



Do Emotional States of the Consumers play a mediating role amongst Visual Merchandising Strategies and Purchase Intention?

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Abstract

Within immense competitive business market, Apparel Industry is one of the giants that apply various strategies to marketing. Among them, visual merchandising refers as a main concept that attempts to influence impulse purchasing behavior of consumers through creative and aesthetic aspects for the store environment. Literature suggests the emotional state of the consumers is stimulating the purchase intention. Hence the objective of the paper is to identify the impact of Visual Merchandising Strategies (VMS) on Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI) and mediating impact of Consumer Emotional State (CES) between VMS and CPI. Both primary and secondary data were collected and survey method was adopted to collect primary data from a sample of 200 respondents which was drawn from Colombo and Kandy Districts. VMS was evaluated by store exterior and interior factors while CES was measured using Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance (PAD) scale and CPI was assessed by dimensions in literature. According to findings, Pearson correlation and the simple linear analysis have proved that there is a significant weak positive relationship between VMS and CPI while the relationships between VMS and CES as well as CES and CPI have been recorded to be strong positive. Baron and Kenny approach has observed that there is a partial mediation of CES on the relationship between VMS and CPI while Sobel test confirmed the significant mediation. Descriptive statistics justified that consumers consider various factors other than VMS when make purchase decision in Fast Fashion Apparel Industry. Improve noticeable VMS which stimulate the pleasure and arousal of consumers can be recommended as Managerial Implications to the retailers in the industry

Keywords: *Consumer Emotional states, Fast Fashion Apparel, Purchase Intention, Visual Merchandising*

1. Introduction

Marketing and promotion is one of the key drivers of current business world which influence the consumers by exposing them to a wide range of advertisements, commercials, public relationship strategies and other methods in every day, everywhere at every time. Due to the rapid growth of the industry and technology, retailing has achieved a wide spread around the world from small retailing shops, retail chains to virtual retailing and due to globalization, the competition has become fierce and created an undeniable need to differentiate the businesses to gain the competitive advantage. Due to that, many apply various retailing strategies to address the challenges. Among number of marketing tactics, retail store design strategy is critical in creating the first impression by appealing to the intended customers. Physical features of the store can influence the moods, feelings and experience of the consumer which prove the importance of the visual stimulation and communication in retailing (McGoldrick & Peter, 1990). Hence, visual merchandising has become a widely used strategy by many retailers to address the challenges in the market. Visual Merchandising Strategies (VMS) refer as the artistic presentation of merchandise such as store front, store layout, store interior and the interior design. Various types of VMS are used by different retailers to appeal the intended consumer in accordance with their type of product/ service due to its ability to create instant effect on the consumer buying decision making process. The readiness and willingness to purchase a product or service is referring as the Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI) where the visual characteristics could have impact on purchase intention. CPI further influenced by the environment stimuli in many situations yet difficult to predict as they attached with Consumer Emotional States (CES). Effective arrangement of the store features can increase the consumer intention to purchase through the visual presentation and communication. Thus, the significance of visual merchandising is emphasized by scholars as the strategy of product's visual communication to the customer and message is decoded appropriately to create a desire to purchase within the consumer (Kerfoot, Davis & Ward, 2003). But yet, the impact of visual merchandising towards the consumer intention to purchase cannot be elaborated directly since purchase intention is highly involved with internal psychological aspects of the people which is hard to be predicted. Prior to 80's, the buyers of a product are considered as rationale beings whose purchasing decisions were based on logical details of available information into a stream that came from the recognition of an issue to their satisfaction with the buying decision (Solomon, 2008). But with the introduction of the hedonic perspective of the consumer behavior, a number of non-rational factors which has a strong influence on the consumer behavior have been recognized such as hedonism, fantasies, feelings, fun, the moods of the consumer and the consumption rituals. The research identifies the relationship between VMS and CPI through the mediation of CES for instance, pleasure, arousal and dominance by bridging the available knowledge and empirical gap by focusing the fast fashion apparel retail industry due to the comprehensive usage of visual merchandising and display strategies in such stores where consumers make their purchase decision by impulse.

