

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF E-STORE IMAGE ON CONSUMER SEARCH INTENTIONS: A SUSTAINABLE MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study investigates the dimensions of e-store image information quality, atmosphere, and convenience impact on Generation Z consumers' search intentions in online clothing retail, with search attitude examined as a mediating variable. Drawing on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), a conceptual framework was developed and tested using data from 342 Gen Z consumers in Sri Lanka's Central Province. Quantitative methods, including correlation, regression, and structural equation modelling (SEM), were employed to assess both direct and indirect effects. The findings show that search intention is considerably and favourably influenced by all three aspects of an e-store's image. Of these, atmosphere has the most impact, followed by convenience and the quality of the information. Furthermore, it was discovered that search attitude somewhat mediates the impacts of information and atmosphere and totally mediates the association between convenience and search intention. These results highlight how crucial it is to provide an engaging and easy-to-use online environment to influence favourable customer perceptions and boost search engagement. The study has useful ramifications for online retailers: Gen Z-specific tactics like immersive content and expert design can increase engagement, while improving the online environment with uniform aesthetics and interactive design can improve the user experience. The study offers a comprehensive understanding of e-store influence in digital retail by integrating search and attitudinal aspects of online decision-making. Geographical and product-specific scope, as well as unmet consumer categories that do not develop strong e-store perceptions, are some of the limitations. Future studies should look at cross-cultural validity, the variations between desktop and mobile experiences, and the effects of visual design on behaviour using experimental tools like eye-tracking. The study's overall findings emphasise how important e-store image is in shaping sustainable customer search behaviour in a cutthroat online market.

Keywords: Atmosphere, convenience, information, search attitude, search intention

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Introduction

The advancement of information technology has significantly accelerated the development of online shopping in Sri Lanka (Kuruwitaarachchi et al., 2018). This digital transformation has led to a rapid increase in the number of e-commerce platforms and virtual retail outlets. According to traditional brick-and-mortar retailers have increasingly expanded their operations into the online domain, while dedicated online brand stores have also evolved, gaining maturity and market share. As a result, online platforms have become critical commercial spaces for many enterprises. Among various product categories, apparel, footwear, and bags have emerged as presiding segments in online retail, displaying higher sales volumes compared to other consumer goods. With continued economic growth, the frequency of clothing purchases has increased, positioning fashion-related products as a key component of the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) market in the digital retail landscape (Wang et al., 2025).

In this context, the e-store image incorporates elements such as layout, navigation, pricing, product display, and visual aesthetics play a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and decisions (Patricija Gedmontaitė, 2024). At the information search stage, consumers rely on high-quality, visually appealing and tempting, well-structured websites to reduce perceived risk and increase confidence. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) supports the notion that e-store image is an antecedent to consumer attitude. Because young consumers are highly fashion-conscious and environmentally aware, the trend toward sustainable clothing is gaining predominance. E-store image, therefore, also reflects sustainable values, which can strengthen consumer loyalty. Given the intense competition in online retail, understanding how e-store image influences consumer search attitude and intention over both decision-making stages is essential for developing effective, sustainable marketing strategies.

Thus, we propose the research questions,

RQ1: How do the information quality, atmosphere, and convenience of an e-store influence consumer search intentions in the context of online shopping?

RQ2: To what extent does search attitude mediate the relationship between the e-store image dimensions (information, atmosphere, and convenience) and consumer search intentions?

RQ3: How does the sustainable marketing perspective of an e-store's image impact consumer search intentions, and how does search attitude influence this process?

Literature Review

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), an individual's behavioural objective is determined by their attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norms, which are influenced by the availability of resources and social expectations. Attitude reflects a person's evaluation of or interest in performing a particular behaviour, and the stronger the positive attitude, the more likely the behaviour will occur. In the context of online shopping, TRA has been widely applied to explain how various beliefs influence consumer attitudes and intentions (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Building on this substructure, the present study conceptualises information quality, atmosphere, and convenience as three key dimensions of e-store image as independent variables that shape consumer search attitude, which acts as a moderating variable between these beliefs and search intention, the study's dependent variable. In this model, the e-store image serves as a belief-forming mechanism that indirectly affects consumer search intentions through their search attitude, in line with TRA's assertion that internal psychological factors, rather than external variables alone, play a critical role in shaping behavioural outcomes. Therefore, the study extends the TRA framework by focusing on how specific aspects of e-store image influence the cognitive and affective processes behind sustainable online search behaviour.

