



DUALITY IN VISUAL MERCHANDISING IN FASHION APPAREL RETAIL STORES: A STUDY

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Abstract

Visual merchandising (VM) is a presentation of merchandise to best-selling advantage and for maximum traffic exposure, plus projection of customer “ready-to-buy”. VM creates the in-store environment that supports the retailer’s Marketing and merchandising strategies. In this study an attempt has been made to identify the awareness among the consumers about the visual merchandising. About 175 questionnaires were distributed randomly to the customers of different types of fashion apparel stores in malls situated in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Out of which 149 were responded. The response rate works out to 85.14%. The concept of visual merchandising has been analyzed using 11 variables such as Billing counter; Gender/age division; Landscape; Ease of Navigation; Trial room; Appropriate use of props; Ensemble; Focal point; Signage; Store atmosphere and Window display. The factor method of data reduction technique grouped the 11 variables into two components such as Emphasis and Layout. The alpha value for all the variables works out to 0.8626 which indicates that the variables taken up for the study were good. The SEM model of two factors, emphasis and layout considered as duality factor were more important for Visual Merchandising. The study indicates that the in-store environment should concentrate on the store layout and emphasis on Interior displays.

Key words: Visual Merchandising, Duality of visual merchandising, Emphasis, Layout of the Store. Fashion Retail.

Introduction

Fashion influences on what we wear; the way we talk; the foods we eat; the way we live; how & where we travel, what we look at and who we listen to. In the modern fashion business, a retail store is no longer just for displaying or selling products. Rather, it functions as a critical marketing element, enhancing intended store / brand image. The atmosphere of a retail store comprises such various sensory elements as color, layout, music, scent, temperature, and odor; each element makes its own contribution to the overall store image. A fashion retail store layout is helpful in building a luxury retail store space that contributes to exceptional shopping experiences. An in-store space constitutes the man-made physical surroundings in contrast to the social or natural environment. The fashion retail store reflects the overall vibrant

impact in the consumers' mind. A fashion retail store should be well designed to successfully communicate the desired brand image.

Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandising (VM) is a presentation of merchandise to best-selling advantage and for maximum traffic exposure, plus projection of customer "ready-to-buy". VM creates the in-store environment that supports the retailer's Marketing and merchandising strategies. It sets the mood, highlights the merchandise, invites, attracts, welcomes and informs shoppers. It is the store where customers can experience the brand to the fullest. It also somewhat more subtly makes the store a wonderful joyous place to be for shopping.

The atmosphere in retail store refers to the ambience and aesthetics of the store. The atmosphere of a fashion retail stores depends upon four important elements such as General Layout, Exterior, Store layout and Interior displays. Each element needs to be given utmost importance to attract the customers and all the elements are interrelated. Lam (2001) stressed the need of a good atmosphere in a retail store and stated that "propositions concern the multiple effects of individual environmental elements/factors, congruence among these elements/factors, congruence between these elements/factors and a store's merchandise, the moderating role of consumer characteristics, and the lagged effects of store environment".

The influence of a store atmosphere is more important and any effects on the elements invariably affect the merchandise, service as well as the shopping behavior of the visitors. (Hui et al. 1997; Ward et al. 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988; Bitner 1992). The atmosphere of the store image depends on the layout, physical and merchandise activities. (Cox and Brittain, 2000).

Review of Literature

The role of aesthetic factors in retail atmosphere becomes further evident in luxury fashion shopping (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Chung, Youn & Lee, 2014; Spence et al., 2014). Almost every year, luxury apparel retail stores put huge investments into visual merchandising; though researchers examined fashion apparel stores atmospheric effects on shoppers (Eroglu & Machleit, 1990; Levy & Weitz, 2001; Turley & Milliman, 2000), few have empirically addressed the effectiveness of the aesthetic factors of apparels retail environments on shopping (Gorn et al., 1997; Labrecque, Patrick & Milne, 2013; Spence et al., 2014). There exists direct relationship between individual dimensions such as purchase intention, attitude, shopping orientation etc. (Mohanraj P & Gopalakrishnan S, 2017). In general satisfaction of purchase were based on store experience, apparel quality and store location, approach of staff and user friendly trial room were few factors that enables to have satisfaction of purchase (Mohanraj P & Gopalakrishnan S, 2017) Symbolic marketing factors, including the point-of-purchase contexts of retail stores, greatly impact luxury buying decisions (Miller & Mills, 2012). Particularly, the aesthetic factors of the retail atmosphere are key to luxury branding, as visual stimuli are most powerful in creating images and symbols (Das, 2014).

