A PILOT STUDY TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS WOMEN APPARELS IN KERALA STATE

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Abstract
The purpose of the pilot study is to examine the correlation between purchasing behaviour among women from various cities in Kerala State and the analysis of variance between age group and customer in the selected cities of Kerala state. It is known that there is numerous research already accessible based on the prior investigations. Only a small amount of research, nevertheless, focuses on the region-specific Therefore, the emphasis of this study is on India's Kerala State. Factor A (H1): There is a significant difference in the purchasing behaviour of women across various cities in Kerala State. Factor B (H1): There is a significant difference in the purchasing behaviour of women across various age groups. These are the two hypotheses constructed for testing in this study. Results show that there is a positive correlation in the purchasing behaviour of women between the cities of Kerala due to virtual merchandising. However, the results show that significance exists only between the various age groups found in this study. The results are limited to Kerala State cities only; they might change with respect to country to country and region to region. Further research scope in this topic may be visualised in marketing using artificial intelligence to increase apparel business.

Key Words:Purchasing Behaviour; Virtual Merchandising; Apparels; Kerala.

Introduction
Sales forecasting often involves the use of statistical time series approaches like moving average (MA), auto-regression (AR), or mixtures of the two. These models don't work in situations where sales are more impacted by external factors like size, price, colour, weather information, the impact of media, pricing adjustments, or marketing campaigns since they only estimate future sales based on past sales. A linear regression model is limited to having a linear approximation function, even if it can account for these variables. Artificial neural networks (ANNs), fuzzy logic, and evolutionary algorithms are examples of soft computing techniques that provide an alternative by accounting for both endogenous and exogenous factors and enabling arbitrary non-linear approximation functions that are directly learned from the data (Frank, C., Garg, A., Sztandera, L., &Raheja, A., 2003). The body scanner is a cutting-edge tool that might help the garment sector with problems related to communication and visualisation of apparel fit as well as challenges with clothing fit. The financial viability of these applications depends on users' interest in the scanning process, in being scanned, and in permitting shops and manufacturers to use their scan data. Although the general acceptance of scanning was quite high, married women and those with household incomes of over $100,000 reported feeling much less at ease with some components of the body scan procedure. Some individuals were found to be uneasy and unprepared for encounters with the unfamiliar yet personalising technology based on observations of their verbal, facial, and physical emotions (Loker, S., Cowie, L., Ashdown, S., & Lewis, V. D., 2004).

Since older commercials often reflect the culture from which they were born and serve to educate viewers about those eras, students studying advertising might benefit from having a historical awareness of these advertisements. Students were required to utilise visual analysis while looking at slides from

two Maidenform advertising campaigns as part of a lesson plan assignment. The activity helped participants to express their aesthetic responses, think about the reactions the advertisements must have elicited in the target audience, and comprehend why the first campaign succeeded in capturing the attention of customers for two decades while the second failed to do so. The study serves as a foundation for comprehending historical expectations and preferences, and it aids in the evaluation of current advertising efforts that offer cultural context (Lyons, N. N., 2005). The investigation was done to comprehend the tactics used by merchants to adapt to the shifting gyrations of the consumer. In recent years, professional management of retail establishments has taken the place of independently owned and operated individual retail outlets in India. The retailers seen in malls are the retail formats that are frequently studied. The research also discusses the influence of both internal and external influences on store-level purchasing choices. Price, sales personnel, quality of merchandise, assortment of merchandise, advertising, services, and other convenience services are the six primary factors that retailers use to determine which type of retail format to use (Lather, A. S., &Kaur, T., 2006).

Consumer behaviour for intimate apparel is likely to differ from that of other types of clothing because of the intricate physical construction of intimate apparel and the distinctive physiological makeup of each female wearer. Intimate apparel purchasing behaviour among Chinese Hong Kong female consumers who are fashion conscious and those who are not is examined in another study. The similarities and differences in need recognition, information search media, and purchasing criteria in intimate apparel among these two groups of consumers are compared, and the results show that there are significant differences between fashion-conscious and non-fashion-conscious consumers. Both groups, however, are equally concerned about fit, product quality, style, and store ambiance when buying intimate wear (Yip, J., Law, D., & Wong, Z., 2007).

