VMC ANALYTIKS

The Moderating Effect of Gender on the Relationship Between Visual Quality and Purchase Intention Among Online Shoppers of Clothes in CALABARZON

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Abstract

In the digital marketplace, where physical evaluations of products are lacking, visual cues in the form of product photos play a crucial role in shaping consumer buying decisions. This study examined the impact of the visual quality of online clothing product photos on consumers' purchase intentions in the CALABARZON region, Philippines, and the moderating role of gender. Guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the study examined how visual quality influences purchase intention in online clothing shopping and the moderating effect of gender on this relationship. A descriptive-correlational quantitative research approach was employed, with data collected from 394 respondents through a structured survey. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to examine the relationships between variables. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between visual quality and purchase intention among online apparel shoppers in CALABARZON, suggesting that enhancing visual quality directly leads to a higher likelihood of consumers making a purchase. However, the study concluded that gender does not significantly moderate the effect of visual quality on purchase intention among online clothing shoppers in CALABARZON. This implies that the impact of visual quality on purchasing decisions remains consistent across different gender identities. Therefore, efforts to improve visual quality in online apparel platforms are likely to universally enhance purchase intention, irrespective of the consumer's gender. This research offers practical insights for online clothing businesses and adds to the understanding of online visual merchandising in the local e-commerce context.

Keywords: visual merchandising, online clothes shopping, consumer purchase intention, gender moderation, online clothing store, CALABARZON

INTRODUCTION

Today's digital marketplace has greatly changed the way people shop and meet their needs. Shopping for fashion and clothing is one area where e-commerce has a significant role in consumer behavior. Globally, the fashion e-commerce industry continues to grow each year, with clothes accounting for the majority of online purchases made by customers, and Asia has the world's largest fashion e-commerce market (Statista Research Department, 2023). As people increasingly use e-commerce platforms, it has become important to understand the aspects influencing their decision-making when making online purchases.

Customers in the clothing industry hesitate to purchase clothes online because of insufficient product information, such as sizing and material. Moreover, the lack of a chance to personally try on or physically examine the product is a significant barrier (Bilovodska & Poretskova, 2023). Similarly, a Philippine market study shows that despite the rise of online shopping, most Filipinos still prefer in-person shopping, suggesting that the convenience of online shopping cannot match the sensory appeal and visceral experience of on-site shopping. The findings further suggest that it is not a battle between online and in-store, but rather an evolving synergy of the two channels, in which consumers look for information online with convenience and enjoy

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the rewarding experience of purchasing in person (Agile Data Solutions Inc., 2023). On the other hand, market data also shows that consumer habits are changing. Statista Research Department (2023) estimates that the number of e-commerce users in the Philippines has reached 47.27 million as of 2022, representing a year-on-year increase from 2018. Moreover, it was revealed that 65.07 percent of respondents in a survey conducted in the Philippines stated that their most common and usual online purchases are clothing and footwear.

Considering the lack of opportunities in the online space to examine and try the clothing personally, presenting these products online through photos is a key touchpoint that helps consumers make purchase decisions. This constraint highlights the role of visual presentations in forming buying intentions. A consumer may have ordered clothing online based on the product photos, only to be dissatisfied when the item arrived, differing in size or appearance. This kind of situation underscores the need to have not only visually appealing but also clear, precise, and informative product photos to shape buyer behavior.

Literature review shows that the visual display of a product photo influences purchase intention. Furthermore, gender differences exist in online purchase decision-making, and gender impacts perceptions of online shopping experiences. For instance, women tend to pay more attention to detailed and informative content than men in online product displays, and men focus on privacy and security in online shopping (Heinrichs et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2019; Sohaib et al., 2018). These gender-specific findings imply that consumer responses to visual signals may vary and that gender plays a role in how visual factors impact purchasing decisions.

This study seeks to fill a research gap in the Philippine e-commerce context and contribute to current knowledge in consumer behavior and e-commerce by exploring the impact of the visual quality of clothing product photos on consumers' purchase intention and how gender influences this relationship. It aims to provide insights into specific aspects of product photos that effectively attract customers to purchase clothing. The results could offer useful perspectives for online sellers and digital marketers of apparel on how to better customize their product photos for their target gender demographic and satisfy consumer expectations, increasing customer satisfaction and sales.

Statement of the Problem. This study examined the interaction between visual quality and gender in influencing the purchase intention of consumers in CALABARZON, Philippines, when purchasing clothes online. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the gender of the respondents?

2. What is the respondents' assessment of the importance of the visual quality of online clothing product images in CALABARZON in terms of the following:
   3.1 Lighting;
   3.2 Product Clarity;
   3.3 Photo Quality;
   3.4 Clothing Fit; and
   3.5 Presentation Style?

3. What is the level of purchase intention consumers exhibit when shopping for clothing products online in terms of the following presentation elements in online clothing product images:
   4.1 Brand Identity;
   4.2 Contextual Imagery;
   4.3 Consistency;
   4.4 Size Chart Presence; and
   4.5 Social Proof Elements?

4. Does visual quality positively affect purchase intention in online clothing shopping?

5. Does gender moderate the effect of visual quality and purchase intention when consumers in CALABARZON shop for clothing products online?

Scope and Limitations. The study focused on the perceptions of Filipino respondents, at least 18 years old, residing in any of the provinces in the CALABARZON region, Philippines – Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon – and had shopped for brand-new clothing items online via Lazada or Shopee more than once in the last 12 months.

