

VISUAL AESTHETICS VERSUS BRAND POPULARITY IN DETERMINING PREFERENCE FOR HANDBAGS AMONG FEMALE FRESHERS AND SOPHOMORES IN UNILAG

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this experimental study is to analyse and evaluate the influence of visual aesthetics and brand popularity on consumer behaviours, with a particular focus on female students and their preferences for handbags. This experimental research examines the impact of aesthetics and branding on customer decisions using a theoretical model based on psychoanalytic theory. Furthermore, the study takes into account the influence of societal institutions, such as sexism, on consumer behaviour. The objectives of the study include investigating female buying behaviours using Unilag female fresher's and sophomores using about 105 participants for the main study and also examining the factors influencing consumer preference for specific brands, exploring the impact of branding on consumer behaviour, and determining if consumers' perceptions of aesthetic qualities differ. The study employs various statistical analyses to assess these objectives, including paired sample tests, independent t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. The findings reveal that visual aesthetics and brand popularity significantly influence consumer choice for handbags. However, age was found to be significant only in relation to visual aesthetics and not brand names. The study highlights the importance of understanding consumer perceptions and preferences for manufacturers and marketers. It emphasizes the significance of visual aesthetics and brand names in consumer decision-making processes and provides insights for enhancing marketing strategies in the competitive fashion market.

Keywords: *Visual aesthetics, brand popularity, handbags, psychoanalytic theory*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The future of the female handbag comes side by side with the origin of the feminine gender, which plays a major part in the preference for women in handbags. Narrow (2017), gave an in-depth explanation of how handbags come into place. Women carried necessities in their pockets before the invention. Although these pockets were entirely different from what we know, they were sewn

differently, worn differently, and tied around the waist under the skirt. This birthed the first kind of handbag with handles, which was usually called *an undergarment* because it was usually worn in undergarments or skirts. It is a common belief among females that handbags complete the feminine look, as they are part and parcel of those accessories that are as important as the shoes or the hair they wear. Moreover, stores that sell female handbags give

the notion that the handbags are complete and define some part of the female personality. In addition, handbags define the female personality, and style and distinguish her from others; thus, there are varieties, colours, brands, and different types of designs of female handbags being made. However, from these varieties, there are choices and options to choose from to fit the style and complete the outfit. For example, a woman who loves to carry her needs by hand will want to look more stylish and elegant by choosing from a pool of items that fit her style. In modern times, the choice of handbags may, however, be influenced by various factors, including visual aesthetics and brand name.

Visual aesthetics is defined as how pleasing and beautiful something appears to be. Although, in this research study, visual aesthetics is seen to be more than beauty, as it tends to be more specific about the colour and design as to which the female consumer sees it fitting their preference. Furthermore, visual aesthetics, through perceptual use, satisfaction, and pleasure it brings from its subjective creative designs, is down to the consumer's preference towards the design that defines what visual aesthetics means. i.e., it plays a key role in influencing consumers' choices of difference (uniqueness) and likeness. Moreover, Workman and Caldwell (2007) suggested in their article that visual aesthetics can influence consumer judgment relating to how one senses the products and also how one makes inferences about

the quality of the products. According to studies, visual aesthetics may have a substantial influence on consumer choices for products such as handbags (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Lin & Chen, 2018). Consumers, for example, may be more inclined to buy a handbag with an appealing colour, pattern, or design, even if the brand is less well-known.

On the other hand, a brand is a name given to a manufacturer's product. It is believed that luxury can be bought with a brand name, and it is assumed that it plays a key role in choosing or having a particular likeness to a particular bag. In this research study, an empirical explanation to show how brand popularity may play a major role in the buying behaviour of consumers will be highlighted. The brand name is the name or aesthetic that a firm uses to do business. The brand name is a crucial consideration since it may occasionally accurately and vividly reflect the primary idea or connection of the product. The brand name is what offers the potential consumer or buyer a lot of information about a product, provides a series of details about the product, and defines what the product signifies. (Alamgir, Nasir, Shamsuddoha, & Nedelea, 2010). The brand name is the first important aspect of a company (Rubini, 2010). The brand name serves as the foundation for attempts to increase brand recognition and communication (Hasan, 2008). Popular and well-known brands are generally perceived as more prestigious and attractive, and customers may be more willing to buy

items from these brands to communicate their status and identity (Liao & Wang, 2009; Pham & Johar, 2001). In the context of handbags, brand popularity may be a crucial element in shaping customer choices, especially among brand-conscious consumers.