A study looked into how different product presentation styles (verbal vs. visual) affect online shoppers' views towards products and plans to make purchases. Both verbal and visual information had substantial effects on emotional and cognitive attitudes towards apparel goods, according to the overall findings of two Web studies that mimicked online clothing buying, but only verbal information had a significant impact on purchase intention. Although research results found verbal information to be superior, previous literature indicated that visual information would be superior. This conclusion has significant implications for online shops that prioritise product presentation in their advertising. Although thorough product descriptions are crucial to improving the consumer purchasing experience when shopping online, visual product presentation is also proven to be vital (Kim, M., & Lennon, S., 2008).

Another study's objectives were to present an overview of the body of research on online visual merchandising and to suggest an alternative theoretical framework for doing research in this area. In the context of online visual merchandising, two study streams were examined: the literature on e-tail service quality and the literature on shop environments from environmental psychology viewpoints. In order to provide a complementary framework to the current online visual merchandising research and produce deeper insights into the online visual merchandising phenomena, the impression formation paradigm from social psychology was applied (Kwon, W. S., 2009).

Literature Review
Another study examines how market liberalisation in Kenya in the 1990s made clear the need for enabling policies that would have promoted fair trade among diverse players with divergent interests. The local industry was hurt by the rise in the importation of low-cost textile and garment items. In the 1990s, market liberalisation spread throughout emerging nations, necessitating the necessity for its

recorded appraisal and the impetus for this study. It is advised that other clothing traders embrace these elements in order to boost their competitive advantage and promote the development of the local sector. The majority of dealers offered excellent-quality goods as their primary approach to increasing apparel purchasing (Imo, B. E. A., Mugenda, O., &Mburugu, K., 2010). According to another study, "retailing is the final step in the distribution of merchandise - the last link in the supply chain connecting the bulk producers of commodities to the final consumers." The person going through this process is known as a retailer. Diverse goods, including garments, footwear, consumer durables, financial services, and leisure, are all included in retailing. But even though India's retail industry is still in a lagging position, it is positioned to see rapid expansion in line with the country's economic expansion. In order to capitalise on this expansion in the retail sector, several firms are now entering the market with a variety of products and tactics, boosting competition. Similar to how many shop models are emerging to take advantage of the possibilities in the retail sector, Saraswat, M. R. (2011)

According to another study's findings, participants evaluate visual store displays from both hedonic and utilitarian perspectives. The utilitarian component refers to genuine customer demands, including clothing degradation, seasonal changes, and special events. According to the hedonic perspective, consumer perception and acceptance of visual displays are governed by the perceived feminine image. It also demonstrates that the standards for judging visual stimuli in stores are determined by the demand to seem feminine. Mannequins, colour, lighting, and other display components that emphasise notions of feminine sexuality tend to incite negative emotional reactions in customers, which ultimately influence their buy intentions (Law, D., Wong, C., & Yip, J., 2012). Many shoppers mistakenly believe that they just buy things when they go shopping, but they frequently also buy the experience of buying. The visual merchandising displays (also known as highlight areas where products are shown) used in stores have a significant impact on the shopping experience. Visual merchandising displays and their impact on customer behaviour have been the subject of much discussion. Consumer reactions and the amount of stuff the merchant sells may be greatly influenced by how things are advertised and presented in clothing retail outlets. According to the results, participants agreed that their purchasing decisions are subconsciously impacted by their gender, personal preferences, and the prominence of visual marketing displays (Hefer, Y., & Cant, M. C., 2013).