Given the substantial similarities between the two major e-commerce platforms in the country, which are Lazada and Shopee, this study focused on respondents' shopping experience for clothes on the mentioned sites to facilitate a more controlled investigation. Furthermore, this study primarily concentrated on investigating the visual aspects of clothing product photos as a key feature influencing purchase intention. Other significant aspects of the online shopping experience, such as user experience (UX), user interface (UI) design, and algorithms for personalized product recommendations, were not explored in this study. Thus, although the findings of the study shed light on how visual cues could influence online clothing purchases, they do not holistically capture these other factors that could influence consumer behavior in online shopping settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This presents, critically reviews, and synthesizes related literature and studies that establish the groundwork and context for this research. The concluding synthesis identifies gaps in the existing literature that this research intends to fill.

Online Shopping and Consumer Behavior. The literature defines electronic commerce, or e-commerce, as the buying and selling of goods or services over the Internet, with the transfer of money and data to complete the sales process (Gohil et al., 2022). One type of e-commerce is mobile e-commerce, or m-commerce, which involves using smartphones and tablets to facilitate online commercial transactions through apps, mobile networks, and wireless networks (Santos et al., 2022).

Online shopping is a form of electronic commerce activity where consumers directly purchase goods or services from a seller over the Internet using a web browser (Krishnamoorthy & Vigram, 2020). Online shopping is a part of e-commerce (Nasution et al., 2019).

With online shopping, the customer's first concern when purchasing is not the products or services but the perceived risk. This perceived risk affects online purchase intention. Thus, building consumer trust is important to decrease the intensity of risk and increase sales (Qalati et al., 2021). Trust plays a critical role in online shopping and is seen as significant in encouraging online orders and positive reviews (Patodiya & Birla, 2016).

Consumer Demographics and Online Purchasing Behavior. Understanding consumer demographics is important for developing effective marketing strategies. Notably, online apparel consumers are predominantly female and younger than physical store consumers (Brown, 2016). According to statistics, most fashion e-commerce buyers are women; as of 2022, most of them belong to the 26 to 35-year-old age range (Statista Research Department, 2023). Blázquez (2014) recommended further research focused on targeting young and older shoppers alike, whose experiences and relationships with technology are different.

In gender differences in online shopping behavior, Xia et al. (2020) examined the moderating effect of gender on the link between the impact of photo attributes on clothing product sales. The findings suggest that the difference in gender affects how customers respond to product photos and impacts sales— shopping for men's clothing is significantly influenced by the product image more than women's.

The Impact of Visual Quality on Online Clothing Shopping. Huseynov & Yildirim (2016) surveyed respondents about what factors in an online seller would increase the site's trustworthiness and, therefore, influence purchase intention

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from that online seller. The top three factors that came out were: (1) guarantee and insurance policy, (2) security and privacy seals on the website, and (3) the presence of product pictures. Regarding product pictures, 81 percent of the respondents stated they tend to trust online sellers who provide actual images of the products. Photography of displayed products influences not only online purchase decisions but also impacts brand memorization and sales and is important for attracting and retaining customers in e-commerce (Pereira et al., 2023).

Similarly, visual elements like the design of product displays play a crucial role in influencing purchasing behavior for online shopping of clothing brands (Slahuddin and Ali, 2021). High-quality images that accurately represent the products and a variety of images representing different views and details significantly enhance the shopping experience, increase users' confidence, and reduce returns and exchanges of clothing products (Brandão et al., 2020).

Utilizing big data analysis, Wang, Li, and YK Chau (2016) studied the impact of photo aesthetics on online shopping behavior involving products from the categories of clothes and shoes. It found that product photos with proper aesthetic color, suitable composition, and proper complexity encourage more clicks from users. For the clothes category, photos displayed with warm colors and following the rule of thirds composition gain more clicks. Thus, online retailers can manipulate this aspect of product presentation to influence online consumers (Wang, Li, and YK Chau, 2016). Independent studies by Pereira (2023) and Harsojo (2022) affirmed that professional photography is essential to generate good-quality photographs of the products for online shop use and, therefore, motivate purchase decisions. Moreover, editing the photo is important if it is not excessive, as the photo representation of the product must be precise to its reality.

Related to this theme, Szulc & Musielak (2023) explored the impact of different lighting schemes in product photography for e-commerce on consumer perception of photograph details. It was confirmed that light is a critical factor in shaping the quality and appeal of product photos. The evaluated product photos in the study are photos of a camera, mobile phone, and eyeglasses. It was further concluded that it is important to consider the product category when examining the relationship between product photography and customer behavior.

Focusing on a different angle of this topic, Maier's (2019) study on product overview through online images concentrates on the negative effect of inconsistency in image characteristics, specifically of product background (white background vs. contextual background), on fluency during a product search, affecting consumer evaluation and choice of the product. The study did not directly investigate the impact of the background color of a photo on consumer perceptions or whether a white background or a contextual background is better for online product images on e-commerce websites. Alternatively, fashion images with light and neutral backgrounds, particularly white, are preferred in terms of aesthetic quality (Li et al., 2017).

Purchase Intention in Online Clothing Shopping. Han et al. (2024) investigated how quality and multisensory perceptions affect online clothing purchasing decisions. Their findings suggest that perceived information quality, service quality, haptic imagery, and visual-auditory cues significantly impact purchase intention. High-quality product information and high service quality during the shopping experience significantly increase purchase intention. Furthermore, trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between such perceptions and purchase intention, suggesting that consumers are more likely to purchase when they trust the online store.

Similarly, Brown (2016) underscores the importance of enriched online information in addressing the consumers' perceived risk of post-purchase dissatisfaction due to their

inability to feel and fit the apparel in an online shopping context. Specifically, this can be done with consumer reviews that will give customers ideas on what to expect about the product. Online reviews positively impact purchase intention.