Handbags for the feminine gender can represent an aspect of their point of preference towards aesthetics and brand popularity consumption as well as addressing individual value (Dangziger 2005). The aesthetic value and brands of bags may therefore do more than carry personal belongings; they also work as accessories that express female identity and feelings. Putoni (2001) supported this view by explaining that types and brand popularity matches one's self-concept and feelings. According to Vigneron & Johnson, (2004), consumers can use beauty and brand popularity as a luxury to communicate their identity and status to the general public. Furthermore, on September 11, 2022, Tunji Olaopa wrote an article in The Guardian Newspaper titled "*a woman's handbag and her identity.*" He emphasized the importance of the handbag to the woman by quoting Kathryn Eisman's witty book titled *How to Tell a Woman by Her Bag* (Eisman, K. 2008), This book describes and explains how the woman sees her reflection, tastes, perspectives, and preferences, which gives the woman room to know her choice of bags.

While the choice of handbags women carry may not be a problem that they

are bothered about, producers and marketers of handbags are concerned about these choices. This is driven by the continuous effort to maintain competitive advantage over competitors in the handbag production industry. An understanding of the contextual factors that influence consumer choice provides empirical based insights and direction for the production and supply of handbags with appealing elements to attract consumers. This research study looks closely at the buying behaviour of young females, who are believed to have high enthusiasm for material things like handbags. Although there's a great deal of change in preference in female buying behaviours. This will help to know if they are for the colour, comfort, and design, if they are for the brand name, or if they are for both reasons that influence their preference.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Visual Aesthetics and Buying behaviour

Visual aesthetics is a valuable tool for the manufacturer to push for a profitable value that can be accompanied by the perception of quality value, functional value, social status value, and individual value. Although, the consumer will be the one to determine based on how they interact with the product's design and colour. The concept of visual aesthetics plays a vital role in how the consumer perceives the product (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). However, visual aesthetics is one of the most important factors that affect consumers' choices of buying and consumption. According to Crilly et

al., (2004), visual designs can influence people's quality of life positively. Mumcu and Kimzan (2015) investigate the impact of visual product aesthetics on customer price sensitivity. According to the study, if a product has a high degree of visual appeal, buyers are less likely to care about the price (Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015, p. 533). This thus becomes a significant consideration in the consumer's purchase choice. Hence, visual aesthetics have a unique role that can influence the way a product is valued by consumers.

The role of visual aesthetics can be central to the total level of importance between consumers and the products provided by the manufacturer. Aesthetics is the visual form of items and perceptual experiences connected to texture, harmony, order, and beauty (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Aesthetics is one of the roles of a product's appearance (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). As in many other subjects, aesthetics can be mentioned as a feature of a product. For some products, sound, smell, and taste are important, while visual aesthetics are an important feature for almost all products (Bloch et al., 2003). Chen and Xie (2008) investigate the influence of online consumer evaluations on product sales in this study. They emphasize the significance of product features, such as aesthetic appeal and brand appeal, in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. According to the report, firms may improve their competitiveness and satisfy changing customer expectations by constantly

updating their product designs and introducing characteristics that resonate with their target consumers.

Marketing the visual aesthetics of fashion businesses, on the other hand, is in high demand and is expected to expand significantly. Phillips and McQuarrie (2010) conducted research on fashion advertisements and aesthetics, as well as the responses they obtained when narrative transportation was employed. Certain aesthetic elements of the fashion ads, such as shapes, colour, silhouettes, and so on, elicited responses from the consumer (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010, pp. 387), implying a link between visual aesthetics and the consumer.

Brand Popularity and Buying Behaviour

Brand popularity is defined as the extent to which a brand is widely purchased by general consumers (Kim & Chung, 1997). According to Hauck et al. (2007), he found out that branded goods are more affordable to consumers, especially middle-class consumers. Handbags can serve as a luxury and not just an accessory for females, which can be best explained by their functional value, which provides a sense of durability, usability, comfortability, quality, and uniqueness. It must be understood that its functional value is based on a tested or guaranteed appraisal of the brand's reliability. According to Rio et al., (2001), they stated that it is fitting to associate this function value with the perception that the brand is attached to products with a suitable

level of performance and is focused on satisfying convenience consumer needs. Gentry et al. (2006) found that one reason consumers will buy luxury brands is because of the superior quality shown in the brand name. Hence, brand popularity can provide room for valuable meanings that communicate luxury to the consumer.