The practice of retailing has existed forever. Over time, the techniques and procedures employed by retailing have been customised and altered to satisfy customer preferences. Consumer-focused in-store activities have also expanded and changed throughout time. Even merchandising, which was at first the only emphasis of retailing, has changed and has become more immersed, specialised, and focused. The main takeaway is that consumers' views of visual merchandising displays are constructed subconsciously in order to draw attention to them, pique their interest in the products they are offering, and serve as a decorative element for the business (Cant, M. C., &Hefer, Y., 2014). The industrial sector in India and overseas is seeing significant expansion and development in the Indian textile industry. India has been viewed as the next nation with the greatest "growth potential" after China because of its affordable labour and natural resources in this era of the globalised market. Over the years, India has also become one of the most alluring markets for clothing merchants. With an annual growth rate of 12–15%, clothing is the second-largest retail category in India and is anticipated to take the lead in the country's organised retail market in the future years (Tyagi, I., & Rani, A., 2015).

The firm is in a competitive environment that is characterised by intense competition, which forces merchants to fight harder for undifferentiated merchandise. Modern retailers utilise this marketing strategy to set themselves apart from other businesses, to stand out in the marketplace, and to draw in

customers. The purpose of the study is to determine how customers' buying habits and impulsive purchases are related (Babu, M. K., 2016). When considering factors that influence a customer's decision to make a purchase at a retail establishment, visual merchandising has frequently been overlooked. Shopping is now more than just a transaction; it's a brand experience. The choice on how much to buy is made at the point of purchase, which is where the actual purchase occurs. The consumer's perception of the store will determine how successful it is in the future. In order to make this difference, visual merchandising and store design are essential. The major goal of the study is to learn what buyers think about visual items and how that influences their purchase decisions (Rathee, V., &Prakash, C., 2017).

Another study's findings opine that a significant portion of retail sales across a variety of product categories can be attributed to impulsive purchasing. Since impulsive purchasing is a common consumer behaviour and a key component of strategic marketing initiatives, it is important for retailers to comprehend the elements of the retail environment that cause customers to behave impulsively. Through targeted merchandising, clever shop design and layout, and other visual merchandising techniques including product displays, packaging, and signage, retailers may assist customers in finding the proper items. All four of the visual merchandising variables have been proven to influence impulsive purchase, but the effect of promotional offers near the entry is comparably quite strong (Thomas, A., Louise, R., &Vipinkumar, V. P., 2018). In this day and age, when many purchase decisions are affected by displays and presentations in stores, another research study on the significance of visual marketing cannot be disregarded. Furniture and furnishing categories in retail have seen increased competition. In this market, there are several firms adopting the organised retail structure. As a result, it is critical for merchants to set themselves apart from one another. Given the similarity of the products, one area where they can set themselves apart is the way they are displayed in stores. A study that examines the effects of different aspects of merchandising display, such as store appearance, lighting, music, window display, mannequins, and price tags, reveals that a number of factors have an impact on consumer purchase behaviour (Agdayemawer, A., & Kumar, M., 2019).

As the initial visual indication to influence clients' purchasing decisions, visual merchandising is a crucial component. Another study looks at the five components of visual merchandising - window display, mannequin display, floor merchandising, promotional signage, and lighting - to uncover factors that affect customers' impulse purchases. At the women's fashion specialty store, window displays, mannequin displays, and promotional signage are positively correlated and recognised as predictors of efficient visual merchandising for impulsive buying decisions. The study's findings deepen our understanding of how visual marketing negatively affects consumer behaviour (Iberahim, H., Zulkurnain, N. A. Z., Shah, R. N. S. R. A., &Rosli, S. Q., 2020). The capacity of social robots to attract people can be leveraged to create robots that can enter the retail business and improve visual marketing. A revolutionary robotic mannequin called RoMa was created with the idea of interacting with people as its main feature and professional showcasing capabilities. RoMa is able to localise the individuals around it since effective human-robot interaction depends on the social robot's sensitivity to ambient information. RoMa was able to boost the number of visitors who glanced at the showcase by 280% throughout the day, according to the data, which supports the notion of visual merchandising and sales enhancement (Zibafar, A., Saffari, E., Alemi, M., Meghdari, A., Faryan, L., Ghorbandaei Pour, A., &Taheri, A., 2021).