DATA CAPTURE

About 175 questionnaires were distributed randomly to the customers of different types of fashion apparel stores in malls situated in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Out of which 149 were responded. The response rate works out to 85.14%.

Table 1 Demographic Detail of Respondents

S. No	Description	No of Respondents	Percent
GENDER			
1	Male (M)	60	40.3
2	Female (F)	89	59.7
AGE			
1	Below 30 (B)	107	71.8
2	31-50 (A)	42	28.2
QUALIFICATION			
1	Graduate and below (G)	98	65.8
2	PG and above (PG)	51	34.2
INCOME			
1	Up to 5 lakhs (L)	35	23.5
2	5 to 10 lakhs (M)	60	40.3
3	Above 10 (H)	54	36.2
MATERIAL STATUS			
1	Single (S)	112	75.2
2	Married (M)	37	24.8
NATIVITY			
1	Urban (U)	93	62.4
2	Semi-urban (SU)	52	34.9
3	Rural (R)	4	2.7
OVERALL			
	Total	149	100.0

Table 1 reveals that almost 60% of the respondents belongs to female community while 71.8% are in the age group of below 30 years and the remaining 28.2% are in the age group between 31 and 50 years. 51 (34.2%) respondents having PG qualification and 98 (65.8%) were graduate and below qualification. Nearly 112 (75.2%) were unmarried and the remaining 37 (24.8%) were married. Out of 149 respondents, 23.5% (35) were having income up to 5 lakhs; 40.3% (60) were having income between 5 and 10 lakhs; 36.2% (54) were having income above 10 lakhs. 62.4% (93) respondents were from urban. It is followed by 52 (34.9%) were semi-urban nativity and 4 (2.7%) were Rural nativity. It is quite obvious that visit to fashion apparel stores are from urban community rather than the rural community which is due to various reasons.

DATA ANALYSIS

The concept of visual merchandising has been analyzed using 12 variables such as Billing counter; Gender/age division; Landscape; Ease of Navigation; Trial room; Appropriate use of props; Ensemble; Focal point; Signage; Store atmosphere and Window display. The respondents' opinion were obtained using five point verbal scale such as Need to improve; Average; Good; Very Good and Excellent. The factor method of data reduction technique has been employed. This technique grouped in to two components. The components were named as Emphasis and Layout. The variables and the components along with component name were shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Rotated Component Matrix

S. No.	Variables	Emphasis	Layout
1	Billing counter		.696
2	Gender/age division		.733
3	Landscape		.717
4	Ease of Navigation		.600
5	Trial room		.650
6	Appropriate use of props	.781	
7	Ensemble	.701	
8	Focal point	.734	
9	Signage	.615	
10	Store atmosphere	.503	
11	Window display	.694	

Further data analyses have been carried out based on these two factors such as Layout and Emphasis. The factor analysis enables to provide a set of objectives for the study.

HIERARCHICAL CLUSTER ANALYSIS

The hierarchical cluster analysis has been employed to identify the group of variables. The dendrogram also confirms the two groups.