Wilcox et al. (2009) stated that consumers buy branded goods primarily to reflect their personalities and social status. Atwal (2009) added that consumers see branded goods above wants and needs but also have an attachment to flaunting luxury, even if it is very expensive. Consumer perception of brands is an important aspect of the marketing mix (Gabor & Contiu, 2012). Jin and Weber (2013) suggest that trademarks primarily serve to identify and recognize goods and their manufacturers. The focus of brand value creation was on individual products, and companies used brands to indicate ownership and take responsibility for their products. This allowed customers to identify and recognize the company's goods at a glance. Since the 1930s, brands have been viewed as images companies create to help customers distinguish the brand from its competitors and identify the needs the brand promises (Jin & Weber, 2013).

Another aspect of branding is that scholars and practitioners firmly believe that brand reputation is becoming increasingly important. A positive reputation is necessary for a brand to be successful and therefore profitable (Veloutsou & Moutinho,

2009). Schmitt (2012), on the other hand, describes a comprehensive model of five brand-related processes: identity, experience, integration, communication, and connection with brands. Hoeffler and Keller (2002) investigate the effect of brand equity on societal marketing by corporations. While the study's focus is not explicitly on visual appeal, it underlines the significance of brand familiarity and distinction in attracting and maintaining customers. The authors emphasize that organizations may boost their brand equity by building distinct value propositions, which might include visual appeal, beautiful designs, and strong brand recognition. Companies may enhance their market share and profitability by properly separating themselves from the competition.

A personal experience of using a brand can take on a different form than a personal experience of using a product that is indistinguishable from the brand (Sheena & Naresh, 2012). Brands can build relationships with other brands. Brands can be humanized, and many are valued as cultural symbols. Finally, consumers can organize communities around brands. Consumers know, experience, and respond to these attributes of brands. The model presented here takes into account these essential characteristics of brands (Schmitt, 2012).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

It is interesting to investigate women's buying and consumption behaviours in this study. However, opinions are

divided as to whether women can be focused on as a homogenous group. This is because there are different opinions about the importance of gender in marketing and attitudes toward a product or brand. Generally, there are different things to consider from gender and marketing perspectives. On one hand, there is the postmodern view, which believes that gender is a dichotomy that stems from cultural understandings of being male or female. Therefore, using the word "female" to designate a unified category is tantamount to giving a false sense of legitimacy to culture-specific versions of gender identity. Advocates believe that gender is irrelevant in consumer research. A neutral view calls itself "*liberal feminism*" and believes that gender differences are not the result of biological differences but of social inequalities. At the other end of the spectrum is a view called the "female experienced voice." From this perspective, there are some lasting differences between men's and women's experiences. Women's experiences thus form the basis of social organization. These proponents believe that sexism is based on a gender structure in all aspects of our lives and is therefore more closely related to consumer behaviour (Moss, 2009).

The focus of this study is on female consumption choices towards their fashion sense in handbags, and as the researchers, we assume that there are women who primarily buy women's handbags to complete their feminine look and to serve other multi-purposes

as part of their gender personality. Based on the assumption that women buy these handbags, it is imperative to study women's consumption and buying behaviour from a consumer behaviour perspective in order to provide a basis for marketing implications. This does not mean that only women engage in buying of handbags; for instance, men may also buy feminine handbags as gifts. However, this study attempts to examine whether there are some common features or elements in handbags that may influence the consumer choice. From a theoretical standpoint several theories may be applicable in understanding the dynamics consumer choice and other variables.

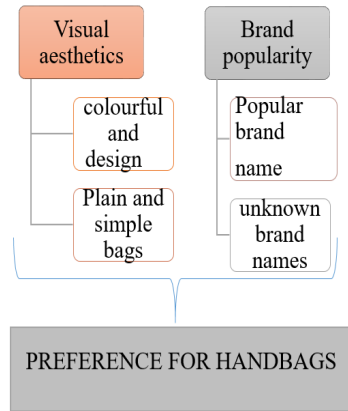
- **Psychoanalytic theory:** This theory states that consumers make purchasing decisions based on their emotions, hopes, aspirations, and fears. For example, if someone wants to be a singer, they probably buy singing lessons and music recording software.
- **Veblenian social-psychological theory:** This model argues that humans are social creatures and make purchases based on social and cultural norms. For example, as gluten-free vegetarian and vegan options become more prominent in society, consumers are more likely to purchase these options at restaurants.
- **Reasoned action theory:** The theory is that consumers buy when they expect certain results. For this reason, marketers should associate positive outcomes with

product purchases. For example, the personal trainer marketer attaches general health and weight loss to an exercise program.