The specific objectives of a different study that looked at the impact of visual merchandising on consumer purchasing decisions among retail stores in Makurdi metropolis included examining the

impact of window displays, lighting and illumination, and signage. According to study results, window displays, lighting, and signage all significantly influence customers' purchasing decisions at retail establishments in Makurdi city. The study concludes that window displays, lighting, and signage have a major impact on customer purchasing behaviour in retail outlets in Makurdi metropolitan area, which is most strongly influenced by lighting and illumination, and it makes many recommendations, including that businesses understand customer expectations and design effective displays (Nyagba, E., &Testim, J.., 2022). The art and science of visual merchandising place a fashion retail store -which is a manifestation of a fashion brand - as the finest medium for developing and sustaining enduring client connections. It is now very important for a fashion company to stand out by developing excellent visual marketing goals that demand the art of show and shop business and support the upkeep of the brand image. The many components of visual merchandising, which showcase the newest fashion trends that emerge each season as well as the fresh look that a fashion company has to offer in its shop, This subsequently aids a company in communicating with their audiences depending on their preferences for fashion clothes and develops a picture of a fashion brand in the eyes of consumers (Akhilendra, S. P., &Aravendan, M., 2023).

Research Gaps And Hypothesis
It is known that there is numerous research already accessible based on the prior investigations. Only a small amount of research, nevertheless, focuses on the region-specific Therefore, the emphasis of this study is on India's Kerala State. Factor A (H1): There is a significant difference in the purchasing behaviour of women across various cities in Kerala state. Factor B (H1): There is a significant difference in the purchasing behaviour of women across various age groups. These are the two hypotheses constructed for testing in this study.

Objectives of The Study
1. To identify the correlation between purchasing behaviour among women from various cities in Kerala State.
2. To identify the analysis of variance between age group and customer in the selected cities of Kerala State.

Research Methodology
This investigation pilot study was conducted in Kerala State, India. 300 respondents in total were chosen at random for the survey. Based on previous research and the identified research gap that has to be filled in this study, a structured questionnaire has been created. Data on retail stores, clothing boutiques, shopping centres, clothing factory outlets, etc. has been gathered, and further analysis has been done to interpret the findings. The respondent profile was determined using a straightforward percentage analysis, and correlation analysis was performed to identify the relationship between the purchasing behaviour of women across various cities in Kerala; further, an analysis of variance implied between the age group with respect to selected cities in Kerala was performed.

Results Summary
Profile of Respondents
Table - 1 indicates the profile of respondents along with their city and age group. The sample size is around N=300. 30% of respondents fall under the age group of 15–30 years; 23.00% of respondents fall under the age group of 30–40 years; 19.33% of respondents fall under the age group of 40–50 years; 15.67% of respondents fall under the age group of 50–60 years; and 12% of respondents fall above the age group of 60 years. Out of 300 female respondents, 18% live in Thiruvananthapuram city, 20% live

in Kozhikode city, whereas 22% reside in Ernakulam city, 19.33% live in Kollam city, and 20.67% live in Thrissur city in Kerala state.