However, clothing product features such as fit, sizing information, and product fit are not easily communicated digitally. This is the most important issue considering the user experience encountered by female users of apparel e-commerce websites (Bozzi & Mont'Alvão, 2020). While enlarged product photos are considered the most important design attribute on online apparel stores' websites, size measurement charts are also considered crucial by men and women (Oh & Lee, 2015).

Tasnin (2024) investigates the key factors influencing young consumers' purchasing intention for clothing in online marketplaces. The study identifies six significant influences: convenience, previous experience, security perception, product variety, website design, and service quality. It further emphasizes the influence of social media in the online purchasing of clothes, suggesting that experiences shared on social media significantly impact young consumers' purchasing behavior of clothes on the internet. This is consistent with Brown (2016), highlighting the influence of reviews in online purchasing decisions.

In Pakistan, Slahuddin and Ali (2021) investigated the main factors that may influence consumer purchasing behavior while shopping online for apparel. The study found that website design and features significantly impact consumer buying behavior when shopping for clothing brands online, and proper product description and display are key factors that influence consumer behavior.

The Link Between Visual Quality and Purchase Intention. High-quality consumer-generated images, specifically features of brightness and clarity, positively correlate with

purchase intention, mediated by emotional arousal (Zheng et al., 2024). This suggests that a high-quality visual does more than attract attention—it evokes emotions that influence the person's intent to purchase (Ariffin et al., 2024, Marwan et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2024). Napompech (2014) found that demand-driven clothing affects consumers' decisions to purchase clothes through e-commerce on social networks. This includes consumers' desire for realistic pictures of clothes displayed from different angles on the website.

Examining multiple dimensions, the study of Huang and Chou (2016) in Taiwan on the effects of online apparel photo code compositions involving three visual codes – product, person, and setting – to enhance women's purchase intention found that product photos that show a face-showing model and an imagery-based setting better influence purchase intention among female users who engage more frequently in online shopping, while photos that show a face-hiding model and an imagery-based setting have more influence among light users. The imagery-based setting in the study is a photography setup in which a specific scenario complements the apparel and person being photographed. In contrast, a decontextualized setting in the photo setup involves a solid color or blank background. Similarly, aesthetic visual user-generated content (UGC) with scenic backgrounds and images showing real-life scenarios, such as street style, can visually attract customers and drive purchase intention in online fashion shopping (Vazquez et al., 2020).

In contrast, although conceptual photos were found to be more appealing to consumers, a catalog photo that has a plain background might be preferred by consumers for better clarity of the product itself, as most of the respondents in the Indonesian market rated a conceptual photo as not important in online shopping for clothing products (Harsojo et al., 2022).

On the contrary, Xia et al. (2020) examined the impact of model display on sales of online products in the Chinese market. It concluded

that models do not significantly increase product sales for men's and women's clothing. Nevertheless, the presence of models in photos as a visually appealing aspect is considered significant in attracting customers' attention. Therefore, sellers can display the clothing product with models to present its various features, such as styles, fabric, and clothing size. This conclusion on the visual aesthetic significance of the models aligns with the results of Li et al. (2017) and Boardman & McCormick (2019), in which fashion product presentation features using models or mannequins are aesthetically preferred. Similarly, Bagatini et al. (2022) found that product images while mannequins are effective in product evaluation situations, images with face-showing human models enhance appeal and purchase intention, as they aid consumers in visualizing themselves wearing the clothing. More apparel product presentation features enhance positive consumer responses (Boardman & McCormick, 2019),

These studies underscore the importance of a well-thought-out product image as a compelling marketing tool that influences consumer decision-making. The presentation of clothing can significantly influence consumers' trust in online purchasing, particularly in an e-commerce environment where a personal touch with the product is not available.

Gender Moderation in Online Shopping. The study of Gonzalez et al. (2021) investigates how rich contextual product displays affect women's online purchase intentions. It found that women respond more positively to products displayed in rich contextual settings than on a plain white background because the former strengthens their emotional connection with the product, resulting in increased purchase intention. However, while the study focuses on online shopping behavior regarding fashion products, it focuses solely on women and does not examine consumer gender differences.

In contrast, Lin et al. (2019) provide valuable insights into gender differences regarding the influence on purchase intention of attitude toward product presentation in online purchase decision-making. Their findings suggest that vividness and diagnosticity influence females more than males. This means that in e-commerce product evaluation, women tend to pay more attention to detailed and informative content than men. Furthermore, interactivity, perceived risk, and attitude toward online product presentation strongly influenced purchase intention more for males than for females. It is therefore implied that a gender-neutral design might not be suitable for product websites, and gender-specific strategies can be applied to enhance online purchase intentions. Similarly, but with a different focus, Heinrichs et al. (2016) explored the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between website-related factors—such as service quality, design, and information—and online shopping behavior. Research findings suggest that, for instance, female shoppers place a higher value on design and information quality than males. It also highlights the importance of developing gender-specific marketing and design strategies in e-commerce retail businesses. However, these studies do not specifically delve into fashion-related products like apparel.

Synthesis. The rise of online apparel shopping has transformed consumer behavior, making online visual quality a critical factor in purchase decisions, as consumers heavily rely on product images to assess fit, material, and overall appeal (Bagatini et al., 2022; Li et al., 2017; Harsojo et al., 2022). Previous research suggests that high-quality product photos have been found to influence how online consumers perceive product quality, boosting trust and buying intention (Li et al., 2017; Harsojo et al., 2022). These high-quality photos not only enhance the perceived appeal but also facilitate the connection between physical store and online shopping experiences, enabling customers to better visualize themselves in the clothing (Bagatini et al., 2022).

