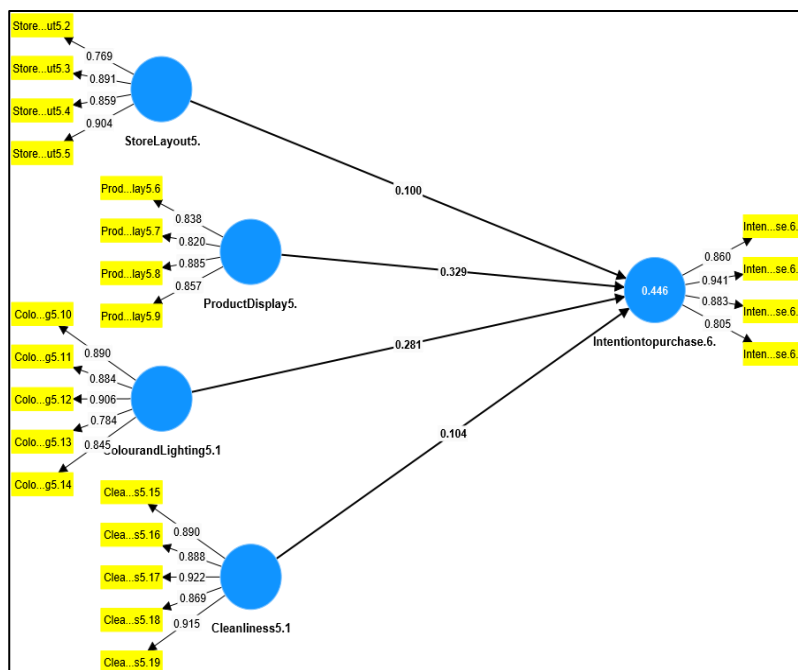


Figure 1: Measurement Model
Source: SmartPLS output (2023)

Factor Loadings

It was discovered that all of the items under each construct had factor loadings exceeding the suggested level of 0.7, as noted in Table 01 below. As a result, none of the items were removed from the existing list.

Table 1: Factor Loadings

Variable	Factor Loading	Variable	Factor Loading
Store Layout		Product Display	
Store Layout 1	0.769	Product Display 1	0.838
Store Layout 2	0.891	Product Display 2	0.820
Store Layout 3	0.859	Product Display 3	0.885
Store Layout 4	0.904	Product Display 4	0.857
Colour & Lighting		Cleanliness	
Colour & Lighting 1	0.890	Cleanliness 1	0.890
Colour & Lighting 2	0.884	Cleanliness 2	0.888
Colour & Lighting 3	0.906	Cleanliness 3	0.922
Colour & Lighting 4	0.784	Cleanliness 4	0.869
Colour & Lighting 5	0.845	Cleanliness 5	0.915
Variable	Factor Loading		
Willingness to buy			
Willingness to buy 6.1	0.860		
Willingness to buy 6.2	0.941		
Willingness to buy 6.3	0.883		
Willingness to buy 6.4	0.805		

Source: Survey data (2023)

Reliability

In the current investigation, the reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, with the suggested threshold level of 0.700 being applied (Hair et al, 2016).

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Cleanliness	0.939	0.947	0.954	0.804
Colour & Lighting	0.914	0.922	0.936	0.745
Intention to purchase	0.895	0.899	0.928	0.763
Product Display	0.873	0.882	0.912	0.723
Store Layout	0.879	0.884	0.917	0.735

Source: Survey data (2023)

The data in Table 02 showed that all of the Cronbach's alpha values for both visual merchandising elements and consumer purchase intention fall between 0.873 and 0.939, surpassing the threshold level of 0.7, indicating the internal consistency of both. Additionally, the composite reliability statistics, which ranged from 0.882 to 0.954, demonstrated the appropriateness of the measuring items employed to assess each distinct dimension.

Multicollinearity

In order to evaluate the indication of multicollinearity, researchers employed the Variance Inflation Factor. Furthermore, when the indicators' VIF value is less than 5, there is no multicollinearity issue. As a result, the information in the table below shows the multicollinearity statistics for each dimension.

Table 3: Multi-Collinearity Statistics

Visual Merchandising	VIF	Store Layout	VIF
Cleanliness 1	3.352	Store Layout 1	1.544
Cleanliness 2	3.678	Store Layout 2	4.103
Cleanliness 3	4.514	Store Layout 3	2.131
Cleanliness 4	3.576	Store Layout 4	4.306
Cleanliness 5	4.099		
Colour & Lighting	3.671		
Colour & Lighting 1	3.982		
Colour & Lighting 2	3.798	Consumers' Willingness to Buy	VIF
Colour & Lighting 3	1.884	Intention to purchase 1	3.179
Colour & Lighting 4	2.526	Intention to purchase 2	4.867
Product Display	2.046	Intention to purchase 3	2.993
Product Display 1	2.088	Intention to purchase 4	1.913
Product Display 2	2.601		
Product Display 3	2.376		
Product Display 4	2.412		

Source: Survey data (2023)

Discriminant Validity

The Fornell and Larcker Standard - It is evident from the data in Table 04 that the square root of AVE values for every diagonal value is higher than the correlation between it and any other construct. Therefore, the greater square root of the AVE values across the diagonal was used to establish the discriminant validity of the current investigation.