Table-1. Profile of Women Respondents

Age Group	N = 300	% Percentage
15-30 years	90	30.00
30-40 Years	69	23.00
40-50 years	58	19.33
50-60 years	47	15.67
Above 60 years	36	12.00
Respondent City		
Thiruvananthapuram	54	18.00
Kozhikode	60	20.00
Ernakulam	66	22.00
Kollam	58	19.33
Thrissur	62	20.67

Correlation Analysis of Women Purchasing Behaviour Between The Cities
Table - 2. Purchasing behaviour of women results in "r" values between Kerala cities

Purchasing behaviour of women in the cities	Thiruvananthapuram	Kozhikode	Ernakulam	Kollam	Thrissur
Thiruvananthapuram	1				
Kozhikode	0.4731	1			
Ernakulam	0.6381	0.8718	1		
Kollam	0.5711	0.9139	0.9739	1	
Thrissur	0.5932	0.8997	0.9970	0.9825	1

Table - 2 indicates the correlation r values. The purchasing behaviour of women results in "r" values between Kerala cities. The values of r = 0.4731 between Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram show low positive correlations; r = 0.6381 between Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram cities show considerable positive correlation; r = 0.5711 between Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram; and r = 0.5932 between Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram cities also show considerable positive correlation. The value of r = 0.8718 between Ernakulam and Kozhikode cities shows a high presence of a positive correlation. Further, the value of r = 0.9139 between Kollam and Kozhikode cities shows an extremely high presence of positive correlation, and the value of r = 0.8997 between Thrissur and Kozhikode cities shows a high presence of positive correlation. The values of r = 0.9739 between Kollam and Ernakulam cities, r = 0.9970 between Thrissur and Ernakulam cities, and r = 0.9825 between Thrissur and Kollam cities also show an extremely high positive correlation. And it is clear there is only a positive correlation and no negative correlation between the cities with respect to the purchasing behaviour of women living in these cities.

Analysis of Variance Between Age Group And City Women Purchasing Behaviour Over Visual Merchandising
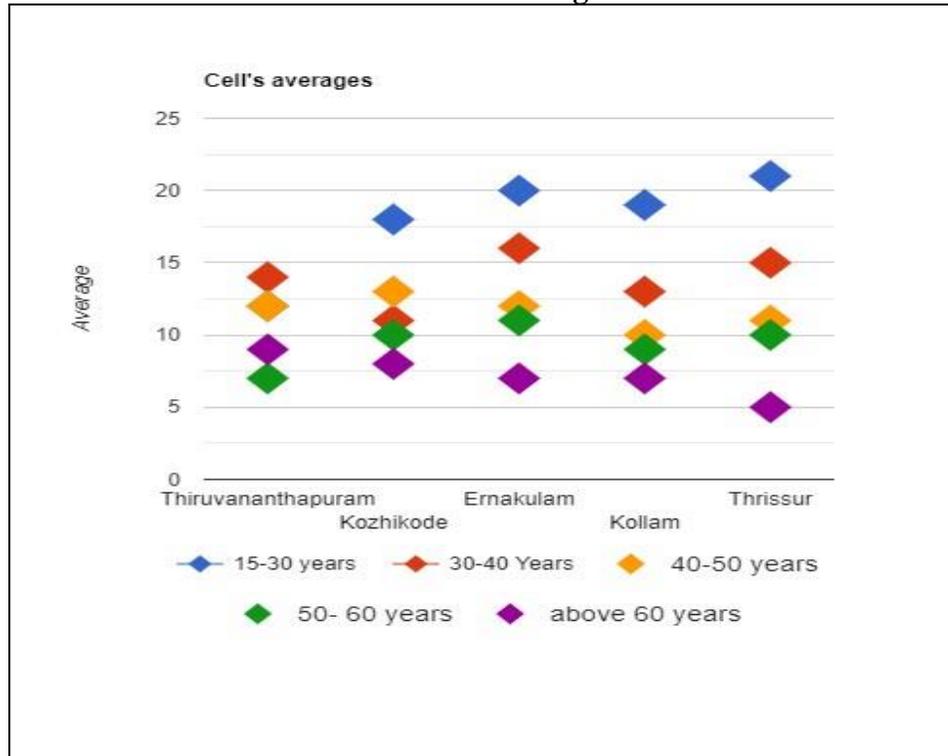

Figure 1. Cell average - various cities and age group

Table - 3 indicates the ANOVA results of the purchasing behaviour of women across various cities and their age groups. Figure 1 indicates the cell's average of female respondents across various cities in Kerala and their age group, whereas Figure 2 indicates the degrees of freedom, and Figure 3 indicates the plot of theoretical and sample quantities.

