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# Consumers' perceptions of visual product aesthetics based on fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership levels: A research study in Mersin

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## Abstract

The main objective of the study is to determine whether consumers' visual product aesthetic perception differs according to the level of fashion innovations and fashion leadership. The study was conducted in five counties of Mersin, and the population was 20-64-year-old consumers. The sample consisted of 420 consumers, 213 of whom were male, and 207 of whom were female. Data were obtained through surveys and were analyzed electronically. Descriptive statistics, factors, clustering, and chi-square analysis with *t*-test were used. As a result of the study, it was found that consumers' perception of visual product aesthetics is three-dimensional, and it differs depending on consumers' levels of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership. Since the divergence of consumers' desires and expectations, and increasing competition among businesses, are driving manufacturers and marketers to produce new products that can appeal to consumers, it is expected that results of this study will contribute to this field.

## Keywords

visual product aesthetics, fashion innovativeness, fashion leadership.

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# Consumers' Perceptions of Visual Product Aesthetics Based on Fashion Innovativeness and Fashion Leadership Levels: A Research Study in Mersin

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## Abstract

The main objective of the study is to determine whether consumers' visual product aesthetic perception differs according to the level of fashion innovations and fashion leadership. The study was conducted in five counties of Mersin, and the population was 20-64-year-old consumers. The sample consisted of 420 consumers, 213 of whom were male, and 207 of whom were female. Data were obtained through surveys and were analyzed electronically. Descriptive statistics, factors, clustering, and chi-square analysis with *t*-test were used. As a result of the study, it was found that consumers' perception of visual product aesthetics is three-dimensional, and it differs depending on consumers' levels of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership. Since the divergence of consumers' desires and expectations, and increasing competition among businesses, are driving manufacturers and marketers to produce new products that can appeal to consumers, it is expected that results of this study will contribute to this field.

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## Introduction

Innovation is an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual or society (Rogers, 1983). Innovativeness is the degree of acceptance of individuals, societies and businesses (Özgür, 2013). In addition, innovativeness is a concept that includes factors such as openness to experience, risk-taking, creativity and leadership (Rogers, 1983).

Innovativeness can also be described as the most admirable style in fashion, clothing, and other accessories related to clothing (Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry, & Deschenes, 2010). Fashion is the popular clothing, hairstyle, etc. in a particular time or place (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries Online, 2020). In addition, fashion is producing and selling clothes, shoes, etc. in new and changing styles (Longman Dictionaries Online, 2020).

Fashion processes lead to changes in cultural values, such as clothing (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). Clothing is an encoded sensory system of nonverbal communication that helps human interaction. The codes of the clothing encompass sensory factors, such as aesthetics, taste, odor, sound, and feeling, and other supplements, such as garments, jewelry, and accessories, that activate cognitive and sensory processes (Eicher, 1995).

The cognitive and sensory processes triggered by the aesthetic dimension of clothing may include variables such as visual product aesthetics, the need for uniqueness, and the need for touch (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). Aesthetics relates to the visual forms of objects and perceptual experiences related to texture, harmony, order, and beauty (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Fashion change is related to changing ideas about aesthetic rules (Kaiser, 1997). The aesthetic codes are culturally derived and, despite the basic design principles, they change with fashion.

The fashion process evolves with the introduction of new styles or variations in existing styles. Since adherence to aesthetic rules is not enough to create successful styles, fashion designers change aesthetic codes as they create new styles. The acceptance of a new style by a consumer ends with the rejection of the previous style, sooner or later. The fashion process continues with the emergence of a new style that changes the rejected style (Workman & Caldwell, 2007).

Fashion designers change the coded sensory system of the clothing using sensory factors such as visual aesthetics. Visual product aesthetics are the features such as material, proportion, color, decoration, shape, and size, which form the appearance of clothes (Bloch, Brunel, & Arnold, 2003). Sensitivity to visual product aesthetics may depend on consumer behavior variables such as personality traits and level of innovativeness, fashion leadership, the need for uniqueness, and tactile experience (Bloch, 1995).

Although there are studies in the literature about visual product aesthetics (VPA), fashion innovativeness, and fashion leadership, there are very few studies (Workman & Caldwell, 2007) that examine the relationship among these three variables. This study aims to determine whether consumer perception of VPA differs according to the level of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Visual Product Aesthetics***

The concept of product refers to a wide range of goods and services that are concrete or abstract. The shape of a product represents many elements that are chosen and combined as a whole by the design team to achieve a specific sensory effect. The physical form or design of a product is the most important determinant of market success. A good design allows consumers to recognize the product, improves communication with the product, and adds value to the product by increasing the quality of the user experience associated with the product (Bloch, 1995).