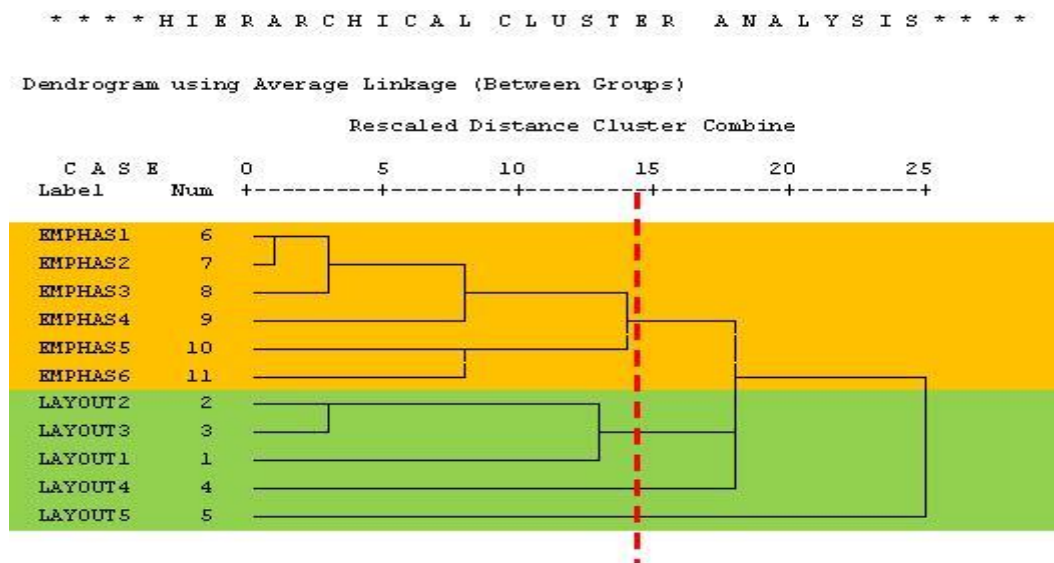


Fig 1 Hierarchical cluster analysis

Reliability Test

The study extended to ascertain the reliability of the data. The external and internal reliability were two identifiable aspects of the data. Majority of the time the internal reliability will be identified for any study. The most common method of estimating internal reliability is Cronbach alpha (α). The formula used for internal reliability is

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K - 1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^K \sigma_{Y_i}^2}{\sigma_X^2} \right)$$

A commonly accepted rules for describing internal consistency using Cronbach alpha (Cronbach, Lee and Shavelson 2004) are $\alpha \geq 0.9$ (Excellent), $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ (Good), $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ (Acceptable), $0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$ (Questionable), $0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$ (Poor) and $0.5 > \alpha$ (Unacceptable). The Alpha value for the two factors has been calculated and the same has been shown in Table 3 which indicates that all the variables are acceptable for further studies.

Table 3 Reliability Test

S. No.	Factor	No. of Variables	Alpha value
1	Layout	5	0.7663
2	Emphasis	6	0.8210
Total		11	0.8626

The alpha value for all the two factors were ranges 0.7663 and 0.8210 respectively which indicates that all the variables are acceptable in nature for further studies. Similarly, the alpha value for all the 11 variables works out to 0.8626 which indicates that the variables are good.

The factor analysis and reliability analysis enable to provide a set of objectives for the study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ANALYSIS

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify the role of layout in visual merchandising in fashion apparel retail
- To list of out the prime factors of emphasis in fashion apparel retail

These two factors are been termed as **Duality Factors** in visual merchandising.

HYPOTHESES

The above duality factors enable to formulate the following hypotheses.

- The role of layout has a significant impact in visual merchandising in fashion apparel retail.
- There exist few prime factors of emphasis in apparel retail visual merchandising.

- There exists significant role on duality factors in visual merchandising in fashion apparel.

Layout

Layout has been categorized such as Billing counter, Gender/age division, Landscape, Space: efficiency & ease of navigation and Trial room. The opinion on these programs were obtained using five-point verbal scale such as Need to improve; Average; Good; Very Good and Excellent with a weight of 1 to 5. The mean and standard deviation were calculated based on the respondent's opinion. The ranks were assigned based on mean and standard deviation. The same has been shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Layout