Table - 3: ANOVA Results Between Various Cities And Age Group

Source	DF	Sum of Square (SS)	Mean Square (MS)	F Statistic (df$_1$,df$_2$)	P-Value
Factor A - rows (A)	4	16	4	0.8889 (4,16)	0.4929
Factor B - columns (B)	4	346	86.5	19.2222 (4,16)	0.000005906
Error	16	72	4.5		
Total	**24**	**434**	**18.0833**		

Two sample ANOVA - fixed-test, using F distribution (right-tailed)

Factor – A (CITIES):H0 hypothesis: Since the p-value > α, H0 cannot be rejected. The averages of all groups assume to be equal. In other words, the difference between the sample averages of all groups is not big enough to be statistically significant. A non-significance result cannot prove that H0 is correct, only that the null assumption cannot be rejected.

P-value: The p-value equals 0.4929, (P(x≤0.8889) = 0.5071). It means that the chance of type I error, rejecting a correct H0, is too high: 0.4929 (49.29%). The larger the p-value the more it supports H0. Test statistic: The test statistic FA equals 0.8889, which is in the 99% region of acceptance: [0, 4.7726].

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Effect Size: The observed effect size $\eta2$ is large, 0.18. This indicates that the magnitude of the difference between the averages is large.
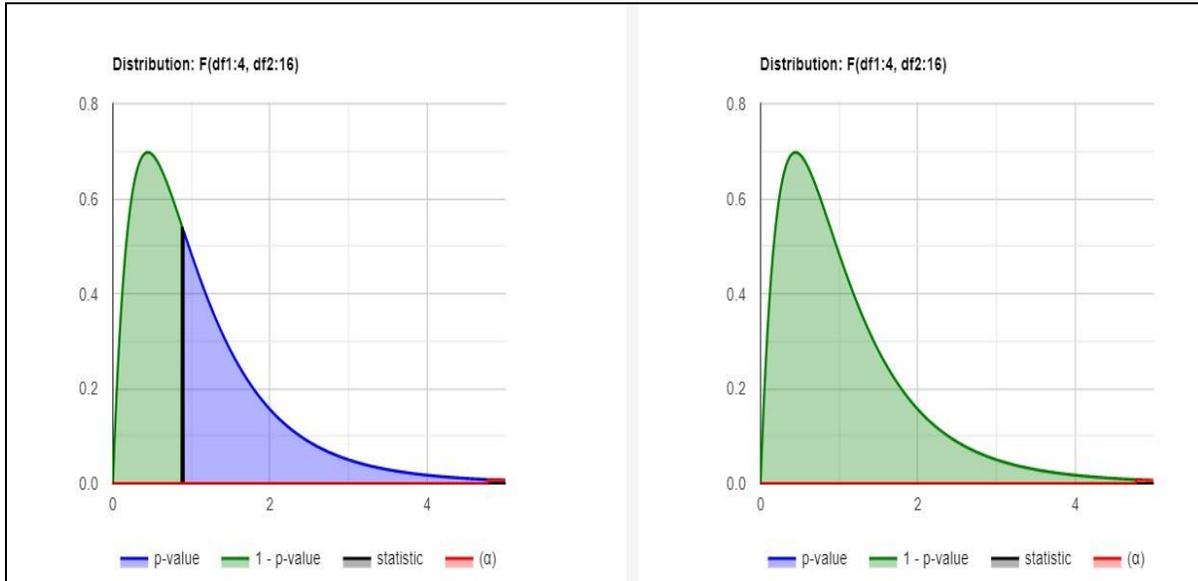