Aesthetics is the visual form of objects and perceptual experiences related to texture, harmony, order, and beauty (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Aesthetics is one of the roles of a product's appearance (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Aesthetics can be mentioned as a feature of a product as in many other subjects. For some products, sound, smell, and taste are important, while visual aesthetics is an important feature for almost all products (Bloch et al., 2003). For this reason, many researchers

have tried to determine the properties of the products in terms of aesthetics (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005).

Bloch et al. (2003) aimed to create a conceptual framework and to develop a scale to understand the differences in the individuals' perception of VPA. Based on previous research and individual interviews, Bloch et al. (2003) formed a pool of 86 items for the VPA, which were initially foreseen as four dimensions (value, acumen, response, and determinacy). After item reduction and reliability testing, a 3-dimensional visual aesthetics scale consisting of 15 items was obtained. Items of determinacy dimension were removed from the scale while testing the scale. With confirmatory factor analysis, a 3-dimensional scale consisting of 11 items was developed.

The VPA are three-dimensional value, acumen, and response. These sub-dimensions that affect purchasing satisfaction and product preference are effective in determining the consumers' perception of VPA. The visual product value reflects the meaning that the consumer attributes to the appearance of the product in order to improve individual and social well-being (Bloch et al., 2003). The visual product value is generally a way of improving the quality of life for both individuals and society. Consumers with a high perception of VPA believe that encountering beautiful objects affects the quality of their daily lives positively or allows them to meet their higher needs (Yalch & Brunel, 1996). The emotional response of consumers affects the skills and experiences required to understand and evaluate the value of an object (Charters, 2006).

Another dimension of VPA is acumen (Bloch et al., 2003). Acumen is the ability to recognize and evaluate objects (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries Online, 2020). Individuals use acumen to evaluate the aesthetic features of a stimulus and make judgement. Products designed with aesthetic principles in mind are capable of creating positive emotions or instinctive reactions (Kumar & Garg, 2010).

The response, which is the final dimension of VPA, is defined as the feeling of personal integrity, the sensation of discovery, and the intense pleasure developed by human devotion. In other words, the response is the behavior of an individual depending on the perception of the product (Veryzer, 1995). The level of responses exists as much as the intensity of them. Some shapes and designs create positive responses for a particular consumer, while others may produce negative reactions. An unpleasant design can lead to the feeling of dislike and criticism of problems caused by that design. Individual differences at the level of responses to design aesthetics may be the cause of purchasing with a momentary impulse (Bloch et al., 2003).

The visual changes of the product reveal more effective responses, more aesthetic evaluations, and more symbolic relationships. When consumers first see products with higher visual changes, they show more emotional and aesthetic reactions to them than new products with low visual changes (Radford & Bloch, 2011). Therefore, when a visual change becomes popular, the product becomes fashionable. Fashion is a part of the visual signs system (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Venkatesh et al. (2010) found that consumers who participate in their research have an inseparable connection between the two meanings of fashion and aesthetics that are called *wearable art*. In other words, the meaning that expresses shape, appearance, the meaning of art, and symbolism. The visual aesthetic value of fashion is evolving not only in the clothes worn by people, but also in various other clothing products, such as high heels.

### ***Fashion Innovativeness and Fashion Leadership***

Innovativeness is when an individual adopts an innovation earlier than other members of the social system in which he or she is involved. Innovativeness is a relative dimension. In addition, innovativeness is a constant variable and is a conceptual tool that is classified by dividing the continuity of social status into upper, middle, and lower classes (Rogers, 1983).

Individuals are divided into five categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Each category refers to individuals with different characteristics. Innovators are very keen on trying new ideas and bringing a new idea to the society they are in. For this reason, innovators take the role of a messenger in the dissemination of new ideas within a social system. Innovators can cope with high uncertainty in the process of adopting a new idea. They also acknowledge that an innovation they have adopted may fail. Innovators are individuals who are keen on trying innovations and taking risks. For them, entrepreneurship is an important value (Rogers, 1983).

The level of sensitivity towards the changing aesthetic qualities or the adoption of these aesthetic qualities varies according to the individuals. Innovative and creative consumers are more sensitive to changing aesthetic qualities, and make changes in aesthetic qualities to differentiate themselves from other consumers (Workman & Caldwell, 2007).

