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Antecedents and Consequences of Fashion Consciousness: An Empirical Study in the Fashion Industry

ABSTRACT

Over years, it is doubtless that appearance consciousness is the privilege of women. In the past two decades, due to the diffusion of sexual boundary, the meaning of sex becomes equivocal. This induces changes on men's consciousness on fashion. However, there is limited research investigating the antecedents and consequences of fashion consciousness. This research aims at exploring the potential factors influencing fashion consciousness and their impacts on the buying intention and behavior of men. We conducted an empirical study in the Hong Kong fashion industry. Our findings show that advancement of information technology, self-identity ambiguity, changing work practice of men, and media influence are four key factors that affect men's fashion consciousness. Our results also reveal that fashion consciousness has a positive impact on men's buying intention and behaviors. We recommend that fashion retailers may allocate organizational resources on advertising and promotion to attract men's interests on their products.

Keywords: fashion consciousness, buying intention, male market, fashion industry

1. Introduction

Over years, it is doubtless that appearance consciousness is the privilege of women. In the past two decades, due to the diffusion of sexual boundary, the meaning of sex becomes equivocal (Bertone & Camoletto, 2009; Brewster & Tillman, 2012). This induces changes on men's consciousness on appearance. Research shows that

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appearance not only satisfies men's vanity but also convey array of social messages, including status and profession to others (Pellegrin, 2009). Hence, men are more willing to spend on fashion purchase (Bakewell et al., 2006; Smith, 2007). In the meantime, retailers attempt to hold men's fashion week in the major fashion capital, such as London (Goworek, 2011; Bakewell et al., 2006). Fashion brands, such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, H&M, and Zara offer more apparel products for men.

Research on fashion consciousness for male consumers is limited. Prior research mainly focuses on examining the economic changes and social changes on masculinity and men's clothing styles (e.g. Kacen, 2000; Patterson & Richard, 2002; Rajput et al., 2012). Only few studies emphasize on investigating the factors influencing fashion consciousness on men. For example, Bakewell et al. (2006) demonstrated that the liberalized attitudes to homosexuality and multiculturalism as well as the increased peer

group association through increased exposure to digital world affect the level of fashion consciousness of male consumers.

This research intends to explore conceptually the potential factors affecting male fashion consciousness and their impacts on male consumer purchase intention and behavior. We conducted an empirical study in the Hong Kong fashion industry. This study provides valuable insights to retailers about the main factors affecting fashion consciousness among male consumers. This helps retailers to tailor-make appropriate marketing campaign strategies to reach the male's market the best.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Fashion consciousness is concerned with the degree of a person's interest in the style of clothing (Nam et al., 2007). A fashion conscious consumer is more likely to involve in shopping activity. Over years, female consumers are considered as conscious-oriented for fashion. But, recent research show that male consumers, especially those who are from Generation Y, become more fashion conscious and more aware of fashion styles and trend; in turn, they are more involved in clothing (Bakewell et al., 2006). Given that clothing is helpful to build up the self-esteem of people, it is generally agreed that male consumers may use clothes to communicate with others about masculinity (Pellegrin, 2009). Hence, it is of importance for fashion firms to gain more understanding about male consumers' fashion consciousness. Previous research suggests that there are some factors influencing fashion consciousness of consumers. In this study we select four factors that have potential to affect

fashion consciousness of male consumers. They are: advancement of information technology, ambiguity of self-identity, change of work practice, and media influence. To better understand these factors, they are described as below in more detail.

Information technology gives significant impact on people's purchase pattern. By the wide usage of information technology, consumers are easy to search for information of the latest fashion style and trend as well as make purchase through Internet. Taking an example of Hong Kong, the number of households connecting to Internet was increased by 121% from 770,200 to 1,699,400 households (Census and Statistics Department, 2010); information search and online purchase are the top two activities that consumers involve in making use of internet in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2010). Apart from the Internet service, more recently, the development and usage of Applications (Apps) for Smartphone also affects consumer purchase pattern. Many fashion retailers, such as Christian Dior, Ralph Lauren, and H&M, adopt Apps to deliver information to their customers. Consequently, consumers have more chances to acquire information via Apps. In line with this reasoning, male consumers are prone to acquire more fashion information through the advancement of information technology. This may increase the level of consciousness on fashion among male consumers. Hence, we posit the following hypothesis.