Problem statement

Literature identified the main components of VMS impulse buying behavior (Bhatti & Latif, 2013; Neha & Chugan, 2015; Pereira, et al., 2010; Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013), store choice behavior (Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007), and patronage intention

(Gajanayake, et al., 2011). The initial model to explain the mediating effect of consumer emotions on the connection between environmental stimuli and behavioral intention was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Yet there is an absence of literature to describe the direct relationship of VMS and CPI with the mediation of CES such as pleasure, arousal and dominance. To fill the research gap, the research identifies the relationship between VMS and CPI through the mediation of CES; Instance, Pleasure, Arousal and Dominance. Study focused on the fast fashion apparel retail industry due to the comprehensive usage of visual merchandising and display strategies in retail stores where consumers make their purchase decision by impulse.

Research questions and Objectives

- What is the impact of VMS on CPI in fast fashion apparel retail stores?
- What is the relationship between VMS and CES towards fast fashion apparel?
- What is the relationship between CES and CPI towards fast fashion apparel?
- Do CES mediate the relationship between VMS and CPI?

Research objectives of the current study are developed based on above research questions.

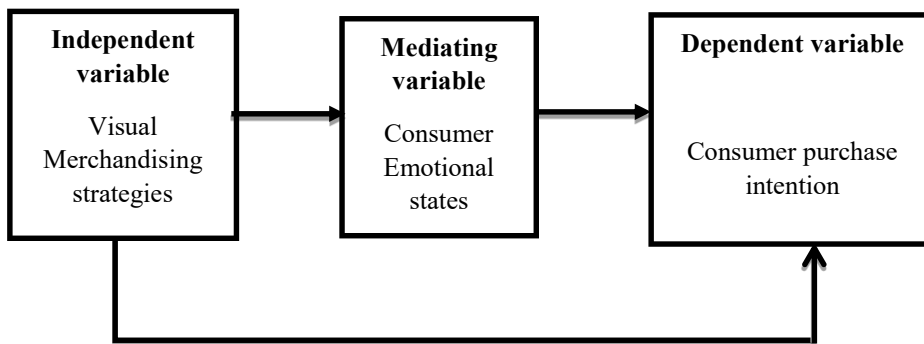
- To identify the impact of VMS on the CPI towards fast fashion apparel
- To identify the relationship between VMS and CES towards fast fashion apparel
- To identify the relationship between CES and CPI towards fast fashion apparel
- To explore the mediating impact of CES on the relationship between VMS and CPI

2. Literature review

Visual merchandising referred as the strategic presentation of a company and its products to attract consumers and facilitate purchasing by creating a positive impression (Diamond & Diamond, 2007) with creative practices in order to save both the sales person's and the shopper's time by making shopping effortless (Hefer & Cant, 2013). This acts as a "silent sales person" by providing the consumers with information through visual mediums. Further the suggestions are made to add items to a consumer's original purchase while act as a sales person. This referred as the visual merchandising communication process that starts from front of the store to its lay-out, interior designing, interior displays and other cosmetic additions (Jain, et al., 2012). Immense competitive market focused the need of retailers for an effective strategy to attract more customers and resulted to use VMS to differentiate their offerings from rivals (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013). Retailers provide assistance to customers to select right products through focused merchandising, intelligent store design and layout, and other visual merchandising practices. Literatures suggests four main elements of visual merchandising; store front, store lay-out, store interior and interior design as VMS. **Store front** is the most prominent element responsible for attracting consumers passing by in to the store and convert in to potential buyers (Jain, et al., 2012) and as an average consumers give 3-5 seconds attention to window display while shopping which creates the need for convey visual message effectively (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013, Taskiran, 2012). **Store layout** includes the selling, merchandising, personnel and consumer spaces where the selling space: Interior displays, sales demonstration areas and sales transaction areas. Store layout will keep the consumer for a long period of time which ultimately increases the probability of an unplanned purchase since they expose more to the store environmental stimuli (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013). **Store interior** refers as the colours, ambience cues, lighting and

illumination, store’s signage and mannequins used to excite the senses of the shoppers (Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007) as well colour builds feelings and affects consumer behavior and attitude by stimulating memories, thoughts, and experiences (Banat & Wandebori, 2012). Scholars (Crowley, 1993, Baker ,1992) mentioned *ambience cues* to in-store music, lighting, scent, noise, and temperature that act as a major determinants of effective store interior touch the human senses. *Interior design* is the arrangement of the products in an open display, that freedom to consumers to handle and examine merchandise without the help of a sales assistant (Thompson, 2009). Moreover, the theme decorations to display the merchandise with a theme, combine with a story telling and creates emotions within the consumers.