S. No.	Description	Need to improve	Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Mean	Std	Rank
1	Billing counter	16 (10.7)	26 (17.4)	56 (37.6)	37 (24.8)	14 (9.4)	3.05	1.111	5
2	Gender/age division	6 (4.0)	18 (12.1)	66 (44.3)	40 (26.8)	19 (12.8)	3.32	.981	2
3	Landscape	6 (4.0)	22 (14.8)	57 (38.3)	46 (30.9)	18 (12.1)	3.32	1.002	3
4	Space: efficiency and ease of navigation	6 (4.0)	28 (18.8)	42 (28.2)	39 (26.2)	34 (22.8)	3.45	1.153	1
5	Trial room	1 (0.7)	9 (6.0)	50 (33.6)	54 (36.2)	35 (3.5)	3.30	1.143	4

The mean value of all the variables ranges between 3.05 and 3.45 which indicate that all the variables were lean towards almost very good. The standard deviation ranges between 0.981 and 1.153 which indicates that there was no much deviation in the respondents' opinion. The first preference was indicated towards Space: efficiency and ease of navigation. It is followed by Gender/age division, Landscape, Trial room and Billing counter. The least preference was indicated towards billing counter. It shows that the customers are expecting trial room as primary.

The analyses were further extended to demographic details such as gender, age, qualification and professional assignment. The same has been shown in Table 5

Table 5 Layout - Gender, Age, Income, Marital Status, Nativity and Educational qualifications

Respondents	Billing counter (B)	Gender/age division (G)	Landscape (L)	Ease of Navigation (E)	Trial room (T)	Remarks
Gender						
Male	3.18	3.45	3.48	3.52	3.25	E>L>G>T>B
Female	2.96	3.24	3.21	3.40	3.34	E>T>G>L>B
	M>F	M>F	M>F	M>F	F>M	
AGE						
Below 30	3.11	3.35	3.36	3.53	3.36	E>L>T>G>B
31-50	2.88	3.26	3.21	3.24	3.17	G>E>L>T>B
	B>A	B>A	B>A	B>A	B>A	
INCOME						
Up to 5 lakhs	3.14	3.20	3.46	3.51	3.43	E>L>T>G>B
5 to 10 lakhs	3.03	3.42	3.40	3.47	3.28	E>G>L>T>B
	1.089	.907	1.061	1.142	1.010	
Above 10	3.00	3.30	3.15	3.39	3.24	E>G>T>L>B
	1.082	1.002	.940	1.140	1.212	
	L>M>H	M>H>L	L>M>H	L>M>H	L>M>H	
MATERIAL STATUS						
Single	3.12	3.37	3.37	3.53	3.34	E>G>L>T>B
Married	2.84	3.16	3.19	3.22	3.19	E>L>T>G>B
	S>M	S>M	S>M	S>M	S>M	
NATIVITY						
Urban	3.04	3.28	3.34	3.44	3.27	E>L>G>T>B
Semi-urban	3.06	3.46	3.25	3.42	3.37	G>E>T>L>B
Rural	3.00	2.50	3.75	4.00	3.25	E>L>T>B>G
	SU>U>R	SU>U>R	R>U>SU	R>U>SU	SU>U>R	
QUALIFICATION						
Graduate and below	3.06	3.35	3.34	3.57	3.35	E>G>T>L>B
PG and above	3.02	3.27	3.29	3.22	3.22	L>G>T>E>B
	G>PG	G>PG	G>PG	G>PG	G>PG	
OVERALL						
Total	3.05	3.32	3.32	3.45	3.30	E>G>L>T>B

The inferences on layout were shown in Table 6.

Table 6 – INFERENCES ON LAYOUT

S. No.	Description	Gender	Age	Income	Marital Status	Nativity	Educational Qualification
1	Billing counter	Male	Below 30	Up to 5 lakhs	Single	Semi Urban	Graduate
2	Gender/age division	Male	Below 30	5-10 lakhs	Single	Semi Urban	Graduate
3	Landscape	Male	Below 30	Up to 5 lakhs	Single	Rural	Graduate
4	Space: efficiency and ease of navigation	Male	Below 30	Up to 5 lakhs	Single	Rural	Graduate
5	Trial room	Female	Below 30	Up to 5 lakhs	Single	Semi Urban	Graduate

From the above Table 6, we can infer that the below 30 age group, single and graduates prefer all the five aspects such as Billing counter, Gender/age division, Landscape, Space: efficiency & ease of navigation and Trial room. Males prefer Billing counter, Gender/age division, Landscape, Space: efficiency & ease of navigation whereas income up to 5 lakhs group prefers Billing counter, Landscape, Space: efficiency & ease of navigation and Trial room. Similarly, the persons of income with 5-10 lakhs preference is gender/age division. And females prefer trail room. Semi urban group prefer billing counter, gender/age division and trail room whereas the rural group prefers landscape and space: efficiency and ease of navigation.