While these studies investigate which visual cues are important and how the visual aspects of online product photos relate to consumers' purchase intention, along with gender

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differences, there is a scarcity of research that combines these aspects in the context of online apparel shopping into one framework. Furthermore, aside from not addressing how gender may moderate the impacts, the studies were conducted in Western contexts or other Asian markets such as Indonesia. There has been little research on how Filipino consumers perceive visuals when purchasing clothes online.

This study addressed these gaps by investigating the role of gender as a moderator in the relationship between visual quality and purchase intention within the context of online apparel shopping in the Philippines. Expanding on the study of Harsojo et al. (2022), this study incorporated gender perspectives to examine whether different genders perceive visual cues differently in the local context. Moreover, this study delivered a more detailed insight into gender-specific online shopping behavior by applying a more sophisticated quantitative analysis method.

METHODS

Research Design. The study employed a quantitative research design, incorporating both descriptive and correlational approaches, and using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for data analysis. This design was employed to examine consumer attitudes toward visual presentation aspects in online clothing product photos on e-commerce platforms and to investigate the relationship between these aspects and consumers' purchasing decisions. Moderation analysis was conducted within the PLS-SEM framework to assess the potential moderating effect of gender and examine the strength and direction of the relationship.

Population and Sampling. The study population consisted of Filipinos aged 18 years old and above, residing in any of the provinces in the CALABARZON region of the Philippines—Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon—and had shopped for brand-new clothing items online via Lazada or Shopee more than once in the 12 months preceding data collection. This research collected responses from 394 respondents. The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique in which target participants were selected based on the set criteria relevant to fulfilling the research objectives.

The geographic breakdown indicates that most responders were from Batangas (28.7%), followed by Laguna (25.4%), Rizal (18.3%), Cavite (17.5%), and Quezon (10.2%). The sample consisted mostly of a young population without homogeneity in characteristics. The largest proportion of responses came from young respondents aged between 18 and 22, accounting for 43.4%, followed by age groups 23-27 and 28-32, which accounted for 31.0% and 15.5%, respectively. Less than 10% came from other age groupings, namely 7.1% between the ages of 33 and 43, and below 3% from those 44 years and above constituted the sample. Such a distribution complements prior studies that asserted that the online consumers who are really involved are those from the younger generation, particularly Generation Z and Millennials, as they are more digitally savvy and gadget-oriented (Geiger, 2024; Chan, 2023). These age cohorts also present behaviors with high regard for experimenting and fashion orientation, reflecting highly on visual aesthetics and user-experience interaction (Bagatini et al., 2022; Ariffin et al., 2024).

Instrumentation. Data were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms to facilitate accessibility and efficient distribution. The questionnaire, adapted from Harsojo et al. (2022), comprised three sections: a screening section to confirm participant eligibility, a main section measuring the influence of various online photo attributes on purchasing decisions using a five-point Likert scale, and a final section gathering demographic information (age and gender) to assess potential moderating effects on consumer preferences. The instrument underwent expert validation by professionals in academe, marketing research, branding, graphic design, and digital marketing. Validity and reliability tests confirmed that the

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constructs for Visual Quality and Purchase Intention met acceptable thresholds, while gender was treated as a categorical moderator rather than a reflective construct.

Data Source. The data collection process was carefully designed to maintain ethical standards while ensuring data quality and reliability of findings. Instrument validation was conducted by consulting relevant field experts to validate the research instrument in terms of its content and clarity for the target respondents. Ethics clearance was obtained from the Center for Research and Extension Office of PUP by submitting the required University Research Ethics Center (UREC) forms, such as the Informed Consent Form, Study Protocol, and Letter of Intent, among others. Data collection assistants supported recruitment by distributing the online survey link with Informed Consent across multiple digital platforms. Only individuals who satisfied the inclusion criteria were invited to participate voluntarily. This process ensured that the study adhered to ethical guidelines related to participant consent, confidentiality, and data security.

Data Analysis. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the characteristics and responses of the respondents, including age, province of residence, and gender. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to analyze the respondents' assessment of the importance of different visual quality aspects of clothing product photos, as well as their purchase intention. The mean scores were interpreted using a 5-point Likert scale with corresponding verbal descriptions. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was performed using SmartPLS software to examine the relationships and interactions among the variables under investigation: the impact of visual quality on purchase intention and the moderating effect of gender. Moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether gender has a significant effect on the relationships. Reliability and Validity Tests were utilized to assess the validity of the research instrument. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment were

conducted by testing Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Additionally, Discriminant Validity using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) was applied to assess whether the constructs are distinct concepts. Bootstrapping was also conducted to determine the statistical significance of the path relationships in the model. Specifically, this method tested whether visual quality significantly affects purchase intention and whether gender had a moderating effect.

RESULTS

Gender of the Respondents. The sample consisted of 198 women (50.3%), 160 males (40.6%), and 20 respondents identifying as LGBTQIA+ (5.1%). A small percentage (4.1%) of the respondents chose not to reveal their gender. This distribution was crucial for a study examining gender as a moderating variable, as it facilitated the meaningful analysis of various gender identities.

Respondents' Assessment of the Importance of the Visual Quality of Online Clothing Product Images in Terms of Lighting, Product Clarity, Photo Quality, Clothing Fit, and Presentation Style. The findings (Table 1) from CALABARZON consumers reveal a continuous belief that lighting is a crucial element in online clothes purchases, with an average mean of 3.93 (SD = 0.80). The findings support earlier studies that highlighted the visual stimuli in online fashion retail to be persuasive.