> Hypothesis 1: Advancement of information technology has a positive influence on fashion consciousness.

Self-identity is another potential factor that leads to fashion consciousness. It concerns with a person's desire for sameness to 'fit in' and for differentiation (Woodward, 2008). Such a desire offers a motivation to a person to understand how he/she is different from others and make a difference from others (Rawliman & Chu, 2002). Self-identity is especially important for young people. The reason is that young people are often in the life stage of uncertainty. In the uncertainty stage of life, people tend to make use of products, such as fashion items, to define their identity (Au et al., 2007). Similar to other products, fashion clothing provides a symbolic meaning that helps people to establish their identity and gain prestige (Bakewell et al., 2006; Khare et al., 2012; Rajput et al., 2012). Thus, we hypothesize:

> Hypothesis 2: Self-identity has a positive influence on fashion consciousness.

Today, there is a growing trend towards the 'metrosexulaity' of men in a 'masculinization' of women in the society. Such trend induces changes men's perception on their gender and role, leading to changes on their work practice. For example, men may take up jobs that have been considered as women's, such as shopping and doing housework (Mintel International Group Limited, 2010). As male consumers are more likely to go for shopping, their awareness of fashion clothing is increased, thereby increasing fashion consciousness of male consumers. Therefore, we suggest the following hypothesis.

> Hypothesis 3: Change of work practice has a positive influence on fashion consciousness.

Mass media is considered as the primary sites of discourse that influence individuals, cultures, social structures and political policy and also reflect social, political and intellectual views and attitudes (Macnamara, 2006). For example, fashion magazines may influence the attitudes of males towards fashion clothing through media. For instance, marketers employ 'New Man' advertising to promote men's appearance concern and associate clothing and style with success by using men as icons (Frank, 1996; Rajput et al., 2012). This 'New Men' advertising leads to changes on the cultural norm that men are encouraged to see their social values and success through what they look like. Thus, mass media is capable of transmitting culture that makes a considerable impact on men's fashion. Thus, we postulate the following hypotheses.

> Hypothesis 4: Media influence has a positive influence on fashion consciousness.

Fashion conscious individuals are more willing to involve in consumption practice. However, consumers with various levels of fashion consciousness differ in their buying intentions and behaviors (Nam et al., 2007). Male consumers who are conscious on fashion have a strong intention to purchase fashion products that help them to show their status and possession to others (Achenreiner, 1997; Summers et al., 2006); in turn, consumers' purchase intention will lead to purchase actions. Thus, we hypothesize:

> Hypothesis 5: Fashion consciousness has a positive influence on purchase intention.
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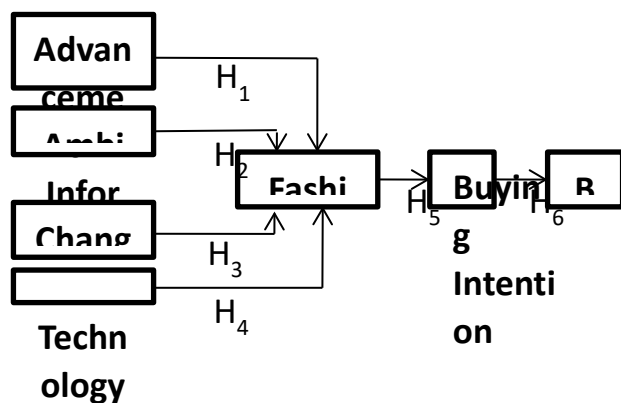> Hypothesis 6: Purchase intention has a positive influence on purchase behavior.

Fig. 1. The research model.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

To test our hypotheses, we conduct a quantitative study of the fashion retailing industry in Hong Kong. We randomly select Generation Y male who are between 20-year-old to 30-year-old. Generation Y male are often in life stage of uncertainty (e.g., Belk, 1988). Thus, they are more likely to purchase and use fashion products to establish their self-identity and increase self esteem (e.g., Belk, 1988; Tuncay, 2005).

3.2 Data collection process

We conducted a pilot study with fifteen male customers of Generation Y, through which we examined the relevance of individual indicators to their corresponding constructs in different service firms (refer to the next section "Instrument development"). Our questionnaire was developed in English and translated to Chinese. To maximize translation equivalence, we followed Mullen's (1995) suggestion to translate the questionnaire items into a foreign language and then back-translate them to identify any discrepancies in meaning on syntax. We invited a total of 150 customers, 130 of them returned their filled questionnaires. However, there are only 123

useable questionnaires as missing data was found in 7 returned questionnaires. The response rate is 86%.