The *importance of emotions* in the shopping environment is being studied under the field of psychology. Researches related to consumer behaviour have heavily revealed the effect of cognitive psychology, concentrating and counting on the traditional information-processing paradigm to forecast consumer decision making processes and the consequences (Bettman, 1979). Oxenfeldt (1974) proposes that customers will have both opinions and feelings toward certain stores that will impact their perceptions which will define their behaviour within retail shops. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) provides a multidimensional perspective in environmental psychology which clarifies the mediating emotional state and a classification of outcomes based on the approach–avoidance notion and Russell (1978) suggested the three-dimensional schema of Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance while Donovan and Rossiter (1982) arranged these variables onto the “Stimulus-Organism–Response” (S-O-R) model which is known as a classical model of psychology about human behaviour. *Pleasure* is one of the organismic variables and an emotional state distinguished from preference, liking, positive reinforcement or approach-avoidance behaviour since the latter responses is also determined by the arousing quality of a stimulus (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Happiness, contentment and satisfaction are the main components of the pleasure. *Arousal* refers to the degree to which an individual senses excited or stimulated (Baker, et al., 1992) and consists of relaxed, stimulated, calm, excited emotional states. *Dominance* is a feeling that is built on the degree to which the individual has control over behaviour. Strength, control, safety and the interest in the store environment indicates the dominating nature that the consumer has (Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003). The knowledge gap on mediating impact of the CES on VMS and CPI has been addressed and the conceptual framework has been constructed according to the identified relationships. The conceptual framework has been developed by referring to the PAD (pleasure, arousal and dominance) describes the mediating influence.



Source: Stimulus-Response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974)

3. Hypotheses development

H₁: There is an impact of VMS on CPI towards fast fashion apparel

H₂: There is a relationship between the VMS and CES towards fast fashion apparel

H₃: There is a relationship between CES and the CPI towards fast fashion apparel

H₄: CES mediates the relationship between VMS and CPI

Operationalization: variables have been measured according to different dimensions and indicators identified in the previous literature and arranged to meet the objectives.

Table 10
Operationalization

Dimensions	Indicators	Measurement
Independent variable – VMS (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013), (Weerasooriya & Sutha, 2011)		
Store exterior	• Store sign and marquee, Window display	Five point-likert scale
Store interior	Store layout, Colours, Music and odour Lighting and illumination, Stores signage and graphics, Creative product display Theme decors	Five point-likert scale
Mediating variables – CES (Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003)		
Pleasure	Pleasant, Enjoyable, Convenient Satisfying	Five point-likert scale
Arousal	Interesting, Active, Awake, Alert, Engaging	Five point -likert scale
Dominance	Strong , Controlled, Safe , Important	Five point -likert scale
Dependent variable – CPI , (Muthur,1998)		
Purchase intention	I would buy apparel from a retail which increases my pleasure. I would buy apparel from a retail which makes me excited. I would like to buy clothes from a retail which lets me have more control over my behaviours I would pay more for clothes from a shop which has a visually appealing environment	Five point-likert scale

I will speak positively to others about an apparel shop with visually appealing environment.

I will re-visit the shop which has a visually appealing environment.

4. Research methodology

Study has adopted a multi-stage sampling method in which, in the first stage, Fast fashion apparel retailers were selected and, in the second stage, stratified sampling method has been adopted in which cases are drawn from each of the strata. As the population, two highly populated Districts have been chosen from Western and Central provinces, Colombo with 2,310,000 population and Kandy with 1,370,200 population from both selected provinces, where both have 77.5 % and 12.1 % urbanization respectively (CBSL, 2014). The selected provinces based on researcher's convenience. For the Sample, four fast fashion apparel retailers have been selected as Nolimit, Odel, Fashion Bug and CIB Shopping Centre, categorized as the high-end fashion retailers according to the Sri Lanka Standard Industrial Classification 5 (SLSIC) (Perera, 2016). Among both Districts, 200 consumers were selected proportionately as number of consumers from each retail chain, according to the number of outlets of each fashion apparel retail chain in each district and applied convenient sampling to select respondents and at different times, different days of the week. Primary data was collected, through a semi-structured questionnaire. The sources such as Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka-2014, Central Bank Reports, published journal articles, business magazines, business articles and books had been referred to develop the Research gap and literature. Data analyzed through descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis along with the use of Microsoft Excel 2013 and Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0 software. The mediating impact of CES has been analyzed using the Baron-Kenny Approach and Sobel Test.