- Maslow’s Motivation-Need Theory:** In the 1950s, psychologist Abraham Maslow created a needs-based hierarchy that explains why people buy. The hierarchy claims that people buy things to meet their needs. Psychological (survival), safety, love, gratitude, and self-actualization For example, people buy alarm systems for their homes because they value security and need it.
- Hawkin’s stern impulse buying theory:** There are many reasons why people buy things, some of which are almost unthinkable. Impulse buying occurs when a person purchases a product based on an external stimulus. For example, if people see a candy bar at the cash register, they might buy it just because it’s there.

Additionally, knowledge of consumer behaviour can be applied to social marketing. Social marketing is not about selling something; it is about giving the consumer an idea. This boils down to the social factor of the purchase. Consumers consider cultural norms and think about how others view them. Understanding consumer behaviour is not an easy task. This study will show diversity in these types of consumers and why they choose to consume a particular product, either by branding, aesthetics, or just simplicity. According to Van van Meijden and colleagues (2015),

women make better decisions in social contexts that require emotional intelligence. Other research has also found that women are more cautious and risk-averse (Babcock & Laschever, 2009). In line with the study objectives, the framework in Figure 1 is developed.



In line with the framework in Figure 1, the following hypotheses are formulated

H_i: There will be a significant difference in consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags.

H_{ii}: There will be gender differences in consumer preferences for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a Quasi-experimental design. This research was carried out online using Google Forms. It specifically covers female freshmen and sophomores across the University of Lagos. A total of 105

participants, spanning across different age groups, were involved in the study. A combination of purposive and accidental sampling techniques was applied in this study. The eligibility criterion of being a female freshman or sophomore formed the basis for the put as this research focuses on only female students in year one and two. This technique helps to gain a detailed knowledge of female preferences in bags rather than just giving statistical numbers. It also helps to pick out a large number of these participants from a small population. The reason for this choice of technique is effectiveness, which is a clear rationale for inclusion.

Instruments used included;

- **An online questionnaire (Google Form):** an online survey questionnaire was created using Google Forms and structured for the targeted audience to complete over the Internet.
- **Cardboard:** a plain, thick piece of paper was needed to paste the pictures of bags that were selected from the internet for the experimental study.
- **Scissors:** This helped to cut out the perfect picture of bags printed from the internet to paste on the cardboard.
- **Paper Gum:** Paper gum was used to stick the cut-out bag pictures on the cardboard.
- **Printed bag pictures:** A selected number of bags were classified as colorful handbags and plain bags.
- **Recording sheet:** this was used during the pilot study as it was done offline. It was used to record

the responses of participants during the pilot study phase.

- **Pen:** A pen was used to record responses during the pilot study phase.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was applied in this study, as this research focuses on only female students in year one and two. This technique helps to gain a detailed knowledge of female preferences in bags rather than just giving statistical numbers. It also helps to pick out a large number of these participants from a small population. The reason for this choice of technique is effectiveness, which is a clear rationale for inclusion.

Procedure

While conducting this research, the focus was to reach out to female students in their first and second years, as that is what the research study was all about. However, before the main study was carried out, a pilot study was carried out offline with the inclusion of the bags that were later displayed online for the main study.

Firstly, a picture of female handbags was lifted from the internet, and there were about 20 of them. It was later shortlisted into 10 handbags, which were still shortlisted into 4 handbags. The four handbags were printed, cut out in fine shapes, and pasted with gum on the cardboard. Each of the handbags was listed as **A**, **B**, **C**, and **D**. Further information about the pilot study is given in this chapter in the next subheading.

The main study followed a different pattern, as pictures of the handbags were taken and used to complete the experimental study online. However, names were added to each of the handbags for the main study. Two popular and two regular names were given to each of the handbags. Gucci and Chanel were given plain bags, while Gary and Kinney were given bags that are colorful and beautiful. Then participants were urged to select two handbags that they would most love to accept as gifts. The questionnaire was very short and precise, and it will only take about 2 minutes for each participant to answer.