3.3 Instrument development

The measures used in this study are drawn from well-established instruments in marketing. The following measures consists of items that respondents were asked to rate each on a five-point Likert scales, anchored at 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'.

Fashion consciousness: We intend to capture the degree of fashion consciousness by using the indicators used by Nam et al. (2007). We choose five questions, which are more relevant to the men's market, instead of using all 33 questions, with appropriate modification to suit for men's market.

Advancement of information technology: We refer the usage information technology to obtain fashion information and buy fashion apparel products. We assess this construct using five indicators used by Mahmood et al. (2001) with appropriate modification to suit for men's market.

Ambiguity of self-identity: We assess self-identity by using five questions extracted from Identity Style Inventory suggested by Beaumont and Seaton (2008).

Change of work practice: We measure change of work practice by using six items developed by Gould and Stern (1989). ($\alpha = 0.894$)

Media influence: We adopt the five items from the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS) to measure media influence on people (Cusumano & Thompson, 2001).

Buying intention: Buying intention refers to a consumer's intention to purchase apparel products. We assess buying intention using items originally

developed by Shim et al. (1989) and modified by Xu (2000) and Teresa and Belleau (2006).

Buying behavior: Buying behavior concerns a consumer's action to purchase apparel products. We assess buying intention using items originally developed by Shim et al. (1989) and modified by Xu (2000) and Teresa and Belleau (2006).

3.4 Reliability Test

Reliability test was conducted to assess the degree of consistency for constructs in this study. Cronbach's alpha (α) is a measure commonly used to assess the internal consistency of a scale. If the value of Cronbach's alpha (α) is greater than 0.7, i.e., the generally agreed lower limit, is acceptable, demonstrating the instrument is reliable.

Table 1 Overview of the results of reliability test.

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha
Fashion consciousness	0.847
Advancement of information technology	0.705
Ambiguity of self-identity	0.683
Change of work practice	0.894
Media influence	0.892
Buying intention	0.875
Buying behavior	0.913

Table 1 provides an overview of the results of reliability test. All constructs have the values of Cronbach's alpha higher than the cutoff point of 0.7 recommended. These results provide strong evidence that the instrument especially designed for this study is highly reliable to acquire consistent data.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics among the constructs included in this study. The descriptive statistics reveals that there is no major violation of regression assumption.

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation of the studied constructs.

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation
Fashion consciousness	3.248	0.896
Advancement of information technology	2.520	0.806
Ambiguity of self-identity	3.675	0.663
Change of work practice	3.988	0.728
Media influence	2.974	1.030
Buying intention	3.402	0.980
Buying behavior	2.595	1.047

4.2 Regression Analysis and Results

We apply Regression Analysis to analyze the hypotheses proposed in this study using SPSS. Hypothesis 1 is supported because advancement of information technology has a significant effect on fashion consciousness ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 2 is also supported since self-identity significantly impacts fashion consciousness ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.05$). Results also show that a

significant and positive relationship between change of work practice and fashion consciousness (β = 0.131, $p < 0.1$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported. Hypothesis 4 is also supported because media influence has a positive effect on fashion consciousness (β = 0.489, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 5 predicts that fashion consciousness has a positive effect on purchase intention. Our results also support this prediction (β = 0.704, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 6 is also supported that buying intention has a positive influence on buying behavior (β = 0.747, $p < 0.05$). As a result, all hypotheses are supported. Table 3 shows an overview of the results of the Regression Analysis.

Table 3 Overview of the results of the Regression Analysis.

	Hypotheses	Coefficient	Support
H_1	Advancement in information technology has positive impact on Generation Y male fashion consciousness.	.149	Yes
H_2	Self-identity has positive impact on Generation Y male fashion consciousness.	.287	Yes
H_3	Changing work practice has positive impact on Generation Y male fashion consciousness.	.131	Yes
H_4	Media influence has positive impact on Generation Y male fashion consciousness.	.489	Yes
H_5	People with higher degree of fashion consciousness has positive impact on their buying intention.	.770	Yes
H_6	People with higher degree of buying intention would proportionally have higher degree of buying behavior.	.798	Yes

5. Discussion

This research investigated conceptually and empirically the factors influencing fashion consciousness and their impacts on customer purchase intention and behavior. Specifically, we conducted an empirical study on understanding how advancement of information technology, ambiguity of self-identity, change of work practice among men, and media influence among Generation Y male consumers in the fashion industry.