E-store image

The concept of e-store image, derived from customary store image theory, refers to consumers' overall insight of an online retail environment based on its functional and psychological attributes (Jiang et al., 2023). These perceptions form a multidimensional structure, containing factors such as information quality, convenience, atmosphere, enjoyment, service, and uncertainty (Almaiah et al., 2022). For this study, the dimensions of information, atmosphere, and convenience are emphasised as the key independent variables influencing consumer behaviour during the online search process. Information quality encircles the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, and depth of product or service data presented by the e-store (Manuzon, 2023). Atmosphere, frequently referred to as online aesthetics, which reflects consumers' awareness of the website's visual appeal and design style, contributes

to their emotional engagement with the site. According to Cristina (2024), convenience refers to the ease and efficiency of steering the site, completing transactions, and accessing relevant information, key aspects that reduce intellectual effort and enhance user experience. Together, these components shape a consumer's search attitude, which serves as a mediating variable that reflects their evaluative disposition toward engaging in online product searches. According to Bogdiun (2022), this attitude, in turn, most importantly influences their search intention, defined as the likelihood or willingness to continue searching for products or information within the e-store environment. By focusing on these specific e-store image attributes, this study aims to explain how design and functional elements of online stores impact consumer cognition and behaviour, thereby providing insights into effective, sustainable marketing strategies.

Search attitudes

Consumer attitudes are defined as an individual's overall evaluative disposition, either favourable or unfavourable, toward objects, behaviours, or ideas, and they significantly influence consumer decision-making. In the context of online shopping, attitudes are not directly observable behaviours but internal predispositions that guide behavioural intentions and subsequent actions (Eshpulatov et al., 2025). This study focuses specifically on search attitude, which reflects consumers' positive or negative estimate of engaging in online information search activities within an e-store environment. As supported by existing literature, consumer attitudes serve as a mediating variable, translating the effect of external stimuli into behavioural intentions. In this model, information quality, store atmosphere, and convenience, three dimensions of the e-store image, serve as independent variables that shape the user's cognitive and emotional evaluation of the online search process. A well-organised, visually attractive, and user-friendly e-store experience can positively influence a consumer's search attitude by reducing effort, increasing engagement, and enhancing trust (Mehmet Ozan Karahan & Fatih Şahin, 2025). This, in turn, significantly contributes to the consumer's search intention, which is the dependent variable and refers to the likelihood that the consumer will continue seeking product or brand-related information online. Identifying the critical role of search attitude in driving online consumer behaviour offers valuable insights for e-retailers aiming to optimise website design and functionality as part of a sustainable marketing strategy.

Search intention

According to Pham et al. (2024), search intention represents the possibility that consumers will actively seek out product-related information through online platforms, and it is considered a key predictor of actual online search behaviour. Embedded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), intention reflects an individual's conscious readiness to engage in specific behaviour, which in this context involves the use of e-stores for information recovery. Search intention is influenced by the consumer's evaluation of the online shopping environment, including the perceived quality of information, visual atmosphere, and ease of navigation, which function as the independent variables in this study (Dua & Uddin, 2022). These dimensions of the e-store image shape a consumer's search attitude, defined as the positive or negative evaluation of engaging in online search activities. A well-structured website offering relevant, authentic information, an aesthetically pleasing and emotionally engaging environment (atmosphere), and a unlined, user-friendly interface (convenience) collectively enhances the consumer's attitude toward the search experience (Patel et al., 2023). In turn, this search attitude serves as a mediating variable, moderating the impact of the e-store image on the consumer's search intention, which is the dependent variable in the model. Empirical evidence suggests that a positive search attitude increases the probability of engaging in pre-purchase information seeking and, eventually, purchasing behaviour. Thus, fostering favourable attitudes through e-store design and user experience is essential for enhancing consumers' intention to search for products in a sustainable and competitive e-commerce environment.