Figure 2. degrees of freedom

Factor – B (AGE GROUP): H0 hypothesis: Since the p-value < α, H0 is rejected.Some of the groups' averages consider to be not equal. In other words, the sample difference between the averages of some groups is big enough to be statistically significant. P-value: The p-value equals 0.000005906, $(P(x\leq19.2222) = 1)$. It means that the chance of type I error (rejecting a correct H0) is small: 0.000005906 (0.00059%). The smaller the p-value the more it supports H1. Test statistic: The test statistic FB equals 19.2222, which is not in the 99% region of acceptance: [0, 4.7726]. Effect size: The observed effect size $\eta2$ is large, 0.83. This indicates that the magnitude of the difference between the averages is large.
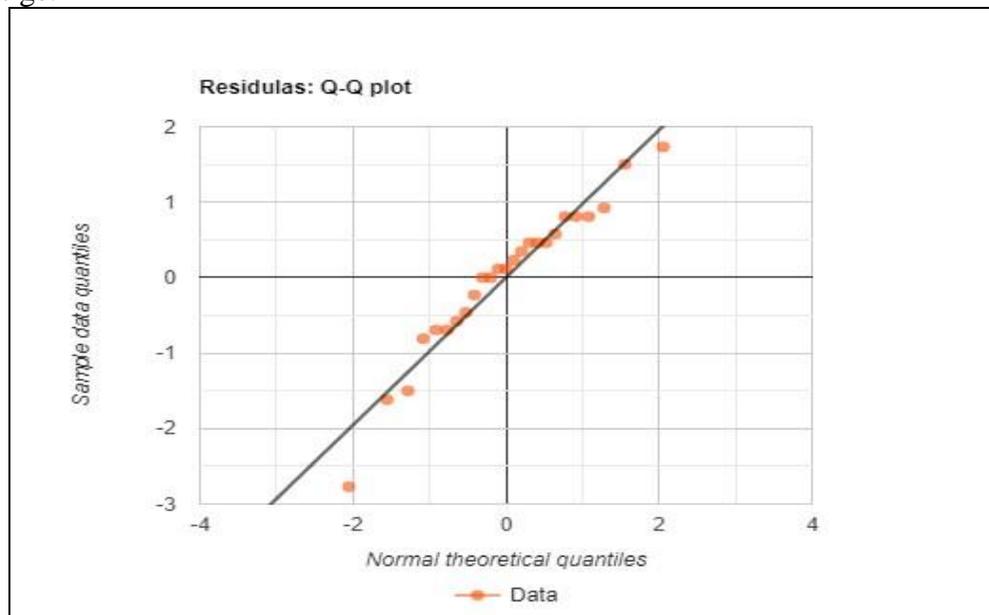

Figure 3. Q-Q Plot theoretical and sample quantities

Discussions

Although virtual reality is becoming more popular, customers might not be ready to shop for clothing in virtual reality just yet. An updated technology acceptance model (TAM) was evaluated with the variables of felt pleasure and perceived innovativeness to ascertain consumer acceptability of virtual reality. Perceived pleasure was shown to be positively correlated with perceived utility and perceived ease of use, whereas perceived usefulness was related to perceived innovativeness and perceived ease of use, according to the results. Surprisingly, this study did not find a favourable association between attitude and perceived ease of use. The revised TAM was also shown to be a useful theoretical framework for comprehending how virtual reality is accepted when shopping for clothing (Jorgensen, J. J., & Sorensen, K., 2021).

Another study looks into how the brain makes judgements regarding purchases in response to various visual display techniques. In particular, event-related fMRI was used to examine brain activity prior to making choices under three different visual presentation techniques: rotation video, image zooming, and static pictures. Whether and how different brain circuits make decisions on purchases in response to diverse forms of visual sensory data using machine learning The functional neuro imaging findings point to great accuracy in predicting purchase choices using brain activity throughout the product assessment process (highest: 95%, rotation condition). The activation patterns under the rotation condition also accurately predict selections across the other two presentation circumstances, according to cross-category validation, which raises the possibility of a common pattern of brain activity in these clothing purchasing decisions (Jai, T. M., Fang, D., Bao, F. S., James III, R. N., Chen, T., &Cai, W., 2021).