Table 1
Mean Distribution of the Importance of Visual Quality of Online Clothing Product Images in Terms of Lighting, Product Clarity, Photo Quality, Clothing Fit, and Presentation Style

Aspect	Overall Mean	Overall Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Lighting	3.93	0.80	Important
Product Clarity	4.09	0.73	Important
Photo Quality	4.08	0.77	Important
Clothing Fit	4.07	0.80	Important
Presentation Style	3.87	0.77	Important

*Legend: 1.00 – 1.80 = Not Important at All, 1.81 – 2.60 = Low Importance, 2.61 – 3.40 = Moderately Important, 3.41 – 4.20 = Important and 4.21 – 5.00 = Highly Important.

Lighting, a major factor that influences product photography, dictates our perception of texture,

color accuracy, and product quality across the board (Szulc & Musielak, 2023; Xia et al., 2020). Bad or inconsistent lighting creates a cognitive load likely to erode customer trust while instilling doubt (Bagatini et al., 2022; Maier, 2019). According to this study, lighting is a major customer evaluation factor for the fashion industry seeking the CALABARZON market. Therefore, it would be prudent to focus on studio-type lighting and uniformity in post-processing.

For consumers in CALABARZON, the clarity of clothing images has been considered a significant factor in making purchases of garments online, thus resulting in a grand mean of 4.09 (SD=0.73). As per the respondents, the various angles from which the garment was shown are most favorable (M=4.24, SD=0.90). All of these findings further support the premise that clarity equates the image with a thorough assessment of the item presented for sale, especially in the absence of tangibility. As mentioned by Harsojo et al. in 2022, the perceived authenticity and professionalism of online clothing shops are largely influenced by the quality and clarity of their images.

Most consumers in CALABARZON put a premium on the quality of images that will affect their decision to buy clothes online, given that the rating averaged 4.08 (standard deviation = 0.77). This means that they require images from different perspectives that are well high-definition, sharp, and most importantly real in order for them to gain their trust and intent. The notion that product images must align with the actual product upon delivery emerged as the most critical factor among respondents, underscoring the influence of visual consistency on repurchase behavior. Similarly, characteristics related to the accurate depiction of texture and details and clear, professional photography were considered critically important.

The results highlight the interplay between behavioral triggers and product aesthetics in digital contexts. As stated by Blázquez (2014) and Xia et al. (2020), visual displays can be used persuasively and impart information about the product, and they can be strategically configured to develop a favorable first impression. For instance, motion-giving and good-quality pictures are used to communicate information and emotional incentives for converting fashion consumers in the Philippines (Bozzi & Mont'Alvão, 2020; Geiger, 2024).

Consumers from CALABARZON have a strong inclination toward a visual representation of garment fit while shopping for clothes online. An average score of 4.07 on the overall fit of the item (SD=0.80) assigned it to be important. The highest-ranking in this category was information provided regarding model size and body measurements, showing that the fitting should correspond with body proportion information to reduce size-related misconceptions. This finding is in line with González, Meyer, and Toldos, who stated that the visualization of product compatibility was enhanced by analogous size indications, thereby increasing the level of confidence in the decision-making process.

It can thus be concluded that the study shows that consumers lean more towards contextual and visual authenticity rather than eliminating cognitive dissonance often caused by online shopping. Model images, proportions of the human body, and user-generated images act as heuristic cues and increase the perception of reliability and accuracy of the product (Zheng et al., 2024; Connelly et al., 2011). Contextual, superior product image strategies that sufficiently match in-person try-on experiences need to be prioritized by sellers as online clothes selling becomes more competitive.

The evaluation of the customers in the CALABARZON area showed that practically all respondents acknowledged the importance of presentation style in the online purchase of clothing, with a mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.77), which is considered important. The apparel combined with other products was rated as the highest item in the entire assessment (M = 3.95).

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It also indicated that consumers preferred an image of products displaying what to wear as a complete outfit. This is also consistent with the finding made by Boardman and McCormick (2019) that products tend to keep higher perceived value and support the decision journey by creating aspirational and practical visual cues through curated placement.

Agile Data Solutions Inc. (2023) highlights how Filipino online customers engage in visual storytelling and embrace aspirational branding. These practices foster emotional connections and build trust, which together serve as critical drivers of e-commerce success in the Philippines. Being able to show lifestyle resonance and visual appeal through tastefully curated imagery serves as a competitive advantage in crowded digital markets (Bahri, 2023; Marwan et al., 2024). It can turn browsing into active thinking and purchase activity with strategic embedding of narrative images, contextual backgrounds, and stylistic coherence.

Level of Purchase Intention Consumers Exhibit When Shopping for Clothing Products Online in Terms of the Following Presentation Elements in Online Clothing Product Images. The general mean of 3.76 (SD = 0.96) is defined under very significant conditions, and the level of purchase intention within the consumers of CALABARZON is tremendously high and mostly influenced by brand identity elements in buying clothes online (Table 2). This implies that visual branding, such as logos, signature colors, and consistent design aesthetics, is needed to encourage consumer interest in buying apparel products online. This finding was in agreement with the Signaling theory, which says that brand visuals served as quality cues to allow consumers to make decisions under uncertainty (Connelly et al., 2011).

Visual brand identity functions as a heuristic cue that facilitates decision-making and enhances consumer trust in a digital environment characterized by information inundation and product homogeneity (Zheng et al., 2024). As a result, it is a strategic imperative

for apparel brands that are targeting Filipino markets, particularly in trend-sensitive regions such as CALABARZON, to invest in consistent, high-quality brand imagery. It not only improves the perception of professionalism but also directly affects the intention of a consumer to make a purchase, thereby increasing the competitiveness of the brand in the online fashion industry.