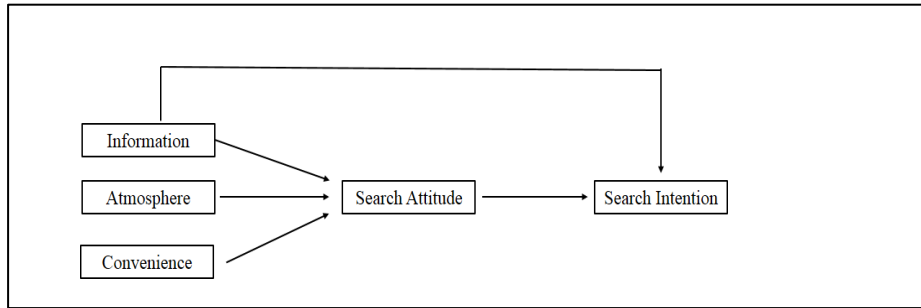
Methodology

Conceptual framework

Based on the theoretical basis of this research, this research combines e-store image (including information, atmosphere, and convenience), consumer search attitude and intention to establish the research model based on the TRA paradigm, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Research hypotheses

Customers' search intentions are greatly influenced by the e-store's image, especially when it comes to the website's convenience and informational atmosphere. A website that is informative and well-structured makes it easier for users to locate and assess products. Customers are more satisfied and trust high-quality and pertinent content, which encourages them to search further. Furthermore, search-friendly features like simple navigation and a well-organised structure encourage users to explore and interact with the site more. When combined, these factors increase the likelihood that customers would go into product details in the online store.

H1a: *Information has a significant positive impact on consumers' e-store search intention*

H1b: *Atmosphere has a significant positive impact on consumers' e-store search intention*

H1c: *Convenience has a significant positive impact on consumers' e-store search intention*

Mediating Effect of Search Attitude: Consumers' attitudes toward searching in e-stores refer to their favourable or unfavorable perceptions of online browsing behaviour. For instance, when consumers find online searches appealing or enjoy casually browsing e-stores, it reflects a positive perception of the search experience. Visual elements, such as image quality and the presence of models, significantly influence consumers' attitudes toward the e-store. In turn, these attitudes serve as powerful predictors of future purchase intentions.

Online stores that offer accurate, easy-to-access information alongside visually pleasing and trend-driven content can enhance the overall search experience. As a result, consumers develop a more positive attitude toward searching within e-stores, which in turn influences their intent to engage in future searches. Based on this reasoning, the current study puts forward the following hypotheses:

H2a: *Search attitude plays an intermediary role between information and search intention.*

H2b: *Search attitude plays an intermediary role between atmosphere and search intention.*

H2c: *Search attitude plays an intermediary role between convenience and search intention.*

Research Methods

Research philosophy forms the foundational beliefs and assumptions guiding the development of knowledge within a study. For this study, positivism serves as the primary research philosophy. Positivism aligns with the use of quantitative data, allowing for accurate predictions and empirical testing of hypotheses. This philosophical position is appropriate, given the availability of tangible quantitative data related to e-store image and the mediating effect of search attitude on search intention (Saunders et al., 2007). The descriptive research design reflects the experiences of respondents and provides an appropriate framework for the study. For example, it enables the reporting of demographic characteristics of a population subgroup. This research employs a descriptive design, and the sample size and sampling technique are based on the true experiences of the respondents. The purpose of the present study can be identified as descriptive hypothesis testing. Accordingly, the researcher aims to identify the influence of dependent variables and the mediating effect on search intention. The researcher seeks to conduct a descriptive study to further explore and understand the issues, as limited research has been conducted on the e-store image and the mediating effect of search attitude on search intention among Generation Z. Since the main purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the variables, it can also be considered a correlational study.

The study will be conducted in a non-contrived setting, with a Gen Z consumer who shops on clothing websites as the unit of analysis. A structured questionnaire will be distributed to collect data from respondents. According to Sekaran et al. (2003), the unit of analysis in this research is at the individual level, specifically, a Gen Z customer who purchases from clothing websites.

Data for this study were collected for the first time, and it will be a single cross-sectional study, as data will be gathered at one point in time. The population for the present study consists of Gen Z customers in the Central Province who shop on clothing websites. The sample represents a segment of this larger population (Bryman & Cramer, 2011). The sample size for this research is 342 Gen Z customers in Central Province who shop online for clothing (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Primary data were collected using a self-administered, structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 and AMOS 24.0. The study used correlation analysis to identify the relationship between independent and dependent variables, and regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Surveys, which are typical in quantitative research, were employed to sample a representative portion of the population.