Pilot Study

The experiment used for the main study was first conducted in the pilot study, which included incumbents who are final-year female Unilag students (400-level and 500-level). This pilot study was done in order to give hindsight to the hypotheses proposed in this study. The participants were 20 female undergraduate volunteers from four (4) different departments, which are: **psychology, economics, human kinetics, Health Education (HKHE), and pharmacology**, with an average age of 20 years. A total of 20 female handbags were collected from the Internet. The background of each picture was plain, and one bag was displayed at a time. The brand was made sure not to appear in any of the pictures, as the target was the subjective selection of the visual aesthetics of handbags based on colour and design. Afterward, four (4) pictures made the final cut out of the

20 pictures collected online. Each picture of the four was boldly printed out and cut out on cardboard and tagged as **A, B, C, and D**. The pictures were shown to each participant, who was asked to select any two of the pictures of the handbag that were pasted on the cardboard. The question asked was: **which of these handbags will you accept as a gift, and why?** Results from this pilot study helped to give hindsight to the subjective proposition in the selection of consumers' preferences for handbags. However, it is not yet confirmed that the result from the pilot study will be the same or close to the result of the one conducted in the main study. Thus, it will be further explained in the final results of the main study and discussion of this research project.

DATA ANALYSIS

The SPSS software program was used to analyse the data collected from the experiment.

The Paired sample t-test was used to test for consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags. Independent t-test was used to test for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags amongst 100- and 200-level students, while One way ANOVA was used to test the participants' preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags based on age.

Descriptive statistics: These statistics helped in identifying the differences between consumer preferences for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags. This was achieved with the

help of the **independent t-test** and the **Paired sample t-test**.

Inferential statistics: These statistics helped in making inferences to see whether there's a meaningful difference in consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags. This was achieved with the help of **One-way ANOVA**.

RESULTS

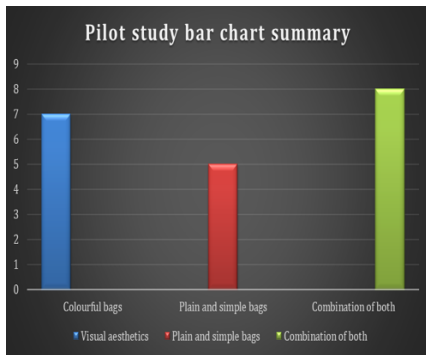


Fig 3: A bar chart showing the pilot study summary conducted amongst female final year students.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant difference between consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags.

Table 1: Paired sample t-test analysis showing the statistical score of participants in preference for aesthetic quality handbags and brand popularity of handbags

	Mean	N	SD	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Aesthetic quality	2.0857	105	0.89994	-2.417	104	0.017
Brand Popularity	2.2571	105	0.75992			

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare consumer preference for aesthetic quality handbags and brand popularity for handbags. The test results show that there is a significant difference, as determined by the paired sample t-test analysis. (M = 2.0857, 2.2571; SD = 0.89994, 0.75992; P.value = 0.017: P.value = 0.017 < 0.05. Therefore, there is significant and strong evidence to show from the result that there would be a preference for aesthetic quality handbags and brand popularity of handbags. Hence, the results indicate a significant difference in aesthetic quality and branded bags among consumers' choices.

Hypothesis 2: Consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags will significantly differ between 100- and 200-level students.

Table 3: An independent sample t-test analysis showing consumer preference for aesthetic quality handbags and brand popularity of handbags

	Level of study	Mean	N	SD	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Aesthetic quality	100L	2.1795	102	0.88472	0.974	100	0.332
	200L	2.0000		0.91581			
Brand popularity	100L	2.2821	102	0.79302	0.285	100	0.776
	200L	2.2381		0.73428			

An independent t-test was conducted for our test and the results showed that participants had statistically insignificant difference in aesthetic quality between 100-200 level, where

M=2.1795, $t = 0.974$, $P > 0.05$ (0.332), while brand popularity also had statistically insignificant difference between 100-200 level, where M=2.0000, $t = 0.285$, $P > 0.05$ (0.776). Hence, consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity between 100- and 200-level students is statistically insignificant.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA test table showing the age of female participants' preferences for bags in aesthetic quality and brand popularity

Hypothesis 3: Age will have a significant influence on consumer preferences for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags.