Our results show that advancement of information technology, ambiguity of self-identity,

change of work practice among men, and media influence have positive impacts on fashion consciousness. Among them, it is shown that media influence has the greatest impact on fashion consciousness. Perhaps, fashion retailers widely use of mass media to deliver information to attract consumers' attention to their products. Our findings also demonstrates that fashion consciousness has a positive effect on purchase intention and behavior. Fashion consciousness elicits buying intention of fashion products; in turn, purchase intention elicits buying behavior of fashion products among male consumers.

6.   Conclusion

Fashion consciousness is not yet only the privilege of female. Due to the diffusion of sexual boundary in the recent two decades, the meaning of sex among male and female becomes equivocal. However, there is limited research investigating the antecedents and consequences of fashion consciousness. This research aims at fulfilling this gap by exploring the potential factors influencing fashion consciousness and their impacts on the buying intention and behavior of men. We conducted an empirical study in the Hong Kong fashion industry. We collected data from 123 male customers of Generation Y to test our hypotheses concerning the antecedents and consequences of fashion consciousness.

Our results demonstrate that advancement of information technology, ambiguity of self-identity, change of work practice among men, and media influence have positive impacts on fashion consciousness. Among them, it is shown that media influence has the greatest impact on fashion consciousness. Our findings also demonstrates that fashion consciousness has a positive effect on

purchase intention and behavior. Hence, we suggest that fashion marketers may pay more effort on allocating organizational resources and customizing suitable marketing strategies for the men's market. In particular, it is recommended that marketers may make use of promotional campaigns, such as delivering advertising messages in different channels, sponsorship and endorsement programs with actors, singers and celebrities, for the purpose of raising customers' interest toward the brand. Consequently, these actions can attract more new customers and retain the existing customers, leading to better firm performance.

For further research, we believe that it would be interesting to find out the association between fashion consciousness and its possible consequences, for example self congruence and self image. Further work can be also conducted to explore moderating effects, such as the influence of mass media and the effect of promotional mix.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Fashion Consciousness

1.   I usually have one or more outfits that are of the latest style.
2.   When I must choose between the two, I dress for fashion, not for comfort.
3.   Dress smartly is an important part of my life.
4.   It is important to me that my clothes are of the latest style.
5.   One should try to dress in style.

Advancement in Information Technology

1.   I usually find fashion information from Internet.
2.   I usually shop online.

3. I have at least one Application (Apps) related to fashion in my mobile phone.
4. I used QR codes offered by the fashion retailer.
5. Innovations in fashion retail information technology advance my fashion sense.

Ambiguity of Self-identity

1. My public image is extremely important to me.
2. I always seek ways to improve relationships with those I care.
3. I try hard to seek for my family's acceptance.
4. I can identify my group in society.
5. I have no interest in impressing the people I know.

Changing Work Practice of Men

1. I reflect about being a man a lot.
2. I am very self-conscious about being a man.
3. I am usually aware of how to be a man.
4. I involved a lot of being a man.
5. I am generally attentive to my inner feelings about being a woman.
6. I never want to be a woman.

Media Influence

1. Watching TV, movies or reading magazines makes me want to dress fashionable.
2. I try to dress like the models in magazines.
3. I compare my clothing to movie stars', popular singers' or famous celebrities'.
4. I would like to have a similar style with the models in magazines.
5. I try to dress like actors and actresses in movies and TV programs.

Buying Intention

1. I would like to buy fashionable clothing.
2. I like to talk about fashion/clothing with my friend.
3. I am aware that some clothes for men are more fashionable than others.
4. I usually notice that some men are more fashionable.
5. When I was given a choice, I always choose to wear fashionable clothing over comfortable clothing.

Buying Behavior

1. I am usually the first to buy the latest fashion.
2. I usually shop in trendy shops.
3. I shop for clothing frequently.
4. I spent long hours in a shopping trip.
5. I spent much on clothing.

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