Results and Analysis

Demographics

A total of 342 valid samples were composed of Gen Z, 20.5% men and 79.5% women. The proportion of women is significantly higher than that of men. On the other hand, women consumers are more impressed with the store than men consumers when buying clothing. All samples are between 19 and 28 years old. From the perspective of the education level, 54% of them are university students, 41% of them are working professionals and 5% of them are entrepreneurs. Among them, 47.6% said they would browse online stores whenever they were free, while 20% said they would browse three to five times a week and one to two times a week. A total of 32.4% of people only browse when they need to buy. In terms of online shopping frequency, 36.4% of young people buy online once a month, 29.7% buy online half a month, and 33.9% buy online more than once a week.

Measurement of validity and reliability: Validity of the questionnaire

Validity analysis indicates how accurately a method measures data. If a method measures what it claims to measure, and the results closely correspond to real-world values, then it can be considered valid. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy is mainly used to measure the validity of the resulting instrument. In addition, all the factor loadings (KMO) values are above 0.7, and the cumulative figure is more than 50% can be concluded multi-item measurement scale is validated enough. Normally, Cronbach's Alpha ranges between 0 to 1, and it indicates that there's no lower limit to the coefficient. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is near to 1 it conveys the message of internal consistency of the items of the variables. According to George and Mallery (2019), there are rules to interpret Cronbach's Alpha as follows: $\alpha \geq 0.9$ - Excellent, $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ - Good, $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ - Acceptable, $0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$ - Questionable, $0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$ - Poor, $0.5 > \alpha$ - Unacceptable.

Table 1

KMO and cumulative factor analysis of variable items

Variable	Items	Standard Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Variance Extracted
Information	I 1	0.752	0.847	0.645
	I 2	0.841		
	I 3	0.785		
Atmosphere	A 1	0.738	0.819	0.582
	A 2	0.837		
	A 3	0.721		
Convenience	C 1	0.756	0.748	0.571
	C 2	0.821		
	C 3	0.797		
Search Attitude	SA 1	0.789	0.877	0.668
	SA 2	0.828		
	SA 3	0.841		
Search Intention	SI 1	0.787	0.810	0.528
	SI 2	0.681		
	SI 3	0.748		

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Table 1 shows the reliability output of the survey data. According to George and Mallery (2019), the statistical figure of Cronbach’s Alpha of information, atmosphere, search attitude and search intention was more than 0.8, and there was a good internal consistency among the five items. Furthermore, the statistical figure for Cronbach’s Alpha of convenience was more than 0.7, and there were acceptable internal consistencies among all items of the above variables. SPSS 20.0 software was used to analyse the reliability of the overall sample data. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient overall scale was greater than 0.7, and the scale had good and acceptable reliability and high internal consistency.

The KMO and Bartlett’s test results for the effective samples (N = 342) show that the sig = 0.000, which indicates that the sample data is suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

The validity test of the scale mainly consists of aggregation validity and discrimination validity. The aggregate validity of the scale was evaluated using the standardised factor load, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). All the standardised factor loads of other items were greater than 0.5 and significant at 0.001. The highest composite reliability is 0.877, the lowest is 0.748, both greater than 0.6, and the AVE values for all constructions are greater than 0.5; the highest is 0.668. Therefore, aggregation validity is supported. By comparing the AVE and latent variable correlation coefficient matrix to judge the discriminant validity, the whole model has good discriminant validity.

Normality

Multivariate assumptions test normality. This study has used one of the most significant assumptions for statistical test procedures in the data to ensure the data set is normally distributed. The test of normality can be tested using either a graphical or numerical method. For the graphical method, there are two types of illustrations, including box plot analysis and histogram and in numerical methods, researchers of the present study have been using Skewness and Kurtosis analysis.

Table 2

Skewness and kurtosis statistics

Variable	Skewness Statistic	Kurtosis Statistic
Information	-0.884	0.468
Atmosphere	-1.158	1.089
Convenience	-1.692	2.456
Search Attitude	-1.652	2.985
Search Intention	-1.772	2.798

(Source: Authors’ Compilation)

There is a statistical norm that if Skewness and Kurtosis slice between -3 and +3, the data set is normally distributed. Table 2 shows all the statistics of Skewness and Kurtosis are sliced between under acceptable range. Hence, the data set of the present research study has been normally distributed.

Test of multicollinearity

Multicollinearity indicates the interrelationship among independent variables in multiple regression analysis. Tolerance level and VIP values can be used to measure multicollinearity, and the tolerance level should be above 0.1, and the VIP value should not be more than 10 to run the regression analysis. According to the Present study, Table 3 shows that research output is at a considerable level.