It is important to pursue consumers with high fashion interest and involvement for the fashion industry and fashion sellers. Consumers with high fashion interest and participation are the leaders of fashion. They are early experimenters and individuals who are capable of communicating in an interpersonal fashion (Tigert, Ring, & King, 1976). Likewise, Hirschman & Adcock (1978) mentioned that there were significant differences between consumer groups according to their level of fashion innovativeness. Innovators are individuals who do not participate in various activities while opinion leaders tend to be members of social groups or entertainment groups. Innovators tend to express their concerns more about guarantees and store regulation policies than do opinion leaders. In short, each consumer group has unique characteristics. In another study conducted by Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin (1999), it was found that fashion innovators did not define themselves as more cosy, pleasant, contemporary, formal, colorful, and free to try on clothes than those who adopted the innovations later.

There was a positive correlation among variables—need for uniqueness, social comparison knowledge and fashion leadership. In addition, there was a positive relationship between social comparison knowledge and fashion leadership, but there was a negative relationship between consumers' need for uniqueness and fashion leadership (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). Need for uniqueness and VPA differed according to fashion consumer groups, but need for touch did not differ according to consumer groups. Innovative communicators need more uniqueness than fashion audiences and fashion opinion leaders. Fashion audiences have less focus on visual product aesthetics than fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, and innovative communicators (Workman & Caldwell, 2007).

Fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership influence consumers' multi-channel choice. Consumers with high fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership prefer more than one shopping channel. Both local and non-local stores are visited by consumers high in need for touch

and who prefer more than one channel for clothing shopping. The channels preferred by consumers with fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership are online stores, TV retailers, and catalogs (Cho & Workman, 2011). Different from the other studies, a study conducted by Gentina, Shrum, and Lowrey (2016) focused on adolescents' fashion innovativeness. Both need for uniqueness and susceptibility have a positive impact on adolescents' attitude towards luxury brands. Fashion innovativeness mediates relation between these variables. The mediated relation between the need for uniqueness and attitudes toward luxury brands are stronger for American adolescents. On the other hand, the mediated relations between susceptibility and attitude towards luxury brands are stronger for French adolescents. It can be concluded that culture moderates these relations (Gentina et. al., 2016).

## Research Hypothesis

It was found in the related studies that advanced aesthetic capacity experience was not the same in all individuals. Both the experience of enhanced aesthetic capacity and interest in developing it differed in each individual (Osborne, 1986). Consumers may be included in different categories, according to their sensitivity to changing aesthetic rules or the process of adopting new aesthetic rules. The innovative and creative fashion consumers, who are sensitive to changing aesthetic rules and who want to distinguish themselves from others, are expected to change their aesthetic understanding (Workman & Caldwell, 2007).

Sensitivity to VPA may depend on consumer behavior variables such as personality traits, innovativeness level, opinion leadership, the need for uniqueness, and tactile experience (Bloch, 1995). Although the sub-dimensions of VPA (value, acumen, and response) which affect the behaviors of consumers are mentioned separately, VPA perception is formed by the combination of all (Bloch et al., 2003). The VPA differs according to the consumer groups, depending on the level of fashion innovativeness (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). From this point of view, it can be synthesized that VPA may be different according to consumers' level of fashion innovativeness, and thus, the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses can be written:

- H1: Visual product aesthetics differs according to consumers' level of fashion innovativeness.
- H1a: Visual product value differs according to consumers' level of fashion innovativeness.
- H1b: Visual product acumen differs according to consumers' level of fashion innovativeness.
- H1c: Visual product response differs according to consumers' level of fashion innovativeness.

Individuals can be divided into two categories: fashion leaders and viewers. Fashion leaders are individuals who influence the ideas of other individuals in society about innovations. The behavior of fashion leaders is effective in determining the rate of adoption of innovations in a social system. In other words, fashion leaders influence the ideas of individuals who follow them about innovations. Fashion leaders and their followers have different characteristics in terms of socio-economic status, personality traits, and communication behaviors (Rogers, 1983). Individuals attribute meanings to objects based on their own judgment and evaluation. These different levels of meaning (cultural, group-oriented, and individual) may be in conflict with each other. Therefore, consumers can solve this complex conflict by developing structures that best reflect their own identity (Venkatesh et al., 2010).

As mentioned earlier, consumers' VPA perception is formed by combination of value, acumen, and response dimensions although they are mentioned separately (Bloch et al., 2003). Researchers

think that different fashion consumer-groups focus on different visual and tactile criteria in estimating the same sensory information presented by clothing fashion. Fashion leaders were found to have higher VPA than viewers (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). The hypothesis and sub-hypotheses based on this conceptual information are as follows:

- H2: Visual product aesthetics differs according to the consumers' level of fashion leadership.
- H2a: Visual product value differs according to the consumers' level of fashion leadership.
- H2b: Visual product acumen differs according to the consumers' level of fashion leadership.
- H2c: Visual product response differs according to the consumers' level of fashion leadership.