5. Results

Majority of the consumers tends to visit fashion apparel retail stores once per month (38.5%) and 29.5% of the consumers visit the store 2-5 times per month and the consumers who do not visit the stores very often accounts for 26.5% in the sample. Majority consumers spend between Rs. 1001 to Rs. 5000 per visit to purchase apparel which is 70.5% while the next highest percentage is recorded by the consumers who spend between Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10,000. Around 12.5% of consumers spend below Rs. 1000.

According to the results, majority consumers (44%), who enter in to the store have noticed the creative product display used within the store which includes the merchandise arrangement and Mannequin display. Store layout arrangement by 32%, and the theme decors, colours, lighting and illumination used within the store have been noticed in lesser amount. Music and odour have received the lowest interest which is 3.5%.

The correlation has been tested with independent, dependent and mediating variables, as to find out the relationship about each of these variables as a combination. Hence the correlation of VMS and CPI, VMS and CES (mediating variable) and CES and CPI had been calculated and stated in below tables, number 2, 3 and 4.

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Table 2
Correlation between VMS and CPI

Dimension	Pearson Correlation	Significance	E N
VMS	0.480	0.000	200

Accordingly there is a weak positive relationship of 0.480 between VMS and CPI. Nevertheless, since the P-value is equal to 0.000 ($P < 0.05$), there is a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 3
Correlation between VMS and CES

Dimension	Pearson Correlation	Significance	N
VMS	0.520	0.000	200

There is a strong positive relationship of 0.520 between VMS and CES relationship is highly significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted at the 95% confidence level.

Table 4
Correlation between CES and CPI

Dimension	Pearson Correlation	Significance	N
CES	0.684	0.000	200

The relationship between the CES and CPI is a strong positive relationship which is 0.684 and relationship is statistically significant where P-value is equal to 0.000 ($P < 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis (H_0) can be rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_3) can be accepted which states that there is a relationship between CES and the CPI at 95% confidence level. As a summary, there is a weak positive relationship between the VMS and CPI while there are strong positive relationships between VMS and CES as well as CES and CPI. Three of the null hypotheses developed have been rejected and the alternate hypotheses have been accepted by referring to the statistical outcome.

Table 5
Model Summary of Linear Regression Analysis between VMS and CPI

Figure	Value
R	0.480
R²	0.230

Adjusted R²	0.226
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The adjusted R square is equal to 23% which concludes that 77% of unexplained variations are involved in the model. The adjusted R squared value of the model is equal to 0.226 which verifies that the 22.6% of the dependent variable, CPI can be explained from the independent variable, VMS.

Table 6
Analysis of Variance for Simple Linear Regression

Model	Sum of Square	Degree of freedom	F	Significance
Regression	28.842	1	59.254	0.000
Residual	96.377	198		
Total	125.219	199		

F-value of the model is equal to 59.254 which is more than the table F-value (3.89) which confirms that the model can be applied to statistically predict the dependent variable. The P-value is equal to 0.000 (P<0.05). Hence, the null hypothesis (H₀) can be rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H₁) is accepted which states that there is an impact of VMS on CPI.

Table 7
Coefficients

Predictor	β_0 Coefficients	Standard error	Significance
Constant	1.461	0.254	0.000
Average VMS	0.579	0.075	0.000

All the values of the beta coefficients are positive and it confirms that there is a positive relationship between VMS and CPI, constant (β_0) is 1.461 which implies that while VMS remain zero or constant, the CPI varies by 1.461 and statistically significant. Moreover, the beta coefficient of the VMS is 0.579 which indicates that if VMS increases by one unit while other factors are constant, the CPI may increase by 0.579 significant.

$$CPI = 1.416 + 0.579 \text{ VMS} + \epsilon$$

- CPI – Consumer Purchase Intention
- VMS – Visual Merchandising Strategies
- ϵ – Standard Error

Table 8
Model Summary for the Regression Analysis between VMS and CES

Figure	Value
R	0.520

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R ²	0.270
Adjusted R ²	0.267

The adjusted R squared value of the model is equal to 0.267 which verifies that the 26.7% of the dependent variable, CES can be explained by the independent variable, assumed that there are factors other than the considered factors which determine the variance of the CES.