Table 3

Test of multicollinearity

Variable	Tolerance Level	VIP
Information	0.286	3.414
Atmosphere	0.181	3.495
Convenience	0.136	5.325
Search Attitude	0.152	7.452
Search Intention	0.147	6.231

(Source: Authors’ Compilation)

Table 3 indicates tolerance level and VIP values of present study. Tolerance level of information, atmosphere, convenience, and search attitude and search intention are 0.286, 0.181, 0.136, 0.152 and 0.147 respectively. All tolerance values were more than 0.01. Hence, multicollinearity is assured according to tolerance level. VIP values of information, atmosphere, convenience, search attitude and search intention are 3.414, 3.495, 5.325, 7.452, and 6.231 respectively and all VIP values were less than 10. Therefore, through the regression analysis of multicollinearity, present study has been assured of multicollinearity.

Model fit

We tested the measures of the model fit using AMOS in Table 4. The model was tested to fit well with $\chi^2/df = 3.124$ (standardized to less than 5), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.056 (standardized to less than 0.08), root mean square residual (RMR) = 0.042 (less than 0.05, which we consider a good model fit), incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.928, normative fit index (NFI) = 0.927, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.961, and goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.928 (criterion is greater than 0.90). Its demon- started a good fit between the model and the data.

Table 4

Measures of model fit

Fit Index	MIN/DF	RMSEA	RMR	GFI	CFI	NFI	IFI
Model value	3.124	0.056	0.042	0.928	0.961	0.927	0.961

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Hypotheses testing

After examining validity and reliability, SPSS 20.0 was used to test the proposed hypotheses. The results of the main effect test between the three dimensions of online store image (information, atmosphere and convenience) and consumers' search intention are shown in Table 5. Information, atmosphere and convenience all have a significant positive impact on search intention. It is assumed that H1a, H1b and H1c pass the verification ($p < 0.001$).

Table 5

Coefficients

Variable	t	Standard coefficient	Sig.	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F
Information	7.158	0.217	0.000	0.356	0.353	156.096***
Atmosphere	8.254	0.265	0.000			
Convenience	6.875	0.199	0.000			

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Table 6

Results of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Support
Ha	Yes
Hb	Yes
Hc	yes

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Mediating effect testing

Based on the above two main effects, to test the mediating effect of consumer attitudes, this study constructed two models. The bootstrap method of AMOS 24.0 was used for parameter estimation (sampling times N = 5000). Table 7 shows the mediating effect.

Table 7

Results of the mediating effect test

Effect Type	Effect	p	Lowest 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Information – search intention (direct)	0.074	0.087	-0.013	0.162
Atmosphere - search intention (direct)	0.123	0.007	0.036	0.206
Convenience - search intention (direct)	0.114	0.015	0.024	0.197
Information – search intention – search attitude (indirect)	0.184	0.000	0.128	0.265
Atmosphere– search attitude – search intention (indirect)	0.239	0.000	0.175	0.311
Convenience – search intention – search attitude (indirect)	0.139	0.000	0.067	0.206
Information – search intention (total)	0.258	0.000	0.169	0.364
Atmosphere - search intention (total)	0.362	0.000	0.284	0.456
Convenience - search intention (total)	0.253	0.000	0.151	0.331

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

The indirect path, information → search attitude → search intention, is significant with an effect value = 0.184, p = 0.000 < 0.01, and a 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. This shows that search attitude plays a significant mediating role between information and search intention. Meanwhile, the direct path, information → search intention, is not significant. This shows that search attitude plays a full mediating role between information and search intention. Hypothesis H2a was verified. The indirect path, atmosphere → search attitude → search intention, is significant with an effect value = 0.239, p = 0.000 < 0.001, and a 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. This shows that search attitude plays a significant mediating role between atmosphere and search intention. Meanwhile, the direct path, atmosphere → search intention, is also significant. The effect value = 0.123, p = 0.007 < 0.05, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. This shows that search attitude plays a partial mediating role between atmosphere and search intention. Hypothesis H2b was verified. The indirect path, convenience → search attitude → search intention, is significant with an effect value = 0.139, p = 0.000 < 0.001, and a 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. This shows that search attitude plays a significant mediating role between convenience and search intention. Meanwhile, the direct path, convenience → search intention, is also significant. The effect value = 0.114, p = 0.015 < 0.05, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. This shows that search attitude plays a partial mediating role between convenience and search intention. Hypothesis H2c was verified.