Table 2
Mean Distribution of Level of Purchase Intention in Terms of Brand Identity, Contextual Imagery, Consistency, Size Chart Presence, and Social Proof Elements

Aspect	Overall Mean	Overall Std. deviation	Remarks
Brand Identity	3.76	0.96	Agree
Contextual Imagery	3.72	0.91	Agree
Consistency	4.14	0.85	Agree
Size Chart Presence	4.14	1.02	Agree
Social Proof Elements	4.03	1.00	Agree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.80 = Strongly Disagree, 1.81 – 2.60 = Disagree, 2.61 – 3.40 = Somewhat Agree, 3.41 – 4.20 = Agree, and 4.21 – 5.00 = Strongly Agree.

The psychological and cultural impact of visual surroundings on decision-making was evidenced by the notably high rating of buy intention among online apparel shoppers for contextual imagery (M = 3.72, SD = 0.91). The majority of consumers demonstrated a pronounced preference for product visuals showcasing apparel in contextually relevant environments, such as workplaces, social events, or gatherings, alongside those incorporating Filipino cultural elements, such as festivals or family reunions. The application of contextual visualization to products intensifies their emotional and cultural value, thereby making them more pertinent and attractive for potential purchases.

The findings align with those of González et al. (2021), who discovered that contextual product displays featuring models interacting naturally with their environment significantly influence the purchasing decisions of women buying apparel online. These graphics augment the product's authenticity and diminish the psychological barrier between it and its digital depiction. As Harsojo et al. (2022) argue,

producing captivating stories around the product considerably enhances consumer engagement, for example, in fashion e-commerce, when contextual significance has been resolved in garment photography.

Creating strong visual uniformity promotes the development of trust in a brand and ensures consumer decision-making in online shopping, which has the most significant purchase intention on consistency for online clothing shoppers (M = 4.14, SD = 0.85). Uniformity with respect to style, background, lighting, and modelling in product imagery sends out a strong communicating signal to potential customers that will enhance their trust in and perception of a brand's professionalism, authenticity, and integrity. This is because, in e-commerce, where users do not touch and feel, homogeneous product display signals an attempt to "level the turf" for a degree of information asymmetry between buyers and sellers (Connelly et al., 2011).

There was a high level of purchase intention shown by consumers towards the presence of size charts in online clothing purchases (M = 4.14, SD = 1.02); hence, the paramount importance of being functional in their information clarity, especially sizing clarity, during the purchase decision-making. Due to the fact that the consumer has no opportunity to physically try the dress before the purchase, honest and accurate size charts become very important in the field of fashion e-commerce. According to Bilovodska and Poretskova (2023), uncertainty regarding the style and fit is one of the major hurdles during online apparel purchases. Eventually, this uncertainty translates into unsatisfaction, product returns, or even cart abandonment.

In simple terms, the size chart serves not only as a utility but also plays its part in nurturing trust, creating the user's experience, and generating purchase intentions in online fashion retail. Therefore, it is a competitive imperative that actually translates into the conversion and retention of customers in price- and trust-sensitive markets such as the

Philippines, serving to deepen clarity and accuracy of measurement information.

Purchase-inclined fashion e-commerce customers assess apparel product photographs with a mean score of 4.03 (SD = 1.00), from which significant efficacy on the online consumers' purchase intentions can, therefore, be derived. Antecedent customer ratings encourage credibility relative to product images and are, therefore, relatable. With good presentation, not all consumer pictures are immediately persuasive, but they do encourage heuristic processing; customers may, in fact, measure product enjoyment fairly quickly through social verification (Zheng et al., 2024). The fashion industry relies on this aspect and makes it more significant because judging things like fit, texture, and flexibility in growth through written product descriptions hardly suffices (Pereira et al., in 2023).

The motive of adding appraisals in images of clothing products is not simply to share that information but to persuade. It brings the product closer to establishing a more individualized shield in warding off post-purchase dissonance, as well as creating a sense of collective reinforcement. So, social proofs are absolute imperatives in tough competition-stricken markets online in fashion to up the conversion rates and also instill consumer trust, especially for the more aesthetic and trust market segments, not just an attribute of integrated visuals.

Table 3
Overall Visual Quality

	Mean	Std. deviation	Remarks
Visual Quality	4.01	0.68	Agree

A visual quality mean of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 0.68 indicate that Filipino online consumers in CALABARZON regard aesthetics most of all in online apparel purchasing. The visual quality was the primary sensory interface between a consumer and a product in e-commerce, which includes clarity, illumination, styling, color accuracy, and model

presentation. Well-executed product visuals, as consistently proven by research, greatly affect purchase intention, emotional engagement, and consumer trust (Boardman & McCormick, 2019; Szulc & Musielak, 2023). High-fidelity imagery is a surrogate supplier in an online environment for tactile experiences, which is thus activating the embodied simulation in the viewer and increasing the desirability of the product (Bagatini et al., 2022).

Table 4
Overall Purchase Intention

	Mean	Std. deviation	Remarks
Purchase Intention	3.96	0.68	Agree

A recorded mean of 3.96 with a standard deviation of 0.68 for purchase intention indicates that consumers generally agree with statements reflecting their willingness to buy products from online fashion platforms. In digital commerce, particularly within fashion, purchase intention is influenced by a synergy of factors including visual appeal, perceived value, trust, and the quality of the overall shopping experience (Han et al., 2024; Boardman & McCormick, 2019).