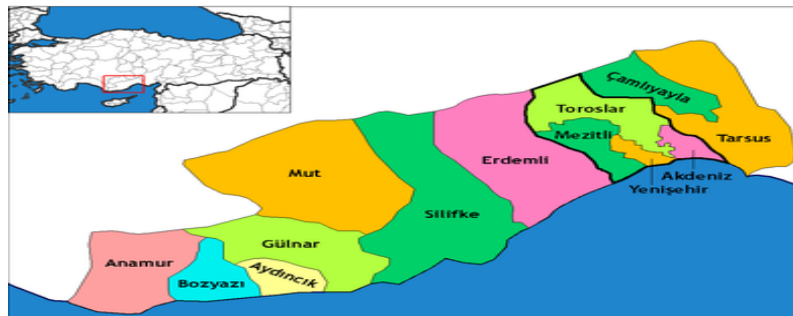
## Method

### *Instrument*

The study was designed as descriptive research. Data were collected by a questionnaire developed based on the literature. In addition to demographic questions, there were two scales. The VPA of consumers was determined by an 11-item scale, consisting of three dimensions (4 items for *value*, 4 items for *acumen*, and 3 items for *response*) developed by Bloch et al. (2003). In order to determine the levels of consumers' fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership, a 6-item scale developed by Hirschman & Adcock (1978) was used. The response categories of all items ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree.

### *Sampling*

The population of the research included consumers, aged 20-64. The population of the study was 20-64-year-old consumers living in five (Akdeniz, Mezitli, Toroslar, Yenişehir, Tarsus) of the thirteen counties of Mersin (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Counties of Mersin

There are some practical reasons for choosing Mersin for the survey. The first one is that Mersin is a metropolitan city. The second reason is related to its economy. Per capita income in Mersin is US\$8,538 while it is US\$10,602 for all Turkey (Turkish Statistical Institute [TurkStat], 2019). Mersin is getting the 10th place in per capita income among 81 provinces of Turkey. There are many national and international clothing brands (i.e., Zara, Pull&Bear, Lacoste, and Mavi) operating in Mersin. It is the third reason for selecting Mersin. The last one was that the researchers have been living in Mersin.



A total 397,106 men and 403,769 women in the 20-64 age group were living in selected counties of Mersin by the end of December 2017. Since the size of the study population is  $N > 10,000$ , the ideal sample size is determined as 384. However, the sample size was increased to 400 because of the fact that the issue was related to fashion, and the quota for gender and age would result in a better sample. As a result of the rounds made in the fractions, 198 men and 202 women in the quota were selected.

Quotas were determined by taking gender and age group ratios into account. One of the reasons for using this quota-sampling technique is that older consumers differ from younger consumers in terms of fashion consciousness. Older consumers are less fashion conscious than younger ones. In other words, young and mature consumers' responses to apparel illustrations differed significantly (Nam, Hamlin, Gam, & Hye, 2007). The other reason is that gender affects consumers' intention to shop for fashion products. Men's and women's interest in fashion is different. Female consumers purchase more than males (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010).

The survey was conducted face to face in May-June 2018. The reason for choosing these months was the sale of new seasonal clothing in the summer months. Therefore, it is assumed that this period of time is appropriate to determine fashion and VPA. After the implementation period, 420 questionnaires were obtained; the quota was exceeded slightly. In short, the sample of the study consisted of 420 participants, 213 of who were male and 207 of who were female (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Quotas Based on Gender and Age Groups

| Gender       | Age groups |    |       |     |       |     |       |     | Total |          |
|--------------|------------|----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|----------|
|              | 20-24      |    | 25-34 |     | 35-49 |     | 50-64 |     | Quota | <i>n</i> |
| Male         | 25         | 30 | 50    | 55  | 72    | 75  | 51    | 53  | 198   | 213      |
| Female       | 25         | 30 | 51    | 52  | 74    | 73  | 52    | 52  | 202   | 207      |
| <b>Total</b> | 50         | 60 | 101   | 107 | 146   | 148 | 103   | 105 | 400   | 420      |

### Data Analysis

We preferred to use a three-step approach to evaluate the quality of measurement and test the hypothesized relationships. At first, explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses were used. For confirmatory factor analysis the overall  $\chi^2$  measure, AGFI, GFI, CFI, IFI, RMSEA, and SRMR were used to evaluate the model fit for the measurement. Psychometric assessment was done for the VPA scale. For this purpose, convergent and discriminant validity, as well as internal consistency reliability, were assessed. At the second step, respondents were clustered based on their level of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership. The last step was composed of hypothesis testing.