Sig	Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Square	F	
Aesthetic Quality 0.021	Between Groups	6.135	2	3.068	4.007
	Within Groups	78.093	102	0.766	
	Total	84.229	104		
Brand Popularity 0.093	Between Groups	2.734	2	1.367	2.432
	Within Groups	57.324	102	0.562	
	Total	60.057	104		

One-way ANOVA was used to test the age of participants on their preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of female handbags. The table above highlights that age was significant in consumer preference for aesthetic quality ($F = 4.22$, $P=0.021 < 0.05$). However, age was insignificant in consumer preference for brand popularity ($F = 2.432$, $P = 0.093 > 0.05$). Hence, the results show that age is significant in the aesthetic quality of handbags, while age is insignificant in consumer preference for the brand

popularity of handbags.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective of this research study, in which the paired sample test was used to compare the aesthetic quality and brand popularity of female handbags. Mappiare (1994) emphasized consumer preference as a mental state that is a joint feeling, expectation, conviction, and prejudice that can influence consumers' choices. This hypothesis was accepted, and the analysis proved to an extent that it was significant in preference for both variables. In a nutshell, the result of the study means that it is fully dependent on the aesthetic and brand popularity of handbags. This result tends to possess similar properties to past studies. In a study done by Augustina et al. (2017), the research results show that the better the product quality, the higher the consumer preference. According to Kotler et al. 2009. study, the consumer's impression of a brand or product impacts its quality, which discovered that product quality is a crucial element in customers' choices. Edge (2005), based on his research, argues that the value of a strong brand lies in the impression it makes on everyone who comes into contact with the organization. Hence, consumers will consider the visual aesthetic and brand name of handbags before appreciating them as a gift or considering buying them.

However, it is important for manufacturers to explore and understand the visual aesthetic of a

product. (Ho, 2014), conducted a study in 2014 to investigate how online shoppers view images of women's handbags. The study involved 33 women who looked at 74 handbag images while their eye movements were tracked. The results showed that people's attention is first drawn to the main body of the handbag, followed by the handle, the featured area, and then the strap. The highlighted area of the handbag was found to hold people's attention the longest, while the handle and strap were the most visually appealing. Aesthetics is the visual form of objects and perceptual experiences related to texture, harmony, order, and beauty (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Also, increasing the brand name of a product is as important as its visual appearance. Mouillot (2013) conducted a study on luxury goods and analysed the curious purchasing behaviours of female golfers. The research polled 707 women over the course of five months and focused on women leaving stores with branded bags in Bahrain's major shopping malls. According to the study, Gulf women seek stakeholder ties by purchasing luxury goods, many of which are Western. Therefore, the report concludes that women golfers changed from traditional dress to premium-brand accessories.

The main aim of this research study, which apparently is the main focus of this study, is to compare the visual aesthetics and brand popularity of female handbags in terms of consumer preference among female students. Several literature and studies have

been done on consumer preference, but different models have been used to test for visual aesthetics and popular luxurious bags. This experimental study examined the influence of visual aesthetics versus brand popularity on female handbags. Emphasis was placed on how female consumers view the product and why they will purchase or appreciate handbags. Centering on models of consumer behaviour, this study gives explanations of where and how manufacturers can best their product in a competitive market by understanding the minds of their consumers. Daye, VanAuken, and Asacker (2008) identified colour as an important factor in developing a branding strategy. Liao & Wang (2009) explain that popular brands are mostly perceived as more prestigious and attractive, and therefore customers will be willing to buy the product. Hence, brand name and colour (aesthetics) are important for a product.

An independent t-test was used to analyse our second hypothesis and achieve our objective in this study. The level of study was important for us in measuring the level of maturity and exposure of female students in fresh year and sophomore year. The result showed that consumer preference for aesthetic quality and brand popularity of bags was insignificant between 100- and 200-level students. Female consumers will be more impressed with visually appealing handbags because of how much they are in vogue. In addition, the difference in level might be too

close for us to determine that there would be a change in preference in buying behaviour. According to studies by Hagtvedt & Patrick (2008) and Lin & Chen (2018), visual aesthetics can have a big impact on whether people choose to buy a product or not, especially when it comes to things like handbags. Celi and Cakici (2020) conducted research on consumers' views of visual aesthetics in fashion innovation, and the study's findings revealed that customers' opinions of product aesthetics varied depending on how they perceived the product. Hence, consumers would be willing to go with what catches their fancy at first glance.