Table 4: Fornell and Larcker Criterion

	Cleanliness	Colour& Lighting	Intention to purchase	Product Display	Store Layout
Cleanliness	0.897				
Colour& Lighting	0.761	0.863			
Intention to purchase	0.513	0.571	0.873		
Product Display	0.441	0.479	0.562	0.850	
Store Layout	0.506	0.535	0.476	0.526	0.858

Source: Survey data (2023)

Assessment of Structural Model

The Structural equation model was used to test the hypothesis and identify the relationship between the constructs. In here, path coefficient, confidence intervals, model fit, R^2 , and F^2 were used to determine the relationship between exogenous variables and endogenous variables. Thus, the structural model of the present study can be illustrated as follows (Latiff et al., 2020).

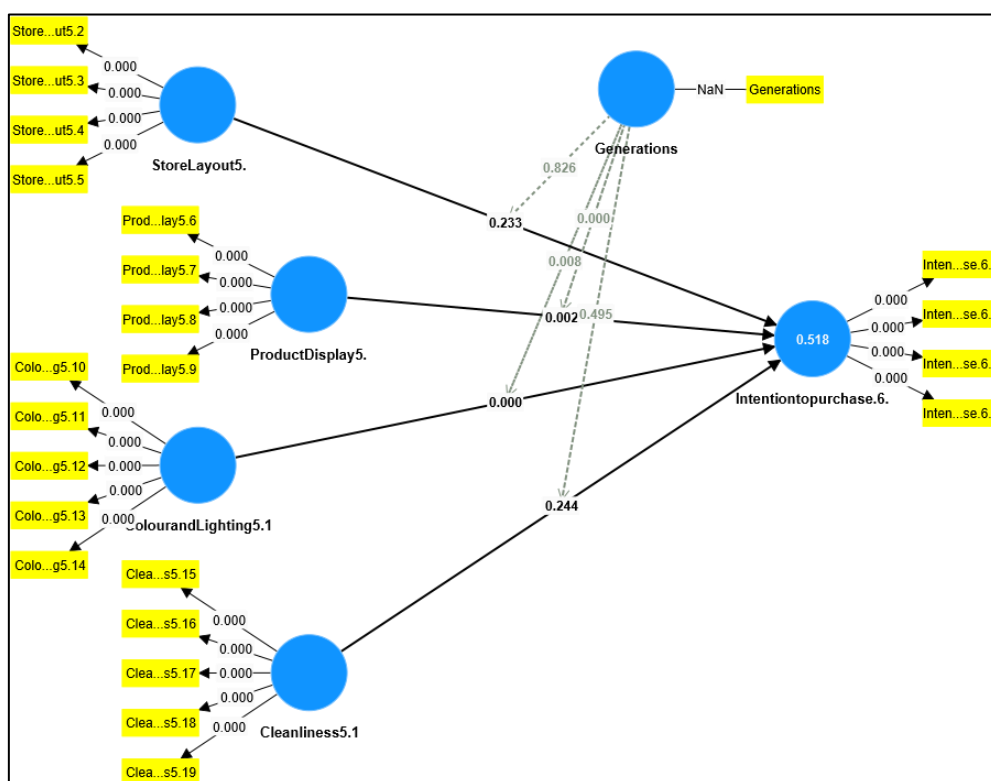


Figure 2: – Structural Model
Source: SmartPLS output (2023)

Model Fit

In model fit, scholars explain that the SRMR (Standard Root Mean Residual) Value should be less than 0.08. According to the data in Table 05 below, the SRMR value is 0.076, which is less than 0.08, and the Normative Fit (NFI) value of 0.797, which is closer to the threshold level of 0.9, indicates that the structural model has a good fit.

Table 5: Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.076	0.076
d_ ULS	1.479	1.479
d_ G	0.753	0.753
Chi-square	687.497	687.497
NFI	0.797	0.797

Source: Survey data (2023)

Path Analysis and Results of Hypothesis Testing

In line with the existing literature, followed by the conceptual framework, 05 basic hypotheses were developed within this study to measure the basic phenomenon. Further, hypotheses 05 were subdivided into four categories to explain the moderating effect of generation on the relationship between each of the visual merchandizing characteristics on consumer's willingness to purchase. Thus, the data shown in Table 06 visually illustrate the findings pertaining to path analysis and results of Hypothesis testing.