### Findings

Half of the participants were women and half of them were men. About half of the sample was between the ages of 20-34; the other half was in the 35-64 age groups. While one third of them were at high school level and below, 40% of them had a bachelor's degree. The monthly income of respondents were transformed into US\$ based on the exchange rate for Turkish lira for the date of 1 July 2018. Nearly two-thirds of the participants' monthly income was from the minimum wage to \$600 (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Participants' Demographic Profile

| Characteristic            | <i>n</i> | %    |
|---------------------------|----------|------|
| <i>Gender</i>             |          |      |
| Female                    | 213      | 50.7 |
| Male                      | 207      | 49.3 |
| <i>Income Groups</i>      |          |      |
| *\$400 and less           | 156      | 37.1 |
| \$401-600                 | 116      | 27.6 |
| \$601-850                 | 63       | 15.0 |
| \$851-1200                | 60       | 14.3 |
| \$1201-3650               | 25       | 6.0  |
| <i>Level of Education</i> |          |      |
| High school and below     | 130      | 31.0 |
| Associate degree          | 98       | 23.3 |
| Undergraduate             | 168      | 40.0 |
| Postgraduate              | 24       | 5.7  |
| <i>Age Groups</i>         |          |      |
| 20-24                     | 60       | 14.3 |
| 25-34                     | 107      | 25.5 |
| 35-49                     | 148      | 35.2 |
| 50-64                     | 105      | 25.0 |

Note: *n* = 420, \*1\$ = ₺4.10 as of July 1, 2018.

### ***Psychometric Assessment of the Measure***

Psychometric assessment of the scale, in which items were in English, was conducted in five steps. At first, an English lecturer who has been currently doing a PhD in business administration translated it into Turkish. Then, another English lecturer translated it back into English. There was no semantic difference in items.

The construct validity of the VPA scale was determined by explanatory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Table 3). At the second phase, EFA yielded three dimensions, as in the original study (Bloch et al. 2003). The three dimensions explained 69% of the total variance. The first dimension was *Visual Product Acumen*, and explained 26% of the total variance. All the items in the second factor constituted *Visual Product Value*, explaining 23% of the total variance. The third factor, explaining 19% of the total variance, brings together the items of the design that motivate the people, and therefore, it was called *Visual Product Response*.

The third step was to conduct CFA. The CFA results showed the following model fit statistics: ( $\chi^2 = 235.45$ ;  $df = 41$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 5.7 > 5$ ; RMSEA = 0.11; CFI = 0.95; GFI = 0.91; RFI = 0.92; IFI = 0.95; AGFI = 0.85; NFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.94; RMR = 0.13; SRMR = 0.083; Model CAIC < Saturated CAIC = 411.45 < 464.66). All model fit statistics were found to be acceptable. All standardized loadings were found to be greater than 0.50, and all *t*-values were statistically significant at 5% significance level. The average variance extracted (AVE) by visual product acumen, visual product value, and visual product response were 0.53, 0.56, and 0.63 respectively. Model fit statistics, significant loadings, and AVE by latent variables provided sufficient evidence for convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, the maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) were calculated, and all MSV and ASV values were less than their respective AVE values, this meant that discriminant validity was provided (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