Table 9
Analysis of Variance for Simple Linear Regression

Model	Sum of Square	Degree of freedom	F	Significance
Regression	23.814	1	73.374	0.000
Residual	64.334	198		
Total	88.175	199		

The residual value of the model is higher compared to the regression value of the sum of squares which concludes the model is not the best fit to assess the variation of the dependent variable, CES and is determined by the factors other than the considered factors, F-value is equal to 73.374 which is more than the table F-value (3.89) which confirms that the model can be applied to statistically predict the dependent variable. Null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected and alternate hypothesis (H₂) is accepted, states there are a relationship between VMS and CES.

6. Regression Analysis between CES and CPI

Table 10
Model Summary for the Regression Analysis between CES and CPI

Figure	Value
R	0.684
R ²	0.468
Adjusted R ²	0.466

The R square of the model is 46.8% which concludes that 53.2% of unexplained variations are involved in the model. The adjusted R squared value of the model is equal to 0.466 which proves that the 46.6% of the dependent variable, CPI can be explained by independent variable, CES and assumed CES explains approximately half of the variation in CPI.

Table 11
Analysis of Variance for Simple Linear Regression

Model	Sum of Square	Degree of freedom	F	Significance
Regression	58.641	1	174.395	0.000

Residual	66.578	198
Total	125.219	199

The residual value of the model is nearly closer to the regression value of the sum of squares concludes model is approximate fit to assess the impact and the variation of the dependent variable, CPI. The F-value of the model is equal to 174.395, significantly higher than the table F-value (3.89) which confirms that the model can be applied to predict the dependent variable statistically. Null hypothesis (H_0) can be rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_3) can be accepted which states that there is a relationship between CES and CPI.

7. Mediator Analysis

The mediation analysis can be done by using Baron and Kenny approach with three steps to examine the effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The dependent variable, CPI has been regressed on the independent variable, VMS to check whether the independent variable is a significant predictor of the dependent variable.

Table 12
Coefficient Analysis

Predictor	β_0 Coefficients	Standard error	Standardized beta coefficient	Significance
Constant	1.461	0.254		0.000
Average VMS	0.579	0.075	0.480	0.000

Results reveal the independent variable, VMS, is a significant predictor of the dependent variable, CPI in which the beta coefficient equal to 0.579 , P-value is equal to 0.000 (P <0.05).

As the second step, the mediator, CES has been regressed on the independent variable, VMS to confirm that the independent variable is a significant predictor of the mediator and if there is no any association between them, the mediation is not possible.

Table 13
Coefficient Analysis

Predictor	β_0 Coefficients	Standard error	Standardized beta coefficient	Significance
Constant	1.760	0.208		0.000
Average VMS	0.527	0.061	0.520	0.000

Results indicate the independent variable is a significant predictor of the mediator where beta coefficient is equal to 0.527. The significance of the relationship is proved by the p-value

Finally, the dependent variable, CPI is regressed on both the mediator, CES and the Independent variable, VMS, confirms that the mediator is a significant predictor of the independent variable.

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Table 14
Coefficient Analysis

Predictor	β Coefficients	Standard error	Standardized beta coefficient	Significance
Constant	0.211	0.242		0.384
Average VMS	0.205	0.072	0.170	0.005
Average CES	0.710	0.071	0.596	0.000

The significance of the independent variable has been reduced from 0.579 to 0.205 when compared the direct relationship with independent variable. The beta coefficient of the mediator, CES, is significant compared to the independent variable which is equal to 0.710. Thus, there is a partial mediation of the CES on the relationship between the VMS and CPI. Perfect mediation holds only if the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled.