Table 6: Path Analysis and Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Results
	Generations -> Intention to purchase	-0.048	-0.052	0.088	0.547	0.584	
H1	Store Layout -> Intention to purchase	0.101	0.106	0.084	1.192	0.233	Not Supported
H2	Product Display -> Intention to purchase	0.266	0.265	0.085	3.117	0.002	Supported
H3	Colour & Lighting-> Intention to purchase	0.420	0.417	0.095	4.426	0.000	Supported
H4	Cleanliness -> Intention to purchase	0.128	0.128	0.110	1.165	0.244	Not Supported

H5a	Generations x Store Layout -> Intention to purchase	-0.017	-0.015	0.078	0.220	0.826	Not Supported
H5b	Generations x Product Display-> Intention to purchase	-0.275	-0.266	0.072	3.828	0.000	Supported
H5c	Generations x Colour & Lighting-> Intention to purchase	0.200	0.193	0.075	2.674	0.008	Supported
H5d	Generations x Cleanliness-> Intention to purchase	0.063	0.061	0.092	0.683	0.495	Not Supported

Source: Survey data (2023)

As per the data illustrated in Table 06, two visual merchandising elements are significantly influencing consumer's willingness to purchase having the T values greater than 1.96 with p values less than 0.05. Among them, colour and lighting are the most important visual merchandising elements which possess the highest impact on consumer purchase intention, having $t=4.426$ with $p=0.000$. Next, product display as the second element of visual merchandising plays a major role in changing the consumer's willingness to purchase the $t=3.117$ with $p=0.002$. However, for both cleanliness and store layout, the t values are lower than 1.96 with p values higher than 0.05.

When it comes to the moderating role of Generations, the data in Table 06, proved that Generations significantly moderates the relationship between two visual merchandizing elements and consumer's willingness to purchase. this is suggested by the statistics pertaining to product display ($t=3.828$, $p=0.000$) and colour & lighting ($t=2.674$, $p=0.008$).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine how consumer generation functions as a moderator in the relationship between visual merchandizing and consumer's willingness to purchase. The study used a deductive approach to assess how consumer willingness to purchase was affected by four visual merchandizing characteristics: store layout, product display, colour and lighting, and cleanliness.

According to the analytical results produced by Smart PLS 4.0, two visual merchandizing elements have a beneficial impact on the Willingness to purchase in Sri Lanka's fashion retail industry. Colour and Lighting proved H3 out of the four elements, having the greatest impact with a t value greater than 1.96 ($t = 4.426$, $p = 0.000$). These findings are in line with the existing research findings of (Yang et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023; Perera & Nishadi, 2024; Madushanka & Nishadi, 2024), claiming that Colour and Lighting have a significant impact on changing the behavior of consumers. Further, Product Display with the second-highest significant impact, $t=3.117$ and $p = 0.000$, were next to be approved as H2. Even here, it is

suggested that these results are in line with the existing arguments of (Siddhibhongsa & Kim, 2016; Husnain et al., 2019; Li et al., 2015) proving that Product Display has a beneficial impact on Customers willingness to purchase fashion retail products.

However, both Store Layout and Cleanliness had no significant impact on consumer's willingness to purchase the with t-values less than 1.96 with P values greater than 0.05, rejecting both H1 and H4. The reason for this insignificant impact is that consumers feel uncomfortable with an inconsistent store layout. Further, the complexities of building design are also key determinants of this insignificant impact of Store Layout on Consumers' willingness to purchase.

Apart from the direct effect, the results of the indirect relationship also show that, by partially demonstrating H5, Generation significantly moderates the effect of Product Display on Consumers' willingness to purchase. This idea further enhances the existing arguments of (Perera & Nishadi, 2024; Li et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013; Kalla & AroraView, 2010) that the visual appearance of the product will increase the consumer's arousal level to buy the product. Further, it is an addition to the existing Sri Lankan argument that consumer's intention to purchase fashionable products varies with the generation.

Practical Implications

The results of the study offer valuable information in the following areas. First off, the study's findings give Sri Lankan officials useful advice on how to handle the country's generational disparities in purchasing intentions. Second, the current study's findings offer insightful information about how to slow the sharp rise in the amount of money spent on designer apparel.

This will be a useful tactic to go over the nation's current, inadequate economic structure. Thirdly, it is clear from the research findings that age cohorts have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Responsible parents should therefore determine the causes of their children's excessive fashion clothing consumption and take the appropriate steps to reduce it.

Directions for Future Researches

It would be more advantageous for future researchers to test the current study's model using a longitudinal study in order to more clearly identify the causal relationships that already exist. Researchers can produce dependable results by using longitudinal research. Second, additional elements can be used to obtain a new understanding of these relationships, even though the current study has used four visual merchandising elements—store layout, product display, color & lighting, and cleanliness—to measure the impact of visual merchandising on consumer purchase intention. For example, window display, music, and fragrance.

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