**Table 3.** EFA and CFA Results for Visual Product Aesthetics

| Statement   | Explanatory Factor Analysis |        |       | Confirmatory Factor Analysis                         |          |       |
|---|-----------------------------|--------|-------|--|----------|-------|
|   | Loadings                    | Mean   | Alpha | S. values  | t-values | Error |
| <b>Visual Product Acumen</b><br><i>Eigenvalue = 2.873; Explained Variance = % 26.120</i>  |                             | 3.4768 | 0.818 | MSV = 0.320; ASV = 0.281;<br>AVE = 0.533; CR = 0.820 |          |       |
| I see things that others have ignored in the design of a garment.   | 0.791                       | 3.2976 | 0.762 | 0.73   | 16.04    | 0.46  |
| I have the ability to imagine how other clothes, such as shoes, bags, trousers and blouses, will be compatible with a dress's design. | 0.776                       | 3.7619 | 0.771 | 0.73   | 15.93    | 0.47  |
| I have a pretty good idea about what makes a dress look better than other brands.   | 0.725                       | 3.4310 | 0.775 | 0.73   | 15.90    | 0.47  |
| Being able to see the subtle differences in clothes designs is a skill that I have developed over time.                               | 0.721                       | 3.4167 | 0.777 | 0.73   | 16.87    | 0.47  |
| <b>Visual Product Value</b><br><i>Eigenvalue = 2.561; Explained Variance = 23.285</i>   |                             | 3.3542 | 0.819 | MSV = 0.320; ASV = 0.278;<br>AVE = 0.565; CR = 0.834 |          |       |
| I like to see clothes with superior designs   | 0.884                       | 3.4429 | 0.706 | 0.90   | 22.07    | 0.20  |
| It feels good to have clothes with superior designs.  | 0.855                       | 3.1643 | 0.757 | 0.81   | 19.05    | 0.34  |
| The design of a cloth is a source of pleasure for me.   | 0.680                       | 3.6143 | 0.776 | 0.70   | 15.79    | 0.50  |
| Beautiful designs make our world a better place to live.  | 0.539                       | 3.1952 | 0.839 | 0.55   | 11.56    | 0.70  |
| <b>Visual Product Response</b><br><i>Eigenvalue = 2.133; Explained Variance = 19.389</i>  |                             | 3.2992 | 0.817 | MSV = 0.242; ASV = 0.238;<br>AVE = 0.627; CR = 0.828 |          |       |
| If the design of a cloth appeals to me, I feel compelled to buy it.   | 0.902                       | 3.0738 | 0.705 | 0.81   | 18.66    | 0.34  |
| When I see a cloth that has a really great design, I feel a strong urge to buy.   | 0.867                       | 3.2262 | 0.658 | 0.91   | 21.47    | 0.18  |
| Sometimes, the appearance of a cloth captures me.   | 0.599                       | 3.5976 | 0.858 | 0.63   | 13.47    | 0.63  |

*Note.* EFA = Principal components analysis with varimax rotation; Explained total variance = %68.794; KMO sampling adequacy = %85.8; Bartlett's Sphericity ( $\chi^2$ ) = 2188.166;  $df = 55$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ;  $n = 420$ ; Overall mean = 3.3838;  $SD = 0.8426$ ; For the whole scale Cronbach Alpha = 0.880; Item-total correlation range = 0.509 - 0.646;  $R^2$  range = 0.355 - 0.663; Response categories: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree.  $\chi^2 = 235.45$ ;  $df = 41$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 5.7 > 5$ ; RMSEA = 0.11; CFI = 0.95; GFI = 0.91; RFI = 0.92; IFI = 0.95; AGFI = 0.85; NFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.94; RMR = 0.13; SRMR = 0.083; Model CAIC < Saturated CAIC = 411.45 < 464.66; AVE = Average variance extracted; MSV = Maximum shared variance; ASV = Average shared variance; and CR = Composite reliability.

At the fourth step, discriminant validity was evaluated. For this purpose, at first, the square roots of the AVE value of the dimensions were calculated. They were found to be greater than the shared coefficients of correlations to provide the evidence for the discriminant validity of the factors (Hair et al. 2010) (Table 4). It also means that reliabilities for all measures were provided (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). From Table 4, it is seen that all correlations are statistically significant.

**Table 4.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Factors

| Dimension               | M      | SD      | Visual product acumen | Visual product value | Visual product response |
|-------------------------|--------|---------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Visual product acumen   | 3.4768 | 0.92880 | (0.730)               |                      |                         |
| Visual product value    | 3.3542 | 1.02912 | 0.566                 | (0.751)              |                         |
| Visual product response | 3.2992 | 1.13998 | 0.492                 | 0.485                | (0.791)                 |

*Note.* All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed test). The numbers in the cells of diagonal line are squared root of AVE.

For the last step, the composite reliabilities for all dimensions of VPA were calculated. All the CRs were determined to be greater than the cutoff value of .60, which was commonly accepted. The CRs for visual product acumen, visual product value, and visual product response were .820, .834, and .828 respectively. Additional analysis for the whole items of VPA (overall mean = 3.3838;  $SD = 0.8426$ ) construct yielded that the item-total correlations ranged from .509 to .646, and the squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) ranged from .355 to .666. Therefore, it may be argued that measurement was quite reliable and valid.

### Participants' Fashion Innovativeness and Fashion Leadership

Consumers' level of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership were both determined by three-item scales. Cluster analysis was performed separately using fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership items, which revealed two clusters in both variables (Table 5 & Table 6). A total of 155 people with low fashion innovativeness had a low average for all items; they formed 37% of all participants. On the contrary, the average of 265 people was relatively higher; they formed 63% of all participants. There was a similar result regarding fashion leadership. A total of 273 people with low averages in all of the items formed 65% of the participants. On the other hand, 147 people (35%) were identified as high fashion leaders, and the majority of the participants (approximately two-thirds of them) had a high level of fashion innovativeness and low fashion leadership.