In this wider perspective, Nasution et al. (2019) stress that purchase intention is the result of a rational evaluation intimately tied to psychological satisfaction and emotional resonance; the two areas are becoming increasingly finely tuned to UX design and personalized marketing techniques in fashion e-commerce. Thus, the very high rating assigned to the purchase intention construct in this dataset reflects a readiness based on rational considerations and an emotional affinity between what consumers expect and the actual experience of shopping online for fashion products.

The Effect of Visual Quality on Purchase Intention in Online Clothing Shopping. Figure 1 illustrates the PLS-SEM path model used to investigate the relationships between gender, visual quality of online clothing product images, and consumers' purchase intention. The

diagram features the main path from Visual Quality to Purchase Intention, as well as the moderating effect of Gender through the interaction term (Gender × Visual Quality). The numerical results of these relationships are presented in Table 5, which includes path coefficients, t-values, and p-values.
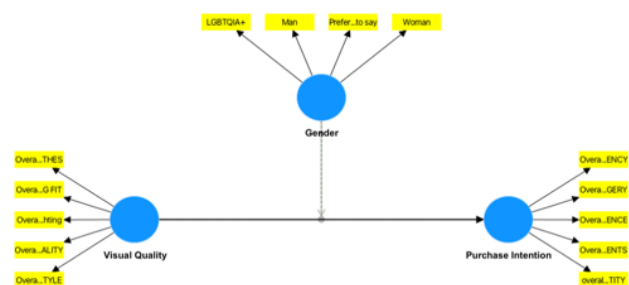

Figure 1
Model of PLS-SEM Path Analysis Diagram

The PLS-SEM (Table 5) results indicated that the direct effect of visual quality on consumer purchasing behavior in fashion merchandising among online CALABARZON consumers is a positive relationship. Visual Quality Purchase Intention path coefficient betas ($\beta=0.7607$; $p<.001$) demonstrated statistically significant as well as highly significant influencing factors. It proves that consumers demand clear, attractive, and aesthetically pleasing product images in their online shopping.

Table 5
PLS Structural Equation Model

Path coefficients	Original sample (O)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Remarks
Gender -> Purchase Intention	-0.0213	0.2357	0.8137	Not Significant
Visual Quality -> Purchase Intention	0.7607	31.0383	0.0000	Significant
Gender x Visual Quality -> Purchase Intention	0.0921	0.9271	0.3539	Not Significant

This corresponds with Ariffin et al. (2024), who observed that visual stimuli elicit emotional and cognitive engagement, subsequently leading to increased purchase intention according to the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) framework. Aligned with findings of Bagatini et al. (2022), Szulc and Musielak (2023) demonstrate that quality consumers regarding visual aspects increase mental simulation about wearing the object, thus enhancing perceived ownership and attraction.

The Moderating Role of Gender on the Effect of Visual Quality on Purchase Intention among Consumers in CALABARZON when Shopping for Clothing Products Online. There were both insignificant direct effects of gender on purchase intention (β = –0.0213, p = 0.8137) and the interaction between gender and visual quality (β = 0.0921, p = 0.3539). These results show that gender is not an important determinant in purchasing attitudes with respect to visual quality. They are consistent with assertions made earlier in cross-cultural research, such as Heinrichs et al. (2016) and Lin et al. (2019), which pointed out gender-related differences in preference with regard to online buying behavior. The data suggests an ever-so-global shopping expectation for aesthetic quality, disconnected from identity probably based on an almost reflexive familiarity owing to uniform exposure to the aesthetics of e-commerce across platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, or Instagram (Chan, 2023).

The least influence of gender on shopping behavior is perhaps the most apparent factor showing that online consumption has become so standard for Filipino consumers, specifically in urban centers and digitally literate locations, like CALABARZON. Here, consumers appear to weigh more in favor of parameters like aesthetic reliability, product clarity, or integrity than on subtle identity cues (Agile Data Solutions Inc., 2023). According to Pereira et al. (2023), it is safe to conclude that when design elements are correctly applied, product photo imagery indeed aids in cross-regional perception across consumer categories.

The observed implications, therefore, heavily enforce branding in fashion e-commerce. Instead of customizing their visual strategy to gender segmentation, companies should target universally engaging visual quality, defined by sharp resolution images, multi-angle perspectives, model displays, and lifestyle-context visuals (Xia et al., 2020; Marwan et al., 2024). The visual design standards are widely appealing and foster consumer trust, a crucial element in Filipino online purchasing decisions (Liu & Wang, 2023; Nasution et al., 2019).

In summary, visual quality serves as a potent and constant determinant of online purchase intention in fashion retail, although gender seems to exert no significant direct or moderating influence. This puts emphasis on why one should develop high-trust, attractively optimized digital stores that meet not just general consumer expectations but also their own specifications of any limited demographic profile. This is an insight into helping practitioners streamline their visual content strategy, where the real foreground of focus becomes clarity of vision, contextual relevance, and aesthetic integrity across all levels.

Table 6
Coefficient of Determination (R²) for Endogenous Construct

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Purchase Intention	0.5770	0.5738

The coefficient of determination (R²) of the model developed for the prediction of Purchase Intention is 0.577 (Table 6), with the adjusted R² being 0.5738. The implication is that Gender, Visual Quality, and their interaction can respectively explain 57.7% of the variance in purchase intention perception. This having a certain degree of significance in the study of online fashion merchandising context, with any value above 0.50 being deemed moderate to strong, implies a reasonably good model fit (certain authors as cited by Hair & Alamer, 2022). Hence, this finding highlights the prominence of visual merchandising and content design with respect to customer evaluation of online purchase intention.