With all the big national and international businesses coming online, buyers now have the option to visit a website and make an online purchase, revolutionising the retail industry. To discover the underlying online visual merchandising (OVM) signals influencing their behaviour, however, and to offer measures to encourage the growth of e-commerce, it is necessary to examine the choice to visit a certain website. According to the findings, colour is the aspect that most strongly elicits an emotional response in Indian culture. The study offers a strategic model of OVM components and customer response behaviour that may be used in the Indian context to encourage good online consumer behaviour, and this model is mediated by the emotional state (Choudhary, F. S., & Sharma, A., 2022).

According to the findings of additional research, technology-driven virtual retailing incites customer arousal and joy, which converges self-image congruence and appearance similarity. The study's participants agreed that visual stimuli that promote congruence between one's self-perception and one's physical appearance foster continual merriment and arousal, which foster good purchasing intentions and decisions and install the idea that seeing is feeling (Rajagopal, A., 2023). Application and influence of artificial intelligence in the apparel industry for measuring solutions evolves in the current scenario. As a result, it was discovered that the mobile scanning procedure is quick (taking no more than 5 minutes and no longer than 30 seconds) and that front and side views are needed for picture capture. The applications offer advanced features like virtual try-on, virtual dressing room, body tracking (body fat monitoring / body surface area / BMI), size and fit visualisation, and recommendation (body fit, regular, and loose fit preference in garment selection) for individualised online shopping in addition to providing digital measurements for customization. Therefore, the increased possibilities offered by mobile body scanning programmes enable users to enjoy personalisation, giving them the power to choose or create clothing items and enhancing online shopping (Idrees, S., Gill, S., &Vignali, G., 2023).

Conclusion

Further study also emphasises the significance of retailer-consumer identity congruence, or the alignment of the consumer's identity with the retail brand identity. In order to create meaningful consumer-brand interactions that will increase engagement, brand loyalty, and desire to pay, retailers might make use of identity congruence and also examine how inventive merchandising techniques and imaginative product offers help to develop a distinctive retail brand identity and make it easier for customers to communicate this identity. giving examples of five ways that retailers can use creative merchandise offerings to establish and communicate their brand identities: by emphasising original and unique merchandise, utilising local merchandise to reflect the area, making their merchandise resemble art, providing sustainable merchandise, and having a high fashion product assortment (Roggeveen, A. L., Grewal, D., Karsberg, J., Noble, S. M., Nordfält, J., Patrick, V. M.,... & Olson, R., 2021). Another study reveals considerable racial disparities in our spatial visualisation training's perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions. Comparatively to other ethnic groups, Asian Americans regarded the training as engaging and were more likely to utilise it, whereas Caucasian Americans perceived the training as the most challenging and were less likely to use it. Additionally, it was shown that the key elements affecting the intention to adopt the virtual technology for garment design to enhance cognitive functioning are perceived simplicity of use and performance expectancy. Four distinct ethnic groups' latent variables revealed ethical variations, pointing to the necessity for more careful training development that considers the various cultural demands and difficulties (Chang, H. J. J., & Min, S. 2022). The study shows how visual marketing has become more significant in modern retail research and practice. The scope of visual merchandising has now expanded significantly beyond the typical reference to a visual stimulus, which was once thought to be a crucial component of retail shop atmosphere. with the use of an integrated analysis and a framework-based evaluation utilising the TCCM (Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methods) typology. It was discovered that shop atmosphere, a display function used for the whole store, and visual merchandising, a display function used for product-driven displays, are closely connected. To understand how visual merchandising and shop atmosphere interact in the changing context of conventional and e-tailers' surroundings, an integrated framework of study is therefore essential (Basu, R., Paul, J., & Singh, K., 2022). This study also adheres to the discussion and conclusions.

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