Emphasis

Emphasis has been categorized as appropriate use of props; ensemble; focal point; signage; store atmosphere and window display. The opinion on these aspects were obtained using five-point verbal scale such as Need to improve; Average; Good; Very Good and Excellent with a weightage of 1 to 5. The mean and standard deviation were calculated based on the respondent's opinion. The ranks were assigned based on mean and standard deviation. The same has been shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Emphasis

S. No.	Description	Need to improve	Avg	Good	V. Good	Excellent	Mean	Std	Rank
1	Appropriate use of props	11 (7.4)	23 (15.4)	61 (40.9)	38 (25.5)	16 (10.7)	3.17	1.055	6
2	Ensemble	2 (1.3)	22 (14.8)	57 (38.3)	51 (34.2)	17 (11.4)	3.40	0.921	3
3	Focal point	7 (4.7)	17 (11.4)	66 (44.3)	37 (24.8)	22 (14.8)	3.34	1.017	4
4	Signage	9 (6.0)	23 (15.4)	48 (32.2)	58 (38.9)	11 (7.4)	3.26	1.009	5
5	Store atmosphere	2 (1.3)	11 (7.4)	49 (32.9)	54 (36.2)	33 (22.1)	3.70	0.941	1
6	Window display	6 (4.0)	16 (10.7)	44 (29.5)	50 (33.6)	33 (22.1)	3.59	1.072	2

The mean value of all the variables ranges between 3.17 and 3.70 which indicate that all the variables were lean towards almost very good. The standard deviation ranges between 0.921 and 1.072 which indicates that there was no much deviation in the respondents' opinion. Based on the mean value, the respondents' preferences were ranked. Accordingly, the first preference was indicated towards store atmosphere. It is followed by window display and Ensemble. The least preference was indicated towards appropriate use of props.

The analyses were further extended to demographic details such as gender, age, income, marital status, nativity and qualifications and the same is shown in Table 8. The overall mean value of all the categories lies between 3.17 and 3.70 which indicate good and very good and the standard deviation is between 0.921 and 1.072.

Table 8 Emphasis- Gender, Age, Income, Marital Status, Nativity and Educational qualifications