Table 8

Types of mediation roles

Dependent variables	Mediating effect	Hypothesis	Support
Information	Full	H2a	Yes
Atmosphere	Partial	H2b	Yes
Convenience	Partial	H3c	Yes

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that all six proposed hypotheses are supported. Specifically, in the information search stage, the three components of e-store image information quality, store atmosphere, and convenience collectively have a positive and outstanding influence on consumers' intention to search for information. Among these measurements, atmosphere has the strongest effect, followed by information, and then convenience.

Furthermore, the study calls attention to the mediating role of consumers' search attitude in the relationship between e-store image and search intention. Drawing from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the concept of consumer attitude toward the e-store is refined and categorised as a search attitude in this context.

The data analysis discloses that search attitude partially mediates the relationship between information and atmosphere with search intention, while it fully mediates the effect of convenience on search intention. This indicates that while information and atmosphere can influence search intention directly and indirectly through search attitude, convenience can impact search intention only through its effect on search attitude.

Overall, these results exhibit that e-store image influences both search intention and purchase intention through the intermediary of search attitude, strengthening the importance of cultivating a strong and favourable e-store environment in shaping consumer behaviour.

Conclusion

This study has strongly verified the simultaneous influence of all dimensions of e-store image on consumer behaviour during the information search stage. While previous research has typically examined individual dimensions of e-store image in isolation, often focusing primarily on purchase intention, this study takes a more joint approach, offering a more realistic representation of the actual online shopping experience. It demonstrates that when multiple dimensions (information, atmosphere, and convenience) act together, they significantly affect the consumers' search intention. Furthermore, consumer attitude toward searching mediates the connection between e-store image and search behaviour, providing a more comprehensive and scientifically robust model.

This research also provides a methodological approach by integrating the two key phases of online consumer decision-making, search and purchase, into an integrated framework, focusing particularly on the search stage. While many studies explore search and purchase behaviours separately and differentiate them across different retail channels (online vs. offline), this study mainly emphasises the difference among different e-stores within the same channel. It highlights that consumers eventually choose specific retail terminals (individual e-stores) rather than broad channels. The findings clear up how various e-store image dimensions are operated differently across the decision-making stages. Specifically, information, atmosphere, and convenience are shown to significantly impact the search phase of decision-making.

This study provides valuable practical applications for e-store operators aiming to enhance consumer engagement during the information search stage. First, upgrading the search experience is crucial, particularly through advanced improvements in the online store atmosphere, which was identified as the most dominant factor affecting search intention among young consumers. A visually appealing atmosphere classified by consistent design, harmonious colour schemes, and seasonal updates can most significantly enhance the browsing experience, increasing the probability of consumers returning to and engaging with the store. Second, e-store operators should develop targeted strategies that serve specifically young consumers, who are especially responsive to engaging and immersive online environments. Investing in professionally qualified design teams, rich interactive content, and compelling visual storytelling can elevate the users' experience, encourage deeper exploration of the store, and foster long-term consumer interaction.

Despite its contributions, the study has several drawbacks. It was conducted within the Chinese market and focused entirely on online clothing stores, which may control the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts or product categories. Additionally, the study presumes that consumers have a pre-existing perception of e-store images. However, approximately 27.34% of respondents, especially males, did not exhibit a clear memory or awareness of specific e-stores, even though they had prior online shopping experience. These consumers generally engage in product-focused searches without forming long-lasting impressions of the stores themselves. Furthermore, the study did not investigate the reasons why some consumers fail to develop store images or how such perceptions could be cultivated, leaving a significant area for future exploration.

Future research could extend this study by verifying the model in different cultural settings, across various product types, and within service-based e-stores to determine the universality of the conclusions. Comparative studies between consumers who form strong impressions of e-stores ("imaged") and those who do not ("non-imaged") could deepen understanding of the underlying mechanisms of store image formation. Moreover, future work could distinguish between desktop and mobile shopping experiences to uncover how different platforms influence consumer perception. Experimental methods, such as eye-tracking technology, may also be employed to assess how visual elements like layout, colour, and design impact search behaviour from a cognitive and perceptual standpoint.

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