One-way ANOVA analysis was able to achieve two more objectives as regards the aim of this study. Age was another factor that was considered in investigating the impact of branding on consumer behaviour and ascertaining the differences in consumer behaviour. The results show that age was significant in consumer preference for aesthetic quality but not for brand popularity of handbags. According to Assael (1992), consumer preferences are decisions made based on their perceptions of a product. In claims of this result, a study done by Joy Kozar and Mary Lynn Damhorst (2008) discusses research carried out on older women. The results show that older women believe that older models are more appealing than younger models and are more willing to buy goods worn by older models, with participants who thought they looked like the model having more positive

beliefs. Therefore, this is in contrast to what our hypothesis says, and this could be due to the fact that the participants for the experiment have very little or no difference in terms of age to establish this fact. Although this explanation was already prepared while carrying out our pilot study with older females using final-year students with an average age of 20 years who are believed to be more exposed and experienced in choices and fashion, the results analysed from observations show that age was an important factor, as some of our participants during the pilot study provided reasons why they would accept a particular type or brand of handbag for a gift. Some of the reasons that were very common during the pilot study were:

1. "This plain bag is very simple for me, and it'll help me carry everything I need without stress."
2. "The durability of the plain bag and the comfort it brings with the design of the strap are just perfect."
3. "The colourful bag is visually appealing to me with the designs, and I can carry it to a party."
4. "The bag fits my personality because it has a beautiful design."

In support of the observations and opinions from our pilot study. A study by Komaladevi and Sakthivel (2014) explains the relationship between brand awareness, brand selection ability, and socio-demographic variables. Their results suggested that older women are more concerned with quality, package design, and longevity.

In 2019, a survey was done using Google Trends to find out which brands of handbags were popular among women. The survey showed that Indonesian women ranked Coach as the top brand of handbags among them after being shown popular brands of handbags.

This experimental study, "Visual aesthetics vs brand popularity in determining the preference for handbags amongst female freshers and sophomores in Unilag," gives vital insights into consumer behaviour, especially female university students' handbag purchase decisions. According to the experiments carried out in this research study, visual aesthetics and brand popularity are important variables influencing female university students' handbag selections.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are relevant because they may be extended to the broader context of marketing, particularly in the fashion sector. To remain competitive in the fashion market, businesses must produce items that resonate with their target customers. As a result, knowing the elements that impact consumer preferences is crucial to establishing effective marketing strategies for attracting and retaining customers. In relation to this discussion, the Veblenian social-psychological theory explains in our theoretical review how people's purchasing behaviour is affected because we are social beings and will consume based on social and cultural norms. Also, it is important

that marketers and manufacturers consider positivity in their products. Just like the reasoned action theory states that attaching positive things to a product can give a good impression of that product, A study done by Okpara (2008) discovered the "consumption complex syndrome" (CCS), which suggests that customers prefer foreign shoe brands over indigenous ones due to impressions and understanding. Hence, local manufacturers should make use of the reasoned action theory to establish a good impression of their product.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, it is proposed that fashion industry producers and marketers consider the value of visual aesthetics and brand popularity in their product production and marketing tactics. Knowing consumers' aesthetic tastes and perceptions may help manufacturers produce aesthetically appealing items that correspond with current trends and attract their target customers. Additionally, increasing brand names and connections can improve consumers' views of quality and prestige, which may influence their purchase decisions. Manufacturers should also work on knowing their customers' brains, particularly female customers, in order to match their tastes and expectations. Further study on customer behaviour, taking cultural norms and social structures into account, can give significant insights for product positioning and marketing strategies. Marketers should also consider the aesthetic components of their products. According to research,

the main body, handle, and prominent parts of handbags grab the most attention. Businesses may attract and keep potential clients by enhancing the aesthetic appeal of these items. Also, local firms should employ the reasoned action theory to create a favorable perception of their products. Local companies may effectively compete with global products and appeal to consumers' preferences by

emphasizing their offers' distinctive qualities, quality, and cultural significance. This study adds to our understanding of consumer behaviour in the context of female student handbag purchasing. The findings can help marketers and producers devise successful methods for meeting customer wants, improving brand perception, and driving sales in the competitive fashion sector.

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