Respondents		Appropriate use of props (P)	Ensemble (E)	Focal point (F)	Signage (S)	Store atmosphere (Sa)	Window display (W)	Remarks
Gender								
Male	Mean	3.33	3.37	3.37	3.38	3.85	3.70	Sa>W>S>F>E>P
	Std.	1.084	1.057	1.008	.922	.799	1.013	
Female	Mean	3.06	3.42	3.31	3.18	3.61	3.52	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.026	.823	1.029	1.061	1.018	1.109	
		M>F	F>M	M>F	M>F	M>F	M>F	
Age								
Below 30	Mean	3.14	3.44	3.37	3.28	3.80	3.64	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.077	.923	1.033	.969	.852	1.101	
31-50	Mean	3.24	3.29	3.24	3.21	3.45	3.45	W>Sa>E>F>P>S
	Std.	1.008	.918	.983	1.116	1.109	.993	
		A>B	B>A	B>A	B>A	B>A	B>A	
Income								
Up to 5 lakhs	Mean	2.97	3.26	3.20	2.97	3.77	3.49	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.200	.919	1.256	1.124	.942	1.197	
5 to 10 lakhs	Mean	3.15	3.45	3.40	3.38	3.77	3.70	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	.988	.999	.942	1.027	.945	.944	
Above 10	Mean	3.31	3.43	3.35	3.31	3.59	3.54	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.025	.838	.935	.886	.942	1.128	
		H>M>L	M>H>L	M>H>L	M>H>L	L>M>H	M>H>L	
Marital status								
Single	Mean	3.14	3.43	3.40	3.24	3.78	3.59	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.081	.956	1.094	1.007	.917	1.103	
Married	Mean	3.24	3.30	3.14	3.32	3.49	3.59	W>Sa>S>E>P>F
	Std.	.983	.812	.713	1.029	.989	.985	
		M>S	S>M	S>M	M>S	S>M	M>S	
Nativity								
Urban	Mean	3.14	3.49	3.34	3.30	3.76	3.69	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.109	.928	1.037	1.091	.925	1.021	
Semi-urban	Mean	3.19	3.21	3.33	3.17	3.60	3.33	Sa>F>W>E>P>S
	Std.	.951	.915	1.024	.857	.975	1.115	
Rural	Mean	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.50	3.75	4.75	W>Sa>E>S>P>F
	Std.	1.291	.577	.500	1.000	.957	.500	
		R>SU>U	R>U>SM	U>SU>R	R>U>SU	U>R>SU	R>U>SU	
Qualification								
Graduate and below	Mean	3.12	3.42	3.34	3.20	3.76	3.63	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.115	.930	1.074	1.055	.942	1.116	
PG and above	Mean	3.25	3.35	3.33	3.37	3.61	3.51	Sa>W>S>E>F>P
	Std.	.935	.913	.909	.916	.940	.987	
		PG>G	G>PG	G>PG	PG>G	G>PG	G>PG	
Over all								
Total	Mean	3.17	3.40	3.34	3.26	3.70	3.59	Sa>W>E>F>S>P
	Std.	1.055	.921	1.017	1.009	.941	1.072	

The inferences on Emphasis were shown in Table 9.

Table 9 – INFERENCES ON EMPHASIS

S.No.	Description	Gender	Age	Income	Marital Status	Nativity	Educational Qualification
1	Appropriate use of props	Male	31-50	Above 10 lakhs	Married	Rural	Post Graduate
2	Ensemble	Female	Below 30	5-10 lakhs	Single	Rural	Graduate
3	Focal point	Male	Below 30	5-10 lakhs	Single	Urban	Graduate
4	Signage	Male	Below 30	5-10 lakhs	Married	Rural	Post Graduate
5	Store atmosphere	Male	Below 30	Up to 5 lakhs	Single	Urban	Graduate
6	Window display	Male	Below 30	5-10 lakhs	Married	Rural	Graduate

It can be seen from the above Table 9 that the unmarried respondents prefer three aspects such as Ensemble; Focal point and Store atmosphere, whereas married respondents prefer appropriate use of props; Signage and Window display. Male prefer appropriate use of props; Focal point; Signage; Store atmosphere and Window display, females prefer Ensembles. Below 30 age group prefers Ensemble; Focal point; Signage; Store atmosphere and Window display, whereas 31-50 prefers appropriate use of props. Similarly, the persons of above 10 lakhs income group preference was appropriate use of props, whereas ensemble, focal point, signage and window display were the preferences of persons of income group between 5 lakhs and 10 lakhs. Graduates and below prefers ensemble, focal point, store atmosphere and window display whereas PG and above prefers appropriate use of props and signage. Urban respondents prefer focal point and store atmosphere whereas rural respondents prefer appropriate use of props, ensemble, signage and window display.

SEM Model

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) uses various types of models to depict relationships among observed variables, with the same basic goal of providing a quantitative test of a theoretical model hypothesized by the researcher. More specifically, various theoretical models can be tested in SEM that hypothesize how sets of variables define constructs and how these constructs are related to each other. For example, a marketing researcher may hypothesize that consumer trust in a corporation leads to increased product sales for that corporation. Basic models include regression, path, and confirmatory factor models. The reason for covering these basic models is that they provide a basis for understanding structural equation models. To better understand these basic models, one needs to define few terms. First, there are two major types of variables: latent variables and observed variables. Latent variables (constructs or factors) are variables that are not directly observable or measured. Latent variables are indirectly observed or measured, and hence are inferred from a set of observed variables that actually measure using tests, surveys, and so on. In this study, the SEM model has been attempted.