**Table 5.** Classification of Consumers According to the Level of Fashion Innovativeness

| Fashion innovativeness level |          |       | I'd like to try new clothing fashion ideas |           | I'm going to wear something new from next season |           | I'm usually one of the last people to wear new fashion clothes |           |
|------------------------------|----------|-------|--|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|                              | <i>n</i> | %     | <i>M</i>                                   | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>   | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>   | <i>SD</i> |
| Low                          | 155      | 36.9  | 1.9806                                     | 0.73388   | 1.8968   | 0.60490   | 3.0258   | 1.32875   |
| High                         | 265      | 63.1  | 3.8075                                     | 0.88588   | 3.7509   | 0.80142   | 3.0528   | 1.23898   |
| Total                        | 420      | 100.0 | 3.1333                                     | 1.21303   | 3.0667   | 1.15828   | 3.0429   | 1.27134   |

Note. Response Categories: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree

**Table 6.** Classification of Consumers According to the Level of Fashion Leadership

| Fashion leadership level |          |       | I usually affect the style of my friends' clothing |           | Others often ask for my advice on fashion and clothing |           | My friends and other people around me see me as a good source of advice on clothing fashion |           |
|--------------------------|----------|-------|--|-----------|--|-----------|---|-----------|
|                          | <i>n</i> | %     | <i>M</i>   | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>   | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>  | <i>SD</i> |
| Low                      | 273      | 65.0  | 2.2637   | .96446    | 2.5018   | .92006    | 2.5275  | .91965    |
| High                     | 147      | 35.0  | 4.1020   | .82541    | 4.2789   | .61691    | 4.3061  | .65806    |
| Total                    | 420      | 100.0 | 2.9071   | 1.26960   | 3.1238   | 1.18419   | 3.1500  | 1.19221   |

Note. Response Categories: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree

The chi-square analysis performed according to the levels of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership revealed that 87.5% of those with a low level of fashion innovativeness had low fashion leadership. On the other hand, it was determined that 86.4% of the ones who had high fashion leadership were high in fashion innovativeness (Yates corrected chi-square = 51.196;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .0001$ ). The Phi coefficient between fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership was found to be .354; this can be interpreted as a low-level relationship (Alpar, 2012).

### Hypothesis Testing

In our study, there were two main hypotheses and six sub-hypotheses related to them. These hypotheses were tested by *t*-test. The analysis showed that there were statistically significant differences in terms of the levels of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership in all dimensions.

According to the level of fashion innovativeness, differences are detected in visual product acumen ( $t = -9.888$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), visual product value ( $t = -9.464$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), and visual product response ( $t = -9.888$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) (Table 7). Therefore, it was determined that those who have a high level of fashion innovativeness gave more importance to visual product aesthetics. This result suggests that the first hypothesis and sub-hypotheses were supported by the available data.

**Table 7.** Visual Product Aesthetics According to the Level of Fashion Innovativeness

| Dimension               | FI level | N   | Mean   | SD      | t       |
|-------------------------|----------|-----|--------|---------|---------|
| Visual product acumen   | Low      | 155 | 2.9242 | 0.93947 | -9.888* |
|                         | High     | 265 | 3.8000 | 0.75510 |         |
| Visual product value    | Low      | 155 | 2.7694 | 1.02308 | -9.464* |
|                         | High     | 265 | 3.6962 | 0.86722 |         |
| Visual product response | Low      | 155 | 2.7484 | 1.14865 | -7.863* |
|                         | High     | 265 | 3.6214 | 1.00527 |         |

Note. Response Categories: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree; \* $p < .0001$

As a result of *t*-test analysis, significant differences were found in the level of consumers' fashion leadership. Depending on the levels of fashion leadership, differences were detected in visual product acumen ( $t = -9.216$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), visual product value ( $t = -7.228$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), and visual product response ( $t = -5.911$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) (Table 8). Therefore, it was seen that the ones who had a high level of fashion leadership gave more importance to visual product aesthetics. Thus, it was determined that the second hypothesis, along with its sub-hypotheses, was supported by the data presented.