The f² effect size in Table 7 validates the structural significance of visual quality. Specifically, a very large f² effect size of 1.3192 for the causal relationship between Visual Quality and Purchase Intention shows very large effects (Hair et al., 2022). This underscores the dominant influence of visual presentation in digital retail platforms. This is consistent with previous research, which demonstrates that high-definition, contextually pertinent, and aesthetically balanced product

images significantly increase purchase confidence and perceived value (Bagatini et al., 2022; Ariffin et al., 2024; Pereira et al., 2023). The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework suggests that visual cues in e-commerce can lead to increased consumer engagement and trust, as they stimulate cognitive processing and affective resonance (Ariffin et al., 2024; González et al., 2021).

Table 7

Effect Size (f²) for Predictors in the Structural Model

	f-square
Gender -> Purchase Intention	0.0002
Visual Quality -> Purchase Intention	1.3192
Gender x Visual Quality -> Purchase Intention	0.0042

Conversely, the effect sizes of Gender → Purchase Intention ($f^2 = 0.0002$) and Gender × Visual Quality → Purchase Intention ($f^2 = 0.0042$) are negligible, which confirms their limited explanatory contribution in this particular model. Emphasizing existing data collected from recent empirical studies, the results corroborate such efforts. The hardly small role played by gender as a predictor within a digitally saturated, design-receptive consumerism environment like CALABARZON may reflect a converging pattern of online shopping behaviors across demographic groups. Along with the acumen on available heuristics provided by platforms such as image quality, architectural coherence, and consumer evaluations featured in a marketing outlet, Filipinos have less resorted to demographic-targeted preferences (Agile Data Solutions Inc. 2023; Chan 2023).

This not-so-obvious substantial gender effect also is portrayed in recent studies concerning the user experience (UX) of e-commerce. An illustration by Marwan et al. (2024) and Szulc and Musielak (2023) states that nowadays, customer decisions depend more on visual-first perceptions in the fashion domain than on

user demographic considerations. Their state personality has found wider acceptance among marketers and social scientists in recent times, but one should be cautious not to overestimate gender factors without contextual digital determinants, especially in culturally and customarily transforming markets (Heinrichs et al., 2016).

In summary, the model's explanatory power, which is almost exclusively influenced by visual quality, is indicative of a paradigm shift in online fashion retail, where visual dominance takes precedence over demographic segmentation. The implication is evident for digital retailers, particularly those in the fashion industry: the highest return on investment in influencing perceived purchase intention is achieved by investing in consistently high-quality product photography, layout design, and visual narrative. In online environments, visuals are the new trust currency, particularly among Filipino consumers who seek clarity, style signals, and value alignment through the screen (Bahri, 2023; Liu & Wang, 2023).

DISCUSSION

The study found that a slight majority of respondents were women, highlighting the ongoing prevalence of women in online apparel shopping, which is consistent with trends in fashion e-commerce. Consumers in CALABARZON value visual quality in online clothing shopping, making it crucial for platforms to invest in high-quality visual content. Key aspects include clear, consistent lighting; detailed, multi-angle product clarity; and accurate photo quality to build trust. Information on clothing fit, via model measurements, customer photos, and size charts, is vital for purchase confidence. Additionally, engaging presentation styles, such as mixing and matching, storytelling imagery, and contextual backgrounds, significantly boost consumer engagement and influence buying decisions.

A strong, quality-associated brand identity and displaying apparel in relevant, culturally

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appropriate contexts foster trust and boost purchase intent. Uniformity in visual elements across product imagery builds professionalism and trust, increasing purchases. The presence of clear, accurate size charts is crucial for confident buying decisions. Additionally, integrating social proof elements like user reviews and customer photos powerfully enhances purchase intention.

There is a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between visual quality and purchase intention among online apparel shoppers in CALABARZON. This confirms that enhancing visual quality directly increases the likelihood of consumers making a purchase. The overall clarity of clothing, along with its accurate depiction of fit and effective lighting, are the most influential visual attributes driving purchase intention. Furthermore, elements like brand identity, contextual imagery and the inclusion of size charts and social proof all contribute positively to this relationship.

The study concluded that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between visual quality and purchase intention among online clothing shoppers in CALABARZON. This implies that the impact of visual quality on purchasing decisions remains consistent across different gender identities. Therefore, efforts to improve visual quality in online apparel platforms are likely to universally enhance purchase intention, irrespective of the consumer's gender.

This study offers several insights for online clothing businesses and future researchers. The findings underscore the importance of investing in high-quality visual content that accurately represents the actual product, thereby fostering consumer trust and reducing returns. Regardless of gender, online shoppers often rely on what they see online, especially when they cannot physically try on the clothing. Providing comprehensive information related to clothing fit, such as size charts and model measurements, and maintaining visual consistency across product listings are also recommended to foster trust and

professionalism. Developing a strong brand identity, incorporating contextual imagery, and promoting customer feedback, such as customer reviews and photos, may further drive confident purchasing decisions, helping future buyers set more realistic expectations. E-commerce platforms may improve their visual quality standards and product listing guidelines that could help mitigate deceptive practices and improve the overall shopping experience. Finally, future research may consider qualitative approaches to explore consumer perceptions of visual quality within specific regional contexts, as well as examine how user experience (UX), user interface (UI) design, and personalized recommendation algorithms shape purchasing behavior.

Conflict of interest. The author declare no conflict of interest.

Funding source. This research received no external funding.

Artificial intelligence use. AI-assisted language editing was performed using Grammarly. The author reviewed and approved all content.

Ethics approval statement. Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Center of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

Data availability statement. The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and ethical considerations involving the respondents.

Publisher's disclaimer. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher. The publisher disclaims any responsibility for errors or omissions.

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