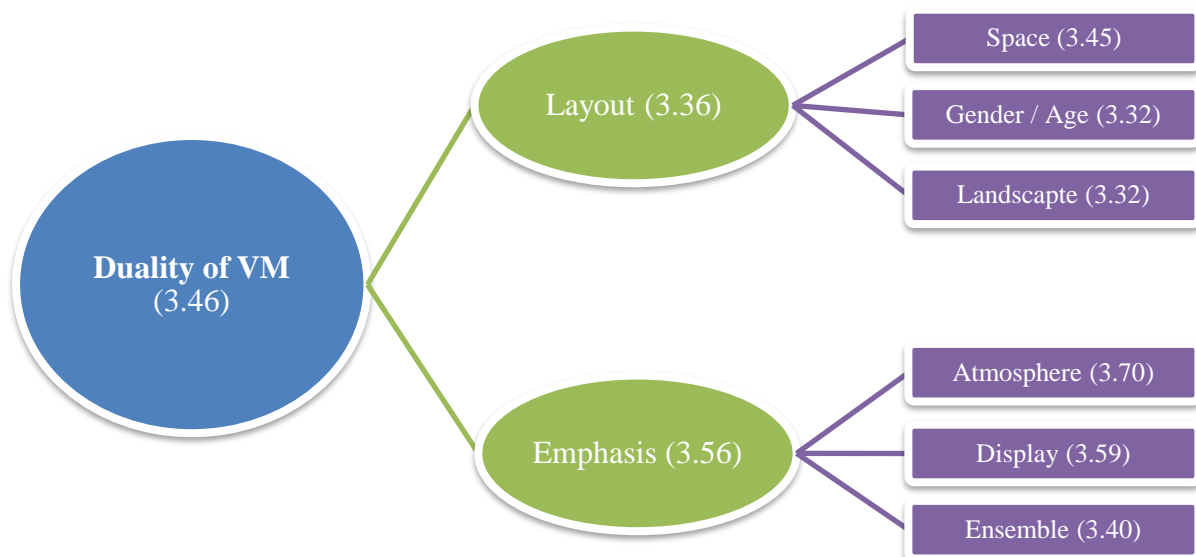


Figure 2 SEM Model on Duality of VM

It is evident from Figure 2 that all the two categories mean value are almost similar, which are required today and the respondents were of the opinion that Duality is more important for Visual Merchandising. The equation thus arrived based on SEM model shown below:

$$D = \alpha_1 * L_1 + \alpha_2 * E_1$$

Where D = Duality of Visual Merchandising

L_1 = Layout

E_1 = Emphasis

α_1 = L_1 Constant = 3.36

α_2 = E_1 Constant = 3.56

CONCLUSION

The objectives of the study were “To identify the role of layout in visual merchandising in fashion apparel retail” and “To list of out the prime factors of emphasis in fashion apparel retail” These two factors are been termed as Duality Factors in visual merchandising.

The above duality factors enable to formulate the following hypotheses such as The role of layout has a significant impact in visual merchandising in fashion apparel retail; There exist few prime factors of emphasis in apparel retail visual merchandising and There exists significant role on duality factors in visual merchandising in fashion apparel. Five variables on layout and six variables on emphasis were taken up to test the hypotheses and to identify the fulfillment of objectives. About 175 questionnaires were distributed randomly to the customers of different types of fashion apparel stores in malls situated in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Out of which 149 were responded. The response rate works out to 85.14%. The reliability test enabled to identify the variables taken up for the study were good. The SEM model also indicates that equal important to two factors such as, emphasis and layout for Visual

Merchandising. The study indicates that the in-store environment should concentrate on the store layout and emphasis on Interior displays. The study further indicates the future visual merchandising Themed stores; Digital imaging and 3D interactive technology; Virtual stores; Entertainment oriented formats like Touch-screen kiosks and extra sensory experiences for customers irrespective of age, gender, Income, Marital Status, Nativity and Educational Qualification.

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