**Table 8.** Visual Product Aesthetics According to the Level of Fashion Leadership

| Dimension               | FL level | N   | Mean   | SD      | t       |
|-------------------------|----------|-----|--------|---------|---------|
| Visual product acumen   | Low      | 273 | 3.2070 | 0.89382 | -9.216* |
|                         | High     | 147 | 3.9779 | 0.77356 |         |
| Visual product value    | Low      | 273 | 3.1108 | 1.01430 | -7.228* |
|                         | High     | 147 | 3.8061 | 0.89796 |         |
| Visual product response | Low      | 273 | 3.0672 | 1.11253 | -5.911* |
|                         | High     | 147 | 3.7302 | 1.06582 |         |

Note. Response Categories: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree; \* $p < .0001$

## Conclusions

In this study, which examines consumers' perception of VPA according to the consumer groups, it was found that the VPA perception of the consumers participating in the research is formed by the visual product acumen, visual product value, and visual product response, as in the original scale (Bloch et al., 2003). Consumers could distinguish the details in the design of a garment, and determine how they fitted into different garments. It was pleasing for consumers to see and have *superior-designed* clothing. In addition, consumers felt compelled to purchase superior-designed clothes that appealed to them, and had a strong motivation to buy them.

Consumers were divided into two categories as *high* and *low*, according to their level of fashion innovativeness. In previous studies (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith et al., 1999; Hirschman & Adcock, 1978; Workman & Caldwell, 2007), individuals were categorized in many different ways, according to their level of innovativeness (innovative communicators, opinion leaders, innovators, and the general population; innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards). According to Rogers (1983), the level of fashion leadership is divided into two groups, as fashion leaders and viewers.

In this study, according to the level of fashion leadership, there were two categories of consumers: consumers with high fashion leadership and consumers with low fashion leadership. Although it was low level, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership. The finding that consumers with a high fashion leadership level have high

fashion innovativeness, and consumers with low fashion leadership have low fashion innovativeness, is similar to the findings obtained through the study implemented by Tigert et al. (1976). According to Tigert et al. (1976), consumers who have a high level of interest and involvement in fashion are individuals who are fashion leaders, who try innovations early, and who are capable of fashion communication.

According to the level of fashion innovativeness, there are differences between consumers in all dimensions of VPA (visual product acumen, visual product value, and visual product response). In other words, it can be said that consumers who have high fashion innovativeness put more emphasis on visual product aesthetics. Similarly, when consumers' perception of visual aesthetics is examined according to the levels of fashion leadership, differences are observed in all dimensions (visual product acumen, visual product value, and visual product response). In other words, it can be said that consumers who have high fashion leadership give more importance to VPA. As a result, in the context of clothing products, consumers' perception of visual product aesthetics differs according to the levels of fashion innovativeness and levels of fashion leadership.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The results obtained from this study support the finding—that VPA varies according to fashion consumer groups—obtained by Workman and Caldwell (2007). As Workman and Caldwell (2007) stated in their study, it can be said that the level of sensitivity towards new aesthetic features and their adoption vary according to consumers, and innovative and creative individuals are more sensitive to new aesthetic elements.

In the literature, although there are studies related to visual product aesthetics, fashion innovativeness, and fashion leadership (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith et al., 1999; Hirschman & Adcock, 1978), there are a few studies (Workman & Caldwell, 2007) examining the relationship among these three variables. It is thought that this study implemented in the context of clothing products will contribute to the marketing literature because it aims to determine whether the perception of VPA differs according to the level of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership.

### ***Practical Implications***

Many garments appeal to consumers' sense of vision. The perception of VPA varies, depending on individual differences. Garment manufacturers and retailers can benefit from innovative approaches to consumer design and sales development which attract consumers' attention (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). Fashion change is linked to changing ideas about aesthetic rules. Knowing whether the VPA differs according to the levels of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership can lead fashion designers and clothing manufacturers to design and produce new products that can attract the attention of consumers at all levels.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

In this study, it was examined whether only one aspect of aesthetics, specifically the visual aspect, varies according to consumers' levels of fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership. Researching only one aspect of aesthetics is the most basic limitation of the study. Design and aesthetics are important for other sensory channels, as well as for appearance. In other words,

products can attract the attention of consumers by addressing their senses, such as sight, touch, hearing, taste, and movement (Bloch et al., 2003; Workman & Caldwell, 2007). In future studies, the aesthetic phenomenon in different product categories can be examined in terms of other sensory channels, as well as the visual aspect.

Another limitation of the study is that data was collected with age and sex quota sampling. Since the data was not collected according to the income levels of the participants, the income levels of the participants in the sample may be similar. Therefore, it may not be determined whether consumers' fashion innovativeness and fashion leadership levels differ according to their income. When data is collected with quota sampling according to the income level of the individuals, the findings may vary.

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