Table 15
Model Summary for the Multiple Regression between VMS, CES, and CPI

Figure	Value
R	0.700
R ²	0.489
Adjusted R ²	0.484

The model summary highlights an increase of R, R square and adjusted R Square when compared to the same values of simple regression between the independent variable and the dependent. The adjusted R square has been increased from 22.6% to 44.4% which is a 25.8% increase, proves the significance of the mediator, CES.

Following models can be developed by the results of the Baron and Kenny approach.

$$\text{CPI} = 1.416 + 0.579 \text{ VMS} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{CES} = 1.760 + 0.527 \text{ VMS} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{CPI} = 0.211 + 0.205 \text{ VMS} + 0.710 \text{ CES} + \varepsilon$$

CPI = Consumer Purchase Intention

VMS = Visual Merchandising Strategies

CES = Consumer Emotional States

ε = Standard error

Sobel test for Mediation

The existence of the mediation effect has been proved by Baron and Kenny approach and significance assessed by the Sobel test.

- a - unstandardized coefficient for the association between VMS and CES.
- S_a - standard error of a.
- b - Unstandardized coefficient for the association between CES and CPI (when the VMS is also a predictor of the CPI).
- S_b - standard error of b.
- C' - unstandardized coefficient for the association between VMS and CPI
- C - Unstandardized coefficient for the association between VMS and CPI when there is no any mediation

Table 16
The Regression Values for the considered paths

Path	Beta (Unstandardized)	Standard Error	Beta (std.)
C	0.579	0.075	0.480
A	0.527	0.061	0.520
B	0.710	0.071	0.596
c'	0.205	0.072	0.170

Z-value using the Sobel equation which is proposed by MacKinnon, et al.,(1995).

$$Z \text{ -value} = a*b/\text{SQRT} (b^2*S_a^2 + a^2*S_b^2)$$

$$= \underline{6.5375}$$

At 0.05 significance level, under two tailed hypotheses, the P-value for Z-value can assumed to be lower than 0.00001. Therefore, the mediation of CES is extremely statistically significant (P <0.05).But if the Z-value falls beyond the detectable range (between -3.9 to +3.9), the pattern demonstrated is probably too unusual in which the p-value will be small to reflect the relationship. Therefore, it is possible to reject the null hypothesis (H₀). Further studies can be conducted to figure out what might be causing the statistically significant spatial pattern. Hence, the alternate hypothesis (H₄) is accepted which states that CES mediate the relationship between VMS and CPI.The portion of independent variable, VMS which determines the dependent variable, CPI due to mediation of CES is equal to 64.59% [(C-C')/C] which is also a considerable value.

8. Conclusion and Recommendation

The research based on assessing the impact of Visual Merchandising Strategies (VMS) on the Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI) through Consumer Emotional State (CES). Accordingly around 44% of the consumers visit the stores due to the ability to purchase the required item easily while 18.5% by noticing the brand image and logo and the

Window Display (15%), despite the retailers improve the visual features. consumers who enter into the fashion apparel store highly notice the creative product display (44%) and the Store layout (32.5%) and few have noticed the in-store signage, theme decors, music, odour, colours and lighting. According to main findings, R^2 and the Adjusted R^2 are recorded low and suggests that majority of the Sri Lankan consumers visit fashion apparel stores not highly encouraged by the aesthetic features available in the store. Factors; ease of access, parking facilities, quality and the price of the goods and the politeness of the staff along with the recommendations of the peer groups than the visual features in the store. The mediation impact of CES on the relationship between VMS and CPI has been identified using the Baron and Kenny approach while the Sobel test has been used to diagnose the significance. The results proved there is a partial mediation with extreme significant.

9. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Following is recommended to retailers in the fashion apparel retailing;

- Among the customers of fashion apparel, there are some who visit the store for leisure purposes and make the purchase by impulse. Improving the merchandise the demand for impulse purchases could be promoted by retailer.
- promoting more functional aspects of the clothes along with the aesthetic value to improve the amount spent by a customer on apparel per visit
- improve the window display and store front to attract window shoppers that leads to create impulse purchase decisions
- Enhancing the ambiance cues; music, odour, temperature and the illumination which are less noticed but plays a major role in developing favorable [[psychological moods...
- Improve the ease of access, availability of parking, fit-on facilities, waiting areas and the supportive staff other than the VMS used in the store.

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